

SERIALITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MEMOIR: 1957-2007

A Dissertation

by

NICOLE EVE MCDANIEL-CARDER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Seriality in Contemporary American Memoir: 1957-2007. (August 2009)

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In this dissertation, I examine the practice of what I term *serial memoir* in the second-half of the twentieth century in American literature, arguing that serial memoir represents an emerging and significant trend in life writing as it illustrates a transition in how a particular generation of writers understands lived experience and its textual representation. During the second-half of the twentieth century, and in tandem with the rapid technological advancements of postmodern and postindustrial culture, I look at the serial authorship and publication of multiple self-reflexive texts and propose that serial memoir presents a challenge to the historically privileged techniques of linear storytelling, narrative closure, and the possibility for autonomous subjectivity in American life writing. As generic boundaries become increasingly fluid, postmodern memoirists are able to be both more innovative and overt about how they have constructed the self at particular moments in time. Following the trend of examining life writing through contemporary theories about culture, narrative, and techniques of self-representation, I engage the serial memoirs of Mary McCarthy, Maya Angelou, Art Spiegelman, and Augusten Burroughs as I suggest that these authors iterate the self as

serialized, recursive, genealogically constructed, and material. Finally, the fact that these are well-known memoirists underscores the degree to which serial memoir has become mainstream in American autobiographical writing. Serial memoir emphasizes such issues as temporality and memory, repetition and recursivity, and witnessing and testimony, and as such, my objective in this project is to theorize the practice of serial memoir, a form that has been largely neglected in critical work, as I underscore its significance in relation to twentieth-century American culture. I contend that seriality in contemporary American memoir is a burgeoning and powerful form of self-expression, and that a close examination of how authors are presenting and re-presenting themselves as they challenge conventional life writing narrative structures will influence not only the way we read and understand contemporary memoir, but will impact our approaches to self-reflexive narrative structures and provide us with new ways to understand ourselves, and our lives, in relation to the serial culture in which we live.

DEDICATION

To my family, especially to my grandparents.

For Martha Carder, Horace McDaniel, and Walt Wolery, and

in memory of

Delbert Carder, Audrey McDaniel, Constance West, and Rosemary Wolery.

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Finally, I dedicate this project to the grandparents I lost during the course of its writing: Rosemary Wolery, Delbert Carder, and Audrey McDaniel. Their absence is palpable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
	ABSTRACT	iii
	DEDICATION	v
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	x
CHAPTER		
I	INTRODUCTION: SERIALITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MEMOIR	1
	Form, Genre, Narrative	14
	Serial Memoir: A Genre for “the Century of Witness”	35
II	SERIAL STRUCTURES, THE ARCHIVE, AND MARY MCCARTHY’S “PERFECT EXECUTION OF THE IDEA”.....	41
	The Tripartite Narrator: Mary, Mary McCarthy, and “Mary McCarthy”	59
	Seriality and Supplemmentarity: From “An Intellectual Autobiography or How I Grew” to <i>How I Grew: A Memoir of the Early Years to Intellectual Memoirs</i>	66
III	“WHAT I REPRESENT IS MYSELF”: SERIALITY IN MAYA ANGELOU’S COLLECTIONS OF MEMOIRS AND MEMORIES .	83
	Passages of Memory and Recipes to Try: <i>The Welcome Table as Memoir</i>	90
	Sartre and Seriality: <i>A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes</i>	105
	National Narratives through Spicy Sausages: Angelou’s Pan-Africanism.....	120
	Coda, or Dessert: The Seriality of a Life Mosaic.....	125
IV	SERIALITY, GRAPHIC NARRATIVE, AND THE MEMOIRS OF ART SPIEGELMAN	131
	Graphic Narrative and Seriality: “The Devil” Is in the Details	141
	Serial Preservation: The Materiality of Seriality	157

CHAPTER	Page
The Book as Object: Archiving Memory	166
Seriality and Self-Representation: Graphic Displacement, or the Many Faces of Art.....	176
A Tentative Conclusion.....	189
V AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS AND SERIAL CULTURE: TELEVISION, CELEBRITY, SELF?	194
“I am a movie of the week”: The Seriality of Television Culture and Self-Construction	204
Live, with “Augusten Burroughs”!	214
The Camp of Celebrity Culture	230
Camp Strategies for Self-Serialization.....	243
VI CONCLUSION: “VENERATION OF THE TRACE”: SERIAL MEMOIR INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY	254
WORKS CITED.....	262
APPENDIX.....	283
VITA	294

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: SERIALITY IN

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MEMOIR

In postmodern America we are culturally obsessed with getting a life—and not just getting it, but sharing it with and advertising it to others. We are, as well, obsessed with consuming the lives that other people have gotten.
—Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Introduction,” *Getting a Life*

In *American Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Writing* (1994), Robert F. Sayre notes that the kind of autobiographical text written, published, and read by different generations of Americans gives audiences a great deal of information about that generation’s particular experiences, values, and fears. Asserting that more than simply the content of these self-reflexive texts change, he continues: “They also change in form, emphasis, and sense of audience. They change with the changing values and concepts of character and society. Formulae and conventions change, reflecting changes in society and the society’s most basic goals and standards” (9). Margaretta Jolly echoes Sayre’s assertions as she claims that life writing presents the “self-image of a culture” (496). Recently, American book critics, scholars, and publishers alike observed that the genre of memoir was becoming more and more prevalent, and they quickly termed this trend the “memoir boom” or, as Michiko Kakutani called it, “the memoir craze” (qtd in Eakin 19). The proliferation of memoir in the second-half of the twentieth-century marked the rise of a particular kind of self-reflexive text that, as Sayre suggested, informs readers about the habits, desires, and hopes of contemporary writers and their readers.

This dissertation follows the style of the *MLA Style Manual*.

In *The Limits of Autobiography* (2001), Leigh Gilmore posits memoir as “the genre in the skittish period around the turn of the millennium” (1, emphasis original), and James Atlas asserts in “The Age of the Literary Memoir is Now” (1996) that, “if the moment of inception is hard to locate, the triumph of memoir is now established fact” (25).¹ More than a decade later, during the 2008 presidential election, for example, some of the critical conversation about candidates John McCain and Barack Obama centered on how they had represented themselves in their memoirs.² One reason for this extended conversation about the self-representational strategies of the presidential candidates may be that, as Kerwin Lee Klein argues, the notion of “memory” is beginning to replace other words that have been traditionally associated with history, like nature, culture, and language (128).³ The role of the literary memoir in this election, then, provides voters/readers with narratives of self-construction in relation to the historical moment. Its popularity increasing in tandem with the larger concept of “memory,” memoir, as Helen Buss writes, has also begun to displace the term “autobiography” to describe “any narrative or essayistic life-writing practice (excluding biography)” (7).⁴ Most recently, in 2006, the National Book Critics Circle included

¹ Gilmore provides a footnote to illustrate that the number of books published as autobiography or memoir tripled between the 1940s and the 1990s.

² McCain is the author of two memoirs, *Faith of My Fathers: A Family Memoir* (2000) and *Worth the Fighting For: The Education of an American Maverick, and the Heroes Who Inspired Him* (2003), and so is Obama, who authored *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995) and *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006).

³ In relation to history, explains Klein, “memory increasingly functions as antonym rather than synonym; contrary rather than complement and replacement rather than supplement” (128-29).

⁴ Julie Rak agrees, writing that in North America, “‘memoir’ is in the process of becoming a byword for autobiography” (305).

memoir as part of an award title, “Autobiography/Memoir”;⁵ this category title emphasizes memoir’s place as a recognized genre, even as it also reinforces the genre’s frequent conflation with autobiography.

While scholarship and popular discussions of memoirs often center on the veracity of the narratives presented—readers may think of the continuing critical conversation around Mary McCarthy’s *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957) and Lillian Hellman’s *Unfinished Woman* (1969),⁶ or the more recent media-frenzied examples of James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* (2005)⁷ and Margaret B. Jones (aka Margaret Seltzer) and her faux-memoir about gang life in Los Angeles, titled *Love and Consequences* (2008)—memoirists are also experimenting with innovative narrative techniques including the publication of multiple discrete self-narratives. The practice of serial publishing represents an emerging and significant trend in memoir and illustrates a shift in the “form, emphasis, and sense of audience” which Sayre proposes marks a transition for how a particular generation of writers understands lived experience and its textual representation. The movement in memoir to publish serial accounts of the self reflects a larger cultural or societal shift in how people interact with one another, how they see themselves and their own participation in the public sphere, and possibilities

⁵ The National Book Critics Circle, founded in 1974, comprises 700 book reviewers. Before 1983, biography and autobiography were considered “general nonfiction,” and from 1983-2004, autobiography and biography were one award category, separate from nonfiction. In 2005, autobiography was given its own category, separate from both biography and general nonfiction, and in 2006, memoir was added to the category’s title.

⁶ Timothy Dow Adams’ exhaustive *Truth and Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (1994) is an excellent source that examines the role of truth and lying in life writing, within which he clearly shows the critical conversation around McCarthy and Hellman, among others.

⁷ In the first chapter of *Living Autobiographically* (2008), titled “Talking about Ourselves: The Rules of the Game,” Paul John Eakin gives a detailed discussion and analysis of the controversy surrounding Frey’s memoir.

they see for effective ways to record their life narratives. I propose that the dramatic increase in authorship, publication, and consumption of serial memoir marks an important transformation for self-narrative in contemporary American strategies for self-representation.⁸

In this dissertation, I suggest that serial memoir is a genre that developed in the second half of the twentieth-century in tandem with postmodern thought and the associated changes and advancements in technology and media. It is a postmodern form of self-representation: relational, experimental, historical, and persistently shifting. Serial memoir is a genre that has become mainstream, taken up by such authors as bell hooks, Esmeralda Santiago, Art Spiegelman, Annie Dillard, Richard Rodriguez, Lillian Hellman, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joan Didion, Maya Angelou, Martha Gellhorn, Augusten Burroughs, Ian Frazier, Rebecca Walker, Harvey Pekar, David Sedaris, Ruth Reichl, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Nancy Mairs, among many others, indicating that there is something appealing and culturally significant in this particular narrative form of self-representation. While there have been occasional moments in the history of life writing when individuals have chosen to publish multiple autobiographical texts, I argue that the rise of the memoir genre combined with postindustrial American culture allows for contemporary American memoirists to think about self-construction and self-representation in a new way. Unlike the rare instances of multiple memoirs in the history of life writing, ours is a moment in which serial memoir is a frequent and widespread occurrence.

⁸ Leigh Gilmore's brief examination—a single chapter titled “There Will Always be a Mother,” in *The Limits of Autobiography*—is one of very few examinations of seriality and its implications for life writing.

Life writing scholars regularly point to the numerous autobiographical texts of Edward Gibbon, who published six versions of one text, *Memoirs of My Life* (1788-93), Giacomo Casanova, the author of a twelve-volume set of memoirs titled *History of My Life* (1826–38), and Frederick Douglass’ three volumes, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, revised 1892), as evidence of serial life writing.⁹ Discussions of these texts often center on the ways in which authors provide multiple interpretations of the past. The texts, written at different points in the authors’ lives, thus allow readers, as Smith and Watson propose, to ask whether or not these varied self-reflexive performances “signal stages of, or changes in, the overall pattern of beliefs encoded in the autobiographical story, or whether changes from one text to its ‘sequel,’ or ‘prequel,’ signal larger cultural transformations affecting how people know themselves through stories tellable (and discourses available) to them at particular historical moments” (*Reading Autobiography* 27). Reading these texts as relatively unique in their revisions of historical moments, or as remarkable for their frequent forays into self-narrative, is significant for this study because they are each considered to be extraordinary in their repeated self-presentation. In this dissertation, however, I argue that serial self-representation is no longer an unusual way to represent selfhood; rather, contemporary serial memoirists often use the available discourse of serial narrative through which to present their life narratives. Serial memoir is a textual,

⁹ In addition to Smith and Watson, see Winifred Morgan’s essay “Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass,” or Stephen M. Weissman’s psychoanalytic examination, “Frederick Douglass, Portrait of a Black Militant—*A Study in the Family Romance*.”

material manifestation of a larger serial culture, marking a crucial shift in how people understand themselves and narrate their life stories.

Historically, Roger Hagedorn points out, serial narratives have been considered inferior to unified narrative forms (“Technology” 5). The relationship between the serialized parts of a work of fiction and the unified form of the novel, or the position of the highly serialized and episodic medium of television in relation to the self-contained narrative of film, provide two examples from different media which generally bear out Hagedorn’s assertions. Since the nineteenth century, the serial has been “a dominant mode of narrative presentation in western culture—if not in fact the dominant mode”—in fiction, television, radio, and film, particularly at their emergent stages, as serials “serve to *promote the medium in which they appear*” (“Technology” 5, emphasis original). Once the medium is established, he argues, the most significant competition an established serial will face is “any serial in a newly emerging mass medium” (“Doubtless” 41). Hagedorn provides examples from a variety of media, including the early twentieth-century example of film: “film serials continued to be profitable until the success of radio serials, which in turn faded into memory as television came into being. In the so-called ‘information age,’ as technology evolves and media corporations merge, we can expect to see new developments not only in the realm of the mass media, but also in that of serial narrative” (“Doubtless” 41). Hagedorn’s observations about seriality and new forms of media and communication can be linked to the “memoir boom” as memoir, a highly episodic and recursive mode, attempts to displace the other serialized forms of self-reflexive texts, such as reality television. It is this episodicity, according to

Hagedorn, which is the most important trait in distinguishing the serial from the “single-unit realistic narrative, including the novel in book form, the feature film, the radio play, and so on” (“Doubtless” 28). Additionally, Julie Rak suggests that, for many autobiography critics, the genre of autobiography “is not connected to the material conditions of its production” (308). The materiality of self-production and self-representation in memoir, I contend, is a central focus of the genre itself, but is particularly significant in serial memoir.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I examine texts that I read as serial memoir as I discuss some of the ways in which this phenomenon works along with other forms of seriality in postmodern American culture. Asserting the significance of reading these texts as memoir, I distinguish this genre from others in life writing, such as diary or autobiography; although self-representational texts are generically flexible, distinctions are important to the ways in which both readers and writers approach texts. One distinction involves the position of the speaking subject, Lee Quinby asserts in “The Subject of Memoirs,” whose “I” is written against the “dominant construction of individualized selfhood, which follows the dictum to, above all else, know thy interior self. In relation to autobiography, then, memoirs function as counter-memory” (299).¹⁰ Counter-memory challenges the possibility of an unified representation of the past

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, in *Language, Counter-memory, and Practice: Selected Interviews and Essays* (1977), presents counter-memory as one way to challenge dominant discourses, thereby empowering the individual against the larger nation or system of imposed history. Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Stern, in their introduction to a special issue of *Representations* on memory and counter-memory, write that “whenever memory is invoked, we should be asking ourselves: by whom, where, in which context, against what?” (2). Extending the concept of counter-memory to supplementarity, Julie Rak posits that memoir’s existence “works to highlight autobiography’s lack” (321), presenting a counter-narrative to the positions established in autobiography.

presented by memory and illustrates the power of collective or unofficial memory. Memories of one event are understood and constructed in various ways by different people, and these memories are subject to revision over time.¹¹ As Barbara Misztal argues, the contemporary challenges posed to “theories assuming the split between history and memory reveals how complex, tense and politically charged the relationship between history and memory can be and shows that for each memory there is a counter-memory” (107). Generically providing positions of counter-memory, memoir allows for a multiplicity of subject positions which pose a challenge to the possibility of having, much less knowing, an “interior self”; the construct of the “I” exposes the idea of a cohesive, consistent “interior self” as fictive. The existence of serial memoir increases the textual spaces available to counter-memory and witnessing, allowing for the repeated act of uncovering constructs of selfhood. Subjectivity is rooted in memory and serial memoir confronts traditional concepts of unified identity and history, presenting a discursive mode that embraces multiplicity, relationality, and historicity. Additionally, serial memoir allows for expansive, relational, and culturally contextualized self-representational positions, which dismantle grand autobiographical and historical narratives.

Serial self-representation is thus consistent with theories of postmodernity which appreciate the techniques of fragmentation, reflexivity, narrative discontinuity, and simultaneity as writers and artists interrogate traditional generic boundaries and categories. François Lyotard, for example, suggests that the postmodern era is

¹¹ For an extensive discussion of memory, see Barbara A. Misztal’s *Theories of Social Remembering* (2003).

characterized by the move away from grand narratives to smaller narratives.¹² The move from grand narratives to little narratives is seen throughout postmodern culture, and its presence in serial memoir is directly associated with that shift.¹³ In one way, the challenge serial memoir poses to the possibility of self-representation in a single text imitates the move toward smaller narratives; serial memoir privileges the episodic and ex-centric as it presents the possibility of an unending system of self-representation. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan suggests that “the medium is the message,” explaining that the “‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (8). Proposing that the content of the medium often distracts readers from the character of the medium, he argues that in order for contemporary culture to fully understand the information we receive, we must pay attention to how that information is disseminated. Serial production, market segmentation, and consumption go hand in hand, and due in part to the appearance and availability of new technologies, the medium of serial self-representation has become an undeniable and compelling reality in contemporary American life writing.

As a genre, memoir “is closely associated with periods of crisis: both historical crises, such as wars and revolutions, and intellectual crises, as [José] Ortega y Gasset

¹² See Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1979).

¹³ Recent examinations in media studies also bear out Lyotard’s assertion. Mark Currie suggests that one example of this shift can be seen in the move away from the broadcasting techniques of early television, in which all viewers tuned in to the same programs, to the more recent trend of narrowcasting, which allows viewers to tailor their viewing habits. Lizabeth Cohen, in her comprehensive study of consumption in the United States following World War II, agrees, explaining that as narrowcasting and other kinds of market segmentation “gave capitalists and rebels alike a shared interest in using consumer markets to strengthen—not break down—the boundaries between social groups, it contributed to a more fragmented America” (331).

defines them, such as periods of intellectual and spiritual transition” (Billson 280),¹⁴ and the number of texts written and published as memoir are a testament to the many upheavals in thought, culture, and global interaction in the American twentieth-century. The association of memoir with moments of crisis, memoir’s ability to provide a counter-memory to the grand narrative of history, and its investment in the ex-centric also engages with the tendency in postmodern American culture to relegate the present to the past as quickly as possible while creating some sort of record.¹⁵ This trend, argues Mark Currie in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), “could more convincingly be analysed as a flight from the present, as an impatience to narrate current events, to hurry everything into the past even while it is still happening. This makes it a way of remembering, of archiving, that actually displaces the experiential present tense with a historical self-consciousness” (97).¹⁶ As the twentieth-century progresses, this process of immediate archivization becomes increasingly amplified by new technologies—like photography, film, television, and streaming video—whose function, it seems, is to record.¹⁷ The concept of historical self-consciousness is foundational for serial memoirists, in particular, as they textually and substantively engage these visual forms

¹⁴ José Ortega y Gasset was a Spanish philosopher who published *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), a collection of essays titled *History as a System* (1941), and *Man and Crisis* (1958).

¹⁵ In its oldest forms, documented in the *Oxford English Dictionary* from 1494, “memoir” means a “note, a memorandum; a record; a brief testimonial or warrant.”

¹⁶ Pierre Nora agrees, as he writes that the phrase, “the acceleration of history,” is important because of an “increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear” (7). “The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition,” he continues, “in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility. Self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun. We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (7).

¹⁷ Currie continues, writing that the “quickenning cycle of narration and renarration reflects the time compression of commercial life in general where the pressure to renew the style of a commodity is part of the process of renewing markets” (101).

in their own projects to record and bear witness. Serial memoir emerges as a genre within which authors can explicitly preserve, archive, and testify to what they have seen in this turbulent and communications-based century.

Significantly, media theorist John Ellis has dubbed the twentieth-century “the century of witness,” pointing to the ways in which audiences interact with the rest of the world based on the development of new communication technologies, many of which rely on the promise of instantaneous contact.¹⁸ In *Seeing Things* (2000), Ellis argues that, emerging from the twentieth-century, “we can realize that a profound shift has taken place in the way that we perceive the world that exists beyond our immediate experience. [...] We live in an era of information, and photography, film and television have brought us visual evidence” (9). Ellis proposes that the amount of visual documentation available in the twentieth-century—beginning with photography and photographic evidence, and continuing to include televisual documentation and the immediacy of digital images recorded and streamed in real-time—changes how audiences and the public interact with global events. Examining the relationship between the medium and the message, Ellis’ argument also underscores the relationality of lived experience—indeed, the hyper-relationality of contemporary life—and his observations provide an interesting corollary to the idea that memoir is “*the genre*” of the twentieth century.

¹⁸ Trauma theorists Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, as well as life writing theorists such as Leigh Gilmore and Nancy K. Miller, are also invested in examining the twentieth-century as the century of witness.

If the twentieth-century has been the century of witness, and if we are able to perceive global events both figuratively and literally, then we have also become invested in the stories which help to contextualize what we have witnessed. The cultural impulse observed by Currie (and others) to immediately record and document ourselves or our interactions with the world is related to the notion of the twentieth-century as “the century of witness” and the concept that “the medium is the message”; access to an increasing variety of digital media and technology throughout the second-half of the century has amplified the cultural impulse to self-record. Ellis argues that, emerging from “the century of witness,” it is clear that a “profound shift” has occurred in the way that we understand the world beyond what we can physically witness and experience for ourselves (9). Emphasizing the visual, Ellis writes that we know and “have seen more of this century, than generations of any previous century knew or saw of theirs” (9). The amount we have seen is directly related to how much of our experiences we choose to record, and the genre of serial memoir textually allows for our expanding self-narratives.

Culturally, moreover, we exhibit a desire to preserve the past or to prove that we have participated in society in some way; the popularity and contemporary uses of serial memoir are directly related to these shifts in our perception of how we function in an increasingly digital and virtual landscape. The act of writing, of inscribing, of textually representing oneself is ultimately linked to anxieties about death and forgetting. In *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002), Margaret Atwood writes that the apparent permanence of writing is based on the actualization of the performance of inscription—writing exists through writing. It is not always ephemeral, like spoken or embodied

performances, and it leaves the trail of its own construction. “Other art forms can last and last—painting, sculpture, music—but they do not survive as *voice*,” Atwood explains. “Events take place, in relation to other events. That’s what time is. It’s one damn thing after another, and the important word in that sentence is *after*” (158).

Emphasizing relationality and temporality, Atwood examines the written product as evidence of embodied repetition. The relationality of self to events, to other events, to self-construction and self-representation, is directly linked to the contemporary impulse to record and testify to what we have witnessed.¹⁹

In many ways, the proliferation of digital technology makes both our witnessing and our testifying possible, and Currie’s observations about our contemporary cultural impatience also works with Hagedorn’s argument about serial media more generally. Hagedorn writes that, in tracing the history of serial forms, it is clear that each time a new technology emerges, those promoting the form have turned to serial narratives so they can create a new customer base by familiarizing their audiences with the new technologies (“Technology” 5). Individual serials promote the medium itself, which “explains why serials appear in a particular medium precisely at that period when the real rival is not so much another serial in the same medium, but another medium” (Hagedorn, “Technology” 5). If serials are created in order to create product and medium loyalty, and if the “medium is the message,” then the increase in potential

¹⁹ Fictional postmodern narratives also engage some of the features of serial self-representational texts, like the character of Nathan Zuckerman in Philip Roth’s novels. While many read Zuckerman as a stand-in for Roth himself, the books are fiction, and Zuckerman is not Roth; however, Zuckerman works as a continuing character, across many texts, and is a figure to whom readers cling. As readers, we are engaged by particular characters and their stories, and we want to follow them in further narratives. This phenomenon is also remarkable in the serialization and sequelization of popular film franchises.

media for self-reflection during the second half of the twentieth-century is a contributing factor in the rise of the serial memoir. While serials appear when media emerges, it is the incredible increase in new media that makes the rise of serial narrative in postmodern American culture compelling. Memoir, as “*the*” current genre in life writing, now competes for audiences with reality television, online social networking, blogging, and sites like YouTube or Twitter, where individuals can record and visually/virtually share moments from their own lives, almost immediately. This constant self-narrativization—the speed with which we are able to “publish” moments from our lived experiences—is part and parcel of the serialization of subjectivity, and of a contemporary cultural impulse to textually archive what we have witnessed.

Form, Genre, Narrative

The first indication that the serial was an important cultural force was its pervasiveness.
—Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial*

Certain genre types—including those of the short story, the novel, and those of poetry—have traditionally been seen as more ‘legitimate’ forms of literature than others, such as diaries, memoir, and autobiography.
—Derek Parker Royal, “Ethnic Resistance in *Tripmaster Monkey*”

Authors who write self-representationally engage in autobiographical writing, if the word is examined from its Greek roots: *autos* means “self,” *bios* is related to “life,” and *graphe* signifies writing or inscribing.²⁰ Any practice of self-life-writing, then, in the most liberal definition of the term, participates in autobiographical writing. The genres of life writing, however, even those that engage in *self*-life-writing, are far more

²⁰ For a more in-depth examination of the etymology of “autobiography,” see James Olney’s essay “Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography.”

expansive than the one genre of autobiography, and include diary, biomythography, testimonio, apologia, captivity narrative, personal essay, autoethnography, self-portrait, travel narrative, and, most significantly for this project, memoir. Distinctions among these various genres of life writing overlap with ease, particularly in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, as writers search for new ways to represent the self, the life, and/or the writing. Yet readers' expectations for and understandings of a text often hinge on its classification as categories and genres alert readers to what they are going to read, and thus to some of the necessary narrative tools with which to consider that text.

Distinctions between autobiographical genres are not simply formal or aesthetic, as they directly influence the way readers approach and understand a given text.²¹ In his well-known text in life writing criticism, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960), Roy Pascal concisely discusses the distinction between memoir and autobiography,

²¹ One well-known example involves Guatemalan author Rigoberta Menchú Tum. In 1992, Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her narrative *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. This text chronicles the Quiché Indian struggle opposing injustices against native people, and was classified in reviews as either an autobiography or a work of testimonio. These generic classifications had serious implications for how readers read, understood, and appreciated Menchú's story. As Paul John Eakin notes: "Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Rigoberta Menchú, makes front-page news in *The New York Times* when anthropologist David Stoll accuses her of having stretched the truth in her autobiography, prompting journalists to wonder whether the Nobel selection committee will reconsider its prize award to her" (113). Reading *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as an autobiography, anthropologist David Stoll wrote an exposé, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), which critiqued Menchú's story for what he read as its factual inconsistencies and called the veracity of her narrative into question. In response to Stoll, Arturo Arias suggested that Menchú's narrative should be understood and read as testimonio instead of autobiography. Testimonio, as a generic classification, is akin to memoir because of its elasticity and inclusivity, and Arias points out that "Testimonio was never meant to be autobiography or a sworn testimony in the juridical sense; rather it is a collective, communal account of a person's life" (76). Testimonio's focus on the collective and on cultural memory is in stark contrast to the project of traditional autobiography, which centers on the *auto* or the representation of an individual. Arias' contention, with others, that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* should be read as something different from autobiography is significant to my project here: as texts are written and understood in different ways by various audiences, new ways to theorize these texts are needed. Further, the international scale on which Menchú's narrative was discussed—and that there was any speculation about reconsidering her Nobel Prize—underscores the significance for delineating multiple approaches to life writing genres and self-representational techniques, many of which are generated from culturally specific understandings of self.

providing a basis for much of contemporary life writing scholarship.²² Attempting to create a way to distinguish the genres from one another, Pascal acknowledges that the line between memoir and autobiography is difficult to draw because they influence one another: “both are based on personal experience, chronological, and reflective” (5). One substantial difference he sees is that autobiographies are most concerned with the self, “not the outside world, though necessarily the outside world must appear so that [...] the personality finds its particular shape” (9). The strict focus on the individual self and its interiority, often at the expense of the larger cultural context, becomes central to his theorization of autobiography and its distinction from memoir; memoirs often focus on the historical moment, occasionally at the expense of the narrator. Another early theorist, Georges Gusdorf, expands on Pascal’s definition, arguing that authors of autobiography narrate their own life history, attempting to gather the fragments of lived reality and “regroup them in a *comprehensive sketch*”; indeed, an autobiographer must work toward providing a “complete and coherent expression of his entire destiny” (35, italics mine). Gusdorf’s emphasis on the entirety of the autobiographer’s project is placed in contrast to Pascal’s assertion that autobiography can involve either the “movement of a life” or “part of a life” (9). Both Pascal and Gusdorf stress, however, the autobiographer’s movement toward the present as the final moment of textual

²² Timothy Dow Adams begins *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (1990), writing: “The modern era in autobiographical theory began in 1960 with the publication of Roy Pascal’s now classic *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Since then, virtually all autobiographical theorists have arranged their arguments within a complex, interconnected spectrum based on the terms in Pascal’s title. *Design* has been treated under such headings as genre, form, mode, and style; *truth* has been handled in a bewildering variety of ways, including its relation to fiction, nonfiction, fact, fraud, figure, memory, identity, error, and myth” (1), and Gilmore calls Pascal’s text a “critical precursor to the renewed interest in autobiography studies” (“Mark” 16).

representation: the end is the point at which the author is able to write their autobiography and pen their “last words,” to use Gilmore’s phrase.

Pascal asserts that the significance of autobiography is “more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past. If this present position is not brought home to us [...] there is a failure” (11). The narrative movement, then, is toward the present as autobiographers illustrate their achievements for the reader as they discover, in Pascal’s words, “the concrete reality of the meaning of their life” (10). Since these early theorizations of life writing performed by Pascal and Gusdorf, scholarship has consistently interrogated the assumptions this “first wave” of criticism makes, such as the idea of unified subjectivity, the possibility of accurately representing the truth, and the ability to narrativize a coherent subject position.²³ These initial forays into life writing scholarship also elevate certain modes of self-representational texts, like autobiography, to the devaluation of others, like memoir; as Derek Parker Royal’s epigraph indicates, memoir and other forms of episodic self-narratives were not considered literary enough to be given the status of autobiography.²⁴

Memoir, as its mnemonic etymology suggests, is concerned with uncovering the past as it situates the subject in a cultural environment instead of focusing on the “revelation of the present situation” in the author’s life or with being the “historian of

²³ In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson delineate three waves of life writing scholarship: the first wave, the second wave, and the “avant-garde, postcolonial, and postmodern” wave (which they propose begins around the publication of James Olney’s *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, published in 1972).

²⁴ Rak suggests that one of the reasons autobiography studies has elided the genre of memoir is because it has been “a form of life writing associated with what [she] term[s] non-professional or non-literary textual production, has often stood in for problems that a wide variety of autobiography critics have had with popular writing, and with writing when it is considered as a commodity” (306).

[one]self” (Pascal 11, Gusdorf 35); the movement in memoir is often achronological and traverses the seemingly established and impermeable boundaries between memory and history, process and product, time and place, or self and other. Quinby reminds readers that, “whereas autobiography promotes an ‘I’ that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an ‘I’ that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others” (298-99). The historical and relational perspective of the memoirist underscores the presentation of a contextualized subject. Serial memoir extends this focus as the memoirist presents the self in relation to others, to historical events, and, for the texts chosen in this project, in relation to other memoirs in the series.

Seriality in self-representational texts presents generic challenges for life writing, as some genres lend themselves to multiple texts more than others. For example, Gilmore asserts that, for autobiography, seriality poses a challenge because it “rais[es] the specter of endless autobiography. That there will always be (another) autobiography means there will be no last words and *autobiography is a genre of last words*” (96, emphasis mine). If autobiography in its traditional sense is a genre in which writers represent their life monolithically, then Gilmore is right—serial autobiography is a limit-case as it challenges the generic implications of autobiography as a single text.²⁵

Historically, some autobiographers, like Frederick Douglass and David Crockett, published narratives across several volumes, creating what Gilmore calls “multivolume”

²⁵ “Serial autobiography” appears in Smith and Watson’s *Reading Autobiography*’s list of fifty-two genres of life writing, and they write that the term “designates an autobiographical work often published in multiple volumes (or films, videos, artworks)” (203). They conclude this short entry by asserting that “Seriality in relation to memory and the terms of various autobiographical genres calls for more sustained study” (204).

or “multibook” autobiographies (*Limits* 96).²⁶ The authors of such multibook autobiographies write in order to re-position the present self, but the impulse to represent the present moment as a point of arrival or as proof of some kind of success is not, however, the goal of memoir.²⁷ Rather, memoirs are far more interested in presenting stories or episodes from memory than in documenting the author’s “complete” life story. Serial memoirs expand the possibilities for episodic and relational self-construction and self-representation because of the scope allowed by multiple publications.

If the wording in Gilmore’s statement about serials is slightly altered, however, if “memoir” is substituted for “autobiography,” assessing the limits of memoir in relation to seriality and serialization dramatically shift the possibilities for multiple self-representational projects. Unlike autobiography, memoir is not a “genre of last words.” Rather, in examining memory and the recursivity of recollection, memoirs end tenuously at best, leaving open the possibility for many more texts. The “autobiographical pact,” theorized by Philippe Lejeune in 1975, complicates the concept of serial autobiography even more, as it assures the reader that, because the text is part of the genre of “autobiography,” it provides the true account of one’s life. Once this contractual obligation is established by autobiography, more than one autobiography seems out of

²⁶ Frederick Douglass published three volumes, as previously noted, and David Crockett published four: *The Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee* (1833; republished as *Sketches and Eccentricities of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee*, also in 1833), *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee* (1834), *An Account of Col. Crockett’s Tour to the North and Down East...*, *Written by Himself* (1835), and *Col. Crockett’s Exploits and Adventures in Texas*, 1836).

²⁷ William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely assert in their Preface to *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* that “Douglass published additional autobiographies [...] designed to update his steadily evolving public image from that of fugitive slave to man of letters, social commentator, and race leader” (viii).

place because the life story should have already been divulged.²⁸ The prospect of more texts in memoir complicates the positions involved in the autobiographical pact: the reader, the author, and the narrator.

For example, in his recent analysis of character narration, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (2005), James Phelan dedicates a chapter to Frank McCourt's memoirs *Angela's Ashes* (1996) and *'Tis* (1999).²⁹ He refers to these texts as memoirs throughout his second chapter, titled "Unreliable Narration, Restricted Narration, and the Implied Author in Memoir," but at the end of the section he makes a claim about the continuing narrator of these books. He writes: "Since the authorial audience of *'Tis* knows the narrative of *Angela's Ashes*, and since the two narratives have the same protagonist and many other continuing characters, they form a *continuous autobiography* with a single implied author" (97, emphasis mine). One question my analysis of serial memoir raises is whether or not the mere fact that the texts are written by the same person means that they must then be considered part of a "continuous autobiography," even if, as Phelan convincingly argues three sentences before this, that while the "career author" is the same for both memoirs, the "implied authors of the two narratives are notably different from each other" (97). The differences between the narrator of *Angela's Ashes* and the narrator of *'Tis*, even if these texts are autobiographical and thus written by the same physical person, are significant both for how readers approach and understand the memoirs, and for how the narrator

²⁸ This contract is well documented in life writing criticism. In memoir, while there is still a contract between writer and reader about the veracity of the story, the obligation to tell the truth is less stringent. Gilmore also makes this point in *Limits*.

²⁹ McCourt published his third memoir, *Teacher Man*, in 2005.

persona functions. Assuming that, because they are serial examples of life writing, they must then be part of a continuous autobiography does not allow for the real complexities of the texts.

In a series of memoirs, texts may appear out of sequential order and may take variable forms. Like other serial modes of postmodern self-representation which value such reflexive and fragmented narratives (such as celebrity culture or social networking websites like Facebook), serial memoir challenges traditional concepts of closure and order as it places the idea of a unified self under scrutiny. An expression of postmodern selfhood, serial memoir is one way for life writers to reflect an uncontainable and shifting perspective on subjectivity. Nancy K. Miller succinctly asserts that contemporary memoir is “postmodern, since it hesitates to define the boundaries between private and public, subject and object” (43). Dissolution of generic boundaries is one hallmark of postmodern thought and writing and, as Linda Hutcheon points out, “the most important boundaries crossed [in postmodern texts] have been those between fiction and non-fiction—and by extension—between art and life” (*A Poetics* 10). Dismantling the boundary between fiction and nonfiction—between art and life—memoir unsettles the autobiographical “truth” of memory as it exposes the narrative structures and techniques which allow for each articulation of subjectivity. Because many memoirs are concerned almost exclusively with the past, memoirists often reconstitute memories by blurring and shifting generic boundaries as they approximate dialogue and recreate scenes from memory; the limit between fiction and nonfiction, in memoir, is always already suspect and unstable.

This tendency to dissolve established generic boundaries leads many critics to assert that postmodernism and genre studies are mutually exclusive, but the ways in which postmodern texts play with or distort traditional generic boundaries paradoxically supports a need for those boundaries. As Robert Cohen argues, although the assumption that theories of genre must necessarily underplay literary artifice, “there are others that are perfectly compatible with multiple discourses, with narratives of discontinuity, with transgressed boundaries” (11). Highly flexible, memoir allows for and encourages multiple discourses and transgressed boundaries, as it is able to incorporate many different kinds of self-representation. Memoir encourages heterogeneity and collage because memories themselves are not restricted to one narrative form or structure.

In its attempt to reconstruct the past, heterogeneity is one of the foundational elements of postmodernism, according to Hutcheon. Rather than presenting a nostalgic “return” to the past, however, Hutcheon argues for a “critical revisiting” or reworking of the past (*A Poetics* 4). Postmodernity, as the dominant mode of culture in American late capitalism, is necessarily linked to mass culture, consumer capitalism, and the attendant technologies which make late capitalism possible. Fredric Jameson significantly draws on Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of seriality in order to describe the position of the subject in advanced and late capitalism, arguing that seriality is “a basic social mechanism” which envisions “everyone projecting onto everyone else an optical illusion of centrality as ‘public opinion’” (“Seriality” 77). For Sartre, in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960),

seriality refers to a relationship with other people that is based on external forces.³⁰ His famous example of a series of people is that of a group waiting for a bus. This group is considered serial for the sole reason that they have been brought together by an external force: to catch the same bus. The series is thus united in this common goal. In seriality, Sartre explains, “[e]veryone is the same as the other insofar as he is Other than himself” (260). The members of the series, then, are aware of their status as individuals as they are also aware of the “serialized context of that activity in a social collective whose structure constitutes them within certain limits and constraints” (Young 725).

Theorist Iris Marion Young contends that one application of Sartre’s theory of serial collectivity is to gender: she suggests that gender is a contemporary manifestation of seriality which allows us to think about women as part of a larger collective without essentializing the commonalities of women.³¹ Serial collectivity is compelling in “the century of witness,” as serial memoirists attempt to record their experiences within the larger mass culture. While a series is united for the common goal, Jameson asserts that the serial relationship resembles “solitude, and our solitude is criss-crossed and mined, corroded, by hosts of serial relationships without our knowing it” (“Seriality” 76). Jameson’s emphasis on the feeling of solitude and the interpolation of selfhood via the actions of others who participate in the same activities allows the subject to feel as if they are “doing just what everybody else is doing” (“Seriality,” 76). In Sartre’s

³⁰ A more detailed examination of Sartre’s theories of seriality in relation to serial memoir is provided in the third chapter of this dissertation.

³¹ Young fruitfully points out that, while Sartre’s primary purpose in theorizing seriality was to examine and describe “unorganized class existence, the positioning of individuals in relations of production and consumption” (731), seriality can also be usefully applied to racial position and nationality. I extend my applications of Sartre’s theories of seriality in the third chapter.

theorization of seriality, as Jameson notes, each individual remains an individual even when construed as part of a group.

Seriality is thus foundational for thinking about the relationality of selfhood. Sartre's theorization of the self as always already in relation to others—as a member of a group even when acting as an individual—is important to serial memoir for more than one reason: the texts themselves are understood as connected; the author is linked to each of the texts in a unique way; and the narratorial personae within the serial memoir are consistently understood as in relation to other people, places, and events. The individual in relation to external forces is emphasized in Sartre's theorization of seriality, as he proposes that “to the extent that the bus designates the present commuters, it constitutes them in their *interchangeability*: each of them is effectively produced by the social ensemble as united with his neighbours, in so far as he is strictly identical with them” (259, emphasis original). Recognizing the interchangeability of self with others, and the ways in which people interact in exchange economies and social situations also point to the production and consumption of serial memoir. These consumers make serial production possible in any medium because, without them, there would be no reason to continue creating the serial text. Additionally, Jameson finds that advertising and production are central to seriality in a postmodern American context, arguing that the manufacture and promotion of mass-produced commodities “represent the most basic manifestation of seriality in our society” (“Seriality” 77). He proposes that this kind of seriality—the interpolation of subject through larger systems of production and consumption—is more visible at certain moments in history. In particular, Jameson

locates a significant moment for seriality in the immediate post-war American culture of the 1950s (“Seriality” 78), which, I contend, extends into the early twenty-first century.

Significantly, the processes of production in the late capitalist moment influence the ways in which authors understand selfhood and self-construction. In *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson argues that the technologies of the late twentieth-century are very different from the technologies of the early twentieth-century, most remarkably in the fact that contemporary machines are machines of reproduction rather than of production, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment, of some older speed-and-energy sculpture. Here we have less to do with kinetic energy than with all kinds of new reproductive processes; and in the weaker productions of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content—into narratives which are *about* the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of the production and reproduction of the simulacrum. (37)

Jameson’s examination of postmodern technologies engages the structures of production and the processes through which that production is represented. Serial memoir, in fact, exposes the systems of production, reveling in the new possibilities for aesthetic representation. Rak suggests that the genre of autobiography tries to hide the “material

conditions of its production,” but that memoir is “part of a material process” (308, 309). I extend Rak’s assertion about memoir and place it in line with Jameson’s arguments about postmodernism to claim that serial memoir is unambiguously part of the processes of writing and publishing, and that serial memoir clearly presents self-representation as similarly in-process. Authors engage the self-reflexive structure of memoir in order to produce narratives which unveil the compositional processes involved in representations of selfhood. As the twentieth-century advanced, these processes became both more prevalent and more transparent; the structural transparency of memory recreation so apparent in Mary McCarthy’s *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), with which my examination of serial memoir begins in the next chapter, is significantly different by the time Augusten Burroughs reflects the inseparability of his own subjectivity with various modes of serial culture. Serial memoir is one example of a genre in late capitalist American society in which the processes of representation and repetition are presented as contestatory and unsettled.

In addition to formal innovation, serial memoir also exposes issues within self-representation in a hyper-mediated context. Postmodern theorist Jim Collins poses two provocative questions in his book *Architectures of Excess: Cultural Life in the Information Age* (1995) that foreground issues of representation, of identity construction, and of narrative’s place in the media-saturated culture of late twentieth-century America. He asks: “How do individuals develop a satisfying sense of identity by locating themselves, spatially and historically, in reference to the array of information and information technologies?” and “How have both the structure and function of narrative

been altered by the seemingly endless recirculation of stories that are always-already-told-subject-to-random-access?" (28-29). The information technologies which allow for immediate access also work episodically: *Amazon.com*, for example, recommends products for a consumer to purchase based on previous transactions. That information, constructed over time by repetitive behavior and digital archivization of customer data, is used as a way to identify and categorize the consumer. Organized through systems of technology and information, consumers must also keep those systems in mind as they try to create narratives of selfhood because they are frequently presented with product-based, archived versions of subjectivity. The larger cultural implication of these systems is that identities are constructed using products. As one way to present an answer to Collins' questions, I argue that in American life writing in the second half of the twentieth-century, and particularly within the genre of memoir, authors look to seriality and serial forms of narrative in order to locate themselves—and their stories—materially, historically, and spatially. In addition, I suggest that this seriality is inextricable from contemporary culture, as serial modes of representation and self-presentation have become one way that we understand ourselves and each other.

At a time when local and regional cultures clash with the homogenizing effects of national, global, and technological consumerism, the contemporary memoir rehearses Cohen's ideas of postmodern "multiple discourses, narratives of discontinuity, and transgressed boundaries" (20). The representation of selves in memoir emphasizes a relational, historical speaker, one who shifts over time, and thus presents readers with a tentative self who, as Hutcheon argues, centers on "who we are and how we 'image'

ourselves to ourselves” (“Introduction,” x).³² This self, Hutcheon suggests, is not only tentative, but also decentered, and as such, decidedly democratic because the “‘marginal’ and the ex-centric (be it in race, gender or ethnicity) take on new significance in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really the homogeneous monolith [...] we might have assumed” (“Beginning,” 252).³³ The ex-centric construction of selves, I contend, is part and parcel of the serial memoir. “A serial is, by definition,” Jennifer Hayward explains, “an ongoing narrative released in successive parts. In addition to these defining qualities, serial narratives share elements [including] refusal of closure; intertwined subplots; large casts of characters [...]; interaction with current political, social, or culture issues; dependence on profit; and acknowledgment of audience response” (3).

The use and examination of the serial and seriality is not new, particularly as it has been documented in popular fiction and media.³⁴ Other serial forms, such as comic

³² Marjorie Perloff points out in her introduction to *Postmodern Genres* that “Postmodern genre is [...] characterized by its appropriation of other genres, both high and popular, by its longing for a both/and situation rather than one of either/or” (8). Memoir, and serial memoir more specifically, allow for the inclusion of other genres, thus granting the reader and writer the longed-for “both/and” text.

³³ While the fact that anyone can write a memoir is appealing to people who have traditionally been silenced, it is off-putting to others. In a 2005 *New York Times* Critic’s Notebook article, William Grimes writes that the number of memoirs published “i[s] more a plain than a mountain, a level playing field crowded with absolutely equal voices, each asserting its democratic claim on the reader’s attention. [...] But the genre has become so inclusive that it’s almost impossible to imagine which life experiences do not qualify as memoir material.”

³⁴ Hagedorn points out that the “serial publication of fiction had been introduced into every newspaper in France” by 1842 (“Technology” 6), although Carol A. Martin points out that even Victorian part publication is not as straightforward as it may appear at first. She explains that there were two main types of serial publication in the Victorian era: separate part publication and serialization within an existing periodical, as with newspaper or magazine serials that included stories, essays, and poems; and separate part publication, a less-common format made famous by the success Charles Dickens had with it (16-17). See Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera* (1997); Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Sequel* (1991); Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930* (1999); and Lund, *America’s Continuing Story: An Introduction to Serial Fiction, 1850-1900* (1993), among others.

strips, soap operas, radio and film serials, and television all appeared in the early twentieth century, along with their corresponding forms of mass media. Contemporary serial memoirists make use of these varying serial structures as they rely heavily on the cultural knowledge and understanding of such early forms as a base for their own serial texts.³⁵ While Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund write that they crafted their comprehensive analysis of the Victorian serial with “the awareness that we no longer live in the age of the literary serial, that we are governed by the mode of single-volume publication and the set of beliefs that have traveled with it for this century” (14), I argue that the contemporary literary serial exists and thrives in the marketplace, but its current incarnation is in nonfiction.³⁶ As serial memoir challenges the larger narrative of the one-book publication championed by autobiography, it overtly and structurally calls into question limits for self-construction. We tell stories about our lives to make sense of them, and we listen to the stories of others to learn about ourselves and about the world. Serial texts in general, including serialized programs on radio or television, serially

³⁵ Seriality in memoir, moreover, underscores its relation to memory, particularly because the relationship between seriality and reflection has not always been as clearly delineated as it needs to be. In an early temporal conception of series and temporality, offered by J. Ellis McTaggart (1908), distinctions between the A-series, which involved change or movement and was signaled by the terms “past,” “present,” and “future,” and the B-series, which expresses the permanent order of events helped to conceptualize seriality in relation to chronology (qtd in Gallagher, 99). The A-series and the B-series, however, does not account for reflection or memory, in which there may often be a great deal of temporal ambiguity.

³⁶ Jennifer Hayward also cites this moment in Hughes and Lund, discussing the relationship of their word, “literary,” to the larger discussion of serial texts. She writes that they “briefly acknowledge that the ‘literary serial’ has been replaced in the twentieth century by soap operas, movie sequels, and so on, but then virtually dismiss these forms,” and that they “seem to have allowed their relative ignorance of such popular texts to blind them to any ‘significance’ that may exist” (5).

narrated fiction, and serial memoir in particular, underscore a cultural impulse for continuing stories and narrative innovation.³⁷

Because serial memoir exposes a new way to conceive of and tell life stories, and because it has been a form that has been taken up by so many contemporary memoirists, it illustrates a new way to understand subjectivity. The shift from narratives about the development of an interior self to memoirs about the relational and historical subject indicate a cultural shift in how subjectivity is understood. Serial memoirs confront the possibilities for incorporating the new technologies into self-representation. The “processes of reproduction,” which consist of “movie cameras, video, [and] tape recorders” (Jameson 37), as well as many advancements in digital technologies—including cellular telephones, MP3 players, the internet, digital archives of photographs online and on personal computers, and blogs—all play a large role in how contemporary Americans understand themselves and each other. In fact, these technological developments have created new ways to archive the past, one of the effects of serial memoir; serial memoirists engage with these other forms of representation in order to question and/or expose the role of subjectivity in relation to a larger, global context.

Multiple versions of selfhood work as an archive for the autobiographer because the selves and stories are materially collected, preserved, and (re)collected, and this

³⁷ Phelan, in *Living to Tell about It*, devotes a paragraph in his epilogue to serial narration, which he defines as the “use of multiple narrators, each taking turns, to tell the tale” (218); as examples, he cites William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1930) as the most compelling demonstration of the technique. The “significant consequence[s]” of serial narration, he continues, include the ability of disclosure to work for the narrator positions as well as across the larger narrative, and because it privileges the multiple, individual perspectives of a variety of characters (197-198). This idea of serial narration is interesting when read in light of serial memoir because, while serial narration emphasizes multiple “clearly demarcated perspectives” (198), serial memoir presents multiple perspectives from the same physical person, in far less clearly identified narratorial positions.

archive is significant because each subsequent memoir works as a small archive of the memoirist's lived experience. Books, then, work as a portable archive of memory, which performs the collection of subjectivity or lived experience. Memoir allows for the textualization of memory in a fashion akin to the physical space of an archive: it provides space for the collection and preservation of heterogenic representations of memory, even as those memories are fragmented and often incongruous. Serial memoir performs the repetitive and fragmented act of memory preservation over many texts, allowing the memoirist ample space to visit and revisit the memories which comprise intersections between individual, communal, and national history. For the purposes of this argument, retaining the historically contextualized term "archive" is significant because the ways in which contemporary society uses and understands this word is undergoing a transition. The similarities between a digital archive of information, stored on a home computer or online, and the Greek *arkheion* of a house of those who were in positions of power, are more compelling than their differences: in both cases, the archive is a repository for memory; the archive is a location inside of which physical documents are stored; an archive is both the space and that which is stored. Engaging the term, archive, as well as its etymology allows for a more complete and compelling discussion about some of the ways in which serial memoir performs and enacts the shift in the definition of archive. As a textual example of the relationship between repetition and representation, serial memoir makes this central impulse of seriality and postmodernism manifest.

Complicating this discussion of archivization and seriality is also the late twentieth-century transition of the word “serial” itself. Hughes and Lund define the serial as “a continuing story over an extended time with enforced interruptions” that presented “a series of recognized steps [...] [which] marked the individual’s (and the group’s) long climb from infancy through maturity and on to an adulthood marked more by accomplishment than failure” (1). Unlike “the linearity of time and its forward-moving nature” thus embodied in the Victorian serial form (Hughes and Lund 61), contemporary seriality is no longer strictly associated with sequelization. Now also linked with repetition, seriality can be either recursive and episodic or sequential and chronological.³⁸ According to the *OED*’s additions of 2001, “serial” has, over the course of the final few decades of the twentieth-century, become linked with the phrases “serial killer” (which first appeared in 1981), “serial marriage” (1970), and “serial monogamy/-ist” (1963, 1986).³⁹ The definition of serial in the episodic or recursive context, and in relation to my argument, is:

³⁸ One important difference between “serial” and “sequel,” according to Paul Budra and Betty A. Schellenberg, is that sequel is aligned with the word “sequence,” from the Latin *sequi*, or “to follow.” Sequels are linked with temporality in a way that series may not be. Sequels also require “a precursor narrative that was originally presented as closed and complete in itself (whether or not it was, in fact, conceived as such by its authors)” (7).

³⁹ Mark Seltzer informs us that “*serial killer* was coined in the mid-1970s by the FBI special agent Robert Ressler. [...] This ‘naming event,’ as he recently described it, had two sources. The first was the British designation of ‘crimes in a series’ [...]. The second involved the repetitive ways of mass cultural representations” (64, emphasis original). Others contest this naming event, however: Philip Jenkins writes that he believes Agent Ressler’s “claim is incorrect, since the term does appear before his time, but his idea is fascinating because it explicitly locates the origin of the serial murder concept in popular culture” (15), and David Schmid locates Ressler’s influence in the Bureau’s position on serial murder, discusses Ressler’s employment with the FBI in 1970 after working with the United States Army’s Criminal Investigation Division, and Ressler’s contribution to the research of serial murder as he “organiz[ed] the first FBI-sponsored research study of serial murderers, the Criminal Personality Research Project, in 1979” (77). Further, Schmid examines Ressler’s “post-FBI books, *Whoever Fights Monsters* [1992], *I Have Lived in the Monster* [1997], and *Justice Is Served* [1994],” in which Ressler “tends to give himself the lion’s share of the credit for the FBI’s development of psychological profiling” (96).

Of a person: that repeatedly or regularly performs a specified activity; inveterate, persistent; *spec.* (of a criminal) repeatedly committing the same offence and typically following a similar characteristic behaviour pattern. Of an action or practice: performed by the same person on a *regular or sequential basis*; habitual, recurrent. (second emphasis mine)

The memoirist who repeatedly publishes accounts of the self, on a regular basis, especially ones that follow a similar pattern of self-reflection and analysis, thus engages in a particular practice of episodic introspection that can be defined as serial.

Persistently repositioning the self in conversation with the world, the postmodern serial memoir necessarily lacks—or as theorist Sharon Russell argues, the serial refuses—closure (qtd in Langbauer 8). Postmodern serial memoir, then, is a space in which the both/and desire of the writer and the reader can be realized, as the memoirist refuses a stable or unified selfhood, and thus refuses the “last words” inherent in closure.

The changing definition of serial clearly marks a larger shift in contemporary cultural media.⁴⁰ In life writing studies, and particularly in the study of memoir, seriality presents an undertheorized and relatively unexamined field of investigation. Studies in memoir provide life writers and theorists with the ability to engage multiple kinds of media and various interpretations of history, as serial memoir repeatedly exposes the process of writing as well as the eventuality of writing as a product.⁴¹ Recently, Smith

⁴⁰ Philip Jenkins also notices the shift in and proliferation of uses for the term “serial,” citing a conversation with a friend who used the phrase “serial fiancée” and pointing to the 1994 film *Serial Mom*.

⁴¹ Examining representations of our serial culture in narratives is central to the growth of cultural studies and changes in the approach much of narrative theory takes. In his essay “Narrative Theory, 1966-2006: A Narrative,” as part of the fortieth anniversary edition of *The Nature of Narrative*, Phelan argues that “narrative theory now takes as its objects of study narratives of all kinds occurring in all kinds of media—

and Watson asserted that issues in autobiography/life writing studies haven't impacted narrative theory as much as they could, with narrative theory's traditional focus on fiction, and James Phelan agrees. He asserts that narrative theory must now examine postmodern forms of narrative, as well as narratives "in their oral, print, visual (film, sculpture, painting, performance), digital, and multi-media formats" (285). It is clear that the studies of narrative and life writing studies have much to learn from each other while also embracing other modes of inquiry, like performance, or digital and visual media. "In making [a] claim to the 'real,'" Smith and Watson assert, "life narratives solicit a particular mode of reading, since they are claiming not verisimilitude, but the 'truth' of lived experience, however elusive that may be" ("The Trouble," 358-59). Writing serial texts is one way for contemporary memoirists to attempt to present this elusive "truth" of lived experience, particularly in its historical, relational, and material nature.

These authors, however, do not present their stories (or themselves) in their serial narratives in the same fashion as each other, or even as they may have done in an earlier text. Seriality is illustrated in a variety of ways in contemporary memoirs, including the more conventional forms of magazine and comic serials; the contemporary rise of the serial graphic memoir; the seriality inherent in collecting as it pertains to (re)collection and the presentation of stories; the creation and development of the "I" across several discrete texts and the requisite experimentation with multiple narratorial personae; and the intersection of mass popular culture and life writing as serial forms of media culture

throughout history: personal, political, historical, legal, and medical, to name just a few—in their ancient, medieval, early modern, modern, and postmodern guises" (285).

influence self-representation. Such seriality underscores issues of temporality and memory, repetition and recursivity, and witnessing and testimony. As generic boundaries become more fluid and the practices of heterogeneity and collage are more highly valued, postmodern serial memoirists are able to be both more innovative and overt about how they have constructed the self at particular moments in time.

Serial Memoir: A Genre for “the Century of Witness”

When I began my memoir, I still believed in telling a true story, but I also began to realize that there were gaps that could be filled in only by leaps of the imagination, and scenes that I could recreate through dialogues that were anything but verifiable. I could write down what I remembered; or I could craft a memoir. One might be the truth; the other, a good story.

—Nancy K. Miller, “The Ethics of Betrayal: Diary of a Memoirist” (emphasis original)

Following the trend of examining life writing through contemporary theories about culture, narrative, and techniques of self-representation, I use the memoirs of four authors through which to illustrate different elements of serial memoir. Mary McCarthy, Maya Angelou, Art Spiegelman, and Augusten Burroughs have all published at least three memoirs in the second-half of the twentieth-century; they are well-known figures in American literature; and each approaches seriality, identity, and the genre of memoir in a unique way. That these are established authors supports my position that serial memoir is now part of the mainstream in contemporary American literature and culture. The chronological order of the chapters illustrates that, as the twentieth-century progresses, so does the genre of serial memoir. Building on the ideas of the tripartite narrator in memoir, the significance of narrative structure and transparency, the role of serial culture, and the concepts of the archive and “the everyday,” the chapters in this

dissertation examine various strategies for serial self-representation in postmodern America. Seriality is a physical manifestation of relationality, and these texts work in conversation with one another to challenge how contemporary Americans understand selfhood and narrative strategies for self-representation. Moreover, serial memoir engages the concept of repetition as it illustrates the impossibility of repetition without difference; stories are told and re-told, but never to the same effect or for the same purpose.

I begin my conceptualization of serial memoir with a chapter titled “Serial Structures and the Archive in Mary McCarthy’s ‘Perfect Execution of the Idea,’” in which I examine the textuality of serial structure in memoir and how memoir’s tripartite narrator functions as inherently serial and dialogic. Much of McCarthy’s memoirs were first published in magazines as she found space for her personal narratives in places like the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*. While she continued to publish in magazines and periodicals throughout her career, I argue that the act of collecting her previously published essays and revisiting them for her first memoir, published as *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), marked her as a transitional figure in serial memoir. Keeping Hagedorn’s assessment of the role seriality plays in new technologies in mind,⁴² I read McCarthy as a figure whose serial memoir explicitly engages the attendant shifts in contemporary culture: her narratives are recursive and insist on reproduction; they are dialogic and incorporate heterogeneous texts; they interrogate the

⁴² Hagedorn suggests that, when new media technologies develop, serial texts are brought in to increase consumption of that particular medium’s product: for example, when printing technologies were advanced enough for mass consumption of newspapers, serial fiction was included on the front page, and “when photoengraving became available to these publishers, the comic strip was developed” (“Doubtless” 40-41).

role of the archive and supplement in memoir; and they present memory as inherently fragmented, even when documented. Her presentation of the tripartite narrator, moreover, underscores the significance of reflexivity in self-narration.

The second chapter, “‘What I Represent is Myself’: Seriality in Maya Angelou’s *Memoirs and Memories*,” examines Angelou’s cookbook/culinary memoir, *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004), as I posit her discussions of recipes, food, and culinary practices as a way to think about the seriality of citizenship. Following Jean-Paul Sartre’s theorization of social or serial collectivity and Iris Marion Young’s related idea of gender as seriality, I argue that Angelou’s serial memoir highlights the social collectivity of African Americans as she grounds seriality in both the familial and global implications of culinary practices. Using *The Welcome Table* as the basis for my investigation, I suggest that Angelou’s investment in self-reflexive writing goes beyond the traditional understandings of autobiography as she illustrates the materiality and relationality of self-construction via foodways. The serial collectivity exhibited in Angelou’s texts, and particularly in *The Welcome Table*, is positioned in relation to contemporary studies of foodways and “the everyday”; her self-representational strategy illustrates the significance of embodied, material reality to readers. Angelou’s texts expose contemporary autobiographical practices as related to the serial, material realities of everyday life: in written and oral tradition, in the kitchen, in the family archive, or in the scrapbook. I present *The Welcome Table* as an example of how Angelou’s texts expose the ritualized and serialized work of food preparation and consumption as having implications that go beyond the home, and indeed, the nation.

Returning to what may seem to be more conventionally serialized texts in the third chapter, “Seriality, Graphic Narrative, and the Memoirs of Art Spiegelman,” I look at the role seriality plays in self-reflexive graphic narrative. With the historical, serial tradition of comics as a base for his graphic memoirs, I propose that Art Spiegelman’s texts underscore the inherently episodic nature of graphic memoir as they are indebted to the serial tradition of comic books/strips. My analysis of the serial, panel-by-panel format of graphic narrative and the inherent repetition of the author’s self-portrait is placed alongside Spiegelman’s textual engagements with memory—both witnessed and inherited—and the materiality of the personal archive; in Spiegelman’s graphic serial memoir, seriality also refers to the ways in which memories are transmitted generationally. Moreover, the grammar of graphic narrative and the serialization of time through the placement and construction of panels allow graphic memoirists to represent life narratives as assembled through paratexts, discrete installments, frames, and images. Each page presents readers with a fractured, decentered series of images which emphasize the provisionality of selfhood and its representations. Incorporating graphic narrative into the larger field of life writing does not present a new challenge for scholars of life writing, but rather opens up a new way of examining more techniques—this time at the verbal/visual interface—authors use in order to represent their lives.

The fourth chapter, “Augusten Burroughs and Serial Culture: Television, Celebrity, Self?,” expands my investigation of the intersection of popular culture and memoir from graphic narratives to the seriality of celebrity and televisual culture. The systems of television and celebrity culture have an increasingly significant role in

contemporary American society, and Burroughs' serial memoir expose the degree to which mediated self-performances influence how we understand subjectivity, and how that subjectivity is narrated. In his serial memoir, Burroughs uses the serial production of celebrity and the seriality of televisual culture as a foundation for his repeated acts of self-performance. In particular, I note the ways in which Burroughs attends to reality television programming, the talk show, domestic situation comedies, and soap operas, as well as to an overarching cultural expectation for fame and celebrity, within his memoirs. Using a camp sensibility, Burroughs' serial project exposes the power of excessive public and dramatic self-performance to critique the fictions of unified subjectivity and compulsory heterosexuality. Burroughs' memoirs engage how his sexuality and his camp sensibility simultaneously queer and model possible strategies for self-representation at the turn of the twenty-first century. I argue that Burroughs' memoirs provide multiple opportunities in which he posits seriality and performativity as a form of queerness, and that through serial memoir, he exposes the processes behind self-construction in the public sphere.

Serial narratives are everywhere in contemporary American culture, creating what I argue is a serial culture. While newspaper serials are increasingly rare, magazines still offer serial fiction, seriality in comics and graphic narratives is a given, and the serialization and sequelization of films illustrate the market's interest in continuing stories and characters. Television, a foundationally serial and episodic medium, provides consumers with a variety of serial programming—beyond soap operas and mini-series, series such as *The Sopranos* and *Lost* allow for different kinds of

seriality.⁴³ In a recent debate on the Project Narrative weblog, narrative scholars Jared Gardner and Sean O’Sullivan argue the merits of these varying forms of seriality, even as they both agree that “serial narrative, at its best, traffics in possibility more fully and creatively than any other medium” as they question why narrative theory has not given enough attention to seriality. I agree, arguing in this dissertation that seriality in contemporary American memoir illustrates an impressive range of possibility for understanding, narrativizing, and performing subjectivity in postmodern culture.

Representing a wide range of the strategies contemporary postmodern memoirists could employ, these authors iterate the self as serialized, recursive, genealogically constructed, and material. My objective in this project is to theorize the practice of serial memoir, a form that has been largely neglected in critical work, as I underscore its significance in relation to twentieth-century American culture. I contend that seriality in contemporary American memoir is a burgeoning and powerful form of self-expression, and that a close examination of how authors are presenting and re-presenting themselves as they challenge conventional life writing narrative structures will influence not only the way we read and understand contemporary memoir, but will impact our approaches to self-reflexive narrative structures and provide us with new ways to understand ourselves, and our lives, in relation to the serial culture in which we live.

⁴³ Hagedorn and Hayward both point to the serialization of television commercials, which occasionally also use serial strategies. “By turning commercials into serial episodes,” writes Hayward, “producers of [commercials like those from the early 1990s, such as Taster’s Choice and AT&T] highlight a crucial connection between economics and serialization. For producers, the advantage of serialization is that it essentially creates the demand it then feeds: the desire to find out ‘what happens next’ can only be satisfied by buying, listening to, or viewing the next installment” (3). Hagedorn also uses the Taster’s Choice commercials as a benchmark, writing that advertisers “have also turned to serial strategies to sell products ranging from coffee (Tasters’ Choice) and breakfast serials (Lucky Charms) to batteries (the most recent Eveready commercials)” (“Doubtless” 40).

CHAPTER II

SERIAL STRUCTURES, THE ARCHIVE, AND MARY MCCARTHY'S

"PERFECT EXECUTION OF THE IDEA"

The lure of stories told part by part has been known since Scheherazade, but serialization took on new importance after industrialization made mass marketing of fiction possible.
—Jennifer Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures*

Like Scheherazade, I was only too pleased to talk.
—Mary McCarthy, *How I Grew*

Over the past forty years, Mary McCarthy has been the subject of several biographies and critical studies, and, as one of the country's leading intellectuals in the middle of the twentieth-century, she herself was a prolific writer and critic who will be included in any discussion of multiple self-referential texts in contemporary American literature.¹ Author of both fiction and non-fiction alike, McCarthy established herself as an influential voice who interrogated American foreign policy as well as domestic issues.² In this chapter, I examine McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), along with her two other memoirs: *How I Grew: A Memoir of the Early Years* (1986) and the posthumously published *Intellectual Memoirs: New York 1936-1938* (1992), as I maintain that a significant shift in serial self-representation and self-archivization took place in the mid-twentieth century. While many of McCarthy's texts take her own life

¹ See, even, the brief paragraph dedicated to "serial autobiography" in *Reading Autobiography* (203-04). According to Joy Bennett and Gabriella Hochmann, authors of *Mary McCarthy: An Annotated Bibliography* (1992), biographies of McCarthy include Doris Grumbach's early biography, *The Company She Kept* (1967), Carol Gelderman's *Mary McCarthy: A Life* (1988), and Carol Brightman's *Writing Dangerously: A Critical Biography of Mary McCarthy* (1992). Since Bennett and Hochmann's bibliography was published, Frances Kiernan wrote *Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy* (2000).

² McCarthy published her first novel, *The Company She Keeps*, in 1942. Following that book, and in addition to her three memoirs, she published seven other novels, two travel books, and a dozen collections of essays ranging in topics from theater to politics.

as their inspiration, it is imperative for this examination that she self-consciously wrote in the autobiographical mode.³ As was the case for *Memories* and chapters from *How I Grew*, as well as her two travel books, *Venice Observed* and *The Stones of Florence*, and her nonfiction publications about Vietnam, individual essays were serialized in periodicals like the *New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*.⁴ I concentrate on the memoirs explicitly, though, because they self-reflexively point to the act of self-construction. Serial memoir often complicates the idea of textual closure, as authors continue to publish and revise their earlier texts, but readers may assume that the series

³ Many note the autobiographical grounds for her fictional texts, in addition to the role her own life played in the writing of her political essays. For example, *The Seventeenth Degree* (1974) (which is comprised of the essay “How it Went” [1974], the collections of essays about global political events *Vietnam* [1967], *Hanoi* [1968], *Medina* [1972], and the essay “Sons of the Morning” [1974]), expands on many of the ideas presented in *Memories*, particularly in examining the role of the memoirist and the life of a writer in relation to historical, global, and political events. Gordon O. Taylor, one of the few researchers interested in McCarthy’s nonfiction beyond *Memories* and *How I Grew*, suggests that there is an incontrovertible lineage between the personae presented in *Memories* and these later nonfictional texts. Writing specifically about *Vietnam*, *Hanoi*, and *Medina*, Taylor explains that the “pressure of [her] personality relates more than distinguishes, indeed fuses into a form of autobiographical narrative continuous with *Memories*, these various literary roles, along with a number of their respective techniques” (86). Some continuity is perceived between her texts, even as she has moved beyond the realm of childhood and into the political sphere, even as she presents her narratives heterogeneically and in an anachronous fashion, and even as she travels or reports on global locations or events. Moreover, Taylor writes that “just as McCarthy’s fascination with Caesar in *Memories* shifts from the personal to the public, without loss on the public plane of personal involvement, so in shifting from the self-inquiries of *Memories* to the study of public issues in much of her more recent nonfiction, she brings with her the persona shaped in the earlier book” (87). The persona from *Memories* is serialized in these memoirs, traveling from Venice and Florence to Vietnam and Hanoi, reappearing first in periodicals, then in pamphlets, then in books. Readers of these texts notice a change in persona as time passes and the global historical situation takes the place of childhood reminiscences, but there is continuity as well; what Taylor calls “her cumulatively shaped ‘I’” (97), is clearly a product of seriality. That readers are able to travel with her, to read her witnessed accounts of significant events in the twentieth century, is a function of serial memoir.

⁴ Three sections of *How I Grew* were published in periodicals before the memoir itself was published. Chapter one appeared in *Vanity Fair*, and chapters two and four appeared in the *New Yorker*. *Venice Observed* was originally published in different forms as “Profiles: The Revel of the Earth: Part I and II,” in the *New Yorker*, July 7 and July 14, 1956, while *The Stones of Florence* was issued as a three-part series titled “Profiles: A City of Stone, Parts I-III,” in the *New Yorker*, August 8-22, 1959. “Report from Vietnam,” published in four parts, appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, April 20-November 9, 1967, before it was compiled into the pamphlet *Vietnam*. “Hanoi” was also published in the *New York Review of Books*, in four parts, from May 23-July 11, 1968, before it was compiled into the pamphlet *Hanoi*. Her essay, “Reflections: A Transition Figure,” published in the *New Yorker* on June 10, 1972, became *Medina*.

finishes upon the physical death of the author. McCarthy's oeuvre, however, also raises the question of serial closure because her final memoir was published posthumously.

Posthumous memoir is a potentially paradoxical term, as the dead are able to speak for themselves, and, in serial memoir, pose questions and posit counter-memories which may challenge other texts. As a form which privileges collection and re-collection, serial memoir does not elevate one text over another, and the posthumous perspective is read in tandem with the other memories and selves McCarthy constructs. Additionally, posthumous publication implies that the text is solely the author's own; as such, it challenges anew the notion of autonomous life writing. The work of publishing the posthumous text, however, requires an editor, a person who will read, shape, and select what is included in the posthumous text, and what is omitted (McGill 41). These editorial decisions invariably influence the way the text is compiled, and adding the editor's voice to the author's text creates a final product that literalizes the relational self. Posthumously published memoirs thus signal the memoir as a centrally relational genre, overtly challenging the separation between self and other, public and private, through their very existence. Unquestionably, other texts are collaborative efforts, requiring input from a variety of individuals, but those texts frequently mask their collaborative roots as they indicate a single author; posthumously published texts must overtly acknowledge that more than one person is responsible for the production of the book.

The "I" of memoir speaks, but through the direction of the editor, and from beyond the grave. As Robert McGill suggests, in the act of speaking, "the autobiographical voice creates performatively its own vitality. However, it is precisely

the fated character of this voice—that is, its being fated to inconclusiveness—that admits the tragic, biographical moment in which the editor intervenes to announce the death”

(43). Generically, serial memoir performs this state of inconclusiveness and it allows the voice of the memoirist, often presented from the first person, to survive beyond death.

While any writing allows authors to exist beyond their physical mortality, the publication of a posthumous text reinvigorates conversations about the author—and, when that author is a serial memoirist, the author’s life. The shift from memoirist to editor, from self-life-writing to biography, also underscores the significance of the author’s archive, as the editor/biographer must rely solely on the physical collections of the author in order to compose the posthumous publication.

The archive is located, Jacques Derrida argues in *Archive Fever* (1996), at the “unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself” (90). Inherently liminal and always material, the archive represents the physical remains of the past. And yet, as Derrida suggests, the archive is not about dealing with the past because it is past; instead, the archive—a repository for memory and the material objects of memory—is a “question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (36). For Derrida, the archive is the physical building in which the materiality of memory is housed, it denotes

the materials contained within the site, and it is a metaphor for conserving and preserving the past.⁵ He writes:

the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomenesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structures of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relation to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (16-17, emphasis original)

The archive's function is to record, to conserve, and through its preservation to present the past to the present and, finally, to the future. Serial memoir is one way that the role of the archive in contemporary American culture is literalized, as the texts themselves work as both the site of archived material and the collected documents. The increasing speed with which texts are archived lends those texts to serialization as a contemporary manifestation of the archivization impulse; as the twentieth-century moved forward, the possibilities and technologies available for archivization increased, ultimately supporting this impulse.

In a posthumously published memoir, the body of the memoirist is made present—as it is the focus of the narrative, of the archive, and of the editor's research—

⁵ Derrida reminds readers that, “As is the case for the Latin *archivum* or *archium* (a word that is used in the singular, as was the French *archive*, formerly employed as a masculine singular: *un archive*), the meaning of ‘archive,’ its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded” (2).

but the body is also memorialized through the text of the memoir. The archive, then, is a prosopopeia for the memoirist, and is one way for them to continue their serial self-narrative. Through her own archive, and examining how she presents herself as always already archived, I read McCarthy's memoirs as part of a postmodern move which focuses on representation and (re)collection as her texts play with older forms of serial periodical production and autobiographical writing through their structure. Additionally, I argue that McCarthy relies on the technologies of the archive in order to present herself as historically bounded and materially constructed.

Memories of a Catholic Girlhood is a significant text for twentieth-century memoir studies for a variety of reasons, not least of which is its unconventional construction.⁶ The self-reflexive collection of essays in *Memories* supports the concept of seriality as recursive, while her italicized comments about the essays reconfigure seriality as both repetitive and chronological. *Memories* presents episodes from McCarthy's youth and follows them with italicized chapters wherein, as contemporary

⁶ For contemporary memoirists, *Memories* is often seen as the ur-postmodern memoir, particularly because *Memories* is seen as flouting convention, questioning veracity, and challenging the possibilities of accurate representation through memory. For example, in the "Mistakes We Knew We Were Making: Notes, Corrections, Clarifications, Apologies, Addenda" section of his memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2001), Dave Eggers writes: "This edition of *A.H.W.O.S.G.* contains countless changes, sentence by sentence, many additions to the body of the text, and it also contains this, an appendix featuring corrections, notations, updates, tangential remarks and clarifications. [...] I was, I figured, the first to think of adding a corrective appendix to a nonfiction work, one meant to illuminate the many factual and temporal fudgings necessary to keep this, or really any, work of nonfiction, from dragging around in arcana and endless explanations of who was exactly where, and when, etc. [...] But upon telling this writer-friend about the idea, she said [...] 'Oh, right, like Mary McCarthy.' There was, in the distance, the sound of thunder, and of lightning striking, presumably, a kitten. 'Um, what do you mean, pray tell, *Just like Mary McCarthy?*' I thought, while, fear-stricken, managing only 'Huh?' She noted that McCarthy had done almost the same thing in *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, a book about which I was of course unaware [*sic*], because I am a moron" (5, italics in original). Eggers writes that, once he had read McCarthy's "perfect execution of the idea," he "abandoned [his] own appendix" (5). In the paperback version of *A Heartbreaking Work*, however, he puts the appendix—along with his metatextual ruminations on the appendix—back in.

memoirist Dave Eggers puts it, McCarthy “dismantled the narrative, in favor of the unshaped truth” (6). The “narrative” is made up of nine essays, seven of which were previously published: between 1946 and 1957 six were published in the *New Yorker*, and one in *Harper’s Bazaar*.⁷ Following the essays, except for the first and the last, McCarthy includes italicized sections which present a counter-narrative to the essays published in periodicals, upsetting any sort of conventional organizational structure. These counter-narratives are akin to providing the counter-memory of memoir; she presents memory as shifting and represents the construction of the speaking subject as historically and temporally situated. “There is no political power without control of the archive,” Derrida asserts, “if not of memory” (*Archive Fever* 4, n1). McCarthy’s moments of counter-memory challenge the narratives she received, which inform how she understands her own subjectivity; her inclination toward the preservation of her material and narrated past indicates her desire to have some control over how that past is presented.

The first essay, written specifically for *Memories* and titled “To the Reader,” provides an overview of the book. “*These memories of mine have been collected slowly,*” McCarthy explains (3).⁸ Considering each essay its own memoir, McCarthy’s text—ultimately a collection of memories, both old and new—exposes much of the

⁷ The contents of the memoir include “To the Reader” (previously unpublished); “Yonder Peasant, Who Is He?,” first published in the *New Yorker* on December 4, 1948; “A Tin Butterfly,” first seen in the *New Yorker* on December 15, 1951; “The Blackguard,” the *New Yorker*, October 12, 1946; “C’est le Premier Pas Qui Coûte,” the *New Yorker*, July 12, 1952; “Names,” not previously published, although a version of it appeared in *Mademoiselle* in April 1944; “The Figures in the Clock,” the *New Yorker*, February 18, 1953; “Yellowstone,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, November 1955; and “Ask Me No Questions,” the *New Yorker*, March 23, 1957. To further complicate the question of genre and seriality, “The Blackguard,” “C.Y.E.” (a version of “Names”), and “Yonder Peasant” all appeared in her earlier work of fiction, *Cast a Cold Eye* (1950).

⁸ The interstitial sections of McCarthy’s memoir are italicized; I maintain their original formatting.

theoretical groundwork that goes into a study of serial memoir: she challenges the durability of memory across time as she explains that her memory is good, “*but obviously I cannot recall whole passages of dialogue that took place years ago*” (4); she attempts to present the true version of many of these events but finds that “*there are cases where I am not sure myself whether I am making something up*” (4); she unmask the persona of the memoirist to illustrate that there are multiple perspectives inhabited by the “I” of the writer; and she reveals the ramifications of an absence of familial and collective memory and the cultural expectations that readers often have regarding what writers should remember. “*The chain of recollection—the collective memory of a family—has been broken,*” McCarthy explains. “*It is our parents, normally, who not only teach us our family history but who set us straight on our own childhood recollections, telling us that this cannot have happened the way we think it did and that that, on the other hand, did occur, just as we remember it*” (5 emphasis in original).

The break in the chain of memory and recollection haunts McCarthy’s memoirs, as well as her other texts, as she continually hunts for verification of her stories and the interrelationality of life narrative taken for granted by many. Paul John Eakin suggests that “training in self-narration begins early,” and that, culturally, children are introduced to identity formation through self-narration as parents and caregivers provide endearing stories which tell us about our younger selves (“The Economy” 122). While these early collaborative efforts toward narrativizing lives may seem insignificant, they give us

“practice nonetheless for longer, solo flights of self-narration” (Eakin, *Living* 25).⁹

Without her parents, McCarthy doesn’t always have the information with which she would be able to separate what is real from what is remembered.¹⁰ Julie Rak points out that memoir “refers to writing as a process of note-taking, and to a piece of writing as a finished product at the same time” (317), and I would extend her observation to argue, in addition to the narrativization of memory, that the construction of memory is figured as both a process and a finished product. Without her parents or any kind of adult perspective in the representation of her memories, McCarthy’s dialogic memoirs underscore the fact that memories are created by and through language.

Much of the scholarship on *Memories* examines the real and the remembered, as McCarthy foregrounds the role of memory and truth. Like many others, Eakin admits that he is drawn to the complicated texts of Mary McCarthy and her contemporary Lillian Hellman “precisely *because* their truth value has been publicly questioned,” citing McCarthy’s presentation of herself in *Memories* as a chronic liar (“Reference” 29). Her creation of an unconventionally structured memoir illuminates the possibilities for manipulation of self-narrative for the purposes of the story, and expose her explicit “struggle with the fallibility of memory” (“Reference” 29). In the same vein, Timothy Dow Adams dedicates a chapter to Mary McCarthy in *Telling Lies in Modern American*

⁹ These familial exchanges of life stories also, Eakin asserts, illustrate that children “are expected to be able to display to others autobiographical memories arranged in narrative form; they learn what is tellable as well” (*Living* 26).

¹⁰ Orphaned during the influenza epidemic of 1918, McCarthy, aged 6, and her three younger brothers were sent to live with the McCarthy relatives in Minneapolis, where they had a grain-elevator business. Hoping to keep the McCarthy children out of the hands of their Protestant, maternal, relatives in Seattle, were sent to live with their great-aunt Margaret and her husband, “Uncle Myers.” “The man we had to call Uncle Myers was no relation to us,” McCarthy writes at the beginning of “A Tin Butterfly,” the third essay in *Memories*. “This was a point on which we four orphan children were very firm” (54).

Autobiography (1994), writing that one reason *Memories* and *How I Grew* are so important for American life writing is that, “with their numerous corrections, revisions, and republications, their attempts at distinguishing between the half-remembered, half-guessed, and half-true,” McCarthy presents the “authentic portrait of a young girl with a profound love of scrupulous honesty who was given to constant lying” (85-86). Here, Adams points to the indeterminate quality of McCarthy’s self-presentation, which is also one of the reasons why Eggers is drawn to her writing. McCarthy’s memoirs, illustrating her attempts to present her own self-construction, ultimately expose the impossibility of accuracy and illustrate her investment in postmodern representation: a version of repetition with a difference. The elements of her texts to which scholars devote attention is important because she explicitly critiques the expectations audiences have for autobiographical genres, including memoir.

One such scholar, Barbara Kraus, writes that although truth and fiction in *Memories* have been examined repeatedly, they are worth looking at again because McCarthy herself participates in the conversation about veracity. “In her introduction to the book,” Kraus writes, “which she calls ‘To the Reader’ but which could well, for the first part at least, be re-titled ‘In Defense of Autobiography,’ she takes great pains to define which parts of her stories are true and which parts she has had to fictionalize for various reasons” (144-45). The lack of distinction Kraus and others make between autobiography and memoir in their analyses of McCarthy’s texts presents a problem for their arguments, particularly because of their concern with representations of autobiographical truth. For autobiography as a genre, the question of accuracy is more

acute, as autobiographies are often less concerned with exploring the gray areas of memory and more invested in the factual account of how a person arrived to be where they are. For McCarthy, the possibility to revise is foundationally important, but so is remaining close to the truth of the memory. Memoir, as McCarthy herself states at the beginning of “To the Reader,” is not fiction: “*The temptation to invent has been very strong, particularly where recollection is hazy and I remember the substance of an event but not the details—the color of a dress, the pattern of a carpet, the placing of a picture. Sometimes I have yielded, as in the case of the conversations*” (3-4). Acknowledging the complications of working within a genre that attempts to recreate memory—often without archival materials or documentation—McCarthy is explicit about why the genre is simultaneously so compelling and so difficult. When she fictionalizes her memories in an essay, she is explicit about where the “hazy” elements of her recollection are in interstitial sections of *Memories*. Readers, then, are given the opportunity to read and (re)collect her memories with her, making the genre a site for active engagement.

These essays, and the book itself, underwent many drafts, and in the original table of contents for *Memories* “To the Reader” was called “A Grain of Salt.”¹¹ This earlier title indicates that McCarthy is all too aware of the kinds of problems inherent in memoir and life writing; through the section titles, she reminds her readers of the impossibility of exact documentation. Changing the title to reflect her relationship with the reader is extremely important, as McCarthy frequently addresses the reader within the text, most obviously figured by the presence of italicized chapters. In various

¹¹ In the Mary McCarthy Archives, at Vassar College, in folder 12.2.

manuscript drafts, archived with the rest of McCarthy's papers at Vassar College, these untitled italicized sections are demarcated with the heading "To Follow," for example, "To Follow 'A Tin Butterfly.'" The question of veracity is not more important than either her relationship with the reader, continually invoked in *Memories* as well as in the other memoirs, or the narrativization of memory. Additionally, the final section of the memoir, titled "Ask Me No Questions," also begs the question of truth-telling, with its call-and-response answer "and I'll tell you no lies," but this is not the only issue the memoir tackles. Indeed, in this final section, the titular "me" is unclear, as it could be Mary within the essay, it could be McCarthy the author, or it could refer to McCarthy's maternal grandmother, about whom that essay is written.¹²

McCarthy is also critiqued for being deceptive because she explicitly mentions her penchant for lying within the narrative action of the memoir and because the post-scripts within the text challenge the narratives she has, textually, just made.¹³ This system, Kraus posits, allows readers the ability to scrutinize how memory works and "the ultimate veracity of her text" (145). In serial memoir, however, the technique of explicit self-performance illustrates the impossibility for a text to exactly represent the past or to discover the "ultimate veracity"; rather, in approximating memories and showing readers that recollection and perspectives shift over time, McCarthy attempts to characterize how her changes in perspective have also changed the ways in which those

¹² "Ask Me No Questions" was originally titled "Double Solitaire," which emphasizes the sense of isolation Mary felt in her grandmother's presence; archival material suggests that the title was changed at the same time as the title of "To the Reader." These changes reflect McCarthy's engagement with self-representation and the challenges she found in her attempts to portray both documentary truth and emotional truth.

¹³ See Kraus.

memories continue to influence her contemporarily lived reality. McCarthy does call herself a liar within the memoir, and she paradoxically points to that habit as one way readers *can* trust her. For example, in “A Tin Butterfly,” a harrowing chapter about living with her great-aunt and “uncle” who would often beat Mary and her brothers, McCarthy writes:

if my uncle’s impartial application of punishment served to make us each other’s enemies very often, it did nothing to establish discipline, since we had no incentive to behave well, not knowing when we might be punished for something we had not done or even for something that by ordinary standards would be considered good.¹⁴ We knew not when we would offend, and what I learned from this, in the main, was a policy of lying and concealment; for several years after we were finally liberated, I was a problem liar. (65)

Other incidents include sneaking out of her boarding school as a young teenager to meet boys, or concealing her whereabouts from her grandparents. These episodes of dishonesty, though, are explicitly called out as such in the italicized chapters, as McCarthy points to them as moments of adolescent duplicity. The seriality of these recollections, moreover, is presented in her memoir as influencing her differently at

¹⁴ Here, McCarthy explicitly refers to a story she tells just before this quotation where, when she was ten, she “wrote an essay for a children’s contest on ‘The Irish in American History,’ which won first the city and then the state prize” (63). She was presented with the city prize, “but when we came to our ugly house, my uncle silently rose from his chair, led me into the dark downstairs lavatory, which always smelled of shaving cream, and furiously beat me with the razor-strop—to teach me a lesson, he said, lest I become stuck-up” (63).

varying moments.¹⁵ McCarthy thus uses the medium of serial memoir to present the constructed nature of memory to her readers.¹⁶

Moreover, the differences between what McCarthy writes in the essays and the claims she makes in the post-scriptum, contradicting those she “just” made, in Kraus’ words, ignores the fact of the serial publication history of the essays in *Memories* and the temporal distance between authorial positions in the disparate sections. The memoir’s dialogic structure and the serial publication history of most of the individual essays work together to challenge conventional autobiographical genres as *Memories* calls into question the possibility of representing the self in any kind of singular way. The first essay from *Memories* to be published was “The Blackguard,” which appeared in the *New Yorker*, October 12, 1946. Over the next decade, these essays appeared in various guises—often in the *New Yorker* as “fiction”—and provoked a variety of reactions among the periodical’s readers. McCarthy both read and saved correspondence with

¹⁵ One of the essays, in particular, McCarthy writes, is “*highly fictionalized*” (97), although McCarthy does not claim that she lies within the text. In fact, she writes that “*the story is true in substance, but the details have been invented or guessed at*” (97). Presenting her readers with an episode that is more substantively true than factually accurate, McCarthy points to one of the challenges of life writing. And yet, the transparency with which she articulates that she has privileged the substance over the details provides her readers with a template for how she illustrates the construction and frequent imprecision of memory.

¹⁶ In one telling example, it seems clear that McCarthy’s own perspectives on lying are distinct from others’. The typescript draft for “A Tin Butterfly” shows a section that was removed at the recommendation of an editor for the *New Yorker*. Expanding on the quote provided above, McCarthy had written: “for several years after we were liberated from the yellow house at 2427 Blaisdell Ave, I was a problem liar. Having no idea what would be considered wrong by these new people, my non-Catholic grandparents, I falsified and sneaked on principle. And if today I am a quite truthful person (keeping within the ‘normal’ quota of fifteen or twenty small lies in a day), and even blurt out what I ought not in a rather pathological way, it is sheerly from relief.” In the margin of the page, the reader at the *New Yorker* had simply written a question mark. This piece of punctuation indicates the distinction between how the *New Yorker* reader might understand lying and veracity in comparison to McCarthy’s. The emphasis she places on normality, what she imagines to be a “‘normal’ quota” of lies in a day, also underscores her desire to simultaneously blend in with the crowd and excel. Additionally, the preservation of this correspondence is an indication that McCarthy recognized its significance as of supplementary interest to researchers. This can be found in file 11.5, page 8 of the typescript, of the McCarthy papers in the Vassar College Archives.

such readers, as evidenced in *Memories*. “*In the course of publishing these memoirs in magazines,*” she writes that she received many negative responses from the public:

The letters from the laity—chiefly women—are all alike; they might almost have been penned by the same person; I have filed them under the head of “Correspondence, Scurrilous.” They are frequently full of misspellings, though the writers claim to be educated, and they are all, without exception, menacing. “False,” “misrepresentation,” “lying,” “bigotry,” “hate,” “poison,” “filth,” “trash,” “cheap,” “distortion” this is the common vocabulary of them all. (22)

McCarthy kept these initial reactions to each of her previously published essays, read them and filed them away, and at this moment in *Memories*, she takes the opportunity to both address and dismiss some of the claims or questions her readers had about the original publications. Her archivization of these letters, and her understanding that they should be preserved, also illustrates one of the ways in which she sees herself in relation to her audience; she doesn’t retain only those pieces of correspondence which laud her writing.¹⁷ Including her reactions to her readership adds another layer to the memoir’s dialogic, conversational structure; addressing the memoir “to the reader,” she is able to explicitly correspond with her audience.

The fact that *Memories* often feels as if it is in dialogue with itself, in addition to its many readers over time, adds to the seriality of its structure; the essays both did and did not “just” happen before the post-scripts. One of the most compelling elements of

¹⁷ These letters are collected in the McCarthy archives at Vassar College.

serialization, Jennifer Hayward suggests, is its “persistent” engagement with the audience (20). “Because of their continued accountability to consumers,” she continues, “serials may offer cultural models for material transformation—models that come not from the directives of academic critics, not from marginal pockets of cultural resistance, but from within mass culture itself as a result of the influence of fans’ voices over time” (20). McCarthy’s serial publication in periodicals like the *New Yorker*, followed by her collection of these essays into *Memories*, and her incorporation of both her own revisions as well as the responses she received from readers all help to present *Memories* as an early work of serial memoir, which made use of one of the dominant forms of mass production—periodical magazines—through which she could serialize her self-representational text. The heteroglossic foundation for *Memories*, moreover, also places it within the tradition of postmodern representation. J.R. Martin and R. McCormack point out that, while modernist texts were framed as self-contained, autonomous, and achieving some sort of closure, “post-modernity frames texts as inherently dialogic contributions to a heteroglossic social milieu made up of a cacophony of complementary voices and points of view. Whereas modernity thought this range of voices could be orchestrated and eventually distilled into a single voice, postmodernity acknowledges the impossibility of synthesis” (14). McCarthy takes Martin and McCormack’s observations one step farther, illustrating the potential impossibility for an author’s own self-representational voice to be singular. Using the techniques of heteroglossia and heterogeneity, McCarthy’s memoirs present a variety of voices through which her

narratives are understood beyond her own, incorporating the reminiscences of family members, friends, and historical documents.¹⁸

In the italicized section following the second chapter—which is also the first previously published essay—titled “Yonder Peasant, Who Is He?,” McCarthy points again to the position of the reader, and acknowledges the complications of reading *Memories*. She begins this interstitial section by writing: “*There are several dubious points in this memoir*” (47)¹⁹. After “To the Reader,” which attempted to prepare the reader as much as possible for the dialogic structure that follows, this one-sentence paragraph still comes as a shock to the reader; the reader’s impulse may then be to re-read “Yonder Peasant” with the new information in mind. This impulse, I argue, is part and parcel of the serial memoir, as both memoirist and reader must consistently retrace the path of memory. The recursive structure of this book, and its investment in working through and exposing the relationality of selfhood, underscores the episodic nature of memory itself, with which both reader and writer must self-reflexively struggle. After delineating some of the “dubious points” in “Yonder Peasant,” McCarthy continues:

“The reader will wonder what made me change this story to something decidedly inferior, even from a literary point of view—far too sentimental; it even sounds

¹⁸ McCarthy’s heteroglossic structure, particularly in its dialogue with documents and records, illustrates Foucault’s argument about genealogy and descent. He proposes that “[t]he search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (*Language* 147). His emphasis on heterogeneity and fragmentation parallels descriptions of postmodernity, in which texts challenge the possibility—and use—of continuity and unity.

¹⁹ The “dubious points” in this episode, for the most part, are related to the influenza. McCarthy, for example, remembered being sick before the family left on the trip, but “newspaper accounts” support the contraction of influenza on the trip, which, in turn, “*conflicts with the story that Uncle Harry and Aunt Zula brought it with them*” (47). Additionally, in the original essay, McCarthy wrote that they had been sick for several weeks, which she recognizes could not be the case. The newspaper coverage of her parents’ death, shortly after their arrival, indicate that the children were in recovery.

improbable. I forget now, but I think the reason must have been that I did not want to 'go into' my guardians as individuals here; that was another story, which was to be told in the next chapter" (49, emphasis original). McCarthy's attempts to retrace her thinking illustrate reflexivity as she also acknowledges that, from its initial publication in 1948, "Yonder Peasant" was conceived of as one part of a larger group of stories including the post-scriptum in which she attempts to recreate the writing of the story.

Within "Yonder Peasant," moreover, McCarthy makes frequent references to her Uncle Harry. "My uncle Harry argues that I do not give his mother sufficient credit," she writes, "'My mother was square,' says Uncle Harry," or "according to Uncle Harry" (49, 50, emphasis original).²⁰ These quotations come from a letter Harry McCarthy wrote to Mary, dated March 8, 1952, in which he tries to give McCarthy some of the information she wrote that she didn't have when writing "A Tin Butterfly" and "Yonder Peasant." McCarthy explains: "*I have stressed the family's stinginess where we were concerned, the rigid double standard maintained between the two houses. Yet my grandfather, according to Uncle Harry, spent \$41,700 for our support between the years 1918 and 1923. During this time, the Preston family contributed \$300. This peculiar discrepancy I shall have to deal with later*" (51). Including the facts and figures directly from Harry McCarthy's letter is another illustration of McCarthy's attempt to reconcile her readers' reactions with her own memories; he provides her with new information

²⁰ The ethical situation for life writers engaging the stories of people who are still alive are sundry, and this is a lively area of scholarly inquiry. See, for example, Eakin's edited collection *The Ethics of Life Writing* (2004).

about her family, information that, as a girl, she would not have been privy to, but that, as an adult, she has a difficult time reconciling.

The split between the child's memories and the authorial perspective is also striking in this memoir, as readers are allowed to see multiple narratorial and embodied perspectives, temporally distinct from one another. In the piece titled "Yellowstone Park," McCarthy presents her philosophy on truth and lying, and therefore also on the position of the memoirist, to her readers. She writes that, as much as she tried to tell people the truth, she "was always transposing reality for them into terms they could understand" (172). Here, and in the other sections of her memoir, McCarthy presents a perspective that is concerned with veracity, but also with making herself understood by others. Positioning herself as aware of her own self-construction and self-representation in both the individual essays and in the interstitial sections, she mediates these various positions for us. Structurally evident in *Memories*, the particular position of the autobiographer in relation to the textual selves is also made clear in McCarthy's later memoirs, *How I Grew* and *Intellectual Memoirs*.

The Tripartite Narrator: Mary, Mary McCarthy, and "Mary McCarthy"

As orphans, my brother Kevin and I have a burning interest in our past, which we try to reconstruct together, like two amateur archaeologists, falling on any new scrap of evidence, trying to fit it in, questioning our relations, belaboring our own memories.
—Mary McCarthy, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*

An obligation to remember truly, we might say, is as binding as the fact that other generations live on in our very blood and descend from our own. To forget the past willfully is to threaten the fragile links that, however tenuously, guard us from oblivion.
—Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Memory and Counter-Memory"

The dialogic structure of *Memories*, and the conversational styles of *How I Grew* and *Intellectual Memoirs*, literalizes the complicated textual position of the tripartite narrator of memoir. This position, theorized by Marcus Billson and revised by Helen Buss, examines the complicated position of the autobiographical author/subject of memoir. Billson explains that the narrator perspective in memoir comprises three positions “the eyewitness, the participant, and the *histor*—employed by the memoir-writer to evoke the historicity of his past and to argue for the truth of his vision of history” (271). *Histor*, borrowed from Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg’s *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), is the position assumed whenever characters narrate events they have not seen for themselves: when narrators report a conversation they read about, learned through historical research, or when narrators provide supplementary information with which to set the scene for their story or further elucidate their narrative (278). In her comprehensive critical examination, *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (2002), Buss revises Billson’s tripartite narrator structure, delineating the three positions as the participant, the witness, and the reflective/reflexive consciousness (16). She writes that she “prefer[s] the more general word ‘witness,’ since we witness with more than our eyes, and [her] concept of the ‘reflective/reflexive consciousness’ more accurately describes the complexity of memoir’s third narrative function than does *histor* [*sic*]” (16).

My work follows Buss’ theorization of the terms: the reflective consciousness is associated with the traditional *histor* function, who is able to incorporate research and, in Billson’s words, “considers himself an historian and poses as one” (278), while the

reflexive consciousness performs, Buss writes, “‘self-vigilance’ with which a memoirist reassesses, reconsiders, and reconfigures her memories and subject positions while allowing for the possibility of more change in the future—at the same time allowing her reader to observe that process” (17). The tripartite narrator of memoir, then, inhabits a space in which multiple subject positions are assumed. Allowing the reader an intimate perspective on the construction of the text—and on the memoirist’s own sense of self-construction—further allows for a more transparent discussion about how authors in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries construct selves and identities. Serial memoir is one way that self-representation is exposed as imitating the embodied and unending nature of lived experience. The narrating position in memoir is thus distinct from the narrator of fictional texts because of the position of the author; even if the narrator in fiction still participates, reports, and interprets, and even if the narrator’s perspective is slightly different than that of the author at the time of the writing, it is still clear that the implied author is the same physical person as the narrator.²¹ Moreover, the tripartite narrator in memoir is also distinct from the traditional autobiographical narrator because of the presence of the witness function.

In each of her memoirs, Mary McCarthy clearly inhabits and explicitly interrogates the complicated position of the tripartite narrator. *Memories* overtly illustrates the reflexive/reflective consciousness through its dialogic structure, but McCarthy also presents herself as the protagonist and the witness; she was the girl in the

²¹ See James Phelan’s *Living to Tell about It* for a detailed discussion of narratorial positions in fiction and a brief discussion of the autobiographical narrator, as well as an examination of the ethics of character narration.

stories—the girl who attended Annie Wright Seminary, whose “*chief interest was the stage*” (125, emphasis original), and whose nickname in high school was, to her continual confusion even as an adult, C.Y.E. McCarthy also presents herself as witness throughout these stories and the interstitial sections of reflection; she witnessed (and was subject to) the cruel treatment by her guardians as a young girl; she attended a Sacred Heart convent school and, from that vantage, observed many of the innerworkings of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart order; and she places the focus of the final episode in *Memories* on the “*figure of [her] grandmother, who had appeared only as a name, a sob, a lacy handkerchief, a pair of opera glasses, a pearl-handled revolver*” (193), in order to emphasize much of the silence that surrounded their relationship.

Witnessing is also, of course, closely linked to testimony, and much of this memoir negotiates the boundaries between witnessing and testifying, particularly in the ethics of life writing: what is acceptable to tell? In the last italicized section, following “Yellowstone Park” and preceding “Ask Me No Questions,” McCarthy writes:

The reader has heard a great deal of my grandfather [Preston] and very little of my grandmother. One reason for this is that she was living while most of these memoirs were being written. Sooner or later, however, I knew I was going to have to touch on her, or the story would not be complete. Even when she was dead, I felt a certain reluctance toward doing this, as toward touching a sensitive nerve. It meant probing, too, into the past, into my earliest, dimmest memories, and into the family past behind that. (193)

In this passage, McCarthy explicitly acknowledges the three positions of the tripartite narrator: the protagonist who experienced those early, dim memories; the witness who was able to intuit the reaction of her grandmother, and who knew that, without examining that part of her own life, she could not approximate her life narrative; and the reflective/reflexive consciousness who must now probe into her own past, as well as her family's collective past.

As Smith and Watson argue in *Reading Autobiography*, while the author is a figure that readers cannot know, the narrator represents his or her subjectivity through multiple self-representational positions. "Often critics analyzing autobiographical acts distinguish between the 'I'-now and the 'I'-then, the narrating 'I' who speaks and the narrated 'I' who is spoken about," they write (58), and they continue to explain that this distinction is too restrictive and does not go far enough to account for the complexities of life writing. Rather, they present four "I's": the "'real' or historical 'I,'" or the author; the "narrating 'I,'" or the provisional subject which "can include the voice of publicly acknowledged authority, the voice of innocence and wonder, the voice of cynicism, the voice of postconversion certainty, the voice of suffering and victimization, and so on"; the "narrated 'I,'" or the protagonist of the story; and the "ideological 'I,'" who is an historically or culturally available subject position, closely aligned with the reflexive/reflective consciousness (59-61).

While the distinctions presented by Smith and Watson are useful, I argue that maintaining Billson and Buss' construction of the tripartite narrator in memoir is important because it attends to the relationality of self-construction in memoir.

Describing subject positions with their function, rather than with a focus on the “I” helps reinforce the relationality of the positions of the witness, protagonist, and reflexive/reflective consciousness. Moreover, this witness function in memoir, found in both Buss and Billson, emphasizes authors’ commitment to writing about the place of others in their recollections, and in relation to their historical moment, which, in my view, is central to the construction of a subject position in memoir. Ellis’ argument that the twentieth century has been “the century of witness” makes the position of the witness function all the more relevant to theorizations about narratorial positions in memoir; as Buss explains, the witness “observes and records the actions of others from a particular and localized viewpoint in the past time of the action” (16). The centrality of the witness function of the tripartite narrator in memoir recognizes that our lives are made up of our participation in a particular historical moment, that identity is foundationally relational, and that the ways in which memoirists represent their experiences must account for interactions with others.²² Significant to this witnessing is also the testimony which results: as the events witnessed become narrated again and again, they are understood as serial. The tension between repetition and representation, so important for other serial modes of expression, is inextricable from witnessing and testimony.

The function of the reflective/reflexive consciousness underscores the multiplicity of “I”s available for subjects of life writing while it simultaneously allows for the memoirist to include research and a more well-developed historical perspective. In their discussion, Smith and Watson point to Mary McCarthy’s *How I Grew* as

²² See, also, Paul John Eakin’s “Relational Selves, Relational Lives,” in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999).

evidence for their analysis of the narrated “I,” citing an important passage where McCarthy writes about the self as palimpsest or pentimento. “I, who was not yet ‘I,’” McCarthy writes as she remembers posing for a poor artist in Seattle, “had been painted over or given a coat of whitewash, maybe two or three times, till I was only a bumpiness, an extra thickness of canvas” (161). Here, as Smith and Watson suggest, McCarthy “differentiates earlier girl selves from the writer she would become, ‘I’” (61), underscoring the possibility of multiple or heterogeneous selves. And yet, there is more to this passage than the delineation of selves, as McCarthy also puts her reflexive/reflective consciousness to work here, the *histor* function, as she explicitly alludes to “pentimento” which was also the title of Lillian Hellman’s 1973 memoir. McCarthy’s use of the pentimento image in *How I Grew* is thus not solely a metaphor for the multiplicity of “I”s; it is also a moment in which the reflective/reflexive consciousness points to what happened after McCarthy’s girlhood.²³ Moreover, McCarthy’s appropriation of this metaphor places her memoirs into a competitive cultural context with Hellman’s memoirs, engaging Hellman in a textual dialogue.²⁴ The

²³ McCarthy appeared on “The Dick Cavett Show” on October 18, 1979, to talk about her novel, *Cannibals and Missionaries*, and, when asked which contemporary writers she believed were “overrated,” she named Hellman as a holdover who she thought was “tremendously overrated, a bad writer, and dishonest writer” (qtd in Brightman 600, emphasis original). McCarthy continued, citing a previous interview where she once said “that every word she writes is a lie, including ‘and’ and ‘the’” (qtd in Brightman 600, emphasis original). Two weeks later, Cavett and McCarthy were sued by Hellman for \$2.25 million. Hellman was the author of two other memoirs, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969) and *Scoundrel Time* (1976), and, at the time during which she writes *How I Grew*, McCarthy is well aware of Hellman and her texts. *How I Grew* was published in 1986; Hellman’s suit lasted from 1979 to 1984, at the time of Hellman’s death, when the suit was dropped by her literary executors. The relationship between Hellman and McCarthy is well documented. For more comparisons of their work, see Adams, *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*, among others.

²⁴ Hellman’s death precedes the publication of *How I Grew* but it is clear from McCarthy’s archives that McCarthy was engaged in writing *How I Grew* as early as the late 1970s.

prospect of posthumous dialogue is significant because of the implications it has for McCarthy's own posthumously published memoir, *Intellectual Memories*.

The tripartite structure is particularly important for understanding the layered, serial text McCarthy has created in *Memories*, although many scholars and critics of McCarthy's texts have failed to make these distinctions. For example, Kraus writes that, even though it is evident that the titular "memories" were collected after they took place, "McCarthy often offers the point of view as well as the feelings of herself as a young girl aged between six and ten. She describes in great detail, for instance, what her sentiments were throughout the tin butterfly episode" (146); however, when McCarthy examines an historical situation or the conditions in which they lived rather than describing the narrative action, Kraus writes, "she takes on an extremely authoritative voice that does not suggest an act of remembering but rather a listing of indisputable facts" (146). The position of the tripartite narrator, however, both allows for and explains these seemingly incongruous shifts in narrative position, particularly because the job of the memoirist is often to account for these simultaneous, multiple perspectives.

Seriality and Supplementarity: From "An Intellectual Autobiography or How I Grew" to *How I Grew: A Memoir of the Early Years to Intellectual Memoirs*

*Hold on! All the time I have been writing this,
a memory has been coming back to haunt me.*
—Mary McCarthy, *How I Grew*

There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition,

and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside.
—Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

One of the threads that holds McCarthy's oeuvre together is her attention to the interrelated nature of her lived experience, of the intellectual self as well as the social person, and her dedication to the preservation of that lived experience. Another important distinction between the genres of autobiography and memoir is precisely this "outside" attention to her interrelationality and the "history of the times," and extant archival material indicates that McCarthy was well aware of this difference. As she drafted *How I Grew*, she used the working title "An Intellectual Autobiography or How I Grew," and it wasn't until the final copy that the title appeared as *How I Grew: A Memoir of the Early Years*.²⁵ One explanation for this last-minute change is that the genre of autobiography, even an intellectual one, ultimately did not appeal to McCarthy as much as memoir. Scholars often overlook the appearance of "memoir" in the titles of both *How I Grew: A Memoir of the Early Years* and *Intellectual Memoirs*, simply relegating them to the realm of autobiography, but, as Francis Russell Hart suggests, memoirs "are *of* a person, but they are 'really' of an event, an era, an institution, a class identity" (qtd in Buss xi, emphasis original). Additionally, as Rak points out, memoir "describes private and public, official and unofficial writing, writing as process and writing as product, all at once" (317). Rak's attention to the significance of the writing process—and the overtly constructed nature of writing—is central for McCarthy's memoirs. Examining McCarthy's texts in relation to the archive in all of its physical,

²⁵ McCarthy papers, Vassar College, folder 80.1. The amount of drafting material McCarthy saved as she was writing *How I Grew* is potentially overwhelming for researchers, but provides great insight into the development of her thinking about the serial memoir project she had undertaken. Even in the manuscript boxes for *Intellectual Memoirs*, researchers find draft copies of *How I Grew*.

metaphorical, and material senses illuminates the seriality of memory and the writing process.

McCarthy's memoirs are invested in presenting the relationality of intellectual subjectivity, as well as interpersonal interaction, and the creation of her intellectual self also works to position her in a specific historical context; she was influenced as much by the texts she read as by the people she knew. *How I Grew* begins as McCarthy addresses the concept of the Cartesian mind/body split, which has been important for examinations of life writing in the twentieth-century, especially as feminist and postmodern critics have called this distinction into question. Following the conventions of a traditional autobiography but with a twist, McCarthy writes: "I was born as a mind during 1925, my bodily birth having taken place in 1912" (1). Readers familiar with *Memories* might challenge the idea that she had no "mind" before turning thirteen, and McCarthy acknowledges that she "must have had thoughts and mental impressions, perhaps even some sort of specifically cerebral life that [she] no longer remember[s]" (1), but she also writes that her memories often contradict the surviving, documentary record. Recalling herself in her first year of public high school, she writes: "I don't know that child" (48). Thus contextualizing herself, she marks a distinction between the position of the reflective/reflexive consciousness and that of the participant; she writes about how "that child" was constructed in terms of relationships at school and through books as she provides additional information that she has found about the texts of her youth. Additionally, she describes how through writing and reflection, "that child" comes to be constructed through memory. She thus emphasizes the inherent relationality of self-

construction, but the ways in which *How I Grew* is placed in conversation with both *Memories* and *Intellectual Memoirs* ultimately underscores the relationality of the writer's own memories as well.

Michel Foucault's theories concerning genealogy and counter-memory illuminate many of McCarthy's serial techniques, particularly as she attempts to provide a documentary history of her family. While McCarthy laments the fact that she has few familial narratives on which to base her memoirs, she textually revels in the possibilities available to her for research, providing documentation in the form of photographs and excerpts from letters and diaries. Foucault writes that genealogy is "patiently documentary," and, like the metaphor of the pentimento, "operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (*Language* 139). Theorizing genealogy as a process of recursive research that is foundationally material and archival, Foucault's observations resonate significantly with serial memoirists who craft multiple self-reflexive texts in order to recapture or document the past. Memoir is an ideal form for this kind of documentary assembly or collage of "entangled and confused parchments," as its etymology underscores its initial association with note-taking and the process of writing. Foucault also proposes that autobiographical texts are written in order to respond to readers who have questions about the unity of the author's name, and who desire to know the "hidden sense pervading [an author's] work," including their personal stories and how they created their texts (*The Archaeology*, 222). His analysis of readerly expectations for autobiographical texts is particularly compelling when examined in light of McCarthy's

serial memoir because of readers' fascination with the self-referentiality of her fiction as well as her nonfiction, and because of her life as an intellectual—the story of how she came to write what she wrote is an interesting one.

In *How I Grew*, McCarthy does attempt to present stories from her personal life and the ways in which those stories or memories intersect with her larger body of work has been fodder for discussion from the beginning; it is no coincidence that she was approached to write *How I Grew* and *Intellectual Memoirs*. The language used in the memoirs, though, illustrates the fallacy behind the reader's desire for a "unity" in works by the same author. As *How I Grew* progresses, for example, readers find more and more occasions wherein McCarthy acknowledges "big patches of amnesia" (48), and she often writes that she interrogates her memories as she remembers them. Phrases such as "I ask myself" (57), "In my memory it feels like a Saturday" (64), "I wish I knew" (79), "something happened, I have no idea what" (131), or "it occurs to me that" (192), appear regularly throughout the memoir. Ultimately, she exposes the "real story" which inspired the writings for which she is so well known to be unrecoverable. "In other words, the feelings I remember," she explains after having looked through documents and letters from her first moments in the Hudson Valley on her way to college, "are almost the *opposite* of those I wrote down" (199, emphasis original). The genealogical discovery McCarthy makes of her own memories supports Foucault's assertion that the duty of genealogy is not to prove or maintain historical continuity, but rather to identify moments we have remembered differently and, finally, "to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents"

(*Language* 146). Truth, as McCarthy's memoirs demonstrate, is not even clear when there is documentary evidence.

Lynn Domina also finds Foucault's assertion about desired authorial unity compelling in relation to McCarthy, although Domina's focus is on the "real story" which, she writes, "*of course*, is read as the deep secrets of the author's self, her memory, her confessions, her sexuality. This 'real story' fails, however, to be anything except another text, *inflating the oeuvre*, demanding through its existence subsequent commentary" (83-84, emphasis added). The argument that McCarthy's proliferation of texts is nothing but inflation suggests a narrow reading of McCarthy's serial oeuvre; rather than a failure to present the "real story," McCarthy illustrates through her multiple self-referential texts and through the technology of periodical publication that there is no way to access the "real story." While Domina acknowledges this impossibility, writing that McCarthy's presentation of the "'real story' becomes simply language purporting to have referential value which nevertheless collapses as language proves continually inadequate" (84), she does not address the complexities of McCarthy's serial memoir, which illustrates that language is both her chosen mode of communication and patently untrustworthy. McCarthy presents herself foremost as a writer throughout her serial memoir, repeatedly and explicitly engaging with strategies for narrativization and representation.²⁶ I propose that one of the functions of serial memoir is to interrogate the possibility of representing the "real story," the story that Foucault suggests readers want,

²⁶ McCarthy, through the incorporation of photographs within the texts of *Memories* and *How I Grew*, explicitly points to the modes of transmission. Photographs are one way to provide a heterogeneous narrative; other ways to communicate include documents, images, and hypertext, which are also used by serial memoirists to expose the same sorts of impossible expectations of readers. I will return to this issue throughout the dissertation.

textually: through language and, occasionally, image. Multiple texts simultaneously employ and challenge the limits of language to be referential, and more precisely, to be self-referential. Serial memoir allows for the possibility that, rather than solely a desire for the “real,” readers may want more “story.”

In scholarly examinations of *Memories*, much has been made about the orphaning of McCarthy and her siblings, and it is clear that the loss of this genealogical tie profoundly affected her. This loss—this absence at the center of her self-construction—carries over into *How I Grew* and into *Intellectual Memoirs*. McCarthy laments that none of her “cute sayings” beyond the age of six were recorded: “After the flu, there was no one there to record them any more. Nobody was writing to her mother-in-law of the words and deeds of the four of us” (2), and she shares an absence-of-narrative that has profoundly shaken her. She writes,

When he died, my father (another Tantalus effect) had been reading me a long fairy tale that we never finished.²⁷ It was about seven brothers who were changed into ravens and their little sister, left behind when they flew away, who was given the task of knitting seven little shirts if she wanted them to change back into human shape again. At the place we stopped

²⁷ Tantalus, the son of Zeus, was given more honors than other of Zeus’ mortal children, but in return, he acted terribly: he had his only son, Pelops, killed, boiled, and served to the gods. Edith Hamilton writes: “Apparently, [Tantalus] was driven by a passion of hatred against them which made him willing to sacrifice his son in order to bring upon them the horror of being cannibals. It may be, too, that he wanted to show in the most startling and shocking way possible how easy it was to deceive the awful, venerated, humbly adored divinities” (346). The gods, however, knew of his actions and punished him for it. Hamilton explains that the gods “set the arch-sinner in a pool in Hades, but whenever in his tormenting thirst he stooped to drink he could not reach the water. It disappeared, drained into the ground as he bent down. When he stood up it was there again. Over the pool fruit trees hung heavy laden with pears, pomegranates, rosy apples, sweet figs. Each time he stretched out his hand to grasp them the wind tossed them high away out of reach. Thus he stood forever, his undying throat always athirst, his hunger in the midst of plenty never satisfied” (347).

reading, she had failed to finish one little sleeve. I would have given my immortal soul to know what happened then, but in all the books of fairy tales that have come my way since, I have not been able to find that story—only its first and second cousins, like “The Seven Ravens” and “The Six Swans.” And what became of the book itself, big with a wine-colored cover? (4)

The physical absence of the book and of the narrative imitates and reenacts the loss of her father. In the narrative of the children’s story, the daughter, easily read as a stand-in for McCarthy herself, must weave shirts for her brothers to keep them with her. The etymology of text, *textus*, means literally, “that which is woven” (“text”), affirming the link between strands of thought and strands of fabric, and it is through her serial self-narrative that McCarthy attempts to weave and re-weave her parents, her brothers, and the memories from her past into the present of her life. Archiving the physical objects from her past is one way to supplement the loss of the wine-colored book.

Readerly expectation may assume that subsequent volumes in serial life writing may follow one another chronologically, yet as memoir, these texts instead interrogate and expose the reader’s expectations. *How I Grew* works as an extended version of counter-memory, presenting an alternative narrative performance to many of the previously published episodes collected for *Memories*, which most often present stories from her childhood. If identity relies on memory, McCarthy’s technique of presenting alternative memories illustrates that she sees her own subjectivity as transitory. A far more chronological and unified text than *Memories*, *How I Grew* also establishes itself

as a counter-memory to the interstitial sections of *Memories*, those sections written specifically for the collection of episodes itself. “Collision of memories,” write Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, “points in turn to the way in which memory can challenge the biases, omissions, exclusions, generalizations, and abstractions of history” (5). The challenges posed to the original self-representational essays—the collision of memories—underscores McCarthy’s commitment to interrogating memory and its narrativization, as she performs these moments of memory and counter-memory for readers. While scholars may suggest that *How I Grew* is redundant or that it simply presents more commentary on the interstitial sections of *Memories*, reading these texts as memoirs does not constrain McCarthy’s textual self-construction.²⁸ Relegating her investigations of seriality and self-construction to mere comments marginalizes the critiques of traditional self-representation performed in her memoirs.

Further frustrating reader expectations, which may abate once the memoirist is deceased, McCarthy’s *Intellectual Memoirs: New York 1936-1938*, was published posthumously. In the introduction, Elizabeth Hardwick writes that the pages of *Intellectual Memoirs* “are a continuation of the first volume, to which she gave the title: *How I Grew*. Sometimes with a sigh she would refer to the years ahead in her autobiography as ‘I seem to be embarked on how I grew and grew and grew.’ I am not certain how many volumes she planned, but I had the idea she meant to go right down the line” (vii). Thus Hardwick characterizes McCarthy here as ever in-process, “embarked on how [she] grew and grew and grew.” In this version, and with the

²⁸ See Domina.

preceding volumes as evidence, McCarthy does not attempt to represent a final moment; rather, she presents her readers with multiple self-reflexive projects: an episodic, dialogic, temporally unstable memoir, *Memories*; and two “volumes” of an autobiographical project that she envisioned as chronological and sequential, and one of which was never completed.²⁹ While readers may expect one thing, the fact that McCarthy allows them—as well as herself—the luxury to revisit moments from a specific period in her life story provides an alternative to autobiography’s traditional narrative chronology. Moreover, Jacques Derrida’s thoughts about supplementarity illuminate the paratextual apparatus of Hardwick’s introduction and her posthumous editing.

Hardwick’s introduction to *Intellectual Memoirs* becomes incorporated into McCarthy’s serial narrative even as it—and, indeed, her efforts in editing the memoir for publication—is presented as supplementary. Nancy K. Miller proposes that memoir is prosthetic, “an aid to memory” (*But Enough about Me*, 14), which suggests an experiential model of memory. The notion of prosthetic or supplement emphasizes the materiality of texts and memory so prominent in McCarthy’s memoirs.³⁰ Derrida’s theories about supplements are of particular significance to this argument, as he suggests that supplementarity poses a challenge to the logic of identity. In *Of Grammatology*

²⁹ Interestingly, both *Memories* and *How I Grew* contain inserts of pictures, while *Intellectual Memoirs* does not. This incorporation of photographs underscores McCarthy’s engagement with heterogenic supplementarity. Moreover, this insert also challenges a chronological approach to life writing because the images themselves provide an alternate narrative. A more thorough discussion of the interaction of photography and serial memoir will take place in Chapter 4: “Art Spiegelman’s Graphic Serial Memoir.”

³⁰ Miller writes that she wants to “propose the notion of memoir as prosthesis—an aid to memory. What helps you remember. In this sense, what memoirs do is support you in the act of remembering. The memoir boom, then, should be understood not as a proliferation of self-serving representations of individualistic memory but as an aid or a spur to keep cultural memory alive” (13-14).

(1967), Derrida examines the status of writing in Western thought, paying close attention to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.³¹ The *supplément*, he suggests, exists in a space of two seemingly mutually exclusive meanings. First, the supplement can be seen as a replacement: the supplement supplements, “add[ing] only to replace” (145). In this capacity, the supplement is “compensatory” and, as “substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness” (145). Additionally, however, Derrida posits the supplement as an adjunct, which adds something new to the original text or structure. In this case, he writes, “the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it” (145). Supplementarity, then, indicates that there is something outside the structure of initial signification, which opens space for new readings or re-readings. Derrida gives equal presence to the supplement as playful—a replacement for the absence—as well as structural—the exterior support which is new.

The dialogic structure of *Memories*, for example, or the inclusion of photographs in *Memories* and *How I Grew*, may seem supplementary, in the sense that they are exterior to the traditional autobiographical narrative presented in the texts. And yet, these elements are needed in order to make up for some loss within the text itself: McCarthy believed it to be central to incorporate photographic images, and those images do influence the way the texts are read and consumed. Supplements, as is the case with the incorporation of photographs, also implicate the process of textual archivization. “Is

³¹ Rak provides an extended examination of Derrida’s engagement with Rousseau in relation to the genres of memoir and autobiography.

the psychic apparatus *better represented* or is it *affected differently* by all the technical mechanisms for archivization and for reproduction,” Derrida asks, “for prostheses of so-called live memory, for simulacrum of living things which already are, and will increasingly be, more refined, complicated, powerful than the ‘mystic pad’ (microcomputing, electronization, computerization, etc.)?” (*Archive Fever* 15). The desire to represent subjectivity or self-construction is intimately bound to the material ways in which memoirists choose to construct their texts. Certainly how contemporary memoirists like McCarthy assemble these textual self-representations must engage advancements in technology for archivization and repetition, but as the twentieth-century progressed, the digital technologies available have changed the way memoirists think about subjectivity and the strategies for self-representation.

The concept of serial memoir itself relies on archivization, as the series works as an archive of self, as well as on reproduction and supplementarity: the individual texts both speak to a potential absence in the other texts, but they remain complete in themselves and exterior to one another. Significantly, Rak posits the genre of memoir itself as supplemental to the genre of autobiography, because memoir offers readers that which autobiography cannot. Using Derrida’s theories of supplementarity, Rak writes that the “existence of memoir as a form works to highlight autobiography’s lack. The tendency of autobiography critics to be dissatisfied by autobiography as a term and to search for new ways to describe exceptions to the discursive rules of autobiography shows that memoir works as the supplement” (321). McCarthy’s decision to rename her intellectual autobiographies “memoirs” is significant in this light as she creates a series

of self-representational texts which present writing as both a finished product and an unfinished process, which challenge official representations, and that explicitly engages the world of publishing, as she (re)collects her previously published texts.

McCarthy was approached with the idea of writing her “intellectual autobiography” when she was in her seventies, and she conceded.³² Hardwick points out that she doesn’t think that McCarthy kept a diary, but that, from the extant pages of *Intellectual Memoirs* and the previous memoirs, “it appears that she must have kept clippings, letters certainly, playbills, school albums, and made use of minor research to get it right—to be sure the young man in Seattle played on the football team” (xv). *Intellectual Memoirs* thus presents an example of the reflexive/reflective consciousness at work in reconstructing the historical moment as well as the lived reality of the time, but it also illustrates the importance of the archive and supplement to McCarthy’s sense of self-construction. Archiving newspaper articles, correspondence, and detritus from the past, in addition to performing perfunctory research, illustrates the ways in which she found these materials central to approximating the absence she felt as she was (re)collecting her memories, but her use of them in constructing the memoirs shows readers the work involved in approximating that past. Archives, then, are versions of serial supplementarity.

³² In his 2008 memoir, *To the Life of the Silver Harbor: Edmund Wilson and Mary McCarthy on Cape Cod*, McCarthy’s son with Edmund Wilson, Reuel Wilson, writes that the title of the posthumous memoir is misleading. Writing about both Wilson’s and McCarthy’s multiple affairs—when married to each other as well as when in relationships with others—Reuel Wilson writes: “both [McCarthy and Wilson] were capable of two-, three-, and four-timing spouses or other lovers. Ample testimony for this can be found in McCarthy’s posthumous *Intellectual Memoirs* (a title that was *ineptly chosen* by the publisher for a book that deals more with sex than intellectual matters), other autobiographical writings and statements, and in her personal letters” (13, emphasis mine). Again, Wilson points to the archive as the site for narrative (re)construction.

McCarthy, in *How I Grew* and *Intellectual Memoirs*, exposes the recursivity of memory, simultaneously creating and performing the seriality inherent in repetition. In *How I Grew*, for example, as McCarthy recounts the circumstances surrounding the loss of her virginity, a paragraph appears, which begins, “Hold on! All the time I have been writing this, a memory has been coming back to haunt me” (75). When approaching the memoir as a cohesive narrative, a reader may understand the rhetorical apparatus of this paragraph as a potentially false “Dear Reader” moment. McCarthy’s meticulous archives, however, indicate that this memory did come back to her at a late stage in the composition of this memoir. Various typewritten manuscripts of the chapter in its entirety appear in McCarthy’s files, but it is not until a late moment in which a new piece of paper, reading “insert after first paragraph,” appears. The paragraph on this page corresponds word for word with the paragraph as it is printed in the memoir.

Another moment like this takes place in the second chapter of *How I Grew*, in a section of a previously published chapter. In “Getting an Education,” published in the *New Yorker* on July 7, 1986, McCarthy details her days at Garfield High School. Here, she reminisces about Larry Judson, a Jewish actor in her class, lamenting the fact that “he disappeared from [her] ken” and she wonders where he ended up (47). Because this section had been previously published, in the final version of *How I Grew* McCarthy is able to add a parenthetical paragraph: “Since I wrote—and published—those words, two people have told me, one of them being Larry Judson himself. He [...] thinks the teacher was named Miss Aiken—Yes!” (47). The enthusiasm of this section

corresponds with its situation as a parenthetical supplement to the earlier published text, and its inclusion in the next version.

The McCarthy archives at Vassar work as another kind of supplement to her serial life writing project, further supporting an examination of her as a serial memoirist. The archives themselves are a physical manifestation of the idea that individuals exist within larger systems and are a material testament to the concept of the self as constructed through those systems. The detritus of letter writing, the dozens of drafts of memoirs and novels, and the newspaper clippings available to researchers in McCarthy's archive illustrate her position that individuals are influenced by outside forces; her frequent return to her own archives as she researches herself are exemplary moments of the seriality of relationality. Archives are both a location, a place to house the physical accumulation of the past, as well as a metaphor for memory. "[A]n archive," Susan Stable asserts, "is the residue of the past, inherently fragmented and incomplete" (9). As she was writing *How I Grew*, McCarthy was well aware that her documents would be housed at Vassar, a place she found to be "transformational" (203): "I have changed; I have become like Vassar or, better, Vassar changed me while I was not looking, making me more like itself" (200). In *Intellectual Memoirs*, she takes the notion of the archive farther, positing her serial memoir as a counter-narrative to the published accounts. Indeed, her texts position themselves as significant in their powers of archivization; her memories are a part of the history of that moment.

Memoir, as a narrative of the self in relation to others *and* in relation to an historical moment, works as a published version of the self-archive. In the following

chapter, I extend my argument of the serial memoir as self-archive as I examine Maya Angelou's culinary memoir, *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004). Recipes are another version of genealogical documentation, and Angelou's emphasis on the everyday and the relational self extends the materiality of seriality into the kitchens of her readers. *The Welcome Table* provides readers with another kind of serial narrative, one based on Angelou's collection of memories and recipes. Angelou, like McCarthy, places herself within an international and political context as she provides a unique perspective on familiar stories and figures.

Regarding her position at *Partisan Review*, the political journal at which McCarthy and many of her cohorts worked in the 1950s, McCarthy points to other memoirs and intellectual histories in which that story has already been told. "Otherwise," she continues, "my recollections tend to differ from the now canonical versions" (82). Providing specific examples and support, McCarthy's memoir presents another perspective on the moment. While she is unable to provide all of the details regarding those moments, even after performing her own research ("None of the histories I've looked at tells how I happened to be on the magazine. I am not sure myself, but I suspect that Philip [Rahv] imposed me on the others" [83]), she is confident that narratives like hers, counter-narratives, will help provide the details and perspectives needed through which the larger story can be told. In the past, in the present of the writing, and in this memoir's posthumous publication, McCarthy reminds readers that encompassing both physical sites and as metonyms for memory, the seriality and materiality of archives are central to understanding the ways in which people construct

themselves and their historical moments. As she writes, “Until the archives are opened (as we said then), we shall never find out” (83).

CHAPTER III

“WHAT I REPRESENT IS MYSELF”: SERIALITY IN MAYA ANGELOU’S

COLLECTIONS OF MEMOIRS AND MEMORIES

*Content is of great importance, but we must not underestimate the value of style.
That is, attention must be paid to not only what is said but how it is said;
to what we wear, as well as how we wear it.
In fact, we should be aware of all we do and of how we do all that we do.*
—Maya Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*

Maya Angelou is often criticized for what some scholars and reviewers believe is her evasion of a political position, generally expected of African American life writing. Hilton Als of the *New Yorker*, for example, argues that her recent memoir, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), in particular, and Angelou’s writing in general, “strays far from the radicalism of her contemporaries,” and instead, presents the “homespun, and sometimes oddly prudish story of a black woman who, when faced with the trials of life, simply makes do.” Als continues, writing that her texts are a “serial soap opera that fascinat[e] in the compulsive way that soap operas do.” The conflation between the “homespun,” the daily, and serialized soap opera serve to distinguish her texts from those which fall more squarely in the tradition of autobiography, written by politically active (and visible) men. Measuring Angelou against celebrated writers and activists such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., however, ignores the fact that Angelou’s autobiographical mode is distinct from theirs. In fact, I argue that the “homespun” qualities of her writing and her emphasis on the everyday are directly related to a Pan-African element in her texts. In particular, I posit Angelou’s discussions of food and culinary practices as a way to extend the personal archive into the political

and global sphere, and thus to theorize citizenship as a “gastronomic contact zone” (Gardaphé and Xu 7) wherein the everyday practices of eating are transformed into both more political and confrontational acts.

Angelou’s memoirs are politically aware because, as her texts illustrate, to be an African American woman in the 1930s through the 1970s is to be confronted by politics. Her use of seriality as a mode of self-expression indicates that “simply mak[ing] do” is far more complicated—and potentially radical—than Als recognizes. Significantly, Lynn Marie Houston argues that “making do” as a practice performed by Caribbean women is “an act of creation using any available resources” (99), a strategy which allows those authors—like Angelou—to use examples from their everyday material culture. Like the texts Houston examines, Angelou’s memoirs foreground the everyday in order to make a claim for the seriality of African Americans through contemporary theorizations of foodways and consumption. By calling attention to the daily and the mundane, Angelou’s serial memoir asks readers to become aware of their own particular social situation and their embodied realities.

It is significant that, historically, ethnic Americans have been involved in the arenas of food production and services; according to Fred Gardaphé and Wenying Xu, in the United States, “relationships between food and ethnicity bear historical, social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological significance” (5) and that, in fact, “ethnic Americans have fed and built this nation” (8). Angelou’s use of the culinary as metonym implicates both the domestic and the diaspora; she is aware of her position in the African American literary tradition of self-narration, and she extends that tradition

through her emphasis on the seriality of self and of nation. While Angelou also considers herself a poet and a playwright, she asserts that her “major platform *is* autobiography,” that she has “great ambition for the [autobiographical] form,” and that, if she has made errors in her use of self-representational forms, she still writes in the autobiographical mode because she “[has] no other” (qtd in McPherson, 142-143, emphasis original).¹ For an author whose primary mode of writing is self-reflexive, the texts in her oeuvre may seem to stand in contrast with one of her most recent publications, a cookbook titled *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004). Yet, when placed alongside Angelou’s other self-referential texts, *The Welcome Table* acts as an extension of her autobiographical project; when read as a collection of episodes, *The Welcome Table* is an addition to and variation on Angelou’s serial memoir.²

¹ Angelou was approached in the late 1960s by Random House editor Robert Loomis about writing her autobiography. “I’m pretty certain that I will not write an autobiography,” she tells him in response. Loomis approached her several other times over the next few months, and was continually rebuffed. She recounts this exchange at the end of *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*. Since her initial rejection of life writing, Angelou has proven to be a dedicated serial memoirist. Following the publication of her most celebrated work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), she published the memoirs *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), and *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), as well as the collections of personal essays *Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (1993), *Even the Stars Look Lonesome* (1997), and *Letter to My Daughter* (2008). *Letter to My Daughter* is “part guidebook, part memoir, [and] part poetry,” according to the publicity information; for the purposes of this project, I read it as part of her serial memoir because it is authored by Angelou, and many scholars read the collections of personal essays as extensions of Angelou’s autobiographical project, including Clara Junker and Edward Sanford. However, while Angelou is the subject of Marcia Ann Gillespie, Rosa Johnson Butler, and Richard A. Long’s *Maya Angelou: A Glorious Celebration* (2008), a scrapbooked narrative of Angelou’s life, it is not self-authored and must be considered separately from this discussion, as biography rather than memoir.

² See, for example, Myra McMurray, Dolly McPherson, Jan Schmidt, and Pierre A. Walker, who discuss the episodic qualities of *Caged Bird* (Walker writes that “an indication of how episodic *Caged Bird* is is how readily sections from it have lent themselves to being anthologized”); Mary Jane Lupton quotes from reviewers who found *Gather Together* even more fragmented and disorganized than *Caged Bird*; and Clara Juncker writes that *Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now* consists of “a series of expository prose segments” (132).

Examining the ways in which seriality and memory work using theories about collecting, following Jean-Paul Sartre's theorization of social or serial collectivity outlined in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) and Iris Marion Young's related idea of gender as seriality, I argue that Angelou's serial memoir highlights the social collectivity of African Americans as she grounds seriality in the global implications of culinary practices.³ Contemporary life writing is not autonomous; rather, it exposes the hyper-relationality of subjectivity. I propose that Angelou's self-referential series goes well beyond the traditional genre of autobiography in order to illustrate a new way to understand self-construction and the self in relation to others via the materiality of food. In particular, I ground serial collectivity in contemporary foodways studies and "the everyday," connecting Angelou's self-representation to an embodied, lived experience. In this chapter, I use *The Welcome Table* as an example of how Angelou's texts expose the serialized work of food preparation as having implications that go beyond the home, and indeed, the nation. As Amy Kaplan illustrates in her essay, "Manifest Domesticity," the idea of the domestic is not limited to discussions of the hearth or "domestic sphere," but also extends to its opposition with the foreign. Aligning domesticity with the nation, Kaplan underscores the significance of repositioning subjects: "when we oppose the domestic to the foreign, men and women become national allies against the alien and the determining division is not gender but racial demarcations of otherness" (582). Angelou's serial memoir frequently focuses on gender opposition, most famously in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, but she simultaneously details her lived experiences as

³ A more detailed discussion of Sartre and Young follows in this chapter.

an African American, both within the United States and abroad. As scholars have suggested, many of Angelou's texts foreground a search for home through the motif of journeys.⁴

It is also through foodways that Angelou searches, however, and in Angelou's memoirs—and as Kaplan theorizes—the nation at large is conceived of as home: one which must be protected, civilized, and maintained. Home and nation are frequently understood through particular food and consumption habits, which also help us understand ourselves as embodied subjects; these habits are inextricable from larger cultural contexts. Collecting recipes works as a form of self-collection as we gather the foods which we have incorporated into our bodies, and presenting a collection of recipes is a version of self-presentation. Production and consumption of food works as participation in ritual, and Angelou's memoirs, exemplified in this case by *The Welcome Table*, expose the ways in which those rituals are serial, communal, and frequently political. Because eating is a daily and often unremarkable activity in western cultures, Angelou's readers have frequently glossed over these moments in her texts, but it is through these quotidian episodes that Angelou's self-representation as a member of the African Diaspora is most powerful.⁵

⁴ See, for example, essays by Juncker and Sanford, Lupton, McPherson, and Traylor.

⁵ In her examination of English serial fiction, Laurie Langbauer suggests that “the everyday” is a category frequently taken for granted, and that it is “because of their expansiveness, their repetitiveness, their complication of closure” that serial texts “seem to mirror and carry properties often defined as essential to everyday life: that it's just one thing after another, going quietly but inexhaustibly on and on” (2). Langbauer's emphasis on repetition and resistance to closure in serial novels is significant to the analysis of any serial text. Indeed, I argue that because Angelou writes self-reflexively, the ways in which she details the everyday in her memoirs engages with a larger cultural shift in how we understand the self in the twentieth century through the seriality of the everyday.

Moreover, because food preparation and consumption are frequently social endeavors, the serial work of eating has implications that extend out to the larger community and through an individual's lived and inherited experience.⁶ *The Welcome Table* includes personal anecdotes, along with passages about her relatives and the variety of communities of which she has been a part. Angelou contextualizes the stories with recipes and photographs of the completed dishes,⁷ some of which are previously published selections of her other memoirs, filtered through the lens of food.⁸ “Here is the recipe,” Angelou writes at the end of the first section of *The Welcome Table*, titled “Pie Fishing.” “In fact,” she continues, “here are the recipes for Mrs. Townsend’s *entire* Young-Man-Catching-Sunday Afternoon Dinner” (6, emphasis mine). As this example illustrates, Angelou’s personal anecdotes are community specific—readers would not have any other knowledge of Stamps’ inhabitant Mrs. Townsend or her dinners—but they simultaneously reach out to the reader, as if, by making Mrs. Townsend’s “entire” dinner, they could understand the story, or stories, more completely. With *The Welcome Table*, I contend, Angelou has crafted a book which can fruitfully be read as part of her series of self-representational texts. Like the act of cooking, *The Welcome Table* textually revels in what Clara Junker calls “the pleasures of experimentation” (134).

⁶ Many scholars of foodways acknowledge the often frequent conflation between female bodies and food. As Patricia Allen and Carolyn Sachs assert, scholars have differing opinions on the ramifications of women’s food work: either it gives them power within a familial structure or it reinscribes a subordinate and essential gender role. See Lupton, also.

⁷ In the “Acknowledgments” section of *The Welcome Table*, Angelou “salute[s]” the photographer for the book, Brian Lanker, who helped her “see clearly the images of foods that were becoming fuzzy” in her memory.

⁸ Selections appear from *Caged Bird*, *Gather Together*, and *Wouldn’t Take Nothing*.

In this chapter, I use *The Welcome Table* to analyze the ways in which seriality is figured in theories of collecting and in the technologies of food and the everyday, specifically in the written recipe. The technique of examining one's life through food is becoming more and more popular, and *The Welcome Table* is thus part of the burgeoning genre of food memoir.⁹ Cookbooks are suited to provide a cultural critique, Anne Goldman asserts, because they exhort "readers to gloss [their] text[s] not only as a *series* of declarative statements (if one were to peruse it without actually trying the recipes) but as a set of *performative acts* as well (provided one not only reads the recipes but reproduces them)" (183, emphasis mine). In *The Welcome Table*, Angelou has provided the recipes and the memories, but what gets performed or enacted beyond the text is up to the reader. Indeed, the consumer of *The Welcome Table* can make the dishes, materializing the performative, serial, and relational nature of memory-making. Combining the genres of memoir and cookbook allows Angelou to propose a new way to engage in life-writing as she moves forward with her autobiographical project. The relationship audiences have with Angelou and her texts is directly related to how Angelou characterizes herself as a social being; she clearly understands herself as a member of distinct communities, such as the rural town of Stamps, Arkansas, or as an expatriate American living in Ghana. Representing herself as an individual within

⁹ M. F. K. Fisher's *The Gastronomical Me* (1943), an early and central culinary memoir, along with her other culinary memoirs, such as *How to Cook a Wolf* (1941) and *Map of Another Town: A Memoir of Provence* (1961), provide an important foundation for the more recent trend. A brief list of culinary memoirs published in the last twenty years includes Pat Conroy's *The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes of My Life* (2004) and *The Cracker Kitchen: A Cookbook in Celebration of Cornbread-Fed, Down Home Family Stories and Cuisine* (2009), Jeannette Ferrary's *M.F.K. Fisher and Me: A Memoir of Food and Friendship* (1998), Judith Jones' *The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food* (2004), Viviana Carballo's *Havana Salsa: Stories and Recipes* (2007), Ruth Richel's serial memoir *Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table* (1998), *Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table* (2001), and *Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise* (2005), and Colette Rossant's *Apricots on the Nile* (1999).

multiple collective groups is significant as she demonstrates the ways in which seriality influences social interaction.

Passages of Memory and Recipes to Try: *The Welcome Table* as Memoir

Despite or perhaps because of their ordinariness, because cooking is so basic to and so entangled in daily life, cookbooks have [...] served women as meditations, memoirs, diaries, journals, scrapbooks, and guides.

—Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*

On the back of *The Welcome Table*, the publisher, Random House, categorizes it as “cooking/memoir,” a seemingly strange combination for both genres. And yet, reading cookbooks as life writing, folklorist Janet Theophano points out, makes sense because they celebrate identity and preserve the past: “Often cookbooks have served as a place for readers to remember a way of life no longer in existence or to enter a nostalgic re-creation of a past culture that persists mostly in memory” (8).¹⁰ Cookbooks are episodic because of their archival resonances: they are read in conjunction with the recipes, marginal comments, photographs, regional inflections, and memories embedded therein. Angelou’s cookbook is no different: *The Welcome Table* presents its readers with passages of memory—reprinted (and thus recontextualized).¹¹ In cookbook form and placed beside Angelou’s more conventional autobiographical texts, *The Welcome*

¹⁰ The marginal status of cooking and foodways is frequently associated with the Judeo-Christian separation of the body and soul, although many scholars have recently established the ways in which cooking and representations of cooking influence literary studies. Andrew Warnes’ *Hunger Overcome?* (2004) and Doris Witt’s *Black Hunger* (1999) are two notable exceptions in the exploration of the culinary in African American literature. Additionally, a special issue of *MELUS* titled “Food in Multi-Ethnic Literatures” (Winter 2007) has helped to raise the profile of food in American literature.

¹¹ Andrew Warnes argues that the tradition in African American literature, “which includes many writers who loved to cook, provides a striking adjunct to the Western prioritization of writing” (6).

Table emphasizes the serial nature of daily experience, the permeability of history, and the shared aesthetics of (re)collecting. “The root of *recipe*—the Latin *recipere*,” Susan Leonardi reminds us, “implies an exchange, a giver and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be” (340). Much like a collection, the recipe is, in Leonardi’s terms, an “embedded discourse” (340), which does not have the same sort of power or significance without context. The collection of memories Angelou presents in *The Welcome Table* is evidence of simultaneous giving and receiving. In *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard argues that individuals want to be both “entirely self-made and yet be descended from someone” (88), and that in collections, the “objects bear silent witness to this unresolved ambivalence” (88); in *The Welcome Table*, Angelou provides contexts that both present her as descended from someone—Momma (Maya’s grandmother), Vivian Baxter (Maya’s mother), unknown enslaved ancestors—and also as self-created. These parallel desires are articulated in *The Welcome Table* as Angelou illustrates the innate connection between cooking and writing.

The Welcome Table insists that consumption and foodways are essential repositories for memory, and it is presented, through its packaging and marketing, as ambivalent about its categorization. The softcover edition of the memoir is a relatively straightforward cookbook: the cover is glossy, the plastic spiral binding allows for the book to be placed flat on a counter, and the index organizes the text by ingredients rather than by memories, but the hardcover edition is bound in a maroon cloth with gold lettering. The image that appears on the cover of the paperback is on the dust jacket.

Angelou dedicates *The Welcome Table* “to every wannabe cook who will dare criticism by getting into the kitchen and stirring up some groceries,” and she also dedicates the text to Oprah Winfrey: “To O, who said she wanted a big, pretty cookbook. Well, honey, here you are.” The readers of the softcover edition, at least from the book’s physical properties and paratextual apparatus, are figured as “wannabe cooks,” instead of the usual reader of her poetry or memoir, but the readers of the hardcover volume may be more invested in the literary value.¹² This ambivalence about categorization is significant because *The Welcome Table* straddles traditional literary genres. One telling mark, however, is in the book’s overall organization, which is not geared toward the cooks in her audience. Mark Knoblauch at *Booklist* writes that *The Welcome Table* is a “memoir of significant meals” (35); *Publishers Weekly* points to the “collection of tear- and laughter-provoking vignettes” (49); and *The Oakland Tribune* writes that “Each recipe is thoughtfully conceived and made even more enticing by the personal history attached to it” (qtd in *The Welcome Table*, n. pag). The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* writes that it is only “a cookbook in a sense that there are recipes” (qtd in *The Welcome Table*, n. pag).

¹² Susan Leonardi argues that a personal or intimate style was, “characteristic of nearly all early cookbooks [such as] the first few editions of *The Joy of Cooking*, and it continues to be popular in contemporary cookbooks like Alice Waters’ *Chez Panisse* collections, Jeff Smith’s *Frugal Gourmet* volumes, and Marcella Hazan’s Italian series” (345), and Andrew Warnes argues that cookbooks from the African American tradition, “by addressing readers individually, by importing phrases from the black vernacular, and by relentlessly apostrophizing and abbreviating, myriad African American cookbook writers nowadays present their recipes less as acts of writing per se than as transcripts that capture the fleeting spontaneity of speech” (11). He looks to Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor’s *Vibration Cooking: Or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* (1970), Bobby Seale’s *Barbeque’n with Bobby* (1988), Jessica B. Harris’ *A Kwanzaa Keepsake* (1995), and Ntozake Shange’s *If I Can Cook / You Know God Can* (1998), as examples of “talking” recipes which “dominate the African American cooking archive” (11). While *The Welcome Table* spends a great deal of time narrating and contextualizing the recipes it presents, however, it is not as rooted in the vernacular as Warner’s examples; Angelou’s transcriptions of the recipes are less oral than the stories she provides.

Customers share the *Journal Sentinel*'s perspective. One reviewer posted on *Amazon.com* that their “only quibble [...] is that the descriptions of the recipes and what makes them special appear in a chapter preceding the recipes, rather than above each recipe—and the recipes are organized by family event, rather than type. That makes it awfully difficult to find anything” (Twain). The text is organized by “family event,” but not by general or typical events that families might have, like dinner parties or holiday celebrations.¹³ Instead, *The Welcome Table*'s “events,” or sections, include “The Assurance of Caramel Cake,” “My Big Brother's Savings Account,” and “Oprah's Suffocated Chicken.” Without the small anecdotes provided by Angelou, these “events” are rendered almost meaningless. Rather than the recipes (and subsequent dishes) providing the instructions, variations, or memories for the chefs and diners, the dishes are figured as central to the stories told. In other words, the memories have already happened, and here's what the participants ate. Additionally, the sections are not presented in a chronological order that would follow the progression of Angelou's life; the anecdotes are recursive and episodic. In her compelling examination of African American culture and food, Doris Witt suggests that a text like *The Welcome Table* demands “that we perform and consume it—that we cook and eat its recipes as an integral part of our experience with the work” (11). Audience participation is often

¹³ Even when recipes for traditional events appear, they're organized under obscure titles. For example, Angelou does include a recipe for Thanksgiving turkey and corn bread stuffing, but they are included in the section “Saving Face and Smoking in Italy.” An extended discussion of “Saving Face” can be found later in this chapter.

necessary in *The Welcome Table*, as readers are encouraged to incorporate the text into their daily life by making the recipes and sharing Angelou's stories.¹⁴

Materiality, via bodily consumption and serial performance, is related here to collectivity as well; Angelou presents the different audiences for this book with various ways of reading, understanding, and appreciating the text. Additionally, she attempts to attract new readers to her previous memoirs and collections of poetry and continues to expand the possibilities for how a memoir can look.¹⁵ *The Welcome Table*, to quote Mary Jane Lupton's assessment of Angelou's serial project as a whole, embodies "an ongoing creation [...] in a form that rejects the finality of a restricting frame." In addition, of course, a larger autobiographical project is at stake in how readers and scholars approach the many texts Angelou has written. "I think I am the only serious writer," Maya Angelou told interviewer Jackie Kay in 1987, "who has chosen the autobiographical form as the main form to carry out my work, my expression" (qtd in Elliot 195). While there are certainly other authors who have made life writing their main form, in this interview—and textually, in *The Welcome Table*—Angelou acknowledges her commitment to self-representational experimentation.

The mosaic of anecdotes and recipes, moreover, place Angelou squarely within the African American communities of which she was a part during her life. The first seven chapters in *The Welcome Table* present Angelou's childhood memories, as Maya interacts with her grandmother, her brother, and the rest of the African American

¹⁴ Indeed, the physical consumption of Angelou's recipes and memories parallels the impulse behind her Hallmark Life Mosaic collection: to be in the hands of her readers. I discuss this joint venture between Angelou and Hallmark in more detail in the coda at the end of this chapter.

¹⁵ Also found on *Amazon.com*, other cooks/reviewers comment that *The Welcome Table* is "more than just a cookbook" as they laud Angelou's self-referential passages (McCray).

community in Stamps, Arkansas; “Early Lessons from a Kitchen Stool,” “My Big Brother’s Savings Account,” and “Mother’s Long View” center on the relationships she has with her mother, her brother, and her son; and various moments in her career are presented in “Good Banana, Bad Timing,” “Saving Face and Smoking in Italy,” and “Oprah’s Suffocated Chicken.” Further, she gives readers an indication of her commitment to the ways in which her text—and her recipes—are indebted to others. In “M. F. K. Fisher and a White Bean Feast,” for example, Angelou gives readers a story in which she prepared a cassoulet for the celebrated author and cook, admitting to her audience that “the owners of the cookery shop were shocked that I would cook for her” (151).¹⁶ Memoir is often as much about the community as it is about an individual, and the culinary memoir is no different; if anything, the form of culinary memoir allows Angelou to illustrate the number of communities of which she has been a part, and the friendships—and traumas—she experienced.¹⁷

For all of these approaches, however, Angelou will not let her reader forget the centrality of memory to cooking. Avid Angelou readers will recognize many of the excerpts presented in *The Welcome Table* from other books, indicating that she is not solely invested in presenting new material.¹⁸ For example, the section “Independence

¹⁶ As briefly noted above, M. F. K. Fisher was a prolific author and serial memoirist who specialized in writing about food. Her 1943 memoir, *The Gastronomical Me*, is widely considered foundational to culinary memoirs as well as foodways studies more broadly. Angelou tells readers that she received a thank-you note from Fisher which read: “That was the first honest cassoulet I have eaten in years” (151).

¹⁷ Buss explains that memoir “may concern itself as much with the life of a community as with that of an individual” (2), and in the “Foreword” to McPherson’s *Order*, Eleanor W. Traylor writes that memoir is “an account of the Self’s experience as that has been shaped by those whom the writer has known and by the world within which the writer/Self has assumed some stage presence” (xi-xii).

¹⁸ Among others, Angelou presents stories that were also printed in *Caged Bird*, *Gather Together*, *Wouldn’t Take Nothing*, and *Letter to My Daughter*. (The excerpts which appear in *Letter*, however, were published first in *The Welcome Table*.)

Forever,” in *The Welcome Table*, provides an anecdote about Angelou’s grandmother, Annie Johnson Henderson, or “Momma,” and her entrepreneurial spirit.¹⁹ Here, Angelou recounts the tale of Momma’s desertion by her husband, and how she was “left with a two-room shack, a lively four-year-old who would later become [Angelou’s] father, and a two-year-old boy who was crippled” (57). She continues:

She looked around at her situation. She was a colored woman in the South at the beginning of the twentieth century. She had herself and her sons to feed, house, and clothe. She would not work as a maid, for that would mean leaving her tots, especially her crippled one, in someone else’s care. She decided to make use of the two largest employers in Stamps. They were the cotton gin, and three miles away, the lumber mill. She devised a plan that would let her make money and at the same time mostly stay at home with her “darlings.” [...] Carrying her fresh raw pies, her coal pot, lard, and a fold-up chair, she would arrive at the factory. She placed herself and supplies on the ground adjacent to the door the black workers used. She would begin frying pies a half hour before noon. (57-58)

Within the context of the cookbook, the emphasis in this section is on Momma’s agency, her resourcefulness, and her cooking—indeed, even the title of the section places this anecdote squarely in the tradition of the Horatio Alger myth. Momma was able to think of a need that she could fill with her cooking, and ultimately was able to build a “hut”

¹⁹ This excerpt from *The Welcome Table* was also published in the December, 2004, issue of *Essence* under the title “Grandma’s Plans,” literally reiterating the serial nature of Angelou’s project.

between the two factories. This hut became the store where Angelou spent a great deal of her childhood, and where the African American community of Stamps, Arkansas, purchased their goods and congregated socially. Contained in this section, readers will find only one recipe—the only recipe significant for this anecdote—for fried meat pies. If readers think of the two factories as the two established modes of prose, fiction and autobiography, it becomes clear that Angelou has created an in-between space for her serial memoir. The expansion of traditional forms of life writing is spatially rendered in this anecdote, as Angelou and her grandmother both present safe spaces for African Americans to gather together to fortify themselves.

Angelou's dedicated readers, however, would recognize this story as "New Directions," from *Wouldn't Take Nothing*. The stories are not identical, which is significant to Angelou's serial, recursive memoir project. In "New Directions," Angelou writes:

Annie, over six feet tall, big-boned, decided that she would not go to work as a domestic and leave her "precious babes" to anyone else's care. There was no possibility of being hired at the town's cotton gin or lumber mill, but maybe there was a way to make the two factories work for her. In her words, "I looked up the road I was going and back the way I come, and since I wasn't satisfied, I decided to step off the road and cut me a new path." She told herself that she wasn't a fancy cook but that she could "mix groceries well enough to scare hungry away and from a starving man. [...] [S]he left her house carrying the meat pies, lard, an

iron brazier, and coals for a fire. Just before lunch she appeared in an empty lot behind the cotton gin. As the dinner noon bell rang, she dropped the savors into boiling fat and the aroma rose and floated over to the workers who spilled out of the gin, covered with white lint, looking like specters. (22-23)

In this section, Momma is still characterized by her resourcefulness and her children are still seen as precious, but she's also described physically here, which does not happen at any point in "Independence Forever." Momma is seen in both passages as caring for the workers, but in "New Directions," the workers are described as "specters" covered with the remnants of the cotton gin; in "Independence Forever," the employees of these factories are described solely in terms of their relation to Momma in an economic fashion: they are "customers" and "hungry workers." Momma's body, compared to the absent bodies of the consumers, reflects Angelou's own attempt to write for an audience she does not see; like Momma's pies, however, Angelou also wants her texts to be held and consumed.

Moreover, Momma is given voice differently in the passage from "New Directions" than she was in the section from *The Welcome Table*. In fact, in "Independence Forever," Momma does articulate a similar message, but it's positioned rhetorically as a lesson from which Maya should learn, rather than as a decision she made in her personal life, for her own reasons. At the end of "New Directions," Angelou writes: "Each of us has the right and the responsibility to assess the roads which lie ahead, and those over which we have traveled" (24), taking a "Dear Reader"

approach with her audience. The rhetorical situation, as it often is in *Wouldn't Take Nothing*, features a narrator who shares pieces of “homespun” wisdom based on personal experience to a general readership. Presented in *The Welcome Table*, however, we see an intimate moment between grandmother and granddaughter, as Momma tells Maya: “Sister, the world might try to put you on a road that you don't like. [...] If nothing ahead beckons you enough to keep you going, then you have to step off that road and cut yourself a brand-new path” (58). Because the anecdote is told in the form of a cooking memoir, however, Maya and the reader are put in a similar position of listening audience; Angelou's decision to make this invective in the form of direct address, repeating the second person and providing the recipe from which her grandmother was able to make a living, underscores the power of recursive memory.

The structure of these anecdotes provides a narrative recipe for intergenerational independence which can be followed by Maya and her readers. “Like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are encouraged to reproduce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own,” explains Susan Leonardi. “Unlike the repetition of a narrative, however, a recipe's reproducibility can have a literal result, the dish itself” (344). Indeed, providing readers—an anonymous, general audience—with the recipe is an intimate, familial act. Rosalyn Collings Eves writes that as the “alternate and older form of the word *recipe*—*receipt*—suggests, these written records also become a witness to something received and passed down through generations” (288). Through the recursivity of memory textualized in serial memoir, readers are given more and more of the family's generational history, even to the point

of vicariously participating in the familial lore. Ultimately, Angelou presents herself as a witness to her family's past, and readers, too, become witnesses.

The Welcome Table, in its presentation of recipes embedded within passages of memory and its techniques of recursive storytelling, is not much of a departure for Angelou after all. Reading *The Welcome Table* as a part of her series of self-referential texts allows for a new space of reading, one that emphasizes the materiality of the passages and stages of life in Angelou's lived experience. Buss writes that "memoir, unlike traditional autobiography, is often specifically *occasional*, concentrating on a small but significant period of time. The 'narrowing of lens,' the 'focus' on the significant event, helps create the dramatic nature of memoir with its scenic quality, which de-emphasizes linear narratives that are necessary to telling a whole life" (23, emphasis mine). Because of this occasional nature of memoir, and of *The Welcome Table* in particular, the emphasis placed on occasions and scenes from Angelou's life is thereby reinforced. *The Welcome Table* works in relation to the rest of Angelou's texts to simultaneously reiterate an episodic or occasional understanding of one's own life, and to challenge the forms that self-reflexive texts can take. Indeed, the series of prose fragments that accompanying recipes underscore Angelou's commitment to deconstructing traditional forms of autobiographical texts. As she tells Kay, using language that mimics the act of kneading dough, she is invested in "really manipulating and being manipulated" by autobiographical forms, "pulling [them] open and stretching" (qtd in Elliot 195).

The transparency of ingredients for a recipe, like tiles in a mosaic, parallels the position Angelou takes as she presents herself as a construct within language. Angelou is no stranger to the idea that to name a thing is to brand it, as she herself went through a series of names before becoming “Maya Angelou.” One oft-cited example involves a ten-year-old Maya, working as a domestic in Arkansas. Mrs. Cullinan, the homeowner, was from Virginia, and Miss Glory, “a descendant of slaves that had worked for the Cullinans” (*Caged Bird* 105), was to help Maya learn the ways of the kitchen and other domestic duties. Mrs. Cullinan continually called Maya “Margaret,” and was advised by one of her close friends that calling Maya/Margaret “Mary” would be more suitable (107). Angelou recounts her experience of being called Mary, writing: “Every person I knew had a hellish horror of being ‘called out of his name.’ It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks” (109). In order to appease Maya, Miss Glory explains that Maya will get used to the new name, as she did—her name was originally Hallelujah. The episode ends with Maya breaking Mrs. Cullinan’s heirloom dishes, and Mrs. Cullinan’s response: “‘Her name’s Margaret!’” (110), but it offers readers an important perspective on the value Angelou and other African Americans (“Every person I knew”) give to their names. As many have theorized, to name something is to exert power over it, and the ways in which that works in the African American community is particularly significant for Angelou. Historically, enslaved African Americans were named according to the status they achieved in American society, frequently only given first names. Last names,

which Western cultures generally associate with lineage, were withheld or bestowed by the slaver—creating a false sense of heritage.²⁰ Accordingly, the name by which Angelou is addressed, through which she enters into dialogue with another, is held in high regard.

In addition to delineating her heritage and emphasizing its matrilinearity, she also indicates to readers that she understands who she is through her relationships with others. Like Mary McCarthy, Angelou also compares herself to Scheherazade, placing herself squarely in the tradition of serial storytellers as well as in the tradition of female storytellers whose survival can be attributed to their narrative finesse. In one episode, readers see Angelou go into a costume shop in order to prepare for a stage performance. The sales clerk asks, “‘Who are you, dear? [...] I mean what’s your act? Who are you?’” (*Singin’ and Swingin’* 61), and Angelou must create the characters she would embody on stage. Immediately, she thinks of two historical, glamorous, black women: Cleopatra and Sheba. After a brief pause, she continues: “‘And Scheherazade.’ If I felt distant from the first two, the last one fitted me like a pastie. She also was a teller of tall tales” (*Singin’ and Swingin’* 61). Angelou’s physical and erotic portrayal of Sheba and Cleopatra—“two queens” (60), as the clerk points out—does not exemplify her authentic art; Angelou is more attracted to the figure of the storyteller. Further, while Sheba and Cleopatra represent glamorous black women in history, they’re also frequently fetishized and eroticized figures. In Angelou’s imagination, Scheherazade, on the other hand, “fit[s her] like a pastie,” physically covering one of the most historically fetishized parts

²⁰ For a more complete discussion, see *Where I’m Bound: Patterns of Slavery and Freedom in Black American Autobiography* (1974), by Sidonie Smith.

of an African American woman's body. Rather than solely sustaining audiences with her body, Angelou's choice of Scheherazade indicates a desire to feed audiences with her stories.

Scheherazade, the serial storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*, is implicated in a tale of gendered and national struggle. The frame narrative for *One Thousand and One Nights* presents the story of a king who was betrayed by his first wife. In order to exact revenge against women, he would marry a new woman each day, and on the following day he would behead her. By the time he was introduced to Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, he had killed three thousand women. Scheherazade decided to tell the king new story each night in order to keep his interest, and he was so enamored with her storytelling that, night after night, he postpones her execution in order to hear the succeeding installments in her narrative. She embodies serial storytelling, and uses many elements which are frequently associated with serial narratives: recurring characters, embedded and complicated plotlines, episodic structures, and a clear resistance to closure. For Angelou, Scheherazade was a teller of "tall tales," but she is also significant in Angelou's self-creation because she was a "glamorous Black wom[a]n in history"; while Scheherazade's physicality is significant in *One Thousand and One Nights* because she tells stories in order to preserve her physical being, it is also significant in Angelou's identification with her as a woman of African descent.²¹ The persona of Scheherazade, whom Angelou would portray in her dance act in *Singin' and Swingin'*, was an act of self-creation which "fit" Angelou in a

²¹ In an important way, Scheherazade is also linked to Momma, who is also a teller of tales, and from whom Maya gets many of her stories and lessons.

way more personal than if she “fit like a glove”; that the character of Scheherazade “fit [her] like a pastie” speaks to Angelou’s identification with Scheherazade as a black female serial storyteller.

Angelou chooses these three women as an ensemble of individuals whom she could portray on stage because of the way they fit into the group: glamorous black women in history. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), Jean-Paul Sartre uses the term “series” to refer to an ensemble made up of members who are understood as separate from other members of the series. In this way, the separate members of an ensemble—those who ultimately form a series—are described in much the same way as individual elements make up a collection; each addition to the whole makes the final assemblage more complete. Sartre places *series* in opposition to *group*, an ensemble whose members are understood as reciprocal or related (65). Sartre does not set out to figure out whether series precedes groups, or vice versa, but rather his goal is to “display the transition from series to groups and from groups to series as constant incarnations of our practical multiplicity, and to test the dialectical intelligibility of these reversible processes” (65). The idea of “practical multiplicity” and the transition between different kinds of ensembles is crucial to my examination of serial memoir because so much of twentieth-century identity formation—and, more importantly, self-creation and self-representation—hinges on how we understand ourselves as relational. Moreover, Sartre’s theorization of seriality privileges alterity and multiplicity; in Angelou’s serial memoir, the tension between presenting her self and presenting an ensemble of which she was a part propels the narrative series.

Sartre and Seriality: *A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes*

From their cookbooks, we can learn about the writer and the social circles in which she traveled. Attributions in a recipe book marked the number and prominence of one's kin and friends, demonstrating the breadth of a social network and one's standing in it. A collection of recipes compiled over the course of a lifetime was emblematic of the social circles through which an adult woman traveled.

—Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words*

With a concept, in effect, everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is himself. In the series, however, everyone becomes himself (as Other than self) in so far as he is other than the Others, and so, in so far as the Others are other than him.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

Angelou's texts are highly relational, which is consistent with Sartre's theorization of seriality in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In this text, Sartre posits "series" as a social collective, the members of which are bound together by the objects around them or by a everyday occurrences. "The unity of the series," Iris Marion Young elucidates, "derives from the way that individuals pursue their own individual ends with respect to the same objects conditioned by a continuous material environment, in response to structures that have been created by the intended collective result of past actions" (724). Sartre's famous example of a series of people is a group waiting for a bus. They are considered a collective solely because they have been brought together in order to catch the same bus; even if their actions, habits, motives, ages, or experiences are widely divergent, at this moment they are united because they all want to ride the same bus. As Sartre emphasizes, the group can be seen as a collective even if they don't understand themselves that way, and even if they have nothing in common save waiting for the same bus. If the bus doesn't arrive as scheduled, however, or if it begins to rain

suddenly, this series of individuals will begin to cohere and manifest, behaving in a more organized and collective fashion.

It is important to note that, within Sartre's theorization of seriality, the individuals remain individuals even as they are physically among a group; each person lives their reality separately, even as they are all, at the same moment, waiting for the bus. Sartre takes the idea of individuality farther, suggesting that "to the extent that the bus designates the present commuters, it constitutes them in their *interchangeability*: each of them is effectively produced by the social ensemble as united with his neighbours, in so far as he is strictly identical with them" (259, emphasis original). Sartre's theorization of a series of individuals, interchangeable solely because of their autonomy and alterity, is significant to Angelou's serial self-representation because she often presents herself simultaneously as a member of different groups and as an *être-unique*. In 1977, just after the publication of *Singin' and Swingin'*, she told Judith Rich: "What I represent in fact [...] is myself. That's what I'm trying to do. And I miss most of the time on that: I do not represent blacks or tall women or women or Sonomans or Californians or Americans. Or rather I hope I do because I am all of those things. But that is not all that I am. I am all of that and more and less" (qtd in Elliot, 83). As Angelou suggests, being a part of each of these groups—or, rather, these series—helps individuals have a clearer sense of who they are, by aligning themselves with others to whom they can relate.

Angelou thus emphasizes her embodied participation in these groups, materially manifested through *The Welcome Table*, which presents her "self" not in a static state of

formed individuality, but in what, in postmodern parlance, is presented as a subject position. This tentative position is *subject to* multiple contexts and experiences, which demonstrate the subject position forming and re-forming itself in relation to others. Deborah Lupton's study of food, in line with other postmodern examinations of food and culture, defines subjectivity as fragmented and contingent rather than as unified. She writes that, because food and eating are foundational to our sense of self, how we live in and through our bodies is inextricable from subjectivity (1). The everyday experience of eating food is thus embodied and culturally situated in such a way to help ensure the individuality and alterity of each member in a series. And yet, membership in groups such as those that Angelou mentions is undefined: how tall are "tall women" in her estimation? "While serial membership delimits and constrains an individual's possible actions," Young points out, "it does not define the person's identity in the sense of forming his or her individual purposes, projects, and sense of self in relation to others" (727). Or, as Angelou articulates, members of groups are "all of [those] and more and less."²²

In *The Welcome Table*, Angelou positions herself as a member of many different communities, many of which may not directly interact: familial (Stamps, St. Louis, her mother's house in San Francisco, her own various attempts at marriage), professional (at the Creole Café, The Purple Onion, performing with *Porgy and Bess*), and political

²² For Sartre, writing *Critique* in the 1950s in France, the purpose of the text was to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how class works in post-war economies. In the early 1990s, Young revisits Sartre in order to examine how useful his paradigms could be when applied to other socially constructed groups who have multiple identifications, as her analysis applies specifically to women. For the purposes of this study, applying Sartre's theories of series and seriality to Angelou's serial memoir exposes the degree to which she writes about her life as a member of groups and how "membership in a series" influences the ways in which she both understands and writes about her self-construction.

(working for Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC] or forming the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage [CAWAH]). As Sartre explains that the series is “determined by inorganic matter” and inextricable from material exteriority (263) or, to put it another way, “each is dependent on the Other in his reality” (263), readers are able to understand the ways in which Angelou’s self construction relies on how she sees herself as an interpolated subject.

Presenting herself as a member of each of these series does not preclude membership in any of the others, and, instead, works as an organizing principle for Angelou’s texts. This organization can be seen in *The Welcome Table*, as its movement is only tentatively chronological; rather than use temporality as an organizing principle, as readers of autobiography might expect, Angelou situates her memoir in terms of spatiality. The recipes at the beginning of the book center on the traditions of Stamps, Arkansas, although there is no narrative interlude explaining the transitions from recipe to recipe. “Independence Forever,” the origin story of Momma’s meat pies—both her store and the family as Angelou knows it— is followed by “Early Lessons from a Kitchen Stool,” which finds Maya and her six-year-old son, Guy, living with Maya’s mother in San Francisco. The episodes provided from the time she lived in San Francisco are also presented in non-chronological fashion, yet they, like the recipes from Arkansas, have been passed from one family member to the next—here, the recipes come from Angelou’s mother, Vivian Baxter, and from Angelou’s brother, Bailey. Goldman asserts that “reproducing a recipe, like retelling a story, may be at once cultural practice and autobiographical assertion,” and that this kind of reproduction “provides an

apt metaphor for the reproduction of culture from generation to generation” (172). The recipes Angelou provides that are passed down from within her family and the communities in which she grew up give way to recipes that Angelou gives to her readers, redrawing the lineage of recipe reproduction and reinforcing the seriality of shared information.

In American culture, few recipes take serial collectivity, food, and ritual as their focus more than Thanksgiving. In “Saving Face and Smoking in Italy,” Angelou prepares a Thanksgiving turkey for guests of the Rockefeller Foundation’s Study and Conference Center in the 1970s. She was in Bellagio, Italy, with fourteen other artists and their partners, as Thanksgiving approached. When the group is asked for a recipe for turkey, Angelou offers her own, which includes cornbread dressing. Offered unfamiliar ingredients (“I asked for cornmeal, only to be offered polenta. I asked for baking powder and was told they didn’t even know what that was” [114]), Angelou works quickly to make the unusual ingredients work with her existing recipe.²³ Here, Angelou’s use of her American recipe combined with unfamiliar, Italian ingredients, for a group of international diners to celebrate an American holiday of nationhood is significant to both Angelou’s serial project as well as to the argument I present in this chapter: that Angelou’s texts use food and its consumption as political metonym as she reminds her readers that recipes embody “a series of cultural traditions, using food as a signifier” (Goldman 181).

²³ In fact, it is her mother’s use of yeast in hot cross buns that gives her the inspiration to use moist yeast as the riser in corn bread, further reinforcing the relationship between recipe and inheritance.

Amy Kaplan reminds readers of Sarah Josepha Hale's campaign in *Godey's Lady's Book* to make Thanksgiving Day a national holiday fifteen years before President Lincoln made it official in 1863.²⁴ Kaplan describes Hale's imagined Thanksgiving scenario: "millions of families seated around the holiday table at the same time, thereby unifying the vast and shifting space of the national domain through simultaneity in time" (592). The power of Thanksgiving, rooted in the domestic sphere, is the unification of families across the country in order to celebrate the "common history" of the United States, even while families are spread out because of the diasporic effects of Westward expansion (593). In *The Welcome Table*, the story Angelou presents of the Thanksgiving celebration, however, is not rooted in the domestic—either in the kitchen of the family home, as Angelou works with Italian chefs to prepare the food; in the celebration of domestic produce, as she uses polenta, the "orange powdery meal many times brighter than American yellow cornmeal," to make corn bread (114); or in the exaltation of the familial, as these academics celebrate with one another. The seriality implicit in ritualized activities, like national holidays, is also linked with inheritance as Angelou remembers the recipe and shares it with her readers. Readers, then, are brought to Angelou's table across space and time to share the memory and experience, although they, like she, also move easily across national borders.

Additionally, however, Thanksgiving is a celebration of a normative national history, a commemoration of a national myth of origins. For Angelou, this is no small

²⁴ Gabaccia reminds readers that "[t]he model for these [community] cookbooks was indisputably American, even if their subject matter often was not. During the Civil War, northern Ladies Aid Societies discontented with mere bandage-rolling had for the first time collected their favorite recipes to sell at Sanitary Fairs supporting the Union Army" (183). See, also, Kaplan.

point, as she makes clear in her anecdote to this section. Once the corn bread is cooked, the head chef is pleased. Unfamiliar with the bread, he and Angelou have an exchange:

I said, "This is the bread my people eat."

The chef asked, "Who are your people?"

I answered, "African Americans. My ancestors came from Africa to America."

The chef said, "Every person in America except the Indians had ancestors who came from some other place."

I couldn't argue that.

He asked, "What makes you different from other Americans?"

I said, "My skin is black. That tells me and everyone who sees me who I am."

He raised his voice. "Roberto, Roberto, come."

A small dark-skinned cook came from the rear of the kitchen.

The chef said, "Here is Roberto. He is from Sicily, but because of his color should I call him an Afro-Italian?" (115)

This scene ends with the Italian cooks laughing with the chef, although Angelou is oblique about her own reaction to this scene; she simply says that she "decided to stop the razzing and get on with the cooking" (115). Beginning this conversation with bread, the symbol of a group of people, is significant because it exemplifies the ex-centric construction of African Americans in the United States; not all Americans eat corn bread stuffing with their Thanksgiving turkey. Cuisine, Kima Cargill reminds us, is a "set of

foods eaten by a group of people who care about it, have opinions of it, have common social roots, and comprise a community” which exists as an element of the “transitional space between self and culture. In the construction of ethnic, gender, and community identities, food often figures into how we think about ourselves as members of communities” (319). Making a connection between the bread of her community, with bread symbolically positioned as the most basic sustenance of a group, and the community itself, Angelou exposes this liminal position foodways inhabits.

The question of inheritance and race or ethnicity in relation to the Thanksgiving meal is significant, though, as we consider the many ways in which Thanksgiving celebrations often efface differences within the nation. In their investigation of the consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day, researchers Melanie Wallendorf and Eric J. Arnould argue that the stuffing provided at Thanksgiving is a moment of real particularity from celebration to celebration. “One family with eastern roots always has oyster stuffing,” they explain, “while a southern family has cornbread stuffing [...]. A western family with a Greek heritage includes pine nuts in their stuffing. A Korean-American family substitutes rice” (24). The turkey, a staple of traditional Thanksgiving feasts, thus acts as a casing into which ethnic variations are placed; cooking the particular stuffing inside the turkey works as a metonym for the multiplicity of American cultures and regions, or even for the individual rituals established by families over the

years.²⁵ Preparing the meal, and finding ways to make the traditional dishes unique, allow individuals to actively (and annually) participate in cultural and national memory.

Angelou's emphasis in this conversation about her heritage—and her embodied relationship to her lineage through her own skin—is significant when read in conjunction with Kaplan's reminder that Thanksgiving was created in the midst of the Civil War. The creation of Thanksgiving was a way to celebrate the desired unification of a nation at war with itself, and to simultaneously laud settlers of Anglo origin in the United States. While the Italian chef rightly points out that, except for Native Americans, everyone came from somewhere else, he does not understand the legacy of slavery and the inherited cultural memory that Angelou and others experience. By including this conversation with her Thanksgiving recipes, Angelou signals her ambivalence toward a nation that considers her “different from other Americans” based solely on the color of her skin.²⁶ Simultaneously, however, Angelou points to the permeability or the seriality of the nation and how nationhood is construed from outside the domestic borders. At this moment, she and her colleagues celebrate Thanksgiving in Italy, yet Angelou spends the better part of this anecdote with native Italians, not with other Americans. She concludes this section with an acknowledgment that “respect for food and its preparation could obliterate distances between sexes, languages, oceans, and

²⁵ Wallendorf and Arnould also suggest that “tradition and community are celebrated, but in ways that are particular to certain families. Through the consumption of foods regarded as traditional, [people] partake of their collective past” (23).

²⁶ Kaplan also includes a fascinating discussion of Hale's novels, in which “Thanksgiving polices the domestic sphere by making black people, both free and enslaved, foreign to the domestic nation and denying them a home within America's expanding horizon” (593). Hale's advocacy for African colonization and Christianization, and her 1852 novel *Liberia*'s construction of, in Kaplan's words, “all black people as foreign to American nationality by asserting that they must remain homeless within the United States” (594), is particularly interesting when read in conjunction with Angelou's memoirs.

continents” (116), although it is significant that, for the recipe itself, she gives the original ingredient list instead of the revised, Italian recipe. Readers inherit the recipe of Angelou’s “people,” not an international version of the American feast, while Angelou asserts her national heritage through the regionally-specific cornbread stuffing; rather than reject the adapted recipe, she privileges the recipe she inherited as she shares it with an international community of chefs and scholars.

The recipes and the anecdotes become more international in scope as the chapters progress. “Sisterly Translation” finds Angelou and Rosa Guy each preparing their version of soul food’s “souse”: Guy’s from Trinidad and Angelou’s from Stamps. They realize that Guy’s version of souse is, to Angelou, pickled pig’s feet, and Angelou’s version of souse is, to Guy, Hog’s Head Cheese. This comedic exchange, however, exemplifies the social contexts for recipe sharing, its interrelationality central to loose communities of cooks. The anecdote titled “Haute Cuisine à la Tabasco” tells the story of Angelou and one of her co-performers from *Porgy and Bess*, Miss Ross, at Fouquets Restaurant on the Champs Elysées in the mid-1950s. Cooking Thanksgiving turkey and cornbread stuffing in Italy, adapting the recipe to fit the international context of the event, or as in “Haute Cuisine,” recounting her initial mortification at Ross’ use of Tabasco sauce on Parisian veal medallions, Angelou exposes the many ways in which specific geographical locations have specific iterations of foodways as she simultaneously acknowledges her own prejudices against certain practices. That Ross pulled out a bottle of Tabasco which “horrified” the waiters and “shocked” the maître d’hôtel so much that “he disappeared from the floor” and made Angelou “wan[t] to join

him,” is evidence of the extent to which prejudice against Southern foodways transcends national boundaries.²⁷ Ultimately, however, she does not pass judgment on these practices: Ross is able to retain her cultural eating habits on the international stage, and Angelou presents herself as having accepted the culinary history of soul food. If foodways practices illustrate and demarcate cultural boundaries, the food habits of individual groups are frequently the site of ridicule.²⁸

In *The Welcome Table*, Angelou posits local foodways as performances of social collectivity: Ross’ Southern heritage sanctions the use of Tabasco on veal, and Ross knows what she likes. Moreover, the combination of gastronomical influences is significant as Angelou examines how African Americans maneuver internationally. Ross, “a sweetly sympathetic figure” who was “prematurely old and had the manner of what southerners call a settled lady” (121), was also part of an elite cast of opera singers who were able to travel internationally when the United States was still segregated. Ross’ self-awareness is, ultimately, inspirational, as Angelou writes: “I’ve come to believe that each diner should be free to flavor her dish as she wants it. For no matter

²⁷ In her article on the origins of soul food, Tracey Poe points to columns published in the *Chicago Defender* during the early part of the twentieth century: “[There was a clear] prejudice against food practices that smacked of Southernness. [...] In 1920 Dr. A Wilberforce Williams’ column on health regularly criticized eating habits associated with Southern food, remarking that heavy meats, excessive carbohydrates, and especially hot sauces and condiments were deleterious to the liver and would cripple the digestive system of anyone over forty. ‘The normal stomach needs little or no condiments when food is properly cooked,’ he wrote” (10).

²⁸ Donna Gabaccia writes: “Eating habits both symbolize and mark the boundaries of cultures. Scholars and ordinary people alike have long seen food habits, both positively and negatively, as concrete symbols of human culture and identity. When we want to celebrate, or elevate, our own group, we usually praise its superior cuisine. And when we want to demean one another, often we turn to eating habits; in the United States we have labeled Germans as ‘krauts,’ Italians as ‘spaghetti-benders,’ Frenchmen as ‘frogs,’ and British as ‘limeys” (8).

how wonderfully trained the chef, no matter how delicate his or her sensitivity, taste buds are as individual as fingerprints” (123).

The individuality of taste buds, however, often owes a debt to the cultural traditions in which the diner was raised. In *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), Angelou recalls the story of a West African woman who was frequently an irate diner:

“I come to you peepose country from Sierra Leone where we serve rye. I know this country is proud Ghana, but it is still Africa and you don't give me rye. You think you England? You think you German? Where is the rye?”

The woman was demanding rice and I quickly sympathized with her. The grandmother who raised me was a firm believer in rice. The only white newspapers which reached our house were brought at grandmother's request by maids oncoming from work. Momma was a good cook who experimented with the exotic recipes she found in the White papers. She would prepare Italian spaghetti, macaroni and cheese, scalloped potatoes, O'Brien potatoes, creamed noodles, but she still served rice with each meal. (25)

Angelou finishes this episode by explaining that she went to the cook to tell him that this woman was “dying for rice,” to which he responds that rice will be served at the evening meal, not at lunch or on demand. When Angelou explained that the diner was from Sierra Leone, the cook “jumped off the stool. ‘Why didn't you say that? You said

“a woman.” I thought you meant a Black American. Sierra Leone people can’t live without rice. They are like people from Liberia. They die for rice. I will bring her some” (26). The absence of rice here, a staple dish for this diner—as for Angelou’s grandmother—is a moment of cultural and, indeed, *national* impasse. The diner’s repeated questioning (““You think you England?””) further reinforces the distinctions between cultural experiences, also pointing directly to the affects of colonialism on the countries in Africa.²⁹

Moreover, Goldman suggests that, in this scene, Angelou “explicitly invokes food as the signifier of political well-being” as the “invocation of a specific food speaks on behalf of cultural nationalism” (173). The explicit connection Angelou makes between the woman from Sierra Leone and the African American community in which Angelou herself grew up furthers Goldman’s assertion about the political dimensions of this scene. While Goldman zeroes in on the African woman’s ridicule of the Ghanaian university (““You peepo, you got your Black Star Square. You got your university, but you got no rye! You peepo!”” [26]), Angelou also explicitly makes the connection between her grandmother’s kitchen and the recipes printed in white newspapers. Discussions of food in Angelou’s texts are frequent, but they are never without political implications, both domestic and international. Honing in on her grandmother’s experimentation with recipes disseminated in the white newspapers also underscores the relationship between national cultures and food; the Italian dishes of spaghetti or

²⁹ Angelou’s position, as part of the university system but financially compensated as if she were Ghanaian, embodies the diner’s concerns; she questions the system of power in the dining hall, but also in Ghana.

macaroni and the Irish O'Brien potatoes foreground issues of the domestic and the foreign. If the nation, as Kaplan asserts, is seen as the home, is the United States a nation of schizophrenic eaters? Or, do the consumption practices of ethnic communities within the United States occasionally get taken for granted? Angelou's grandmother's assertion that these different, previously marginalized ethnic communities are "exotic" and found in the "White papers" illustrates one of the ways in which colonialization and foodways intersect.

The autobiographical impulse in Angelou's texts furthers the significance of the intersection of the personal and political in the gastronomic sphere because she is actively involved in her own self-representation through stories about food, and through the materiality of the recipes which go along with food. As Goldman argues, "[f]iguring the development of an ethnic identity with the metaphor of domestic labor thus provides a means of associating struggle in the political domain with endeavors in the cultural sphere. Because it calls attention to the work involved in cultural reproduction, the culinary metaphor provides writers with a means of reexamining power" (191). Food, recipes, and the transmission of history are part of the language of diaspora, and much of Angelou's narratives center on her experiences as a citizen of the United States and as an active member of the African Diaspora. Ultimately, Angelou sees herself as part of a larger series: a descendant of enslaved Africans.

This series is in line with Sartre's theorization, as Sartre explains that there are "serial behaviour, serial feelings and serial thoughts; in other words a *series is a mode of being for individuals both in relation to one another and in their relation to their*

common being and this mode of being transforms all their structures” (266, emphasis original). In relation to others, in relation to herself, and in relation to her self-representation, Angelou presents her subjectivity as serially constructed and participating in series. Angelou’s identification as an African American is central to the tradition of African American autobiographical texts in which she writes, particularly because of her position as a member of a racialized community. Valérie Baisnée, for example, argues that Angelou frequently employs a “communal voice” in addition to her personal voice, ultimately speaking “for a whole generation” (69), while Kenneth Mostern argues that African American self-representational texts are neither entirely communal, as is the case with Latin American *testimonio*, nor are they staunchly individual, like many traditional western autobiographies;³⁰ rather, African American life narratives illustrate “the constant and conscious negotiating of the ‘I’ with a variety of racialized engagements” (45), where the “I” has an actual relation to a racial “we.” Rather than assert that Angelou’s memoirs speak for anyone beyond herself, reading the multiple voices of the narrator as elements of the tripartite narrator—as a foundationally serial perspective—helps to delineate the distinct perspectives that are simultaneously at work in any memoir. I propose, however, that Angelou’s participation in a variety of communities does not mean that she speaks for them; instead, her interest is in exploring and exposing the seriality of her own experiences.³¹

³⁰ I provide a brief discussion of *testimonio* in relation to *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in the introduction.

³¹ In a related argument, Lupton writes that, in *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, “Angelou gives only five pages to King’s assassination, most of it having to do with other people’s responses rather than her own. Her mode as a reporter is not to confront but to withdraw,” and that Angelou “describes the Watts riots as if she were a news commentator rather than a victim of racism” (“Sexuality,” 2). Much of the distance Lupton experiences in *A Song* may be Angelou’s attention to the voices of other members of the

National Narratives through Spicy Sausages: Angelou's Pan-Africanism

I was a hungry person invited to a welcome table for the first time in her life.
—Maya Angelou, *Gather Together in My Name*

In *Traveling Shoes*, readers find Angelou living in Ghana and, while she writes that she “had finally come home” (21), she is also put in the position of moving back and forth between the position of speaking for herself and speaking for a larger group of people. Upon returning to Africa, Angelou expresses her simultaneous joy and ambivalence about this arrival, where less than one hundred years since the emancipation of African Americans in the United States, “some descendants of those early slaves taken from Africa, returned, weighted with a heavy hope, to a continent which they could not remember, to a home which had shamefully little memory of them” (20). In her memoirs, Angelou provides the reader with many stories about her experiences as an African American living in Africa in the 1960s, many of which underscore the similarities she finds between cultural customs in Africa and those she remembers from her youth in Arkansas, but many of which also relate a profound feeling of homelessness. She often feels that, while she may have finally found a home, she is not a native African and has many associations—familial, political, cultural—with the United States.

Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory is an appropriate and effective framework within which to read Angelou's relationship to Africa. Postmemory is a

community, who may not have access to the kind of literary forum that she has. Indeed, because Angelou presents herself as a member of this community, she is interested in depicting the reactions of the community rather than solely solipsistically presenting herself. The mosaic of multiple perspectives and her interaction with different people allows for a more nuanced presentation of Angelou's experiences and of her historical moment.

form of second-generation memory that, as Hirsch explains, “characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood or recreated” (22). While Hirsch developed the concept of “postmemory” in relation to Holocaust survivors and their descendants, which I will examine more fully in the following chapter, she also writes that postmemory could be helpful with regard to other groups who have inherited the memories of cultural or collective trauma.³² In particular, extending the concept of postmemory to describe the narratives of African Americans helps to contextualize Angelou’s ambivalence about her “return” as a descendant of enslaved Africans to Africa. The impulse to remember, to preserve cultural heritage and customs among multiple, varied groups, is one way Angelou continually attempts to create a home for herself in these texts, and, perhaps more importantly, to create a home for her son who is a synecdoche for future generations of African Americans.

In Angelou’s texts, cooking, writing, and a socially aware consciousness transform the serial daily work of cooking and of food preparation into behaviors that are aligned with political resistance, postmemory, and memorialization. Also in *Traveling Shoes*, Angelou recounts an episode in which her friend, Julian Mayfield, returns from a trip to the United States. She writes:

³² Many scholars have picked up on the ways in which postmemory can be usefully applied to the experiences of African Americans, in particular. Most recently, see Arlene R. Keizer’s “Gone Astray in the Flesh: Kara Walker, Black Women Writers, and African American Postmemory,” published in the October 2008 issue of *PMLA* (123.5, p. 1649-72).

Homesickness was never mentioned in our crowd. Who would dare admit a longing for a White nation so full of hate that it drove its citizens of color to madness, to death or to exile? [...] We chewed the well spiced pork of America, but in fact, we were ravenously devouring Houston and Macon, Little Rock and St. Louis. Our faces eased with sweet delight as we swallowed Harlem and Chicago's south side. (120)

Here, the sausage signifies the United States generally, but in particular it stands in for the African American communities from which they feel exiled. Following the meal, Julian shared the American magazines and newspapers he brought back from the United States, and his wife announced the failing health of W. E. B. Du Bois. The conversation quickly turns to possibilities for activism and action, and the group of Americans in Ghana of which Angelou is a part decides to gather at the same time that Americans in the United States would gather in Washington, giving them the motivation to act in defiance of an oppressive governmental regime. "Our arrangements were made and agreed upon," she writes, concluding the section, "and we broke up our meeting, our heads filled with a new and exciting charge and our fingers still smelling of spicy pork sausage" (123). Du Bois' association with this group—he is an intellectual and political ancestor to African Americans who is also living in Ghana—underscores their desire to memorialize him. The sausage in this scene acts as a representation of unity: unity of origin, of their expatriate community, and of cultural memory.

This episode features the consumption of spicy sausage as a manifestation of geopolitical seriality, and the active nature with which the members of the crowd, "we,"

ingest the “pork of America”—to chew, to devour, to swallow, ravenously—underscores the unity of the group at this moment. Sartre writes specifically of the significance of the unity of a gathering, explaining that “if, in special circumstances, it is possible to see a symbolic relation between the gathering, as a visible assembly of discrete particles (where it presents itself in a visible form), and its objective unity, this is to be found in the small visible crowd which, by its presence as a gathering, *becomes a symbol* of the practical unity of its *interest* or of some other object which is produced as its inert synthesis” (264, emphasis original). As one in a “crowd” of expatriate African Americans, is possible to make a connection between Angelou’s presence in this group and an objective unity: together they eat the food of America before they, as a gathering, discuss ways in which they could mobilize as activists and participants—across the globe—of the group to gather together in Washington.

Angelou frequently engages with the ways in which that national identity is simultaneously foundational and restrictive, further illustrated by this moment of communal consumption. The nation, however, is constantly in flux, and the time period covered by Angelou’s serial memoir emphasizes many of the changes the United States underwent socially, culturally, and politically between 1940, when the action of *Caged Bird* begins, and 2008, when she published *Letter to My Daughter*. As Jason Dittmer argues in his essay on seriality and geopolitics, national narratives can be described as serial in and of themselves; national narratives have “a continually shifting storyline in which the characters change, grow, and interact but certain plot elements remain the same” (258). The fact that we learn or understand history in general, but history of

nations in particular, in serialized episodes of a nation's story, underscores the fact that those narratives make up nationhood. Dittmer further observes that "American history unfolds with a changing cast of villains/Others (the British, Native Americans, Nazis, Communists, Red-baiters, etc) and a relatively unchanging protagonist, 'America'" (258). Reading the national narrative as a serial—and domestic—one, understanding national figures as continuing characters in a compelling national plot, and presenting the conversations in which we engage about what American identity is or how it is constructed, it seems clear that the serialization of self-life-narratives is not easily separated from serial narratives about nation.

To describe Angelou as an African American female serial memoirist places her within several different, occasionally competitive ensembles, each of which presents to its members a different lineage. She recognizes and claims many of those series, invoking Scheherazade, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Oprah, among others, and ultimately presents her serial memoir as a collection of communities. Reading her texts as serial memoir is significant because of their clear emphasis on the relationality of self-creation and experience, and also because her texts actively resist the boundaries placed on them by traditional forms of autobiography. If, as Theophano asserts, cookbooks are archives of women's domestic lives (8), Angelou also asserts that they are receipts of public lives as well. Angelou's serial memoir is a testament to the seriality of national narratives because those national narratives are formed by the groups which make up the nation, and the interrelationality—and, indeed, the internationality—of subjectivity in the twentieth century. Seriality, so evident in

Angelou's memoirs through the multiple and often recursive publications, recurring cast of characters, the refusal of closure, and the episodic and a-chronological narrative, presents itself in varied ways throughout Angelou's texts.

Coda, or Dessert: The Seriality of a Life Mosaic

She writes of experiences that are universal, that are common to all human beings, such as love and loss, joy and sorrow, hope and courage. Dr. Angelou's message is that these are all vivid pieces in the tableau that is your life. And so we wanted the identity of the new brand—its name and its visual expression—to also carry this message.
—Julie Cottineau, "Interbrand"

When Hallmark and Maya Angelou announced their partnership in 2002, they were met with criticism. For example, former poet laureate Billy Collins responded that it was "preposterous," and that it "lowers the understanding of what poetry actually can do" (qtd in Matthews). Angelou explicitly addressed that kind of reaction by saying: "If I'm America's poet, or one of them, I want to be in people's hands. All people's hands, people who would never buy a book" (qtd in Thorpe). This statement's emphasis on the desire to be "in people's hands," is also significant when approaching *The Welcome Table* as part of Angelou's serial memoir. Natasha Cole-Leonard suggests that, because Angelou is a celebrity and a successful businesswoman, *The Welcome Table* could be considered as simply another product that bears her name. Yet, she concludes that *The Welcome Table*, because of its self-reflexive tendencies, is an "essential work of Angelou's literary oeuvre" (69). Cole-Leonard looks explicitly at the construction of Angelou's use of and challenge to stereotypical notions of African American women in the kitchen in *The Welcome Table*, arguing that both Angelou's

self-presentation on the cover, which invites comparisons to other cultural images of African American women in a kitchen-like setting, such as Aunt Jemima, and her recipe selection within the text, present a challenge to the culturally-established, reductive identities for African Americans in general, and for African American women in particular (69).³³ Regarding Aunt Jemima, Witt points to the “symbolic slippage,” between the advertising for Aunt Jemima’s pancakes, which uses terms like “good taste,” and the figure of Aunt Jemima herself, which is characterized as “war[m]”; “the trademark is intended to signify both the cook and the food” (22). The “slipp[ery]” words include “quality,” “heritage,” and “reliability,” as if Aunt Jemima simultaneously makes and embodies the food, as if customers consume Aunt Jemima.

While Angelou and Aunt Jemima are certainly far removed from one another, Angelou occasionally treads a narrow line between the product—her serial memoir, including *The Welcome Table*, but also her series of products for Hallmark—and the figure of the author herself. The idea of trademarking oneself is particularly compelling when reading her serial memoir, as the tripartite narrator in memoir allows Angelou to be the witness who sees and records events, including recipes that have been handed down over time; the protagonist who participates in the narrative action of the passages presented from memory; and the reflective/reflexive consciousness or the *histor*, in a certain amount of control over the information presented—in this case both the stories

³³ In *Even the Stars Look Lonesome*, Angelou writes that “while the characteristics of Uncle Tom and Aunt Jemima were fictional, created in the fantasies of unknowing whites, the appellations Uncle and Auntie had certainly been brought from Africa and planted into the consciousness of the New World by uprooted slaves” (17). Later in the book, she discusses stereotypical representations of African American women, who were understood by “the larger society” as “a fabulous fiction of multiple personalities,” including the roles of “acquiescent, submissive Aunt Jemimas with grinning faces, plump laps, fat embracing arms and brown jaws pouched in laughter” (43).

and the recipes—and able to dictate in large part how that information is presented to the reader. It is also this self-reflexive consciousness who realizes that, as an African American female, writing a cookbook is complicated by myriad contexts, including those of the Quaker Oats Company and their Aunt Jemima products; readers can't help but be reminded of the branded bodies of enslaved African Americans.

On January 14, 2002, Interbrand, a consultancy firm, announced that it had partnered with Hallmark in order to create a name and an image for Hallmark's new line of products with Maya Angelou. "To give shape to the brand idea and to the name of the line, we referred extensively to Dr. Angelou's own themes," said Julie Cottineau, Director of Naming at Interbrand. "Life Mosaic is a perfect metaphor for Dr. Angelou's philosophy," she explained. "The beauty of a mosaic is that it is made up of individual colors, and sometimes textures. The individuality of each piece adds to the power of the whole."³⁴ In a different context, Susan Stewart explains that "each element within the collection is representative and works in combination toward the creation of a new whole that is the context of the collection itself" (152-53), and Angelou's recent venture with the Hallmark company furthers her association to collections and collectibles; these items are manufactured in order to be collected. Her line of products, "Maya Angelou Life Mosaic," allowed her "inspirational messages [to] appear on cards, mugs, pillows, picture frames, wind chimes, candle holders—a total of about 60 products" (Mehegan).³⁵

³⁴ When Angelou writes about "discover[ing] the Russian writers" (*Gather* 69), she remarks that as far as she had figured out, life "was a series of opposites: black/white, up/down, life/death, rich/poor, love/hate, happy/sad, and no mitigating areas in between" (*Gather* 69). Angelou's serial memoir, however, is an extended meditation on liminal spaces, so central to the creation of a complex mosaic. The opposites are as important to the overall effect of the image as the "areas in between."

³⁵ The collaboration between Hallmark and Angelou lasted from 2002 until 2005.

The Life Mosaic Collection of objects serially reproduced her text on products that were purchased, taken home, and used in the everyday repetition of domesticity. The items for sale at Hallmark are traditionally seen as sentimental and unoriginal, and are frequently gendered female. Angelou's collection for Hallmark has become harder to find in the years since their partnership debuted, but my recent searches online have turned up objects such as the Life Mosaic music box, picture frame, tea-for-one set (figure 1), journal, candle holder (figure 2), and photo album (figure 3).³⁶

The episodic nature of each of Angelou's memoirs can also be understood using the metaphor of a mosaic, as each episode adds to the other parts of the collection; indeed, it is precisely the accumulation of pieces in order to create a "whole" that is the impetus behind collecting, according to Baudrillard and Stewart.³⁷ Rather than working toward a complete, cohesive final product, moreover, the concept of a life mosaic is compelling because it is overt about the process by which the text or image was serially assembled, created, remembered, and re-remembered. Michael M. J. Fischer presents a theory of "mosaic memory," arguing that

Memory is layered in differently structured strata, fragmented and collaged together like mosaics in consciousness and in unconscious maneuverings, all of which takes a hermeneutical skills to hear and unpack, which is another sense might also be called Mosaic, as a figure of the hermeneutical traditions created in the interface between orality (face-

³⁶ The role of sites like eBay and garagesale.com are also interesting when thinking about recycling objects, the ways in which these sites are used by and for collectors, and as providing an electronic archive of images.

³⁷ Valérie Baisnée argues that the "internal organization, that is, the mode of narration within and between the chapters [of *Caged Bird*], is characterized as a series of contrasts" (65).

to-face, relational, immediately monitored-adjustable communication) and literacy (distanced, ambiguously playing on the graphics of absence). (80)

The distance between orality and literacy that Fischer points out is bridged by many episodes in Angelou's serial memoir. Indeed, reading Angelou's memoirs as their own kind of mosaic of life exposes the artful placement and construction of each piece. For example, when Angelou serially recalls a moment, as the example of her grandmother's meat pies illustrates, she shifts emphases and alters words in the retelling. Each story told, and retold, can be considered a different piece of the mosaic, ultimately presenting the reader with a composite reflection of Angelou's memories. This composite, though, is simply an approximation, especially as she continues adding to the mosaic through her serial texts. Construction, and the transparency of that construction, illustrates important links between the mosaic and the structure of memoirs and recipes. There is no attempt to present the final product as pre-formed or to understand the text in the same way each time a reader approaches it.

Approaching texts as an accumulation of pieces, or examining serial memoir as a collection of objects or images which, when collected, provide a way to understand selfhood is part of Angelou's self-representational series, in *The Welcome Table* as well as throughout her autobiographical oeuvre. Complicating the idea of self-representation through the Life Mosaic collection, Angelou also asserts the materiality of self; these objects present a version of self-representation in the form of objects, taking her serial project beyond words on a page. Like Angelou, graphic memoirist Art Spiegelman also presents self-reflexive narratives in visual form, engaging the mode of comics and

graphic narrative. His serial memoirs, detailed in the next chapter, assert another version of self-representation with its foundation in the materiality of experience, the significance of the archive, and the experimentation inherent in visual art. Spiegelman's career as a graphic memoirist begins contemporaneously with the rise of autobiographical comics more generally, and dovetails with the end of Angelou's self-representation as delineated in her serial memoir. In many ways, Spiegelman's texts help to usher in a new way of thinking about how we represent ourselves to ourselves, especially when working in a form—the graphic serial memoir—which, like Angelou's culinary memoir, is not always recognized as a legitimate medium for self-expression.

CHAPTER IV

SERIALITY, GRAPHIC NARRATIVE, AND THE MEMOIRS OF ART

SPIEGELMAN

It would take many books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories.
—Vladek Spiegelman, *Maus*

The artist, to be successful on this non-verbal level, must take into consideration both the commonality of human experience and the phenomenon of our perception of it, which seems to consist of frames or episodes.
—Will Eisner, *Comics & Sequential Art*

Autobiographical comics first began to appear in large numbers during the underground comix movement, when comics artists resisted the Comics Code Authority's strict regulations by writing about their own lives.¹ These underground autobiographical comics first flourished during the 1960s and 1970s and gave rise to some of the most influential graphic artists of the late twentieth century, including Art

¹ The publication of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1945) led to the US Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency hearings. Their report prompted comic book publishers to form the Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, commonly known as the Comics Code Authority. Regulations from the 1948 Code include: "1. Sexy, wanton comics should not be published. No drawing should show a female indecently or unduly exposed, and in no event more nude than a bathing suit commonly worn in the United States of America. 2. Crime should not be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy against law and justice or to inspire others with the desire for imitation. No comics shall show the details and methods of a crime committed by a youth. Policemen, judges, Government officials, and respected institutions should not be portrayed as stupid or ineffective, or represented in such a way as to weaken respect for established authority. [...] 4. Vulgar and obscene language should never be used. Slang should be kept to a minimum and only used when essential to the story" (Nyberg 165). The Code was revised in 1954 and again in 1971 in order to "meet contemporary standards of conduct and morality" (Nyberg 170). Revisions include a prohibition on use of the words "horror" or "terror" in the title of a comic magazine, a requirement that all stories "dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader" (Nyberg 172), prohibitions on "profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings" as well as "nudity in any form" (Nyberg 173). Finally, "All situations dealing with the family unit should have as their ultimate goal the protection of the children and family life. In no way shall the breaking of the moral code be depicted as rewarding" (Nyberg 173).

Spiegelman.² Spiegelman began crafting autobiographical comics in the early 1970s with the publication of two short comic strips: “Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History,” which first appeared in “Short Order Comix” #1 (1973), and “Maus,” originally published in “Funny Aimals [*sic*]” #1 (1972).³ Over the next nine years, the three-page, self-referential strip, “Maus,” evolved into the two-volume, Pulitzer Prize winning, *Maus* (1986, 1991).⁴ Spiegelman had long been known as a central figure in the underground comix movement, but after the publication of *Maus* he rose to national and international prominence, attracting the attention of critics and scholars outside the field of comics.⁵ Due in large part to its serial publication, the critical discussion prompted by *Maus* continued into the early 1990s, when, as graphic narrative scholar Charles Hatfield suggests, “the reception of *Maus* suddenly made serious comics culturally *legible*, recongizable, in a way they had not been before” (xi, emphasis

² In *Comic Books as History*, Joseph Witek explains the rise of comix, writing that, “[w]hen America’s rebelling youth of the 1960s set about breaching their culture’s established taboos, the comics medium offered a particularly fruitful ground for iconoclasm. Besides the much-heralded innovations in popular music, the most influential and distinctive artistic achievements of the 1960s counterculture were the uninhibited and socially defiant underground comic books, which distinguished themselves from their Code-approved counterparts by adopting the soubriquet ‘comix’” (51). These underground comix, he continues, “were cheaply and independently published black-and-white comics which flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s as outlets for the graphic fantasies and social protests of the youth counterculture” (51).

³ These strips were later anthologized in Spiegelman’s first collection, *Breakdowns: from Maus to Now* (1977).

⁴ Spiegelman received a Special Awards & Citations Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

⁵ In one of the first critical books published about American comics, *Comic Books as History* (1989), Joseph Witek writes, “The clearest sign that something unusual was afoot in the 1980s in the sequential art medium came in 1987, when the National Book Critics Circle nominated a comic book by Art Spiegelman for its annual award in biography. [...] [F]ew people were prepared for the public acclaim for Spiegelman or for the media attention on the comic book medium which accompanied the 1986 publication [...] of *Maus*” (96). Witek also notes that although “*Maus* was nominated for the Book Critics Circle Award in biography, it is perhaps more precisely an autobiography. In order to live his own life, Art must understand his relations with his parents. To do so, he must confront the Holocaust and the way in which it affected Vladek and Anja” (98). Biography and autobiography were in the same Book Critics Circle Award category from 1983 until 2005.

original).⁶ Not only was *Maus* significant for the larger field of graphic narrative, but Spiegelman himself considers the early “Maus” strip “his personal starting point” (Kartalopoulos, “Comics”). Through the conversations sparked in the underground comix community by “Maus,” and in academic and popular circles by *Maus*, Spiegelman’s graphic serial memoir allowed comics a kind of recognition they had not yet been afforded. The autobiographical foundation for these comics made sense to a wider readership, thus increasing their legibility, even when the subject matter of *Maus*, the Holocaust, is often understood as *illegible*, and demonstrating the potential of graphic narrative.

Indebted to the various and storied traditions of graphic narrative, Spiegelman struggles in each of his major works to represent the self. In *Breakdowns* (1977), *Maus I* (1986), *Maus II* (1991), *The Complete Maus CD-ROM* (1994), *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), and the reissue of *Breakdowns* (which includes an expanded autobiographical introduction, titled *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&?!*, [2008],⁷ [figure 1]), Spiegelman—either as an illustrated version of himself as a man, as a mouse, or as an historically significant cartoon character—challenges traditional understandings of self-referentiality. By graphically placing himself in different styles, guises, and positions, emphasizing the importance of visual images to his own self-representation,

⁶ Chute and DeKoven, in their introduction to the special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to graphic narrative, point out that “in 1986, the year *Maus*’s first volume was published, two other works also significantly participated in reorienting comics readership toward adults. They are Frank Miller’s *Batman: the Dark Night Returns*, and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen*. Neither of these works, however, entered broad public and critical consciousness with the same profound effect that *Maus* did” (779-80).

⁷ Before its wide-release book publication, the *Virginia Quarterly Review* published excerpts of the introduction to the 2008 reissue of *Breakdowns*, titled “Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@%?!,” in which Spiegelman reflects on early moments in his career. The 2008 reissue of *Breakdowns* is categorized as “memoir” by the publisher.

and underscoring the serial nature of experience, Spiegelman's texts challenge traditional forms of autobiographical writing. In this chapter, I argue that the serial production and consumption of Spiegelman's graphic memoirs underscore the inherently episodic nature of graphic self-reflexive narratives as they rely on the serial tradition of comic books as well as the panel-by-panel format of graphic narrative. Serial graphic memoirs visually expose a contemporary cultural impulse to engage in practices of repeated self-examination, self-presentation, and, ultimately, self-collection.

Collecting multiple versions of selfhood, Spiegelman serially crafts an archive as his various self-portraits and stories are collected, preserved, and (re)collected. Inherent in any discussion of the archive, or the serial assembly of objects/texts, is the materiality of the archive, and serial graphic memoir is no different; collections and repetitions of images that represent moments of lived experience are linked by the form and structure of the text to the illustrated and graphically performed self through serial archivization. As graphic memoir, moreover, those remembered images are also associated for readers and artists with memory and the visuality of memories. Postmemory, a term suggested by Marianne Hirsch to describe the inherited memories of children of Holocaust survivors, recognizes that there is an impossible gap between the experiences of the survivor generation and the lives of their children, and that this gap includes a lack of contextualizing stories. That is, postmemory is more directly related to the past, not through recollection, but through the imagined investment and creative powers of the second-generation. Additionally, the children of survivors are also always in diaspora because pre-Holocaust "home" does not exist; feelings of exile from generational

identity, Hirsch explains, helps to characterize postmemory (“Past” 662).⁸ For Spiegelman’s graphic serial memoir, the visual—images received through postmemory or witnessed in the first-person—is given a position of privilege. Thus, for Spiegelman’s graphic serial memoir, seriality also refers to the ways in which memories are transmitted generationally.

I also suggest that the serialization of time, through the placement and construction of panels, allows graphic memoirists to represent life narratives as foundationally assembled through paratexts, discrete installments, frames, and images. Each page presents readers with a fractured, decentered series of images, emphasizing the provisionality of selfhood and its representations. The reader’s reorientation foregrounds the relationship between seriality, image, and narrative, experiencing what Gillian Whitlock terms “autographics.”⁹ Autographics underscores the intersection of the visual and the verbal in graphic self narrative as it simultaneously draws attention to the multiple subject positions narrators in graphic narrative must negotiate. The consistently shifting position of the narrator in memoir more generally, but in serial memoir in particular, becomes visually represented or illustrated as memoirists create avatars through which to figure their subject positions and episodes from lived experience. Memoir’s tripartite narrator can be visually seen and understood as the author graphically represents different subject positions within the narrative.

⁸ A more complete discussion and interrogation of postmemory and Spiegelman’s memoirs follows in this chapter.

⁹ Whitlock points out that Leigh Gilmore’s term, “autobiographics,” “lends to my thinking about ‘autographics’ the insistence on the shifting jurisdictions and limits of autobiography” (966).

While many may consider the autobiographical trend in comics encouraging for new and innovative ways for self-expression, many scholars express a concern that, as Hatfield writes, “its episodic, often picaresque [...] nature still caters to the outworn tradition of periodical comic book publishing” (112).¹⁰ Hatfield’s main concern here is with the fact that even self-representational graphic narratives follow the traditional practice of serial publication; that, because graphic narratives work within the established (and often limiting) system of periodical publication they reinscribe that very system. What Hatfield fails to recognize, however, is that the ability to be published serially is revolutionary for the autobiographical genres within which these artists work. This so-called tyrannical structure or the “Devil of Serialization,” in Hatfield’s words, underscores the possibility of the episodic and picaresque in contemporary memoir, a genre that has traditionally been seen as inferior to autobiography because it is recursive and episodic. While conventional forms of autobiography assert an overarching life-narrative and reinforce the possibility of monolithic self-representation, serial memoir presents the episodic and the picaresque as viable possibilities for understanding one’s life. Failure to take the wide range of possibilities into account in life writing, particularly in a medium that presents a clear challenge to traditional forms of textual self-representation, does not do justice to the myriad possibilities for life writing.

¹⁰ Other critics of the serial mode of publication include Derek Parker Royal and Jason Dittmer. Royal, in a talk given at the 2008 International Conference on Narrative, argued that serialization was a constraint on Gilbert Hernandez’s publications and outlined a distinction between the “author controlled” serialized text and the “reader controlled” graphic novel, while Dittmer posits a theory of “the tyranny of the serial,” that, he argues, “is dictated by the nature of the medium, which involves monthly issues ad infinitum connected to each other through the structures of continuity.”

Conflating all forms of life writing into “autobiography,” Hatfield articulates his concerns over the discrepancies between “reality” and “representation” in graphic narrative, a concern that has been rehearsed in autobiography and life writing studies since its inception. “[A]utobiography has become a distinct, indeed crucial, genre in today’s comic books,” Hatfield writes, “despite the troublesome fact that comics, with their hybrid, visual-verbal nature, pose an immediate and obvious challenge to the idea of ‘nonfiction.’ They can hardly be said to be ‘true’ in any straightforward sense. There’s the rub. But therein lies much of their fascination” (112). The challenge to nonfiction, according to Hatfield, is based solely on the fact that rather than dealing with written self-reflexive narratives, the reader must negotiate a verbal/visual interface. And yet, the possibilities by which hybrid texts challenge the visual/verbal binary are rife through postmodern forms of expression. Rather than “troublesome,” these forms—graphic narrative, film, visual art, and collage, to name a few—emphasize the multidimensional interaction writers, artists, and audiences have with the world around them.¹¹ The incorporation of graphic narrative into the larger field of life writing does not present a new challenge for scholars of life writing, but rather opens up a new way of examining more techniques—this time at the verbal/visual interface—authors use in order to represent their lives.

The intersection between verbal and visual forms of expression, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest in the introduction to *Interfaces* (2002), is a particularly

¹¹ Hatfield’s other concern, about the representation of “truth” in nonfiction, is nothing new in the field of life writing, as discrepancies between “truth” and representation have been fertile ground for critics and theorists. See, for example, Timothy Dow Adams’ *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (1990).

fruitful place for criticism and research in contemporary life writing studies because, in addition to the traditional textual forms of autobiographical writing, there are a multitude of visual modes that can be examined as acts of self-construction.¹² Smith and Watson include material modes of possible self-representation, such as “sculpture, quilts, painting, photography, collage, murals, installations, as well as films, artists’ books, song lyrics, performance art, and Web sites in cyber-space” that encourage new ways for contemporary readers and life writing scholars to approach strategies for self-representation (5-6). “[I]t is essential to expand the concept of visual autobiography as self-portraiture,” they continue, “to include visual, textual, voiced, and material modes of embodied self-representation” (7). Graphic self-narrative, existing within the interstices of visuality and textuality, is at the fore of expressing postmodern lives in general, and contemporary experiments in self-portraiture and self-representation in particular.¹³ Further, because the genre of memoir itself is generically tenuous, it allows for a great deal of flexibility and interdisciplinarity in representation and self-expression.

Spiegelman’s dedication to the self-reflexive, episodic, and recursive structures of graphic serial memoir can be seen throughout his texts, recently in the experimental memoir *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2005). In this book, Spiegelman chronicles events in his life immediately following the bombing of the World Trade Center on September

¹² There have been many special issues of journals that center on life writing and graphic/non-verbal modes of expression, including *Auto/Biography*, *ARIEL*, *MELUS*, and *Modern Fiction Studies*.

¹³ The confusing liminal position of the verbal/visual interface in autobiographical writing was publicly exposed when *Maus II* was first published. Editors at *The New York Times Book Review*, unclear of how it should be classified, placed it on the fiction list. In a letter to the editor, Spiegelman protested the classification of *Maus* as fiction: “If your list were divided into literature and non-literature, I could gracefully accept the compliment as intended, but to the extent that ‘fiction’ indicates a work isn’t factual, I feel a bit queasy. As an author, I believe I might have lopped several years off the thirteen I devoted to my two-volume project if I could have taken a novelist’s license while searching for a novelist’s structure” (“A Problem of Taxonomy”).

11, 2001, in a structure that imitates the pages of newspaper comic supplements. As he was with *Maus*, he remains concerned with the intersection of world history and personal history while exploring the cultural resonance available in comics and graphic narrative. And, in fact, *No Towers*' heterogeneous composition presents readers with a more complex narrative than *Maus*. In an interview with Nina Siegal for *The Progressive*, Spiegelman explains the differences readers find between *Maus* and *No Towers* in narrative structure. Writing *Maus*, he says,

involved using all the specific discoveries I'd made about how comics work formally and using those formal elements not to jump or undercut the narrative but to allow the narrative to happen more seamlessly. Eventually you were left with an IV that just delivered you narrative. After a few pages most people weren't even aware anymore that they were reading comics, and that was fine by me. I didn't want to get in the way of an already complex set of narrative events and themes that needed to be the focus of the book.

In the *Maus* memoirs, Spiegelman collects and archives memories of his father and of his own childhood or, as he tells Siegal, "it had to be this story I got from my parents." He is able to knit the narrative threads together in order to make the medium of comics, the subject matter of the Holocaust, and the self-reflexivity of the memoirs cohere in accessible ways. Comparing the narrative structures at work in the two volumes of *Maus* and those apparent in *No Towers* is important because they are all part of the artist's serial memoir: they involve many of the same characters (most obviously the

figure of Art Spiegelman); they illustrate an artist's evolution in style and composition over time; and, finally, they have similar thematic concerns, including the preservation of memory, the representation of self, and experimentation with the form of graphic narrative. Spiegelman's memoirs engage seriality as a strategy for reflecting the episodocity of life as it is made manifest through generational or inherited transmission. Memory, collection, archivization, and recollection, his self-reflexive project asserts, are serial.

Rather than emphasizing accessibility in *No Towers*, Spiegelman exploits the fundamental fragmentation inherent in graphic narrative in order to underscore the ways in which he felt scattered and unsettled after the World Trade Center attack. In his attempt to assign *No Towers* to an established genre, describing the plates that make up *No Towers* as diary fragments and "over-articulated journal entries" ("Art"), Spiegelman distances it from traditional autobiography by pointing to the ruptured nature of the text and of lived experience. Indeed, this difference is one that characterizes the split between autobiography and memoir, as memoir allows for heterogeneity, achronology, and fractured pages. The self-referentiality of these texts is central to the way they are read and understood, and the generic ambiguity leads scholars to categorize Spiegelman's texts in a number of ways. Kristiaan Versluys suggests that *No Towers* can be seen "as episodes in a continuing family saga" (983), which is a compelling way to examine *No Towers* in relation to *Maus* or *Breakdowns*, particularly as these texts are distinguished from autobiography. Genres in life writing are not always easily delineated, but approaching *Maus*, *Maus II*, *No Towers*, and the two versions of

Breakdowns as serial memoir underscores the relational and familial elements of the texts, rather than emphasizing the self-creation of Art Spiegelman.

Versluys also posts *No Towers* as a “sequel to *Maus*” (989), which is compelling when examined in light of the term frequently used in discussions of graphic narrative: “sequential art.” The notion of a sequel, particularly because Spiegelman uses seriality in a number of compelling ways, is interesting because it implies that the narratives presented with Spiegelman’s texts are continuous in their sequence. While clearly another installment of Spiegelman’s series of self-referential graphic narratives, I read Spiegelman’s use of seriality as one way to challenge traditional concepts of sequential or continuous history, on the world stage as well as the personal one. His memoirs blend his own personal history and the histories of his family members as they simultaneously emphasize his (and, indeed, his family’s) place in collective memory. History, however, is both chronological and recursive or repetitive, because it is often through narrative that we understand historical events. Presenting self-representational texts as episodic, Spiegelman’s serial memoir illustrates, allows for a more expansive discussion of the texts.

Graphic Narrative and Seriality: “The Devil” Is in the Details

The underground comix embraced the rich stylistic, thematic and formal heritage of the comics medium and rejected its habitual commercial motivation and juvenile orientation; in so doing the comix creators demonstrated that, if the marketplace cannot be overthrown, it can be forced, provisionally and haltingly, to open itself to new ideas and new ways of looking at the world.

—Joseph Witek, “Imagetext”

Maus was done in comics form because I make comics and so it was the natural language for me to speak. Comics have to do with art like Yiddish has to do with language; it's a kind of vernacular. And so Maus was essentially a natural means for me.
—Art Spiegelman, “Healing Images”

Graphic narrative is often also referred to as “sequential art,” and thus some discussion distinguishing “sequence” from “series/serial” is needed. My understanding of the difference between sequence and series in graphic narratives follows that of French comics historian and philosopher Thierry Groensteen. In his early essay titled “La narration comme supplément,” he distinguishes between sequence and series: “A *series* is a succession of continuous or discontinuous images linked by a system of iconic, plastic or semantic correspondences. . . . A *sequence* is a succession of images where the syntagmic linking is determined by a narrative project” (qtd in *System* 146, ellipses original). The concept of “sequential art” is committed to the narrative coherence of a particular text, while serial images may present challenges to the ubiquity of a central narrative storyline. Reading a series as a succession of different kinds of correspondences supports elasticity in narrative theory, particularly when those narratives are serially produced. That seriality can be understood through a variety of systems—iconic, plastic, or semantic correspondences—allows serial memoirists more flexibility as they construct their memoirs. Placed in a graphic context, moreover, serial images are flexible in textual placement and temporality, while the text still retains overall continuity through character and storyline. This continuity can be experienced through devices of repetition and recursivity of image or language, through a theme or visual marker, or by the narrative itself.

Approaching these potentially unrelated images, however, the reader must have some idea about how to navigate each panel's relationship with the others. The correspondence of images across space and time in graphic narrative, particularly in a text that has been published serially, is extremely important to the manner in which graphic narratives work. The position of a panel on a page anchors it to the narrative and determining the panel's "place in the reading protocol" (Groensteen 34). As artists construct their texts through the process of "breakdown," they choreograph the narrative's verbal and visual elements with panels. The site of a panel is thus spatially located as it is also temporally fixed; the panel's position is grounded in the larger story as well as within the site of the larger book or periodical. Beyond the individual frames in a graphic narrative, readers encounter several other images that indicate how the text should be read—what comics scholars such as Gronesteen, Will Eisner, and Scott McCloud contextualize as the "grammar" of sequential art—including the margins of a page, the white space (or "gutter") between panels, and speech or dialogue balloons. Ian Gordon, in his investigation of comic strips at the turn of the twentieth century, points out the significance of audience participation in relation to the mechanics or grammar of comics. He asserts that:

The techniques of comic strip and comic book narratives require readers to fill in the gaps. In comics the narrative flows from panel to panel, but there are quite literally gaps between the panels, which means readers have to interpret the space and comprehend its place in the story. To do so readers have to at various times understand the techniques and

structure of comic art, the context of a particular strip, its place in an ongoing narrative, and the likely pace of the story. (10)

Reading graphic narratives, then, audiences must negotiate between the various grammatical markers, or codes, that designate particular ways to read and understand the text. The more readers are exposed to the conventions of graphic storytelling and are comfortable with the kind of work they must do to actively read those mechanical elements of the graphic narrative, the more they will participate in the kind of serial reading those narratives require.

The relationship between the construction and composition of a text, its breakdown, and the ultimate desire for closure—whether it is the artist’s desire that the text achieve some temporary closure until the next page, or the reader’s desire for narrative closure—is complicated and linked to the distinction between sequence and series. Hatfield observes that terms like breakdown and closure both describe the “relationship between *sequence* and *series*: the author’s task is to evoke an imagined sequence by creating a visual series (a breakdown), whereas the reader’s task is to translate the given series into a narrative sequence by achieving closure” (41, emphasis original). As artists are able to be more creative in their breakdowns and as readers crave different kinds of texts—perhaps those without any defined narrative closure—the relationship between breakdown and closure may not be so clearly demarcated.

While it is easy to dismiss the margin, gutter, and dialogue balloons as mere conventions of graphic narrative, these conventions underscore the relationship between different images on the page. Indeed, even as an individual and contained image, each

panel is presented as part of a series, either within a sequence with other panels or in a narrative series. Images participate in series with other panels as they are in conversation with the spatial construction of the page itself, what Eisner calls the “hard frame” (63), and what Groensteen articulates as the “hyperframe” (30). While the individual frames of panels are created and read as part of the larger frame of the page, each page is also understood in relation to the others around it, and, on a larger scale, in relation to the book or periodical in which the narrative is contained. “In distinction to the hyperframe,” Groensteen asserts, “the multiframe does not have stable borders, assigned *a priori*. Its borders are those of the entire work, whether it is an isolated strip or a story of two hundred pages. The multiframe is the sum of the frames that compose a given comic—that is, also, the sum of the hyperframes” (31, emphasis original). Delimiting the different kinds of frames within a given graphic text is important to examinations of those texts as authors play with or challenge conventional narrative structures. The permeability of borders between frames—whether they are individual panels, pages in a text, or of the entire work—underscores how seriality can work within and through those borders.

Comics have traditionally been serialized, whether in the format of daily or weekly comic strips, in the episodic installments of comic books, or in the periodic publication of longer graphic narratives before they are compiled, and Art Spiegelman’s own textual production has also followed this pattern of serialization. Serialization, whether or not the final product is ultimately read as a cohesive longer text, invariably influences the composition of the text, the significance of episodes in its structure, and

the way that the narrative is understood as created across time. Even though *Maus* was originally conceived as a longer text, by eliding its historical roots as a strip and ignoring its initial serial publication in *RAW*, readers and scholars lose an important piece of the text; approaching the two volumes of *Maus*, *No Towers*, and the two editions of *Breakdowns* solely as discrete books ignores their original, serial roots. As Hatfield writes, “serialization can undercut or reinforce a graphic novel’s structural cohesion. Serial units (chapters or installments) can be used to impose structure on a novel, or, alternately, they can compromise structure through digression, redundancy, and the attenuation of suspense” (159). One important factor in its serial publication is that *Maus* was initially consumed in an entirely different context than it is now.

Understanding where *Maus* was originally published, by whom, for what purpose, and in conversation with which other works is extremely important because the memoir itself is concerned with context and the possibilities of recontextualization.

Maus first appeared serially in the “graphix magazine” *RAW*, published and edited by Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly.¹⁴ *RAW* was originally designed, as Mouly explains,

to show an audience, a world, or whatever, to make it manifest how good comics could be. I mean, it was to fight the prejudices against comics as toilet literature, that they should be printed only on newsprint, and

¹⁴ “Graphix magazine” is the term Spiegelman and Mouly, his wife, use as a subtitle for each issue in the first volume of *RAW*. Featuring titles such as *RAW: The Graphix Magazine of Postponed Suicides* and *RAW: The Graphix Magazine for Your Bomb Shelter’s Coffee Table*, the graphix magazine was related to the size and publication material of the magazine. With the eighth issue of volume one, the magazine became squarebound and did not retain the “magazine” subtitle. In 1986, following the publication of *Maus*, Mouly and Spiegelman began to publish *RAW* with Pantheon Books. Examples of other subtitles include *Open Wounds from the Cutting Edge of Commix* and *Required Reading for the Post-Literate*.

disposable [...]. So here the large size, and the good paper, and the fact that it was non-returnable, were meant to force people to see how beautiful, and how moving, and how powerful, the work could be. And it should [include] Europeans and Americans and people from all over. It should bridge a lot of gaps. That was the intent. (qtd in Kartalopoulos, “A *RAW* History”)

The ideals of *RAW*, including the desire to move away from the misleading perception that comics are “disposable,” is significant as the nature of the kinds of comics produced and consumed continue to expand and as authors have the flexibility to and the demand for continued innovation. Bridging the gap between “high” and “low” art, Spiegelman and Mouly challenge the consumption and production of comics at every turn: comics can be read as literature, not solely as ephemera.¹⁵

The first chapter of *Maus* appeared in the second issue of *RAW*, published in December 1980. As Bill Kartalopoulos, editor of *Indy Magazine*, writes in “A *RAW* History: Part Two, The Magazine,” in addition to the collage-inspired incorporation of bubble gum cards and “an actual stick of bubble gum,” this second issue of *RAW* “also included the first chapter of Spiegelman’s *Maus*, incorporated as a small-format booklet attached to the magazine’s inside back cover. Each subsequent issue would contain a similarly-formatted chapter from Spiegelman’s book-in-progress.” And yet, as Mouly explains, “If [Spiegelman] had started doing *Maus* for *Raw* it would have become

¹⁵ Temporal boundaries were also crossed, as *RAW* included contemporary graphic artists like Chris Ware and Drew Friedman as well as historically significant artists whose work was in the public domain, like early twentieth-century American comics artists George Herriman and Windsor McKay and nineteenth-century European artists Caran d’Ache and Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen.

something else altogether in terms of the intimacy of the book. [...] This is somehow, the way it's presented, it's not exactly part of the magazine. It's more like a supplement. And that was different if it had been in the center of the magazine. ... This is *Raw*, and it also has this whole other work" (qtd in Kartalopoulos, "Part Two"). As Jacques Derrida suggests in his discussion of supplementarity, a supplement represents a liminal position between externality, or those instances when a supplement is seen simply as an enhancement of a complete text, and one of interiority, as when that which has a supplement cannot be seen as complete without its supplement (*Of Grammatology* 145). The distinction Mouly makes between the placement of the *Maus* chapter in relation to *RAW* emphasizes the eternal/internal divide. Moreover, the materiality of *RAW* and the chapters from *Maus* that appeared therein—inhabiting the indeterminate position of supplement—is central to refiguring popular approaches to graphic narratives in general, and to the serial graphic memoir in particular.¹⁶

Ultimately, the texts in Spiegelman's series of graphic memoirs can be seen as supplementary to the rest; none purport to tell the "whole story," rather, each text interrogates established ways of representing the self and challenges the idea of a finished self. Understanding the ways in which the structural integrity of both *Maus* and *RAW* could have been jeopardized by the serial incorporation of *Maus* into the magazine is significant to the way it was read and understood from the beginning. On the back cover of *RAW* 1.2, the editors write a note about this first chapter of *Maus*, explaining

¹⁶ The notion of a supplement is also significant in the discussion of *No Towers*, which contains a ten-plate "Comic Supplement" of comic strips Spiegelman collected from turn-of-the-century newspapers, which I will address in more detail in the conclusion of this chapter.

that “[t]his is the first part of a projected 200-250 p. work-in-progress. Future chapters will appear in *RAW*, on an occasional basis, as they are completed” (figure 2). The “occasional” publication of chapters in *Maus* is one way to get away from the “devil of serialization,” as time constraints and deadlines often hinder the artists of comic strips, comic books, and graphic narratives. Spiegelman’s ability to publish this text serially and still on a by-completion basis was extremely important for him as an artist, and continued to be for the publication of his subsequent works: *Maus II* and *No Towers*.¹⁷

Chapters from *Maus II* were also published serially in *RAW*, as early *Maus* critic Miles Orvell notes.¹⁸ One of the elements of the narrative that Orvell finds particularly compelling about the first chapters of *Maus II* is the attention Spiegelman gives to the metatextuality of the memoir. Spiegelman gives his readers a brief synopsis of the previous episodes in order to place the reader at the time of writing: “Art Spiegelman, a cartoonist born after WWII, is working on a book about what happened to his parents as

¹⁷ In *No Towers*, Spiegelman writes that the pages of the text were “originally going to be a weekly series, but many of the pages took [him] at least five weeks to complete, so [he] missed even [his] monthly deadlines. (How did the newspaper cartoonists of the early twentieth century manage it? Was there amphetamine in [William Randolph] Hearst’s water coolers?)” He also claims that one of the reasons he never wanted to be a political cartoonist was because he “work[s] too slowly to respond to transient events while they’re happening. (It took [him] 13 years to grapple with World War II in *Maus*!)”

¹⁸ Orvell’s essay, published in 1992, is in a particularly interesting position to comment on the serialization of *Maus* because he relies only on those serially produced chapters that were published at the time he was writing his article, not yet having the opportunity to examine the full-length work. This attention to serial production in the mountain of criticism on *Maus* distinguishes Orvell’s essay from most later criticism; he writes that “[t]he conclusion of *Maus* promised a sequel, and as of 1990, chapters 7 and 8 have indeed appeared” (123). He continues, discussing the relationship between *RAW* and *Maus* in the time following the publication of the first volume of *Maus*: “Though Spiegelman continues to publish the installments in *Raw*, *Maus* has carried *Raw* into the trade paperback marketplace, where it is now published in a downsized version by Penguin. Where a book-size *Maus* had previously been inserted into the large-format *Raw* in a separate binding, the graphics comics of *Raw* are now all of a size—*Maus* size—as further proof of the latter’s dominance” (123).

Jews in wartime Poland.”¹⁹ After the synopsis, *Maus II* begins with a chapter titled “Mauschwitz,” which is another indication of where the story left its readers: at Vladek and Anja’s arrival at Auschwitz. And yet, with all of these culturally significant and resonant moments presented at the end of the first volume, the first page of the first chapter of volume two concerns itself with difficulties in representation.

This struggle with representation is, of course, fundamentally a struggle Spiegelman faces between how to represent such a catastrophic series of events while simultaneously acknowledging the criticism he received for choosing the “funny animal” genre in which to work in the first place.²⁰ At the beginning of *Maus II*, Spiegelman strips away the “funny animal” façade of his graphic narrative and visually articulates his concerns about how to draw Françoise, his wife. The first third of the page is taken up with a drawing of a notepad, on which Spiegelman has sketched several variations on how he could represent Françoise: a moose, a mouse with long brown hair, a rabbit, a dog, and a frog. In each, she wears a striped blouse and a scarf around her neck, elements that will remain associated with her in order to distinguish her character throughout Spiegelman’s self-referential oeuvre. “What are you doing?” Françoise asks,

¹⁹ Orvell writes that, “As if to acknowledge the wider audience for *Maus*, Spiegelman has printed at the start of Chapter 8 (in the Penguin *Raw*) a brief summary of the earlier volume, together with a miniaturized reprint-cum-synopsis of chapter 7 (from *Raw* 1.8)” (123-24). This is also true of the book-length *Maus* texts, as a one-page synopsis precedes the table of contents in *Maus II*.

²⁰ Joseph Witek, in “Imagetext, or, Why Art Spiegelman Doesn’t Draw Comics,” writes that the American consciousness equates “commerce and comics” so completely that book reviewers, among others, are “unable to conceive that the brilliance of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* stems not from the artist’s transcendence of the comics medium [as they write that Spiegelman doesn’t “draw comics,” but that he has created his own genre] but from a deep understanding of comics traditions and conventions and a *fearless reimagining of the medium’s possibilities*. Any careful reader of Carl Barks’s Donald Duck comics could testify that the funny animals genre can generate compelling stories, and no reader of the passionate and overtly political underground comix would doubt that the combined words and pictures of the comics medium can support themes of the most profound seriousness, even that of the Holocaust itself” (emphasis mine).

opening the dialogue of *Maus II*. “Trying to figure out how to draw you...” Art responds, underscoring both the artificiality and the power of graphic self-representation (figure 3). Their conversation continues, first centering on their immediate relationship before moving into the national and international struggles that are so central to Spiegelman’s discussion about and understanding of World War II and the Holocaust. This conversation spans the length of the first page, and, while it continues to the next page of the chapter, the nature of the conversation shifts slightly, becoming even more metatextual. The metatextuality at this moment is particularly significant because the seemingly innocent decision Art is trying to make, how to graphically represent his wife, is a part of a larger series of references and cultural moments. He, and Françoise, must navigate current nationality with nation of birth, religion, and cultural affiliation as they try to graphically illustrate how we as people, as citizens, as inter-related, define who we are and where our allegiances lie.

The first six panels which make up the first half of page two show Art talking to Françoise about possible ways he could break down the narrative presented in the first *Maus* book—a text with which the reader is likely familiar. “I’ve got it!” Art exclaims to Françoise (figure 4), “Panel one: my father is on his exercycle ... // I tell him I just married a frog ... // Panel two: he falls off his cycle in shock. // So, you and I go to a mouse rabbi. He says a few magic words and *zap!* ... // By the end of the page the frog has turned into a beautiful *mouse!*” (12). In this conversation, Spiegelman deconstructs several myths he must negotiate as he writes his graphic narrative in the late 1980s, as it was still undervalued as a medium for self-expression. His ideas, here, are more fanciful

and indebted to fairy-tale or superhero narratives than what the reader has already seen in *Maus I*.

As Art talks about the breakdowns of the panels in these six frames, the reader will remember that, in fact, the early panels of *Maus I* do show Vladek on his exercise. Instead of talking about Françoise and rather than going back in Art's life to the moment he tells his father he will be getting married, however, the discussion Vladek and Art have revolves around Art's desire for Vladek to tell his story (figure 5). "I still want to draw that book about you," Art tells Vladek, "the one I used to talk to you about... // about your life in Poland and the war" (12).²¹ This moment in *Maus II* reflects back on one of the first episodes in *Maus I* as it emphasizes the constructed-ness of Spiegelman's text. By the end of the first volume, readers may be accustomed to the rendering of people as animals and may not be interrogating the devices Spiegelman uses in order to tell his family's story. At the beginning of the second volume, however, Spiegelman demands that the reader think critically about *how* the narrative is constructed, panel by panel, while he also foregrounds the circularity and episodic nature of lived experience and memory.

Emphasizing the episodic nature of experience within *Maus*, Spiegelman incorporates the early "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History" strip into the narrative of the first volume of *Maus*. As many scholars have noted, Spiegelman maintains the original integrity of the early strip—the different graphic style, human

²¹ For a more detailed reading of this page, see Hillary Chute's "Literal Forms." She points out the intrusion of the past onto the present in this scene by material objects, including a framed photograph of dead Anja Spiegelman and Vladek's tattoo.

characters instead of mice, no page numbers that correspond with the exterior narrative—while he simultaneously emphasizes the *Maus* narrator’s position.²² The differences in artistic styles between the two pieces are visual markers of temporal shift, but the focus of Spiegelman’s serial memoir remains constant: he is invested in archiving and preserving his own memories and the memories of his family. Moreover, including Anja’s photograph in “Prisoner,” and thus embedding it in *Maus*, also reinforces the reader’s investment in the story; these characters are human and this story is real.²³

Spiegelman’s search for a way to collect previously published material as well as material that could be found in an archive reflects his commitment to the preservation of texts. His concern with archiving—and with making the collection/archive available to readers and scholars—is a contemporary version of Derrida’s concept of archive fever, a frantic archivization and preservation which transforms the present into the past by anticipating its memory. Indeed, the seriality inherent in these graphic memoirs is closely tied to the archivization impulse, and, for Spiegelman, becomes particularly compelling because he experiments with electronic methods of archiving. Mark Currie, in his examination of time in contemporary literature, writes that, because “the envisaged future which produces the present as memory” is always already central to

²² See, for example, essays by Mireille Ribière and Bill Kartalopoulos.

²³ In 1994, Spiegelman published *The Complete MAUS*, a CD-ROM devoted to collecting traditionally archived material, including interviews, photographs, transcripts, and drawings, allowing him to present the reader with the materials from which his memoirs were constructed. In the fall of 2008, *Breakdowns* (1977) was reissued with a lengthy autobiographical comix introduction, titled *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!*. This introduction was serially published in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*: part 1 was published in the fall of 2005, part 2 in the winter of 2006, part 3 in the fall of 2006 (which also included a republishing of the 1972 “Maus” strip), and part 4 in the winter of 2007. *Be a Nose!*, a collection of three of Spiegelman’s sketchbooks, was released in the spring of 2009, and, according to the Barclay Agency, he is at work on a book with DVD about the making of *Maus*, titled *Meta Maus*.

narrative, archive fever in contemporary society is significant because “the grip that this fever currently has on the world of personal and collective self-representation is not to be underestimated or ignored on the grounds that it has a history” (12). Archival impulses, then, are nothing new, and yet the speed and frequency with which texts are thought of as archives in relation to contemporary society and self-representation—assisted by digital texts, online communities, and other technological advances—presents a new space in which to examine seriality and archival impulses.

Spiegelman’s self-reflexive texts, and his long-form memoirs in particular, are indicative of this larger cultural archival impulse and exemplify what Jared Gardner calls the “archival turn in the contemporary graphic narrative” (788). This attention to collection and the archive or archivization, Gardner asserts, is to be expected from graphic narrative because comics require the reader to pause between panels and make sense of what they read. Pausing between panels, or between episodes in serial memoir, allows both the reader and the writer the opportunity to reflect on what they have just read; ultimately, the act of reading works as a kind of (re)collection, imitative of the serial structure of the memoirs themselves.

Spiegelman’s collection of comic-strip inspired plates, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, underscores his continuing commitment to the archive and to exploring serial self-narrative. He begins *No Towers* in the tradition of the superhero comic book, giving his readers an “update” on the first plate of the memoir: “In our last episode, you might remember, the world ended” Here, Spiegelman relies on the reader’s familiarity with conventions of comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels as he underscores the

importance of the episodic in constructing this memoir, yet he also echoes his earlier strategies from *Maus II*, as he fills his readers in on where the last “episode” ended.

Initially, the series of ten episodes which make up the first half of *No Towers* were to be published more frequently in periodicals, as comics in newspaper supplements were at the turn of the twentieth century, however, in the introduction to *No Towers*, Spiegelman laments the fact that the pages took him longer than he anticipated, forcing him to miss even monthly deadlines. He continues: “the idea of working in single page units corresponded to my existential conviction that I might not live long enough to see them published.” Serial publication was a way for Spiegelman, from the beginning, to think of his project as both open-ended and repetitive, without time constraints or deadlines.

Afforded the opportunity to think of his project as open-ended, Spiegelman avoids the closure that comes with finishing a project. While working under the idea that he may not live long enough to see his work get collected into a book, seriality and serial publication allows Spiegelman some protection against death because the project will always continue. “There is always writing to be done, for all eternity,” Philippe Lejeune suggests. “The intention to write one more time presupposes the possibility of doing it. You enter into a phantasmagoric space where writing runs into death” (101). In his lecture “Ephemera v. the Apocalypse,” given at the Great Hall of Cooper Union on September 10, 2004, Spiegelman explains that the pages of *In the Shadow of No Towers* “ran [monthly] from September ‘02 to September ‘03. Each of those pages was done like a diary entry, and the first five or six, I didn’t think I would be around to see it

printed. So I wasn't thinking about [writing a book], I was thinking about ephemera."²⁴

The strips that were eventually collected into *No Towers* were originally published as a series of pages for, among a few others, the *London Review of Books* and the German newspaper *Die Zeit*.²⁵

This open-ended approach also allowed Spiegelman to do what postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard suggests we must in order to make any sense of a catastrophic event: "You have to take your time. [...] [Y]ou have to move more slowly – though without allowing yourself to be buried beneath a welter of words, or the gathering clouds of war, and preserving intact the unforgettable incandescence of the images" (*The Spirit* 4). Spiegelman is greatly concerned with the preservation of the image in his serial memoir, as evidenced by his interest in archiving material electronically (as was the case with the 1994 CD-ROM, titled *The Complete Maus*, or with the forthcoming DVD, titled *Meta Maus*), and with the emphasis he places on photographs in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" and *Maus*. Preservation and, here, publication of the image, of the material texts upon which memories are often compared, is significant to the seriality inherent in collecting. Baudrillard posits that collections are "never really initiated in order to be completed," but, rather, that the objects in a collection are those "through which we mourn for ourselves" ("The System" 13, 17).

²⁴ "When I started off, I wasn't making a book," Spiegelman told interviewer Kenneth Terrell, after the publication of *No Towers*. "I was making pages while waiting for the world to end. But it wasn't. Or if it was, it was taking its time."

²⁵ In the introduction to *No Towers*, Spiegelman writes: "As the series got rolling I found my own 'coalition of the willing' to publish it along with *Die Zeit*. Most of the distinguished newspapers and magazines that found a way to accommodate the large format, quirky content, and erratic schedule were in the 'old Europe'—France, Italy, the Netherlands, England—where my political views hardly seemed extreme. [...] [In the United States] only the weekly *Forward*, a small-circulation English-language vestige of the once-proud daily Yiddish broadsheet, enlisted and ran them all prominently." *Forward* had also printed serialized pages of *Maus*.

“Seriality,” Naomi Schor writes, “is the crucial motivating factor for the true collector” (202), and this remains true even when the collector assembles memories, texts, and reminiscences from their own life.

Serial Preservation: The Materiality of Seriality

Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos. An ugly or grotesque subject may be moving because it has been dignified by the attention of the photographer. A beautiful subject can be the object of rueful feelings, because it has aged or decayed or no longer exists. All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.

—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

Synopsis: my past keeps coming back to me.

—Art Spiegelman, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@?**

“Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History,” one of Spiegelman’s first autobiographical strips, tells the story of Art learning of his mother’s death (figure 6). A Holocaust survivor, Anja committed suicide in 1968 and, Art says in the second frame of “Prisoner,” “she left no note.” Spiegelman incorporates this strip in its entirety into the text of *Maus*, giving readers part of the backstory necessary to make sense of Art and Vladek’s complicated relationship. Readers are thus allowed to witness the grief Art and Vladek feel for Anja, and by extension, for other victims of the Holocaust as it also implicates this short strip into a larger—and more historical—narrative structure. The ways in which readers approached “Prisoner” when it debuted in *Short Order Comix* (1973) or when it was collected into *Breakdowns* (1977), is very different from how readers understand it in *Maus*. The repeated publication of “Prisoner” textually imitates the recursivity of memory, and of traumatic memory in particular. Its presence

throughout Spiegelman's serial memoir allows him to represent how memory works through the preservation of texts and images.

Readers, as the epigraph from Sontag posits, are implicated in Spiegelman's pathos for his mother; we mourn his loss with him. Locating his trauma in this image, moreover, presents the visual documentation of lived experience as a *memento mori* for his mother. "Prisoner" begins with a photograph of Art and Anja, dated "Trojan Lake, N.Y., 1958." The bottom, left-hand corner of the photograph is obscured by a drawn left thumb that holds the picture. When incorporated into *Maus*, Spiegelman extends the trope of physical contact with the material past by presenting another left thumb; this second thumb holds the bottom corner of the magazine in which "Prisoner" is found. In the diegetic space of *Maus*, Art holds the copy of *Short Order Comix* which had been sent to his father. Finally, the observant reader will become aware of their own left thumb, holding *Maus* and, by extension, Art's archived past. The repetition of the image of the left thumb in relation to this strip—the reader's thumb holding the book *Maus*, Art's holding the magazine, and Art-circa-1973's holding the photograph of Anja and himself as a child—physically implicates the reader in a kind of longing for the past. The serial left thumb images also forge an immediate connection between the reader and the narrator of *Maus*, as our left thumbs are placed in the same position as the one Spiegelman draws indicating Art's thumb.

This series of images materially connects the reader with the text and the action of *Maus*, preventing its readers from being passive to the narrative action presented within the memoir. Instead, our corporeal association in reading the book, the physical

fact of the reader's thumb participating in this series of images, demands that the reader understand and be aware of their complicity within the text. Graphically representing the position of the reader as witness and as participant emphasizes the power of the visual/verbal interface while it also insists that the reader pay attention to the personal moment *and* the historical moment. Spiegelman has presented himself as a witness to the stories and experiences of his parents, and by emphasizing the materiality of seriality, he also turns his passive readers into active witnesses to his and his parents' stories. Extending the witnessing function of memoirs, Spiegelman emphasizes the visuality of witnessing for his readers, graphically proving that the twentieth-century has been "the century of witness" (9).²⁶

In the narrative storyline of *Maus*, "Prisoner" is included because it was read by Vladek for the first time as he claimed he was looking for Anja's diaries.²⁷ "I found it when I looked for the things you asked me last time," Vladek tells Art and Mala, Vladek's girlfriend. "*Hoo!* I saw the picture there of Mom, so I read it ... and I cried. / I

²⁶ For Spiegelman's texts, the relationship between the visuality of witnessing and the (traditional) orality or graphia of written testimony is made explicit, as his graphic memoirs expose the dependence of testimony on visuality. His serial memoir participates in the twentieth-century's emphasis on witness and, by extension, on testimony. Elie Wiesel suggests that, "[i]f the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony" (qtd in Felman 6). Testimonial literature has become central to both literature and, more specifically, to life writing in the twentieth-century, associated with such global catastrophes as the Holocaust and Apartheid; it has been suggested that "our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony" (Felman 5). If the twentieth-century has been the age of witnessing and testimony, is no coincidence that "our era" is also the "age of the literary memoir," because the foundational significance of public events to the way contemporary writers understand their own lives is central to memoir, as writers portray their lived experience in connection to public life. Robert F. Sayre's assertion that the kind of autobiographical text each generation of Americans chooses to write, publish, and read often tells readers and scholars a lot about the generation in question; for the twentieth century, the values, fears, and hopes of writers and readers center around, among other things: human rights, memorialization, and the ways in which people interact on a global scale.

²⁷ I use the word "claimed" because, through the course of the memoir, we find out that Vladek burned the diaries in a particularly dark period after Anja's suicide.

– I’m sorry. // It’s good you got it outside your system. But for me it brought in my mind so much *memories* of Anja. // ... of course I’m thinking always about her *anyway*” (I.104, emphasis original). The fact that it was the picture of Anja that caught Vladek’s attention, more than that it was Art’s comic strip, is significant as it illuminates what Susan Sontag says about photographs: “A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (16). This tug between pseudo-presence and absence is evident as the conversation continues in *Maus*, between Vladek and Mala. “Yes,” Mala says after Vladek says he’s always thinking of Anja, “You keep photos of her all around your desk—like a *shrine!* // What have I to do, Mala? In the garbage put them? Of you *also* I have a photo on the desk! / *Ach!* Don’t do me any favors” (I. 104). Vladek’s connection to the past is presented here, literally, through the physical records or documents of Anja’s life. For Vladek, the past is physical and continuous; his grief is twinned with Art’s through the presence of images. Anja is simultaneously figured as presence and absence, haunting their lives and the texts. Because the reader has “held” the photograph and has heard parts of her story, moreover, she haunts us as well.

Immediately following Mala’s departure from this scene, Art asks his father if he has found Anja’s diary. “So far this didn’t show up,” Vladek responds, “I looked, but I can’t find. / I’ve *got* to have that! // Another time I’ll again look,” Vladek reassures him (I.105). On the last two pages of the text, after we have followed Vladek’s story up to the point of arriving at Auschwitz, we find out what happened to the diary. The end of this volume presents readers with two of the most harrowing scenes in *Maus I*: in the past, Vladek and Anja arrive at Auschwitz: “And we came here to the concentration

camp Auschwitz, and we knew that from here we will not come out anymore” (figure 7). Vladek tells Art, “We knew the stories—that they will gas us and throw us in the ovens. This was 1944...we knew *everything*. And here we were” (I. 157, emphasis original). Here, Vladek’s emphasis is on the knowledge he and the others possessed based on storytelling, underscoring the veracity of witness testimony. Spiegelman places these two dialogue boxes over the image of a truck arriving at the main gate at Auschwitz, a gate now infamous for its inscription “Arbeit Macht Frei,” or “work makes one free.” This image is large, rendered in finer detail than many of the other images, and is uncontained by panel or border lines. According to Eisner, a “non-frame speaks to unlimited space. It has the effect of encompassing unseen but acknowledged background” (45), which demonstrates that the shape of a frame, or the absence of a frame, becomes part of the narrative. An unbounded panel, or a non-frame, heightens the reader’s participation or investment in the scene as it illustrates an emotional or atmospheric dimension of the narrative. At this moment, as Anja and Vladek—and with them the shadows and stories of millions of others—pass through the gates at Auschwitz, Spiegelman indicates the power of this moment through the verbal/visual interface. Vladek’s words, his knowledge of what was in store for himself and for Anja, is superimposed on the threatening and uncontainable image.

In Spiegelman’s serial memoir, photographs exist as a material connection to the past, and as Marianne Hirsch suggests, photography is thus “precisely the medium connecting memory and postmemory. As traces, photographs record both life (the rays connecting body to eye) and death (the moment they record becomes fixed with the very

act of recording)” (“Past” 669). Postmemory, according to Hirsch, is secondary or second-generation memory, forceful “because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment in creation” (“Past” 662). Postmemory is thus directly connected to the past, and “characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created” (“Past” 662). In graphic narratives, in particular, the function—indeed, the presentation—of postmemory is emphasized through the author’s placement of panels in the breakdown stage of creation. The hyperframe of each individual page is placed in dialogue with the larger multiframe; the borders between panels, hyperframes, and the multiframe are complicated as photographs and different kinds of images fracture the narrative. In her essay, “Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory,” Hirsch explains that she started thinking about the connection between family photographs when she read *Maus II*:

These photographs [of Richieu on the first page and of Vladek on the last page] connect the two levels of Spiegelman’s text, the past and the present, the story of the father and the story of the son, because these family photographs are documents of both memory (the survivor’s) and of what I would like to call post-memory (that of the child of the survivor whose life is dominated by memories of what preceded his/her birth). As

such, the photographs included in the text of *Maus*, and, through them, *Maus* itself, become what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de mémoire*. (8)

The generational relationship between memory and postmemory is thus linked to seriality in its infinitely repetitive and frequently episodic structure, while it is simultaneously associated with life and death. Hirsch's use of Pierre Nora, moreover, links her theory of postmemory to Nora's examination of sites of counter-memory. Nora argues that contemporary uses of history and memory are in opposition: memory is life and links us to the perpetual present, while history is the construction or representation of the past (8). The sites of memory, embodied in Spiegelman's texts in photographs and documents, illustrate the distinctions between history and memory, and the difficulties inherent in reconstructing the past.

Spiegelman's texts continue to engage the generational aspects of postmemory; while *Maus* foregrounded Art's relationship with Vladek, in the new introduction to *Breakdowns*, Spiegelman focuses on the next generation, extending the scope to Art's relationship with his own son, Dashill. While never using the term "postmemory" in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&?!*, Spiegelman does address the implications of received traumatic memory for future generations. "No matter how much I run, I can't seem to get out of that mouse's shadow!" Art exclaims as the "monument [he] built to [his] father," an oversized mouse-image of Vladek, looms in the background of the panel, casting a long shadow. As he tries to escape the mouse-image, Art comes across his own son, Dashill, who sits in the foreground of the panels with a laptop computer. In

this episode, Art tells Dash—and by extension, his readers—the story of *Maus*' creation and of how Art himself became the memoirist with whom we are now familiar.

Portrait is broken up into episodes itself, in a structure similar to *No Towers*, and one strip, titled “A Father’s Guiding Hand,” is particularly important to my discussion of postmemory and generational memory in contemporary serial memoir. The title of this strip is written as if it were carved on a tombstone, beneath which an “undead” hand emerges from the ground, and, far in the background, there is a shadowy outline of a mouse-like figure. Here, Spiegelman uses the genre of the horror comic as a foundation for his own, autobiographical, “horror story.” The second panel features a manic-looking Art carrying a treasure chest, running toward his son. As Art hands Dash a key, Art explains that within the chest there is a family heirloom, that’s “been in the family for years!” “My dad gave it to me when I was a little boy . . . ” Art continues, “And now I’m giving it to you!” The heirloom is postmemory, here figured as a green, sword-wielding, prison-hat wearing dragon with two mouths.²⁸ Out of one mouth the dragon breathes fire, and out of the other springs a worm-like creature with the head and face of Adolf Hitler. “It makes you feel so worthless,” Art tells Dash in panel six of this episode, as the dragon begins to chase the boy, “you don’t believe you even have the right to breathe!” In the penultimate panel of this strip, neither Art nor Dash can be seen—all that is left of them graphically is someone (presumably Dash) shouting “Aieeee!” in the lower, left-hand corner of the panel. As Art locks the monster back into the trunk, in the final panel of this strip, he tells his singed and defeated son: “Just

²⁸ The hat the monster wears is reminiscent of the hat worn by Art in “Prisoner on the Hell Planet.”

think!—Someday you’ll be able to pass it on to *your* son!” (emphasis original).

Depicting generational memory as a terrifying monster that is passed down from parents to their children indicates the power Hirsch recognizes in postmemory. Spiegelman has always lived with the Holocaust stories of his parents, he has repeatedly incorporated those stories into his life’s work, and he is clearly convinced that this legacy will continue to influence the members of his family into the distant future.²⁹

The recontextualization of family stories is central to Spiegelman’s texts as he interrogates the repetition of subjectivity in relation to time throughout his works. Indeed, the postmemory Spiegelman figures himself passing to his children, while it’s “been in the family for years,” must be dealt with anew and by each person, individually. Here, postmemory is illustrated as archived memory, and Spiegelman exposes the ways in which postmemory transforms over time. The seriality of the archive, and of the collection, is rearticulated as the seriality of postmemory, and the generational repetition and reconstitution of memories is thus graphically represented in Spiegelman’s serial memoir. Currie suggests that “[t]he compressed global stage, the intense now-awareness of recontextualization, and the self-distance involved in archive fever are all conditions in which a subject is self-consciously aware of its representation, or its perception from the outside, from the point of view of another” (13); both Art and Dash are aware of the simultaneous global and personal meanings of their family stories. Moreover, the fact that Spiegelman represents himself and these familial accounts through graphic narrative underscores the level of self-consciousness at work in representation.

²⁹ Following this strip in *Virginia Quarterly Review*’s publication of “Portrait” is the original comic-strip version of “Maus.” (“Maus” is also republished in *Breakdowns* [2008].)

In addition, the impossibility of identical repetition because of recontextualization also plays an important role in Spiegelman's use of graphic narrative. Repeated texts or images are always resituated with a difference, and repetition of panels is no exception: even if two identical panels appear in the same narrative, they are not duplicates. Rather, the two images are always distinct because of a citation effect, whereby the second and subsequent images cite the original image. The repetition of the panel, if the panels are distantly repeated, raises the specter or the memory of the first, or, if the occurrences are contiguous, emphasizes a particular point. Significant for this repetition, as Groensteen asserts, "being isomorphs, these panels cannot be 'isotopes'; by definition, they cannot occupy the same site" (149). Like memories, panels cannot be repeated exactly; upon each repetition or reoccurrence, there is a recontextualization. For Spiegelman, each moment of recontextualization provides a new space for considering the significance of personal and historical events. Seriality, then, works in tandem with the archive fever inherent in Spiegelman's contemporary graphic narrative, both thematically and structurally, as he investigates the authorial possibilities of repetition and recontextualization in memory.

The Book as Object: Archiving Memory

Ultimately, you are left with all of these things together that create something new, that's made of pieces. [...] I wanted to use something very traditional in the sense that each sequence has a little miniature story inside it. But the thing that I am making is something other than that. So, the point of making these little anecdotes was to build a model of how memory works.

—Art Spiegelman, in a 2008 interview with MK2

An archive, Susan Stabile asserts, “is both a physical place and a metaphor for memory,” that, she continues, “presents a kind of homesickness, a pain or longing to return home or to some lost past, where one remembers a sense of wholeness and belonging” (9). In *Maus*, one of the most harrowing moments for Art is the discovery that Vladek burned Anja’s diaries. This destruction goes against the author’s preservationist and writerly instincts while it simultaneously reinforces and, indeed, embodies the impossibility of returning to the past.³⁰ Both the physical site of preservation as well as the documents preserved therein, archives embody Nora’s *lieux de memoire*, the possibilities of memory, and its various manifestations: postmemory, counter-memory, cultural memory, personal memory, or collective memory. In *Archive Fever* (1995), Derrida begins his enumeration of the archive with the word itself, pointing out that *Arkhe* is derived from the Greek *arkheion*, “initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded” (2). Etymologically associated with domestic spaces or the interior life, the archive was both part of the domestic sphere and associated with people of power before it gained its association with a public repository. In *Maus*, Vladek embodies this particular position: in the present action of the narrative, he is rarely seen outside the domestic situation; he is, in Buss’ language, Art’s “significant other” in terms of the interrelationality of the memoir; and it is by his hand that documents and memories are preserved or destroyed. Spiegelman’s concern with his family’s archival materials

³⁰ In “Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and the Graphic Narrative,” Jeanne Ewert suggests that the destruction of the diaries “might not have happened years before the book’s writing began, but perhaps in response to the competition from a narrative that would rival Vladek’s own” (191).

follows with the archontic principle of the archive, which Derrida suggests is also a principle of gathering together, or of collecting. The archontic principle of the archive is made manifest in Spiegelman's serial memoir, as he exposes the seriality and familiarity inherent in the project of self-collecting or self-archivization. While the twentieth-century may have been "the century of witness," it has also been a century wherein citizenship, documentation, and contestatory histories have undermined or challenged those witness testimonies. Collecting the family archives is a material way to preserve the past.

After arriving at this moment in his story, Vladek tells Art that when they arrived at Auschwitz, the men were taken one direction, and the women another. Art pushes Vladek to find the notebooks and, in a panel on the bottom right hand corner of the page (a privileged site, according to Groensteen and Eisner), Vladek says "These notebooks, and other really nice things of Mother ... one time I had a very bad day ... and all of these things I *destroyed*" (I.158, emphasis original). Art is incredulous, and, as the last page of the memoir begins, Vladek explains further: "After Anja died I had to make an order with everything ... these papers had too many *memories*. So I *burned* them" (I. 159, emphasis original). To Art's great dismay, the only thing Vladek can tell him is that Anja "said, 'I wish my son, when he grows up, he will be interested by this'" (I.158). In a clear moment of anger, evidenced by the scowl on Art's face as well as the jagged edges of the dialogue ballon, Art screams "God *Damn* you! You-you *murderer!* How the Hell could you do such a thing!!" (I.158, emphasis original). Vladek chastises him for speaking that way to his father, explaining that he was "so *depressed* then," that

he “didn’t know if [he is] coming or [he is] going,” and Art apologizes. In the final panel of the memoir, also outside of any frame, Art walks away and says, “. . . murderer,” to himself (I.158, emphasis original). As a son, as an artist, as someone invested in strategies of self-narrative, and as the character who tries to preserve and record his family’s stories, the loss of Anja’s diaries is unbelievable to Art. This grief is also palpable for the reader, as Anja’s story has been told by both Vladek and Art. That Art has Vladek say “I didn’t know if I’m coming or I’m going,” while certainly an affect of the Yiddish inflected English Spiegelman has been praised for writing so well, also leaves the reader with the distinct impression that Vladek is far from finished mourning. The tense confusion here indicates that he still is unsure if he is coming or going, and the grief he feels is compounded by the fact that Art has been asking him to relive this unimaginably difficult time.

Art’s search for Anja’s diaries resonates with his own project of self-narration over time. Reading *Breakdowns*, *Maus*, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, and *Portrait* as serially published, readers are offered glimpses into the past—either distant or recent—as Spiegelman allows us to read the records of his own episodic life writing. While diaries and memoirs are two distinct genres of life writing, they share many elements, particularly in their ability to be written, published, and read serially and episodically; the seriality inherent in these forms of life writing put them in direct contrast to a genre like autobiography, and they challenge the idea of self-representation in one volume. In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson define diary as “a form of periodic life writing [that] records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses. [. . .]

[T]he diary is fragmented, revisionary, in process” (193). Indeed, that the writer does not know what will happen in the future, and doesn’t hesitate to publish the “story so far,” to use a device of comic books, underscores the development of the author as both a protagonist and an author; what “happens next,” in future episodes, is a surprise to everyone. The immediacy of the diary, its fragmentary and in-process narrative structure, and its periodic or serial nature aligns the genre of diary with memoir, and it is no surprise that graphic memoirists like Spiegelman have noted the similarities.³¹ Indeed, serial publication works as a way to collect one’s own work and to archive it in the public sphere, while simultaneously mimicking the periodic writing of a diary. This public/private distinction is, perhaps, one of the most significant in distinguishing the two genres.

Phillipe Lejeune, most well known for his explanation of the autobiographical pact, has recently shifted his critical gaze to the form of diary. In a recent article, “How Do Diaries End?” (2001), he explains that, while beginnings of diaries are usually quite clear, their endings are far more complicated. Conventional guides for diarists, Lejeune explains, contain a great deal of advice on how an author can end an autobiography, but “it wouldn’t occur to anyone to explain how to end a diary. It would be like writing a treatise on suicide” (100). Likewise, serial memoir does not afford its readers or its practitioners an end, as writers engage in serial writing in order to avoid closure. Lejeune proposes four reasons for which people write diaries: to express themselves (either to release in order to separate emotions or thoughts, or to communicate), to

³¹ Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir, *Fun Home*, also uses the diary as a foundational structure, as does Harvey Pekar in *American Splendor*.

reflect (either to analyze oneself or to deliberate), to freeze time, and to take pleasure in writing. Without Anja's diaries, it is impossible to know what her specific reasons were for writing, but it is possible that she wrote to release herself from the weighty memories of the camps. Spiegelman writes to freeze time; using the form of graphic narrative, he immobilizes each moment in a particular frame, rendering the image permanent.

Lejeune's explains that, by "freeze time," he suggests the possibilities for constructing "a memory out of paper, to create archives from lived experience, to accumulate traces, prevent forgetting, to give life the consistency and continuity it lacks. [...] Here we're in the state of mind of the collector. The accumulated series, growing by one unit each day, is always incomplete. Stopping the daily entry is a relative failure; *destroying the diary is a total failure*—at least from this perspective" (107, emphasis mine). The creation of memory out of paper and the desire to accumulate traces of lived experience is one of the projects inherent in Spiegelman's serial memoir; his oeuvre devotes itself to the possibilities of exposing the materiality of graphic testimony in order to emphasize a cultural or historical need for its preservation.

Moreover, Spiegelman's reaction to the destruction of Anja's diaries—his anger and frustration with his father, going so far as to call his father a "murderer"—indicates his dedication to the records his mother left: he is invested in what the diaries contained, certainly, but he also demonstrates his commitment to the texts themselves. The desire to keep death at bay through publication is seen in Spiegelman's own serial publication of the plates contained in *No Towers*, and can also be seen as Spiegelman reflects on his career in comics. Texts will usually outlive their authors, and, as Lejeune suggests,

“death can prevent me from continuing my diary, but it can’t undo the diary. Paper has its own biological rhythm. It will long outlive me. It will end up yellowing and crumbling, but the text that it bears will have its own reincarnations, it can change bodies, be recopied, published” (110). In *Maus*, there are many scenes in which paper is seen as a precious commodity because paper may outlive the writer, and the impulse toward preservation—either bodily or textual self-preservation—is paramount. In the camps, letters and the privileges of communication are underscored (figure 8), and while there are dangers inherent in written communication, these scenes of preservation are figured as necessary for survival and testimony. “As a relation to events,” Shoshana Felman points out, “testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference” (5). Indeed, Spiegelman presents his texts, and thus his memories, as bits and pieces, often inherited from his parents, and in the form of graphic serial memoir. The serial, as with the bricolage of contemporary memoirs and the permeability of archives, by definition, exceeds frames of reference; that it is frequently condemned as excessive and interminable means little when it is a form which eloquently presents Spiegelman’s particular situation.

In the first selection of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&?!*, Spiegelman focuses on when he wrote “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” and includes traditionally archived supplementary material, like early sketches and notes for the strip’s breakdown. The images are layered one upon the other, creating a collaged version of a comic strip.

Indeed, retaining each individual frame, this page visually competes with the preceding pages' consistency and uniformity. Most of the frames are associated with a letter or space, ultimately spelling out the title: *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&?!.* In a group of frames, the final "t" in "portrait" through the "s" in "as," Spiegelman writes, "Dear Diary, thinking back on the days when I drew 'Prisoner on the Hell Planet,' I looked through a box of old family photographs. // I don't tend to confuse Art and Therapy (making Art is cheaper) but I *did* think Hell planet had helped me 'deal' with Anja's suicide... // 33 years after drawing that strip, 33 years after my mother's death, I didn't expect the bolt of pain!" The final image in this group is a photograph of a teen-aged Art, showing his mother something in *MAD*. That Spiegelman went to a box of family photographs in order to piece together his reflective personal essay for the reissue of *Breakdowns* is not a surprise, as he has shown a fierce loyalty to the power of photographs and images.³² To combine his artistic archive with his personal archive, however, to follow a page full of notes and sketches from "Prisoner" with another photograph of Art and his mother reading comics together, emphasizes the impossibility of moving "beyond" the moment of her death for him. While he thought he had "deal[t]" with her death, it is clear from the "bolt of pain" he feels that it is not about time, but about the seriality of memory and the materiality of preservation.

Spiegelman's archival impulse is understandable, as he continuously attempts to reconcile the inherited fragments of memory that make up his texts, and the desire to

³² In "Portrait," in *Breakdowns* (2008), Spiegelman quotes from Susan Sontag's *On Photography* as he discusses the interface between word and image in the relationship between a caption and a photograph (n. pag). Both he, and readers, remember the power of his mother's photograph at the beginning of "Prisoner," which worked as a catalyst for his emotions and creative energies when he originally crafted the strip.

preserve is in line with seriality. Graphic narrative is an excellent form in which the present is made aware of its own archive; even as readers progress in the text, the images themselves remain on the page, waiting for the reader's gaze to return to them. Past and present, then, exist simultaneously on the page. "Here the double-vision that allows present and past to coexist is not uncanny, but natural, inevitable, and responsible," writes Jared Gardner. "These are not the lost souls of a forgotten past, but the soon-to-be-past traces of the living present" (803-04). The simultaneity of past and present, as figured generally in contemporary memoir, and graphically presented in Spiegelman's texts, emphasizes the relevance seriality has for contemporary subjectivity. The present will quickly become the past, and the detritus of today will become the archive of tomorrow; this repetition and recursivity is foundational to the materiality of seriality in postmodern America.

For Spiegelman, the materiality of the text is as important as the ephemerality of the past, as he "is one of many comic artists for whom layout, typography, and the physical design of books are important signifiers in themselves—artists for whom print and paper are privileged reference points, and the tension between experience and object is paramount" (Hatfield 73).³³ The conflict between experience and object underscores the tension between ephemerality and physicality as it highlights the particular position of someone whose memories are part of a larger system of stories. Moreover, because

³³ Much of the popular and critical response to *In the Shadow of No Towers* emphasized the materiality of the book; it's an oversized text with cardboard pages that clearly places the idea of book-as-object in the fore of conversations about the text.

contemporary subjectivity is frequently grounded in the consumer reality of objects, postmodern subjects often understand themselves through materiality.

The materiality of the text often stands in for the ephemerality of memory and testimonial storytelling, as it attempts to make a case for recording the past. In testimony, according to Felman, language is always in-process. “To testify,” Felman writes, “to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one’s own speech as material evidence for truth—is to accomplish a *speech act*, rather than to simply formulate a statement” (5). Testimony as performative speech act is more powerful than simple speech, and it attempts to provide voice as material evidence of witnessed events; if it is not written or recorded, however, that testimony will not take material form. Memory has a history, Smith and Watson suggest, “and that history is material. We locate memory and specific practices of remembering in our own bodies and in specific objects of our experiential histories” (*Interfaces* 9). The materiality of history and the seriality of memory are foundational to the way Spiegelman conceives of and constructs his memoirs. They are impressive physical objects that testify, both in their content and as objects themselves, to history as he understands it.

Spiegelman’s texts also underscore the presence of repetition and recursivity of memory, as so frequently enumerated in trauma studies; that his texts take the form of serial graphic memoir reinforces the fact that the witnessing and testimony are engaged in seriality. As Helen Buss argues, in order to make witnessing into testimony, formal arrangement is of the utmost importance and should be considered “an artful activity” (123). She continues, explaining that “writing such a testimony as a memoir is a delicate

search for a form that can contain both the personal narrative and the cultural and historical contexts that make personal witnessing into public testimony” (123).

Spiegelman’s search for a form, and the manifestation of that form in the serial graphic memoir, is no accident. Indeed, the materiality of testimony is clearly significant when considered in the context of the Holocaust, as Spiegelman suggests, but it is also important in order to preserve memories from other moments in time, such as one person’s feelings after the events of September 11, 2001, or, indeed, to present a record of one’s lived experience.³⁴ Presenting the self, serially and graphically, as an object in a text, points to the desire to reconcile the tension between experience and materiality, as the subject becomes an object through which experiences can be recounted.

Seriality and Self-Representation: Graphic Displacement, or the Many Faces of Art

*Note: Though **Happy Hooligan** is a fictional character borrowed from the first Sunday comics, the following interview is 100% nonfiction.*
—Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*

Spiegelman’s self-representational style shifts constantly; he illustrates the serial memoir’s challenges to traditional concepts of closure and order as he places the idea of a unified self under scrutiny. An expression of postmodern selfhood, the graphic serial

³⁴ Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven assert in their introduction to a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to graphic narrative that, “in the present moment, images have never been more important, or more under seige” (771). “Photography is an embattled medium in the wake of recent disasters in the US,” they continue, “after 9/11, the ‘falling man’ photograph by the AP’s Richard Drew, which showed a man who jumped from the North Tower falling head-first before the building collapsed, was censored” (771). Spiegelman’s reaction to the 2005 controversy surrounding the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, further underscores the power images have in contemporary culture. “We live in a culture where images rule,” Spiegelman asserts, “and it’s as big a divide as the secular/religious divide—the picture/word divide.” The worldwide, and often violent, protests sparked by these images, when placed in historical context with other controversial moments in contemporary history—the images from Iraq, from Afghanistan, from Abu Ghraib, from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina—reinforces the significance of both drawn images and of photographs.

memoir is a way to materially and visually reflect an uncontainable and shifting perspective of provisional selfhood. This variable perspective is clear through both the styles in which the texts are written as well by the ways in which Spiegelman represents himself across panels and texts.³⁵ Serial self-representation allows the reader a way of understanding how the writer understands subjectivity—and, in Spiegelman’s texts, graphically images the self—across texts, time, and space.

From the publication of the early “Maus” strip to the longer *Maus* memoirs, there is a distinct shift in pictorial styles which illustrates a transition in the way Spiegelman represents himself. The differences between the early strip and the longer memoirs were clear to Spiegelman from the beginning. As he told interviewer Alfred Bergdoll in 1979:

what I’m doing with *Maus* is ... I don’t think extension is the right word. I don’t know what the right word is, but I’m doing *Maus* for the first time. I sort of had this little sneak preview that excited me to work on this project, which was the *Funny Aanimals* three-page “Maus,” but what I’m doing now is so much more extensive that it’s something else completely. It has different requirements, a different rhythm, a completely different work. (7)

Visually, the two texts are strikingly distinct and it is unsurprising that Spiegelman sees them as entirely different projects. In the early strip, the mice are presented as far more visually complex and individualized than in the graphic memoir. Joseph Witek, in his

³⁵“Prisoner on the Hell Planet” has been described as having been drawn in an expressionist scratchboard style, while *Maus* is seen as minimalist; Kartalopoulos suggests that “it is worth noting Spiegelman’s utilization of expressionist scratchboard *styles*, plural” (“Comics,” emphasis original).

groundbreaking study of comics, *Comic Books as History* (1989), suggests that the final style in *Maus* “renders the figures minimally with just dots for eyes and short slashes for eyebrows and mouths” (106). This mask-like representation of figures in *Maus* foregrounds the difficult job of representation—and, significantly, of self-representation—in these particular texts.³⁶ In creating the longer text, Spiegelman made a clear choice against the intricate drawings he created in “Maus,” instead drawing ciphers, characters with mask-like faces. That he doesn’t see one as an extension of the other is important for recognizing distinctions between seriality and sequentiality: while these texts follow one another chronologically, they are independent works that happen to cover some of the same material in a recursive-yet-separate fashion. The way that these projects approach self-representation and the stories Spiegelman tells are very different, even if they do share plot-level similarities.

Spiegelman’s self-awareness is visible throughout the memoirs, but it is especially evident in the second volume of *Maus*. In the oft-cited passage of *Maus II*’s second chapter, “Auschwitz (time flies),” Spiegelman presents himself at his drawing table as a human wearing an animal mask. His desk is perched upon the emaciated bodies of concentration camp victims, and he is clearly distressed. Erin McGlothlin and others point to Spiegelman’s use of a mouse mask over Art’s head as another moment of self-reflexivity; the text is aware of itself as a product and that the ways in which Spiegelman chooses to represent people and situations was done for a specific reason

³⁶ Spiegelman told NPR’s “Fresh Air” in 1986 that “to use these ciphers, the cats and mice, is actually a way to allow you past the cipher at the people who are experiencing it. So it’s really a much more direct way of dealing with the material” (qtd in Witek 102).

(183). This moment comes after Spiegelman has graphically represented his struggle to find the right way to draw Françoise, and after he has articulated how he envisions the first book beginning; both of these moments are points at which Spiegelman asks the reader to be aware, as he is, of the constructed nature of these characters and images.³⁷

The fact that a memoirist graphically presents an avatar of selfhood is significant precisely because of the visual component. Rather than through the repetition of proper nouns or pronouns, as evident in non-graphic texts, in graphic narratives the protagonist is visually repeated in a large number of panels and so the way an author chooses to figure the self is significant. There is a peculiar distance required of graphic memoirists as they are not afforded the simple “I” of non-graphic texts, and instead, must figure out a way to present their likeness visually. Hatfield suggests that this distance requires a certain estrangement or alienation “through which the cartoonist-autobiographer regards himself as *other*, as a distinct character to be seen as well as heard. [...] Objectification of the self, through visual representation, may actually enable the autobiographer to articulate and uphold his or her own sense of identity” (114-115). The fact that, in

³⁷ These moments of self-consciousness are places the tripartite narrator in memoir, defined by Helen Buss as the participant, the witness, and the reflective/reflexive consciousness, is particularly important for readers to fully understand the multidimensional narrator in Spiegelman’s memoirs; the narrator in memoir is more complicated than most narrators in either fiction or traditional autobiography.³⁷ The reflective/reflexive consciousness, Buss explains, is outside of the narrative world of the text and is able to provide readers with multiple contexts and a temporally more objective perspective (16). This temporally exterior narratorial perspective is precisely what readers are presented with during this moment in *Maus II*; Spiegelman has explained to readers how much he struggled with the success of the first volume of *Maus* and his discomfort with publicity. Throughout the text, we watch as Art, the participant, listens to his father’s tape-recorded stories. He is also the witness, through both the second-generation memory of postmemory and through his own first-person encounters with his father. Finally, he presents the reflective/reflexive consciousness through the visual presentation of Art at the drawing table, as he thinks about the publication of *Maus* and its critical success, and through the trope of the mask. When drawn from the front, the mouse face looks genuine, and readers could believe that they are in the story itself; when shown from the side, readers are able to see the strings of the mask, the artifice of the narrative construction.

addition to presenting himself as “other” to his readers, he must also present himself as “other” to himself is compelling because it literally demonstrates the idea of having multiple selves. The multiplicity of selfhood, assert many postmodern thinkers, is a cultural reality; in postmodern culture, the idea of an uncomplicated understanding of the essential self has evaporated, and in its place are multiple tellings of self-narratives. Graphic narrative is a powerful medium through which to assert the multiplicity of self because the otherness of visually recreating the self in comics is complimented by the very “syntax of comics—specifically, its reliance on visual substitution to suggest continuity—puts the lie to the notion of an unchanging, undivided self, for in the breakdowns of comics we see the self (in action over a span of time) represented by *multiple selves*” (Hatfield 126).

This is particularly true in *Maus*, where he drew himself as a mouse, or in certain strips within *No Towers* or *Portrait*, where he represents himself as a body with different objects in place of his head. In these moments, Spiegelman presents his own image as a part of a larger collection of images of objects; his head is no more his own than a lampshade or his own hand. In “The System of Objects,” Baudrillard writes:

The singular object never impedes the process of narcissistic projection, which ranges over an indefinite number of objets: on the contrary, it encourages such multiplication, thus associating itself with a mechanism whereby the image of the self is extended to the very limits of the collection. Here, indeed, lies the whole miracle of collecting. For it is invariably *oneself* that one collects. (12, *emphasis original*)

The materiality of the objects Spiegelman presents in place of his own head is significant because of the materiality of seriality; the image he presents of himself, one that readers have seen repeated throughout his texts, is not confused by the “Weapons of Mass Displacement” presented instead of himself. Rather, through self-objectification, he collects himself. The objectification of the narrator is underscored in “Weapons” as Spiegelman illustrates the artist’s ability to change his physical appearance. In each panel in this strip, he shifts the placement of body parts and household objects—his head is replaced by his cigarette-holding hand, his foot, his cat, and a lampshade—while the narrator’s voice and presence remains continuous in the strip’s narrative. Foregrounding strategies for self-representation and supplementarity, Spiegelman is able to use the continuity of comics to his advantage as he illustrates the ability to represent the self as a variety of personae without undermining his perspective.

In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&?!* , Spiegelman extends the technique of displacing his head or his face. The second panel of the first installment of his introduction features Art’s head without a face, perhaps to emphasize the serial development of himself as an artist and as a character graphically represented within his memoirs. Instead of his facial features, Spiegelman inserts a squiggly-line, a line which appears repeatedly in a variety of guises throughout the introduction. This squiggle represents a link to his mother, who turns the squiggly-line into hair on a face. In the first panel on the following page, Spiegelman draws his mother’s face in the foreground, staring out of a window. Her face is framed by the panes of the window, physically rendering her separate from a teen-aged Art, who is in a separate part of the panel,

framed away from her by the window panes. These panes mimic prison bars, a connection further emphasized by the second panel on the line: another faceless Art, this time rendered in the prison clothes from “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” and whose face, instead of presented as a squiggly-line, and is replaced by the words “Hell Planet,” drawn in an eerie script. Underneath this image, Spiegelman includes a location and a date: San Francisco, 1972.

In this section of the introduction, Spiegelman gives his readers the back story to his own life as he created “Prisoner,” ultimately blurring and recontextualizing the boundaries between author, protagonist, and witness. On the fifth page of this excerpt, Spiegelman includes the ephemera he collected as he wrote “Prisoner,” including sketches and notes for the frames that will ultimately comprise this early strip. Following this moment, Spiegelman also images himself as, among other things, having a head replaced by an over-stuffed suitcase, whose label reads “unpacking,” and wearing prison stripes, the date reads: Soho, nyc. 2005; a bawling infant whose mouth provides the backdrop for the words “Cry-Baby,” and the date Stockholm, ca 1949; a young Art, whose facial features are obscured by the words “Mad Love,” printed upside down, in script that echoes *MAD Magazine*, below which is the date: Washington Heights, nyc, 1955; a mirror image to the earlier “Unpacking” frame, which now says “Packing,” and the date reads Rego Park, nyc. ca 1960; and, finally, as having a light bulb for a head, inside of which the word “Genius,” is written in script—here, Art wields a wooden mallet, placed precariously near the light bulb, and the date is written as Rego Park, nyc. 1964?1965??.

His self-portrait, then, is always understood through its relation to material objects.³⁸ Essentially, the repetition of drawn selves is also the presentation of multiple selves, each self positioned in a different spatio-topical moment. For serial memoir in particular, this presentation of the self across panels and texts is significant because as much as the image itself may be consistent, the repetition of that image in multiple panels and in discrete texts articulates the impossibility of a stable self or unified subject. Repetition of a self-image suggests difference and movement. Hatfield argues that “[t]he representation of time through space, and the fragmentation of space into contiguous images, argue for the changeability of the individual self—the possibility that our identities may be more changeable, or less stable, than we care to imagine” (126). The changeability of the self, whether or not the self is consistently represented, is one illustration of the isomorphic quality of the individual panels; memories are constantly recontextualized, and so is Spiegelman’s self-image.

In representing the self, Spiegelman’s texts point out, memoirists must also present the ways in which the self has changed over the course of time and through the course of history. Memoir, Buss suggests, “is a form in which history must come into concourse with literature in order to make a self, a life, and to locate that living self in a history, an era, a relational and communal identity” (xiv). The self that Spiegelman

³⁸ As another example of serial self-representation and graphic displacement, Spiegelman uses the images of beloved characters from old comic strips to stand in for himself. He provides his own take on George McManus’ strip “Bringing Up Father,” titled “Marital Blitz,” in which he is given the image of Jiggs and his wife the image of Maggie (plate 8), and he assumes the persona and “hapless” nature of Happy Hooligan in several different places (plates 6, 10).³⁸ It is clear through the both the dialogue and the narrative that these characters allow Spiegelman to illustrate for his readers the significance “old comic strips” have for the way he understands himself after September 11, 2001, while simultaneously asserting the unfixing nature of one’s self-image. Even as he shifts from image to image, however, that the narratorial voice or presence has not changed.

locates in each of the different strips, on each of the plates, is as varied as the strips themselves. What they do have in common, however, is the presentation of a relational and historically specific self which shifts from strip to strip. In *No Towers*, Spiegelman frequently presents himself as a human man: wearing glasses, dark pants, a white shirt, and a black vest. His dark hair is thinning on top, he is usually smoking a cigarette, and keeps a pen in the pocket of his shirt. These things are, more or less, consistent throughout the narrative, and they remain so even when he portrays himself with a mouse head. “*Seeing* the protagonist or narrator,” Hatfield asserts, “in the context of other characters and objects evoked in the drawings, objectifies him or her. Thus the cartoonist projects and objectifies his or her inward sense of self, achieving at once a sense of intimacy and a critical distance” (115, emphasis original). One reason for this consistency in self-representation, then, is that the characters are figured in a material, objectified way. The reader may feel a closeness with the artist because the artist has presented an intimate version of the self, but the reader is also kept at an important critical distance, ultimately outside the telling of the story.

When Spiegelman chooses to represent the narrator as the *Maus* mouse, it is for a specific reason. In some instances, he represents a frightened child, and places this childlike mouse self, in the “McSpiegelman” version of Winsor McKay’s “Little Nemo in Slumberland” (plates 6-7). The childlike version of the self is significant to Spiegelman’s serial self-representation because the “Maus” comic strip begins with the

child mouse, listening to his father’s stories about the Holocaust.³⁹ Representing the childlike self, whether a version of Art as a child or of his own children, illustrates the recursivity of familial history and of generations.⁴⁰ Rather than imitate the outdoor city scenes for which McKay is so famous, however, Spiegelman uses the final frames of the “Little Nemo” strips, when the child has woken from dreaming. In the first, placed in the bottom, right corner of the sixth plate, one frame done in the “McSpiegelman” style is superimposed over the end of the previous strip about the “Crazy Lady.” The child mouse self has fallen out of bed and tells his mother—figured as a blonde human in a pink nightgown and gas mask—about his nightmare: “Then John Ashcroft pulled off his burka and shoved me out the window.” The second version of “Little Nemo” is on the next plate, placed in the same position as it was on plate six.

It is on plate two, however, that the Art-as-mouse narrator is most reminiscent of the *Maus* narratives. Here, the larger strip presents the ongoing narrative of the morning of September 11. In this storyline, Art and his wife, Françoise, search for their daughter, Nadja, whose school sat at the base of the World Trade Center. The page is flanked on

³⁹ The second plate on which the “McSpiegelman” panel appears is after the strip “An Upside Down World,” a six-panel strip in which a dejected Spiegelman thinks about the “**war to begin all wars**” that his “unelected government” had just started (boldface original). This strip features governmental officials drawn in red, brandishing weapons, flags, and bibles, excited about “Redemption!” and “Pre-emption!” This strip is headed with a short anecdote about how his eleven year-old son “woke up dreaming he was in Baghdad and bombs were falling on him” Because this particular part of the plate begins with the anecdote about Spiegelman’s son, this panel could as easily be representative of the child’s nightmares as it could of Spiegelman’s own.

⁴⁰ Spiegelman’s attention to the role genealogy plays in self-construction resonates with Foucault’s theories about the fragmentation of genealogy. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault writes that searching for descent “is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (147). This description of the search for descent resonates with my argument about memoir generally, and serial memoir in particular, as memoirists “disturb” the past and illustrating that the past, and memory, is disjointed and fluid.

the left by the “glowing bones” of the tower and on the right by a lit cigarette, on which “In the Shadow of No Towers” appears. The center of the page is divided into four separate sections, but features only two distinct strips in an alternating pattern: the narrative of going to Nadja’s school to find her, in which characters are rendered as humans, and Art-as-mouse talking about smoke, the smoke in Auschwitz, the air in Lower Manhattan after September 11, 2001, and cigarette smoke. Here, smoke becomes directly linked with the past, as the narrator from *Maus* reappears here: a grayscale Art is drawn in contrast to the bright colors of *No Towers*, visually linking him even more to the black and white of the *Maus* narrative. “I remember my father, trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like,” he tells us in *No Towers*. As the strip continues, Art makes an important connection between the smoke his father smelled in Auschwitz and the air after the terrorist attacks.

This parallel is reiterated in the first paragraph of Spiegelman’s introduction to the memoir, as he explains that “outrunning the toxic cloud of the World Trade Center left me reeling on that faultline where World History and Personal History collide—the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed.” This intersection between “World History and Personal History” lends itself to serial memoir as history or histories are contextualized and told in an episodic fashion, thus allowing serial self-representation in the guise of multiple personae and a variety of perspectives. In fact, as the strip continues over the next fifteen panels, Art makes the connection between the smoke his father smelled in Auschwitz and the air after the terrorist attacks; he criticizes the United States

government for lying about the quality of the air and for not taking care of the New York City's children. The narrator here holds up a sign, which obscures panels that seem to be necessary for two different strips. Instead, readers are presented with a sign that features two children in gas masks. Art's sign is placed outside the panel frame, emphasizing the disjointed nature of the flow of events during this point in the narrative, disrupting his own panels, and highlighting the timelessness of this message: "NYC to Kids: Don't Breathe!" As the sign foregrounds the rest of the narrative panels, the danger persists into the present.

Aware that memoir is not solely about the self, Spiegelman occasionally chooses not to represent himself at all. Instead, in an act of witnessing rather than self-presentation, Spiegelman's physical effacement of the narrator's portrait does not mean that the narrator is absent; rather, readers are still given the narrator's perspective, but it becomes a perspective of communal witnessing. In *No Towers* there are two entire plates—twenty percent of Spiegelman's original pages—in which the image of Art does not appear. The first plate of the *No Towers* is a representation of the immediate, collective reaction to the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center; rather than show himself, Spiegelman chooses to give his readers the image that has stayed with him since the attack: the "glowing bones" of the North Tower in seven large panels. This image, of the North Tower's destruction, is one that resonates with readers, not because of the perspective from which it is represented but because this is one version of the image that was repeatedly presented to the world. In the fifth plate, rather than focus on the collective trauma and fear of September 11 itself, Spiegelman presents three

different strips about how he sees the post-September 11 political climate: the tower's "glowing bones" as they become distorted; the formation of an "Ostrich Party," dedicated to "Ris[ing] Up and Stick[ing] Your Heads in the Ground!"; the Tower Twins as they, on fire, are doused with oil by the stand-in for Uncle Sam, "Uncle Screwloose," and are then chased by hornets and an "Iraknid," who has the face of Saddam Hussein.

It is significant that the visual narrator is absent from these plates because Spiegelman has made a career out of presenting his life in relation to others as well as in relation to an historical moment. Buss suggests that, "[i]n memoir, real lives happen in all their daily richness in parallel and in connection with public life. We are allowed into that richness so that we can better feel the effect when private lives are crushed by public policies" (128), and *No Towers* illustrates the impact of public policies on an individual's life. Spiegelman's reactions to those policies become the focus of many of the strips in last five of his original pages. Rather than focussing on his own mourning, for example, Spiegelman centers on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The historical situation of the 2000 presidential election, also discussed on plate seven, is combined with the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 and the beginning of the war in Iraq in 2003. These two pages, without providing Art's image, posits Spiegelman as collective witness. While *No Towers* is only one person's reaction to the loss of the Twin Towers, it also reflects the significance of the collective grief and national responsibility he feels. These historic, national events can also be understood as "a succession of continuous or discontinuous images" that, when linked together by some system, forms a series of events (Groensteen 146). Indeed, the correspondence of these

events is foregrounded in *No Towers*; rather present these images in a clear sequence of events that indicate a singular plot, they are included as incongruous and fragmented.

A Tentative Conclusion

*The negotiation of everyday narratives is an ongoing process
rather than a certain achievement.*
—Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Introduction,” *Getting a Life*

How can I make a memoir? I can't even remember what happened last week!
—Art Spiegelman, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&?!*

The second half of *In the Shadow of No Towers* is made up of “The Comic Supplement,” in which Spiegelman offers his readers an historical perspective on turn-of-the-century comics assembled into a ten-plate collection. This history is given from Spiegelman’s contemporary point of view, as he discusses the history of the production of comics in New York City. Chronicling the rise of Pulitzer and Hearst’s Yellow Journalism, for example, Spiegelman remarks that “[t]heir distorted reporting of the Spanish-American War [...] would have made Fox News proud.” Examining his collection through a post-September 11, 2001, Manhattan perspective, it is clear that each comic strip in the seven-strip archive has been selected in order to give readers the kind of lens through which Spiegelman himself looks at these comic strips, recontextualizing the images from their early significations into contemporary ones. “Like the early years of the twentieth-century,” Jared Gardner explains, the early twenty-first century “is a time when the connection between the words and images that we encounter in our daily lives is as frenetic, jumbled, and potentially disconnected as it ever has been” (803). Spiegelman’s “Comic Supplement,” and the ten original plates

which it follows, juxtapose texts, images, current events, history, and postmemory in a complicated alinear narrative structure. Here, as Spiegelman discusses the history and tradition of comic strips, he alludes to a particular one and discusses it in depth. This technique allows his reader to read the history without simultaneously being presented with the comic itself. While Spiegelman does indicate to which panel he refers, he gives his readers the option to examine the strip during a reading of the introduction, or later. While he provides his readers with a narrative of his collection, extremely helpful to those readers who lack an historical background of the tradition of comics, Spiegelman also provides his readers with the collection itself, allowing readers to examine the pieces of ephemera.

This collection assembles seven comic strips, published in New York or by a New Yorker at the turn of the last century, and features a wide variety of artistic styles. Spiegelman includes George Herriman's "Krazy Kat," Lyonel Feninger's Kinder Kids in "The Kin-der-Kids Abroad," Richard Outcault's Yellow Kid in "The War Scare in Hogan's Alley," "The Upside-Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo," by Gustave Verbeck, a collaborative effort by four of Hearst's artists to create "The Glorious Fourth of July," Frederick Opper's Happy Hooligan in "Is This Abdullah, the Arab Chief?," Winsor McKay's "Little Nemo in Slumberland," and a poignant "Bringing Up Father," by George McManus, in which Jiggs is able to prop up the Leaning Tower of Pisa in order to keep it from falling. Images of Manhattan and New York City are combined with commentaries about patriotism, immigration, terrorism, racism, surrealism, and fear, all of which illuminate Spiegelman's original strips while

reinforcing a common historical position. Moreover, this collection emphasizes the importance of the role of graphics, of visuality, and of comic strips in particular in telling these narratives. Sequential art, as evidenced by the strips in this collection, has a significant and unique place in storytelling; the serial production of these strips assures readers that the story will not, does not, end.

“Comics chronicle the twilight world, the liminal space between past and present, text and image, creator and reader,” Gardner writes. “The comic frame is necessarily a space where these binaries overlap, collaborate and compete for attention and meaning” (801). Spiegelman’s use of comics in order to chronicle the liminal space between personal history and world history also emphasizes the liminal position of the serial memoir, as a genre which demands its readers and practitioners to reexamine textual boundaries. If, as Naomi Schor asserts, “to complete the series is to die” (202), the authors of serial memoir also work in the liminal space between memory and actuality, between life and death. The archive is a material representation of this final liminal position, making that which is ephemeral permanent; “The archive is not a passive record,” Currie points out, “but an active producer of the present: an ‘archiving archive’ which structures the present in anticipation of its recollection” (12). Structuring the present in anticipation of its re-collection, and, further, figuring the self in anticipation of re-figuring the self, forces the author to examine what it means to write a life narrative. Collecting ephemeral items, like comic strips, to put in a collection or archive for posterity is not the same as collecting family stories, and yet the boundaries between these distinctions begin to break down when the stories are presented through a

collection of images—photographs or comic strips—and preserved for posterity in a variety of media.

This collected yet serial self is presented as inherently and always unfinished, as are the lives of actual individuals. The 1977 edition of *Breakdowns* worked as an archive of Spiegelman's early texts, and the 2008 edition is an archive of the previous text, even as they are situated squarely within the larger self-referential tradition of *Maus*, *Maus II*, and *No Towers*. Spiegelman's graphic serial memoir exposes an important link between comics and archives as they are: forms that are never solely linear in narrative structure; mediums that privilege the interaction of text, image, and paratextual apparatus; and ways of looking at the self and other that underscore the seriality of the daily, of lived experience. "The comics form is forever troubled by that which cannot be reconciled, synthesized, unified, contained within the frame," Gardner argues, "but it is in being so troubled that the form defines itself. The excess data—the remains of the everyday—is always left behind (even as the narrative progresses forward in time), a visual archive for the reader's necessary work of rereading, resorting, and reframing" (801-02). The "remains of the everyday" that are left behind allow Spiegelman to interrogate the possibilities of understanding oneself and one's daily existence as serial, within a liminal space of text and image that is foundationally repetitive, recursive, and recontextualized. Graphic narrative presents a visual archive for both the memoirist and the reader, and its popularity increases as readers become more comfortable with visual culture. Media studies, the relationship between text and image, the rise of celebrity culture, and the "remains of the everyday" are interrogated in

Augusten Burroughs' serial memoir, as he constructs himself and his self-representational narratives through the lens of television and celebrity culture, and through the queer perspective of camp.

CHAPTER V

AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS AND SERIAL CULTURE:

TELEVISION, CELEBRITY, SELF?

Fundamentally, celebrities represent the disintegration of the distinction between the private and the public. [...] The private sphere is constructed to be revelatory, the ultimate site of truth and meaning for any representation in the public sphere. In a sense, the representation of public action as a manifestation of private experience exemplifies a cultural pattern of psychologization of the public sphere.

—P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Augusten Burroughs published his first book, a novel titled *Sellelevision* (2000), which takes a behind-the-scenes look at the eponymous fictional home shopping network. This novel centers on the significance of celebrity and the power of television as it engages the permeable boundary between public and private, particularly in terms of public performances of self-creation. Burroughs continues to negotiate these themes of postmodern American existence in his creative nonfiction, illustrating the possibilities for self-fashioning within the paradigms of celebrity and performance. Since the publication of *Sellelevision*, Burroughs has crafted a unique series of memoirs which present the influences of contemporary American media and celebrity cultures as central to our self-construction and self-representation. Burroughs' best-selling series of memoirs, *Running with Scissors: A Memoir* (2002), *Dry: A Memoir* (2003), *Magical Thinking: True Stories* (2004), *Possible Side Effects* (2006), and *A Wolf at the Table: A Memoir of My Father* (2008), weave his life narrative through the hyper-mediated landscapes of postindustrial American culture as they emphasize contemporary culture's fascination with celebrity and serial cultural production. Navigating the intersections of sexual, familial, and social expectations,

Burroughs examines and critiques the possibilities for self-creation at the end of the twentieth-century through the “sensibility” of camp (Sontag 275).

Burroughs’ most well-known memoir, *Running with Scissors*, begins as young Augusten watches his mother, Deirdre, prepare herself to give a poetry reading. Burroughs presents his mother’s self-production through brand-name products, such as Jean Naté perfume, Dippity Do hair gel, and Pucci clothes, all of which appear on the first page. As the scene continues, shifting into the present tense, Burroughs writes that she “climbs the stairs slowly, deliberately, reminding [him] of an actress on the way to the stage to accept her Academy Award” (4); he describes her as “shiny, like a star, like a guest on the *Donnie [sic] and Marie Show*” (5);¹ and, ultimately, he decides that she “*is a star. She is just like that lady on TV, Maude. She yells like Maude, she wears wildly colored gowns and long crocheted vests like Maude*” (5, emphasis mine).² In these examples, Augusten refracts his perception of his mother through televisual culture: the televised and glamorous Academy Awards ceremonies, as a celebrity guest on a popular talk show, or as the star of a situation comedy. That is, he understands her as a television star.

At the end of the chapter, she leaves and his writing shifts into the future tense.

Augusten imagines himself imitating his mother’s carefully manufactured self-performance:

¹ The *Donny & Marie Show*, a variety show starring siblings Donny and Marie Osmond, aired from 1976-1979.

² *Maude* was a half-hour American television sitcom, which aired on CBS from September 12, 1972 until April 22, 1978. A spin-off of *All in the Family*, on which Beatrice Arthur had portrayed Maude, Edith Bunker’s cousin, *Maude* centered on the outspoken, middle-aged, politically liberal Maude, who lived in Westchester County, New York, with her fourth husband. I give a more detailed discussion of the seriality of television situation comedies later in this chapter.

I will switch the spotlights on in the living room, illuminating the fireplace, the sofa. [...] I will run from the wall and stand in the spotlight. I will bathe in the light like a star and I will say, “Thank you for coming tonight to my poetry reading.” I will be wearing the dress my mother didn’t wear. It is long, black and 100 percent polyester, my favorite fabric because it flows. I will wear her dress and her shoes and I will be her. (7)

Here, Burroughs places his mother in relation to the television personality of Bea Arthur who, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, models potential modes of unconventional femininity for ambitious women like Deirdre, who tells Augusten that she herself ““was meant to be a *very* famous woman”” (*Running* 12). Through this performance of his mother, Burroughs points out some of the ways in which public figures demonstrate possibilities for repeated acts of self-presentation: their actions are deliberate and orchestrated; they are able to portray themselves in such a way that even their idiosyncrasies (like Bea Arthur’s deep voiced outspoken-ness and her “long crocheted vests”) become part of a carefully staged production; and performers must always be aware of how they look from the audience’s perspective.

Emulating his mother, Augusten also places himself in a system of celebrity and stardom mediated by television, performing a role through which he hopes to understand his mother more clearly. His fondness for polyester’s flowing affectations emphasizes the significance of presentation for him as a child. Burroughs thus presents himself as understanding the power of dramatic performance, of staging, and of bodily

transformation in order to look the part through the discourse of celebrity: he will be “like a star.” Here Burroughs illustrates his adolescent self coming to terms with reality as he sees it: mediated by television and celebrity culture. Nikki Sullivan argues that the consumers of popular culture are actively involved in the process of recreating popular cultural texts, integrating the texts into identity construction (189). Burroughs clearly illustrates his investment in various acts of self-creation modeled on public representations of selfhood extant in contemporary serial culture. This active engagement with texts from popular culture, moreover, is one way readers are given access into Burroughs’ self-reflexive narratives; as readers themselves must fill in the narrative gaps between panels in graphic narrative, here, readers are given certain clues from popular culture, and are expected to make the connections. Burroughs’ ambiguity in certain places, or his failure to make those associations explicit, is one way for him to establish distance between the tripartite narrator and the author.

Burroughs’ performance, however, is excessive; from the beginning of his serial memoir, Burroughs acknowledges the power and role of theatricality in his self-reflexive project. From the second page of *Running with Scissors*, Burroughs notes that, when he was young, he wanted to be a flight attendant because of its aesthetics and accoutrements (“I like uniforms and I would get to wear one, along with a white shirt and a tie, even a tie-tack in the shape of airplane wings” [2]). “I suppose I was just comfortable with the concept of excess,” Burroughs writes (*Running* 94). In fact, Burroughs presents his childhood self as a collector of all things shiny and kitsch: the bookshelves in his room are lined with aluminum foil, and those “shiny bookshelves are lined with treasures” like

empty cans, pictures of jewelry removed from magazines affixed to cardboard and propped upright, a sterling silver spoon from his mother's set of flatware (which he thinks is wonderful and she finds "God-awful tacky" [8]), and a collection of boiled and polished coins (8). Showing readers his childhood collections and illustrating that he is attracted to "shiny things" and "stars," Burroughs outlines his strategies for self-construction and self-narrativization: his is a narrative of camp.

Excess and artifice are two fundamental elements of camp, the theorizations of which begin with Christopher Isherwood's *The World in the Evening* (1954) and Susan Sontag's essay "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964). Since these early forays into the project of determining what camp is and how it works, camp has been predominant in queer theory, even as scholars continue to problematize and work through these early conceptualizations. "Tentatively approached as *sensibility*, *taste*, or *style*, reconceptualised as *aesthetic* or *cultural economy*, and later asserted/reclaimed as *(queer) discourse*," Fabio Cleto writes in his introduction to *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (1999), "camp hasn't lost its relentless power to frustrate all efforts to pinpoint it down to stability, and all the 'old' questions remain to some extent unsettled" (3, emphasis original). In Burroughs' memoirs, camp provides a useful frame through which to interrogate his serial self-performances, even if—or, perhaps, because—the term remains conceptually fluid. As a way to engage his witty and allusive style, his use of seriality as a mode of self-representation, and his astute engagement with contemporary celebrity and televisual culture, camp simultaneously provides a critical foundation on which I base my analysis of Burroughs' serial memoir.

His use of camp crystallizes many of the postmodern elements of contemporary life writing, including self-reflexivity and parody, and it is also evident in his often oblique references to popular culture. The more indeterminate qualities of camp, particularly in its definition and its relation to homosexuality and postmodern theories of subjectivity, are interrogated and exposed in Burroughs' texts.

In this chapter, I extend my investigation of the intersection of mass popular culture and memoir from comics and graphic narrative to the ways in which serialization of television and celebrity affect self-construction. As the opening scene of *Running with Scissors* exemplifies, the serialization of popular culture through television powerfully shapes how contemporary Americans understand themselves and their experiences. Because of the physical integration of television sets into the domestic spaces of home, readers enter Burroughs' childhood through the familiar systems of media programs. I accordingly examine Burroughs' use of audience familiarity with domestic entertainment technologies, specifically television, and the characteristics of such different televisual genres as the reality program, the talk show, the soap opera, and the situation comedy. Likewise, these memoirs are reflected through serial culture's production of celebrities and television personalities, figures who, like the example of Bea Arthur, provide alternative models for the possibilities of self-performance. Using the seriality of celebrity and televisual culture as a frame, I argue that Burroughs presents himself as refracted through a larger, mediated, serial culture in order to complicate conventional notions of self-representation and autobiographical subject positions.

Burroughs' subjectivity is constructed as a continual, serial interaction with social structures. Subjectivity, writes Sally Robinson, is "a continuous process of production and transformation" which creates subjects that are "constituted, differentially, across complex and mobile discursive practices in historically specific ways that involve relations of subjectivity to sociality, to power and to knowledge" (11-12). For Burroughs, serial memoir is one way to narrativize his constantly changing subjectivity as he simultaneously illustrates the ways in which social forms of entertainment—like television programs and celebrity culture—influence how he understands and narrates episodes from his life. Alluding to mass culture throughout his memoirs, I suggest that Burroughs' hyper-referentiality and excessive use of popular culture is one way he presents his narrative as camp. Using seriality and excess as techniques through which to expose the fictions of unified subjectivity and compulsory heterosexuality, Burroughs' serial memoir simultaneously queers and models possible ways of self-narrativization at the turn of the twenty-first century; Burroughs' serial performances of subjectivity often rely on those which came before his, replicated within popular culture, although he inflects them with a particularly camp aesthetic. Associated with excess, theatricality, parodic humor, and performativity, camp has the potential to queer "heteronormative notions of identity" (Sullivan 193). Burroughs' serial memoir critiques ways of self-representation which, finally, have the desire to normalize people at their center.

Camp is generally associated with a queer sensibility, and Burroughs' serial memoir unquestionably engages how his sexuality influences his self-presentation. Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us that the word “queer” means “across,” from “the Indo-European root *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *toquere* (to twist), English *athwart* and *torque*,” and she emphasizes what she sees as the relational and conditional quality of queer lives that must transverse spaces designed for heteronormative individuals and families (Moon 30, emphasis original).³ The relationality Sedgwick notes in the lives of non-heteronormative individuals is significant for memoir studies in general, as memoir presents life narrative as focused on the self in relation to others. This relational self is particularly relevant to queer memoir, as readers are given an important counter-memory to established historical records. Memoirists who identify as queer, or who queer contemporary culture in their memoirs, frustrate and delegitimize heteronormative structures and conventions, providing narratives of subjectivities that make the traditional ways of knowing strange; if memory or history are involved—both constructions of language and narrative—queer memoir poses questions which ask who has implicated memory and history, for what purpose, in what context, and to what end. These questions allow for a multiplicity of perspectives, particularly from those that have been marginalized, and illustrate potential revisions to the historical narrative of cultural memory. Challenging assumptions based on heteronormativity, queer memoirists are able to present alternate perspectives for self-construction.

³ Queer theory, as a theoretical model, emerged in the mid-1990s, and uses the word “queer” to point out that there are a multitude of identity categories which could fit under its rubric. Instead of trying to categorize individuals with diverse backgrounds in a potentially restrictive model of LGBTQ identities, using the term queer acknowledges difference as it “raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity” (Butler 226, emphasis original).

The use of the word “queer” itself also underscores the relationality of non-heteronormative lives. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), for example, Judith Butler argues that it is the history of this term—a history which posited “queer” as an insult and attempted to create a subject of ridicule through its use—which makes its contemporary position in discourse powerful. “‘Queer’ derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult,” Butler explains. “This is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time. This interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time” (226). The monovocality of oppressive discourse and of homophobic communities is placed in opposition to the polyvocality of queer groups, who create communities of their own. Paying attention to how language works, by whom, and examining how it has been used against people in the past, queer writers—and queer memoirists in particular—understand themselves in relation to a history of subjugation and pathologization. Refashioning language and revisioning the serial performances on which history is based provide alternate spaces of memory and representation that question normative practices. For Burroughs, this questioning takes the form of camp as he also interrogates how mediated culture works in these larger historical frames and in systems of discourse.

Tying camp and queer studies together does not mean that either camp or queerness is reduced, but ignoring the relationship between them—and the way they interact with one another within Burroughs’ serial memoir—negates the potentially radical space in both. Scholars of queer theory and camp agree: Nicholas de Villiers

explains that “to sever [camp and homosexuality] is almost always a homophobic move. In fact, ‘camp’ has been increasingly understood in its specificity as a form of queer praxis, and its history as a queer survival tactic is undeniable,” while Steven Cohan sees queerness and camp as inextricable from one another. Camp, Cohan writes, “may illuminate the subordination of women alongside that of gay men, but because of its queer bias it is not reducible to either feminist political aims or postfeminist awareness of the interaction between feminine identities, gender performativity, and consumption” (184). Reading Burroughs’ serial memoir through the lens of camp provides a frequently marginalized perspective on the role of contemporary popular culture in providing queer models for lived behavior. Possibility, a narrative like Burroughs’ suggests, allows individuals to be aware of the constructed nature of subjectivity and how we can narrate those selves.

In his memoirs, Burroughs engages seriality as a form of performativity or citationality in which the personalities of others—especially those from popular culture—are implicated in his own self-representational strategies. Serial phenomena, as Sean O’Sullivan suggests, exist in a liminal space between the old and the new (117), and this in-between space, unlike the self-contained texts of a novel or a feature film, constantly promises something new, whether via plot, characters, or experience. This movement from new to old, and the significance of the in-between space of the serial production gaps, parallels and imitates lived experience. Influencing how audiences read, understand, and narrate the texts they’ve consumed, the movement between old and new also changes how we narrate stories to ourselves and to each other. Burroughs’

memoirs consistently draw readers into the past, and because of their serial publication, audiences move with him through the temporal spaces of past, present, and future.

Serial self-narrative imitates the recursivity of memory, along with its iterations and infinite reiterations. Burroughs' memoirs posit seriality and performativity as a form of queerness through which he exposes how subjectivity is constructed in the public sphere.

“I am a movie of the week”: The Seriality of Television Culture and Self-Construction

It is a play and we are in our roles. I am performing from a script.
—Augusten Burroughs, *Dry*

Even as other twentieth-century serial memoirists understand the self as relational, the influences of media culture—in particular, celebrity and televisual culture—on contemporary self-representation are often ignored. In his memoirs, Burroughs invokes television programs and personalities as ways for the reader to enter into the narrative space of his texts, and he repeatedly provides moments in which he watches or re-enacts scenes from serialized television programs. Often, Augusten engages with the digital medium as much or more than with members of his family or, later, than with his close friends. Using televisual techniques and forms through which to present himself and his stories, Burroughs constructs himself as the star of his own show: he becomes a familiar personality modeled on television celebrities. In particular, he engages programs which privilege the familiar, the familial, the domestic, and the confessional: the serial televisual genres of reality shows, talk shows, domestic situation comedies, and soap operas. Burroughs' memoirs articulate how the relationship between

television and everyday life, and the seriality of each, affects his—and by extension, our—conception of the world.⁴

Television viewers, like listeners of radio shows, expect that a program will air at a particular time, for a set period of time, and that this pattern will repeat on a daily or weekly schedule.⁵ Media scholar Joshua Gamson notes that, by the mid-1960s, both adults and children were watching roughly four hours of television a day (*Claims* 43), and the allusive nature of Burroughs' memoirs indicates that Augusten was no exception to this statistic. As his memoirs illustrate, frequent exposure to serial programming and the normativization of seriality through television has radically shifted our general awareness of subjectivity as constructed and performed. Additionally, Burroughs' use of seriality is explicitly tied to the episodic serial; there is both a cumulative narrative as those readers who are familiar with all of Burroughs' texts (including *Sellelevision*) are rewarded with familiar anecdotes, and for those readers who may be unfamiliar with the

⁴ While not all television programs are serial in the traditional sense of the term—including cumulative narratives, a large and recurring cast of characters, and a resistance to closure—postmodern television programming has generally moved in this direction. One example is that of the situation comedy *Arrested Development* (FOX, 2003-2006), which self-reflexively pointed to its serial roots while playing with those conventions. At the end of each episode, for instance, the program featured a short segment in which the voice-over narrator said “On the next *Arrested Development*,” and viewers observed what they perceived to be a future episode. Generally, what would happen “next time” was part of a continuous narrative, and would extend the action of the just-watched program. Ironically, however, the events in these future episodes never materialized, and in the following episode, viewers were shown a different storyline.

Featuring a large cast of recurring characters, self-reflexivity about the genres of television, continuing and diverging narratives, and a resistance to closure which was made explicit in the final season (the narrator frequently broke the fourth wall to plead with the audience members to convince friends to watch the show, because it was going to be canceled). Additionally extending the narrative, a film is slated for 2010.

⁵ The role television programming plays in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century television culture, especially since the inventions of the VCR and digital video recording devices, has shifted as viewers are able to have more control over when and how they watch a particular program. A more complete examination of how these recording devices have changed television culture is necessary to understand how these shifts also change contemporary culture.

other memoirs, the texts are structured episodically as well.⁶ Burroughs' memoirs enact the transition of how "serial" is used and understood in contemporary parlance, and the possible implications for that shift.

Burroughs references television programs and television celebrities throughout his serial memoir as a touchstone through which to communicate with his audience. In contrast to the glamorous world of cinema and film stars, Burroughs privileges television and its attendant personalities, which are integrated into the intimate family space.⁷

From the beginning, television's status as a domestic entertainment technology influenced its consumption. The position of televisions within the lived spaces of the home is significant because they become integrated into everyday life.⁸ Part of domestic daily routines, television shows and celebrities are incorporated by viewers into their everyday lives. David Poltrack argues that television programming until the 1970s, because it was disseminated broadly and for a general audience, was unable "to provide much identification of the viewer with the programs he or she watche[d]" (115). Indeed, while contemporary television programming provides characters with whom viewers can identify, the pre-narrowcasting or pre-cable television did not influence an "individual's forming of his or her specific identity" (Poltrack 115). Poltrack singles out *The Mary*

⁶ Burroughs' brother, John Elder Robison, published a memoir titled *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's* (2008), which maintains the same pseudonyms Burroughs established in *Running with Scissors*. Reading this memoir in tandem with Burroughs' own texts furthers the possibility of a cumulative narrative.

⁷ Films, in their initial debut, are presented to the public in the space of a cinema or theater. The progression of films from theater, to "dollar theater," to subscription television channels (like HBO [not coincidentally titled Home Box Office] or Showtime), to cable channels, and finally to broadcast network television channels is indicative of the hierarchy in broadcast mediums.

⁸ Television, David Gauntlett and Annette Hill write, not only spatially changed vernacular design but also temporally changed household routines: "because broadcast TV has set timetables, [...] people's everyday activities are shifted, elongated or cut short to accommodate the programmes that they want to watch" (23).

Tyler Moore Show as one example of a program that was immensely popular, I propose that Burroughs' memoirs illustrate new possibilities for identification even within broadcasting: a queer identification. That is, Augusten is presented with a wide variety of personalities and characters on television with whom he can associate, but frequently, he identifies with characters across gender lines.

In the last scene in *Running with Scissors*, for example, seventeen-year old Augusten imagines the possibility of a new life in New York City. Without a formal education or much work experience, he presents the reasons why he might succeed through two celebrities: Liza Minelli and Mary Tyler Moore. “*Of course* I can make it in New York City,” he thinks to himself, recognizing that the struggles he faced as a child—as the text of *Running with Scissors* attests—had prepared him to face all kinds of obstacles. He continues: “I had a vision of Liza Minnelli in a black leotard singing, ‘*If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere ...*’ and then tossing me a black top hat that I expertly catch and place on top of my head, astonishing all of Broadway with my debut in the stage version of *New York, New York*” (301). Imagining that he and Minnelli share the stage, Burroughs alludes to a lineage of camp and queer sensibility: Minnelli’s mother, Judy Garland, is heralded as queer culture’s pre-Stonewall era icon (Doty 9-10); Minnelli’s father, Vincente Minnelli, directed both musicals which trade on camp and visual excess in their musical numbers as well as non-musicals which provide queer readings of contemporary life, like *Tea and Sympathy* (1956);⁹ and he acknowledges the excesses of Broadway, in general, and of Liza Minnelli in particular. While the camp

⁹ See Matthew Tinkcom’s essay for a more complete discussion of Vincente Minnelli.

and queer possibilities of Broadway are a compelling force for Augusten's move to New York, he remains unconvinced; immediately, he has a "parallel" vision of the degraded life he could have if he were to stay in Northampton, in which he imagines "giving a blowjob to a fat cop on the verge of retirement" for money (301). The potential of New York, embodied by Broadway, Minnelli, and stardom is immediately negated by this second vision.

Instead, Augusten is convinced by another traditionally queer-identified figure: television personality Mary Tyler Moore, and her role in the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1979). In the opening credits of the show, Burroughs writes, "Mary's in a supermarket, hurrying through the aisles. She pauses at the meat case, picks up a steak and checks the price. Then she rolls her eyes, shrugs and tosses it in the cart" (302). He continues: "That's kind of how I felt. Sure, I would have liked for things to have been different. But, *roll of the eyes*, what can you do? *Shrug*. // I threw the meat in my cart. And moved on" (302). This is the final scene in *Running with Scissors* and it provides an important moment for Augusten's cross-gendered and television-mediated recognition as he identifies with and imitates Moore's character. He, like she, can move to the city and "make it after all." Because readers have just finished this memoir, they are confident that this is precisely what Augusten has done.

In the opening sequence of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Mary performs a number of quotidian activities in addition to shopping for groceries; viewers watch a fifty-second montage of Mary going to work, running errands, washing the car, and spending time with friends. The everyday nature of these serial activities allows viewers

to identify with her character, as they also do the same things in their day-to-day lives, and the program's serial broadcast familiarizes the activities she performs. In contrast to the narrative closure of film or Broadway plays, the seriality of television presents Moore's character's decision to move to the city as a feasible option, on a weekly and recurring basis. Moreover, as illustrated in this excerpt, Mary is presented as a familiar character who thinks about things in the same way as the viewer. As she picks up the meat and checks the price, for example, she rolls her eyes because of the inflated price of meat, allowing the audience members to identify with her exasperation.¹⁰ The narrative thus provides such viewer-identification with Mary through her attempt at independence from traditional gender roles and the dailiness of her performed lived reality.

Burroughs acknowledges the possibility of a straightforward viewer-identification with Mary even as he also demonstrates his own, queer reading of the scene. Affecting her slight gestures and textually embodying her eye-roll and shrug, Burroughs presents a queer reading of her that enacts the process between Augusten, Mary, and the world of inflated meat prices as a possible place for queer identification in the acquisition of meat. The ways in which Burroughs uses popular cultural texts—books, television programs, magazines, popular music, or advertisements—make them seem strange or campy, and illustrate how those texts shape his experiences of subjectivity and sexuality. “Queering popular culture,” Nikki Sullivan suggests, thus necessitates “critically engaging with cultural artefacts in order to explore the ways in which meaning and identity is [*sic*] (inter)textually (re)produced” (190). Doty presents

¹⁰ This scene with Mary and the meat was not in the opening sequence in the first years of the show; it was included in the mid-1970s.

The Mary Tyler Moore Show and its entire cast of characters as a space of queer identification (6), and Sedgwick quotes Robert Dawidoff, who proposes that the gesture of camp is simply the moment at which “the consumer of culture makes the wild surmise: ‘What if whoever made this was gay too?’” or, finally, “What if the right audience for this were exactly *me*?” (156, emphasis original). Reading the scene and enacting its performances, embodying the character’s behavior, Burroughs presents himself as “exactly” the audience for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Moreover, his incorporation of this scene at the end of the memoir, presenting it as a site with which others can identify, shows the significance of camp as a site of recognition through cultural texts for Burroughs’ serial project.

The character of Mary Richards, played by Moore, works as the catalyst for camp identification, and Poltrack suggests that it is the characters of a program like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* that distinguish it from other programs. In fact, Poltrack argues that the label “situation comedy” does not adequately describe a program like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* because, rather than present its comedy through “physical humor,” it is the characters, not the situations, who are comedic (116).¹¹ These characters are presented to the audience as realistic, multi-faceted, and familiar, and the viewers are the ones who have the ability to read their characters in queer ways. Serially aired, these characters and their stories are broadcast into the domestic and familial spaces of American homes. The actors’ lifelike or convincing portrayal of these

¹¹ Other post-1970 shows that Poltrack considers “character comedies” include *All In The Family*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, *Barney Miller*, *Taxi*, *M*A*S*H*, and *Cheers* (116).

characters made them familiar to audiences, and provides an important link to the rise of reality television in the 1990s.

Viewers, used to realistic portrayals and character-driven narratives, are often drawn to reality television for the same reasons. The century of witness, in John Ellis' words, is made manifest in part through reality television as producers market the combination of authenticity and spectacle.¹² Taking its cues from fictional programs like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, reality television attempts to present realistic situations that rely on the seriality of contemporary experience. One of the more compelling aspects of reality television is that it promotes the idea that individuals can have their own television show—or at least become a celebrity within a reality television format—and that the “work of being watched” could make a person famous (Andrejevic 2). Mark Andrejevic suggests that the promise of reality television is that spectators can become participants, and celebrities, which will “result in the overthrow of the rule of the culture industry and replace the homogenized pabulum of mass-produced pop culture with the vital fare of the ‘real’” (3), but that in actuality, reality television formats are now so varied “that they have become self-conscious parodies of their original premise of access to the unscripted interactions of people who are not professional entertainers” (3). Instead, reality television has become a forum for staged spectacles and B-

¹² Reality shows include documentary-style programs like *Big Brother* (2000-present), historical re-enactment programs like PBS shows *The 1900 House* (1999) and *Frontier House* (2002), or celebrity-centric shows such as *The Osbornes* (2002-2005); reality game-shows such as *Survivor* (the Swedish program debuted in 1997, and the US counterpart in 2000) and *American Idol* (2002-present); home improvement shows like *This Old House* (1979-present) and Britain's *Changing Rooms* (1996-2004; the American version was *Trading Spaces* 2000-2008); and makeover shows like *What Not to Wear* (British version ran from 2001-2007; American version aired 2003-present) or A&E's *Intervention* (2005-present).

celebrities to reinvigorate their careers. The staged “reality” of reality television, which has become more and more scripted, uses self-performance as a central tenet.

Reality television, however, is frequently taken to task by critics and viewers because it is supposed to simultaneously provide entertainment based in actuality or the “real,” but it has come to illustrate the many ways in which that “reality” seems most authentic when it is mediated and fictionalized. Audiences often have a difficult time distinguishing the real from the fictional. In Misha Kavka’s words, reality television programs seem to present verity in their transmission, and are

thus sites of “constructed unmediation,” where the technology involved in both production and post-production shapes a final product that comes across as unmediated, or real. This has important implications in the age of media globalization, where the demand for an “ethics of actuality,” or a guarantee of strict overlap between reality and its representation, is being overwhelmed and reconfigured by reality in the service of entertainment. (94)

This reconfiguration of reality for the purposes of entertainment is a technique of which contemporary life writers, especially serial memoirists like Burroughs, are also accused.¹³ Audience demand for and appreciation of reality television shows illustrates their desire for representations of what viewers perceive as reality, and the rise of reality television parallels the “boom” in life writing. Nancy K. Miller describes the 1990s as

¹³ In each of his memoirs, Burroughs presents an author’s note. In *Possible Side Effects*, this note says: “Some of the events described happened as related; others were expanded and changed. Some of the individuals portrayed are composites of more than one person, and many names and identifying characteristics have been changed as well.”

the era in which the private became public to a degree that was “startling even in a climate of over-the-top self-revelation” (*But Enough About Me* 1), and she explains that the memoir boom provides readers with presentations of “a different, or at least more interesting, life through literature” along with “a narrative through which to make sense of your own past” (12). Memoir provides audiences with possibilities for structuring the past and, I would argue, the present as well. The concept of “constructed unmediation” and its role in the representations of reality indicates a significant parallel between Burroughs’ strategies for self-presentation as mediated through the serial structures of televisual culture and the attendant shifts in the configurations of the domestic entertainment technologies themselves.

The movement toward “postmodern realism” (Rowe 217), the attempt to represent reality through structures which are clearly reconfigured for the purposes of domestic entertainment, and privileging the postmodern techniques of reflexivity, intertextuality, and self-consciousness are crucial strategies for Burroughs’ serial memoir. John Carlos Rowe suggests that the movement through the twentieth century is from the “fragile artifice of the medium” toward “postmodern realism,” which presents “the authority of the immaterial, the figurative, and the metamorphic” as increasingly part of the reality of televisual spectatorship (217). The fragility with which television presented itself in the early decades is also related to the seriality of the medium; as Roger Hagedorn argues about the serialization of print media, so too did television programs rely on serialization to make audiences familiar with the new medium and to

garner a reliable customer base.¹⁴ The move Rowe observes toward postmodern realism is also manifest in the proliferation of reality television shows; beginning with television shows like *COPS* (Fox, 1988-present) and *The Real World* (MTV, 1992-present), reality television programming provides viewers with what networks market as the “real.” These programs present events from the everyday to increasingly intense interpersonal interaction. Further, the shift move toward postmodern realism is significant for the rise of life writing studies because viewers—and by extension, the contemporary audience—is invested in representations of the “real.” Creating the spectacular in postmodern realism is tied to presenting “authentically real” situations (King 21), evident in film and literature in addition to television.¹⁵

Live, with “Augusten Burroughs”!

*Like cubic zirconia, I only look real. I'm an imposter.
The fact is, I am not like other people.
— Augusten Burroughs, Dry: A Memoir*

Television programs often rely on an “authentically real” character through whom viewers can engage with the visual text, as the example of Mary Tyler Moore

¹⁴ See Hagedorn’s essays: “Technology and Economic Exploitation” and “Doubtless to Be Continued: A Brief History of Serial Narrative.” A more thorough discussion of his theories appears in the Introduction to this dissertation. As the century progressed and as viewers became more used to serial programming, audiences have become accustomed to this serialized format of television shows. Moving into the twenty-first century, however, the ways in which viewers engage with television programs is shifting again. Now, viewers will frequently purchase or rent an entire season of a series and watch several episodes in a row, changing the viewing experience from the show’s serialized production when broadcast live to one that is controlled by the viewer.

¹⁵ Geoff King writes: “Impressions of the ‘real’ or the ‘authentic’ (or the authentic-seeming) are valued as forms of media spectacle in a number of other contemporary media forms. Examples in film range from the Dogme 95 movement, in its association with grainy image quality and unsteady hand-held camerawork, to the ‘uncanny’ verisimilitude of the latest developments in computer-generated animation” (13).

attests. She was the character through whom audience members were able to interact within the diegetic space of the program, and even though her name was “Mary Richards” within the show, the title of the program itself demonstrates the importance of her television personality for viewers. Likewise, Augusten Burroughs must create a similar character with whom readers can enter the space of his written texts. In serial memoir, the figures of the author and the tripartite narrator are the point of entry into the world of the narrative, and for Burroughs’ memoirs especially, the “voice” of the tripartite narrator is particularly significant. The level of focus on Burroughs’ voice is in line with the rise of individual figures from reality television genres, such as the talk show. The talk show host, an easily recognizable personality, is frequently a television celebrity: from late-night hosts such as Dick Cavett and Jay Leno to daytime hosts like Oprah Winfrey and Kathy Lee Gifford.¹⁶ Talk show hosts are familiar to audiences because of their personality; they represent their “real” selves, frequently referring to their non-performing lives on-air.¹⁷ Talk show hosts use a method of direct address because they often openly communicate with the audience, breaking the fourth wall familiar in traditional modes like film and theater. For Burroughs’ memoir, his construction of “Augusten” keeps readers engaged through the serial narrative, and his attention to the artifice through which this character is created provides insight into how contemporary Americans understand subjectivity. In “Bloody Sunday,” from *Possible*

¹⁶ Talk show hosts often gain their celebrity in a different television medium before their celebrity is such that they are able to hold their own on a talk show. For example, Kelly Ripa, co-host of *Live with Regis and Kelly* and replacement for Kathy Lee Gifford, gained celebrity as a character on the daytime serial *All My Children* (1990-2002), while Elizabeth Hasselback, one of the co-hosts of *The View*, gained her celebrity as a contestant on the reality television show *Survivor: The Australian Outback*.

¹⁷ Mary McCarthy’s appearance on the *Dick Cavett Show*, then, reinforces her status as both host and celebrity.

Side Effects, Burroughs writes that, wherever he goes, “*Augusten* followed” (22). It is thus through the figure of the host that the audience is often invested in watching a particular program.

Much of the seriality of the talk show lies in the self-presentation of the hosts and the seriality of everyday life. The dailiness of talk shows is significant because of the continuing relationship the audience creates with the host personality, and hosts frequently reference what is happening in the world around them, going so far as to read headlines or discuss current news stories during their live programs. Hosts are able, then, to “indicate some reference to the real time of the program—to show that, in fact, the program corresponds to everyday life and responds to everyday events” (Marshall 124), further strengthening the connection between the host and their audience. The familiarity of the talk show host is one manifestation of the blurred line between image and reality, as viewers feel that they have an intimate relationship with the host.¹⁸ The celebrity of talk show hosts trades in and on the familiar.

The talk show genre itself furthers the significant link between the talk show host and the memoirist, as talk shows are designed to discuss everyday events as well as to expose significant features of intimate daily life. As the genre of the talk show evolved, the notion of the “tabloid talk show” appeared which presented guests who were able to “talk back,” to use Gamson’s phrase, in ways that were hitherto unrepresented on television. Now, Gamson writes, if “you are lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgendered,

¹⁸ Burroughs’ novel *Sellelevision* takes the concept of audience familiarity with talk show hosts as one of its premises. Burroughs crafts many scenes at the Sellelevision network during which audience members call into the television program and try to sustain conversations with the hosts.

watching daytime TV talk shows is pretty spooky. (Indeed, it must be unnerving and exciting for pretty much anyone whose behavior or identity does not conform to the dominant conventions of goodness, decency, and normality)” (4). Talk shows present a genre in which televisual space is created for people who do not conform to the subject positions presented on other, often fictional, programs.

In *Running with Scissors*, Burroughs echoes Gamson’s attention to the available space for nonheteronormative individuals on talk shows. Augusten comes out as gay to Hope, the eldest Finch daughter, and, while confident in himself and in his sexuality, he wasn’t sure what the Finches would think. “[B]ecause I seldom interacted with other kids,” he writes, “I hadn’t really been programmed to believe it was wrong. Anita Bryant on TV talked about how sick and evil gay people were. But I thought she was tacky and classless and this made me have no respect for her” (69). A television viewer, Augusten is presented with a particular narrative of his own sexuality without hearing from people who identify as he does. Significantly, Augusten dismisses this perspective because it is presented by someone who he finds “tacky” in such a way as to be unappealing for a person with his political and his camp sensibilities. Hope tells Augusten that she had already “figured it out” and that she wants to introduce him to Neil Bookman, a former patient of her father’s, who is also gay. Burroughs writes: “I’d never seen a real, live gay man in person before; only on the *Donahue* show. I wondered what it would be like to see one without the title ‘Admitted Homosexual’ floating in blocky type beneath his head” (70). Crafting this scene in relation to *Donahue*’s media-influenced sensationalization of nonheteronormative individuals, Burroughs reiterates

the significance of television for the ways in which he understands interpersonal relationships as well as his own subjectivity. Further, he explains to readers that he had “known all [his] life” that he was gay but he also writes that he had never seen an openly gay person before without the mediating structure of television. Gamson’s assessments of the traditionally marginalized individuals who are able to find a place on television—and on talk shows, in particular—points to the possibilities television has for both performers and audience members.

Available models for self-construction proliferate when opportunities are given to people who don’t generally have avatars on television programs. On talk shows, Gamson explains, audiences watch as people are “testifying, dating, getting laughs, being made over, screaming, performing, crying, not just talking but talking back,” all in front of millions of television viewers (5). The parallels between talk shows and memoir are not difficult to illuminate: both forms allow people to talk, and “talk back,” in front of a large audience; they allow for performances of selfhood which are constructed through language and texts; and they often center on the margins, exposing the multiplicity and diversity of individuals who make up contemporary society. Talk shows frequently raise questions about families and familial relationships, centering on issues like relationships between siblings, parents and children, parenting more generally, and self-expression. Burroughs’ memoirs similarly use the cultural familiarity with the genre of the talk show, and the attendant celebrity of talk show hosts, through which to foreground the familial situations he presents in his memoirs.

Burroughs also inflects his memoirs with the stuff of domestic situation comedy, which likewise place families at the center of their discourse. Beginning with shows like *The Honeymooners* and *I Love Lucy*, the domestic situation comedy uses relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, or co-workers and neighbors to drive the narrative action.¹⁹ Situation comedies are scripted, choreographed, and recursive as the narratives are cut up for commercials, and the plot frequently finds the recurring cast of characters in an humorous situation. Again, television's investment in "making the world familiar" (Marshall 129), as was evident in my discussion of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, point to the use of examining how domestic entertainment technologies work when placed in the context of the interrelationality of contemporary memoir. Situation comedies provide space for Burroughs and others to incorporate camp readings because they are frequently based in representational excess.²⁰

In *Running with Scissors*, Burroughs goes so far as to place himself in the dramatic action of situation comedies. Extending his embodied participation of the opening credits of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, here, he imagines the possibilities for fully participating in another family's life. "I would have been an excellent member of the Brady Bunch," Burroughs writes. "I would have been Shaun, the well-behaved blond boy who caused no trouble and helped Alice in the kitchen, then trimmed the split ends off Marcia's hair. I would not only have washed Tiger, but then conditioned his

¹⁹ Marshall argues that "the dramatic tension and resolution in these programs have been organized around the family. Even in shows that on the surface appear not to be based on the family are structured so that the work environment resembles a family environment" (129).

²⁰ One serial memoirist with whom Burroughs is often compared is David Sedaris, whose essay collections include *Barrel Fever* (1994), *Naked* (1997), *Holidays on Ice* (1997), *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (2000), *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* (2004), and *When You Are Engulfed in Flames* (2008). Sedaris is also a frequent contributor to the PRI/Chicago Public Radio program *This American Life*.

fur. And I would have cautioned Jan against that tacky bracelet that caused the girls to lose the house-of-cards-building contest” (*Running* 10). Here, Burroughs articulates his relationship with the episodic nature of serialized television, imagining himself as a recurring character on *The Brady Bunch*. His self-creation as the gender-ambiguous “Shaun,” differentiating himself from the other boys and identifying with the girls through the trope of his blond hair and his attention to fashion accessories, combined with the fact that he’s already pictured how his character would interact with other people on the show, illustrate his investment in these characters. He feels as if he knows them because of their serialized domestic performances, and he is thus able to envision how his character would behave as part of this fictional family.

Ironically, the Bradys are not a traditional family, which often leads to the comedy of their domestic situation, much in the same way that Burroughs himself uses comedy and the absurd to portray his experiences living with his own family, and then with the Finches, in *Running with Scissors*.²¹ Significantly, Annalee Newitz writes that *The Brady Bunch*, was seen by its contemporary viewers as “almost dangerously unrealistic” (68). She continues, reminding readers that the “perky, liberal storylines” of situation comedies from the 1970s, such as *The Brady Bunch*, *Happy Days*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, “have been recast as ‘classic TV’ by critics, rebroadcast on the cheesy ‘TV land’ of Nickelodeon’s Nick at Nite, and reissued on video for decontextualized consumption” (68). The recontextualization of shows like *The Brady*

²¹ Burroughs presents himself using the line, “I’m in advertising. Like Darren Stevens on *Bewitched*,” “hundreds of times” as an adult (*Magical Thinking* 111), creating another link to his imagined participation in domestic situation comedies.

Bunch provides a new audience for Burroughs' allusions to the show: it, along with its counterparts on Nick-at-Nite, has found a new generation of viewers who appreciate it for its camp qualities. While Newitz proposes that "no one could call cheesy TV shows like *The Brady Bunch* [...] 'campy'" (62), I suggest that Burroughs does precisely this. Sontag writes that much of camp objects are out-of-date, not simply because they are old, but because time and "the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment—or arouses a necessary sympathy" (285), and the deracination of these repeated programs, along with the attendant ability to revel in their aesthetics rather than investment in the content of the program, underscores the possibilities for camp in these programs.

Reading camp as serial is important to this argument because of the diverse ways in which television programming began to present gay characters on the small screen. Joe Wlodarz sees what he calls a "cross-textual seriality" in various television programs which engage with gay visibility, and, seriality, he writes, "addresses the developmental narrative of queer representation during this period. While this seriality occurs unpredictably, inconsistently, and often incoherently *outside* of the specific parameters of individual texts in seventies television, a fragmented narrative is illustrated piece by piece in the series of representations shown to us" (91, emphasis original). Assembling seemingly inconsistent pieces from multiple television programs provides this fragmented narrative of queer visibility on the small screen, and it is through this seriality that young Augusten sees himself. In his memoirs, Burroughs uses camp as a framework through which he privileges intertextuality and representation; camp's

emphasis on the significance of contextualization and intertextuality, is both underscored and challenged by the representations of nonheteronormativity on television.

The possibilities for the seriality of camp also expand as television shows are continually repeated. In his examination of the history of television through repeat programming, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (2005), Derek Kompare explains that after television became ubiquitous in the 1950s and 1960s, some of the programs created for television began to be repeated. These reruns became standard on every station as they persisted in (re)presenting the past; while during the 1970s and 1980s, the reruns were one way to present a televisual history for consumers, since then they have become “ensconced in American popular culture, and fostering experiences and practices of television *structured around continual repetition*” (xi, emphasis mine). Reruns amplified the already serial practices of television programming, insuring that audiences would associate serial narrative storytelling with television. In fact, a large part of Burroughs’ reading audience is familiar with television programs like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *The Brady Bunch* only through the phenomenon of syndicated television. Extending Sontag’s observation about detachment, Andrew Ross proposes that “the camp effect” is created when the products and celebrities of an earlier moment “become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste” (312). How an audience of Nick-at-Nite viewers watches *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* will be distinct from how an audience engaged with it in the 1970s. While many of the cultural texts Burroughs incorporates into his serial memoir are not anachronistic to his childhood or his serial self-

construction, the ways in which his contemporary audience reads and understands those texts is certainly important as they bring twenty-first century codes and values to the programming.

Representing “the past” using repeated or historical stories underscores and complicates television’s ability to simulate “liveness.” In the early days of television, programs were “taped in front of a live studio audience” and transmitted simultaneously to television sets across the country, where they were viewed at one moment. This ability to present “liveness” was one of the ways television distinguished itself from other media. As the decades progressed, even if the programs were not aired live, the televisual medium, based in large part on the seriality of its programming and the ways in which broadcasts worked, simulated live transmission; viewers watched the broadcast “live,” even if the program itself had been previously taped. The relationship between the past in television history and the present, live broadcast, is made more complex by the proliferation of repeated programs; contemporary American audiences are presented with a version of serial narrative that constantly engages with the past, present, and future—or in-between space, to use O’Sullivan’s terms—as audiences know that a program will reappear in the future in syndication. Moreover, the role of the television celebrity shifts because of the possibilities inherent in repetition, as they, like the programs themselves, are read in new ways by different audiences. Decontextualized, the characters portrayed by the television personality are also appreciated on the level of aesthetics and style, rather than more traditional modes of serious engagement.

The seriality of situation comedies—or character comedies—and the seriality of familial relations are directly associated with the seriality of the everyday; the repetition of domestic moments creates a serial collective among audience members and television personalities.²² From the late 1940s to the 1960s, the few extant television networks competed with one another for the largest audience, presenting programs that would appeal to the largest number of audience members. Catering to a wide age range in presenting domestic situations, programs, in many ways, mirrored the possible composition of the viewing audience. The domestic situation of the family, as P. David Marshall asserts, reinforces the kinds of narrative acts which are aired on television. “There is an implicit assumption that any conflict contains within it a resolution that will not substantially alter the relations among the characters,” he explains. In all its various forms, the dependability of the family is reinforced by the “seriality of the situation comedy” (130). In Burroughs’ narratives, however, the viewing audience does not generally reflect a family-viewing situation. While the television set itself is placed in common spaces of the home, in the living or dining rooms of Burroughs’ house, for example, the audience is comprised of either Augusten, or his father, both of whom watch television alone. The family is never presented as watching television together.

²² The serial collective of Jean-Paul Sartre, which posits a collectivity among individuals based on their relationships to external factors or objects, can be usefully applied to the seriality of domestic labor and family relationships, particularly as the decades of television continue throughout the century. In the 1950s, for example, as individual audience members watch *I Love Lucy*, they also participate in a larger network of viewers who watch as Lucille Ball performs comedic domesticity. Viewers are able to enjoy the program’s comedic moments because they know that Lucy gets into extraordinary domestic situations, yet their serial interactions with the fictional world of *I Love Lucy* creates a social collective from the audience.

The ideal television-viewing audience is thus characterized as imaginary; while programmers scheduled television shows based on who they thought would be watching, Burroughs' memoirs illustrate many of the other ways in which audience members consumed programs. In *TV Living* (1999), a study of television viewing habits based on the data of 500 viewers' diary entries over five years, Gauntlett and Hill include an entry from a mother who uses television as a surrogate: "Saturday and Sunday morning children's TV keeps daughter happy," she wrote, "while I stay in bed an hour or so longer than weekdays, though she usually draws or paints while it's on" (28). This viewer, then, does not comprise the audience along with her child. In *A Wolf at the Table*, Augusten similarly engages with the television in his own childhood Saturday morning routine. His parents slept in late, until two- or three-o'clock in the afternoon, he writes, and "[a]wake, alone, I watched TV and ate vanilla cake frosting straight from the can with a spoon" until the cartoons were over (56). Burroughs' childhood experiences overlap with the rise of kid media culture in the 1950s and 1960s, in which the morning programming schedule often created space solely for kids. Here, Burroughs uses the space created by television broadcast programming as an entire generation of individuals can relate to his text—if not to the specific events of his memoir, at least to watching cartoons on Saturday mornings.

Presenting a different mode of serialized televisual performance, Burroughs also engages the genre of the soap opera in his memoirs, which many read as the serial televisual genre *par excellence*. Discussions of soap operas often emphasize their dailiness, recursivity, and seriality: soaps air every weekday; the narrative action

continues on a provisional, day-to-day basis; multiple storylines are threaded through the narrative each day; and their central concern is on relationships between people.²³ These generic qualities of soap operas interest Burroughs in his serial self-representation, including the fact that, in the diegetic space of soap operas, characters are confronted by “realistic” or everyday problems. Global or national issues, like war or famine, influence the lives of the characters peripherally, while realistic personal or intimate issues like illness or marital infidelity are more of a concern.²⁴ Moreover, as Katzman suggests, “almost everything that happens in the soap operas takes the form of verbal activity. [...] The characters talk, and talk, and talk” (208).²⁵ For Burroughs, and others

²³ Soap operas have been part of domestic entertainment technologies since they were serialized on radio, and as Natan Katzman writes in 1972, from the beginning of network television, “the public has been offered an uninterrupted and growing supply of daytime serials” (200). Additionally, Jane Feuer suggests that prime-time programs like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* use the “potentially progressive narrative form” of seriality (16). In one of the most well-known essays on soap operas, “The Search For Tomorrow in Today’s Soap Operas,” Tania Modleski points out that examinations of soap operas have been subject to a “high-art bias,” and that rather than “criticize classical narrative because, for example, it is based on a suspect notion of progress and then criticize soap opera because it *isn’t*” (18, emphasis original), readers/spectators need to find a different approach to analyze soap operas’ narrative construction. Examining the ways in which serial narratives provide possibilities in memoir, for example, rather than claim that they are inferior because they do not conform to the traditional narrative structure of autobiography, is one way to extend Modleski’s observations into written texts.

²⁴ A recent example of the incorporation of contemporary issues into the narrative space of the show is the February 12, 2009, episode of ABC’s *All My Children*. Narratively, Erica Kane’s daughter, a lesbian, prepares to marry her partner. Because, at the time the episode aired, gay marriage was not legal in Pennsylvania, where the characters live, they travel to Connecticut in order to marry. A conversation takes place before the rehearsal dinner in which Erica speaks with longtime friend Tad Martin about the wedding:

TAD: So you really meant it? It’s just, like, an intimate family affair—no press at all?

ERICA: No press. I have tried very hard to keep a lid on it.

TAD: Well, congratulations. You did it. It’s a miracle, given your profile. [Erica is a celebrity: a former model, entrepreneur, and a talk-show host.] You’ve got to admit, this is a hell of a photo-op, given the national debate on same-sex marriages.

ERICA: Well, except that that’s not really what this is about. It’s about two people who are in love, who are promising to live the rest of their lives together, who just want to share it with the people they love. This is really family time.

TAD: Amen to that.

²⁵ In one of the earliest scholarly essays on soap operas, Katzman’s research includes field work collected in 1969 and 1970, a particularly interesting time during which to collect information about the viewing habits of individuals who were engaging with television and its programs more completely. He writes that

engaged in serial textual production, the possibilities available in continuous storylines and incessant talking are encouraging because they illustrate the willingness of the audience to listen and witness. A dedicated diarist and serial memoirist like Burroughs is foundationally invested in creating characters who talk and talk. The talk, moreover, is always new, as soap operas do not air repeats; the conversations, like the narratives, continually move forward.²⁶

The focus of these constant conversations often revolves around interpersonal interactions, as the characters negotiate familial, professional, and romantic relationships. *Running with Scissors*, along with Burroughs' other memoirs, is squarely rooted in the world of the domestic and, while many memoirists situate their self-narratives in relation to a larger global or political situation, Burroughs elides all mention of global issues.²⁷ Toward the end of *Running with Scissors*, for instance, Burroughs discusses his first semesters at a community college in the early 1980s.

in the span of four weeks, “observers coded all of the participants and conversations in one episode per week in each of fourteen soap operas. In the course of this procedure 371 different individuals either appeared or were mentioned on the programs. These characters were described when possible through codes for sex, age group, marital status, and occupation. During the same period, 1,789 participants engaged in 884 distinct conversations. Conversations were coded by location, topic, participants, object of discussion, and evaluation of topic” (208). Katzman and his team thus concluded that verbal activity is one of the most significant parts of the genre.

²⁶ SoapNet, a cable channel initially conceived to re-broadcast same-day episodes of ABC soap operas during the evenings and on weekends, also airs reruns of “classic dramas” (Romano 30) such as *Ryan’s Hope* and *Beverly Hills, 90210*. Allison Romano quotes ABC Cable Networks Group President Anne Sweeney, who sees SoapNet’s success as an indication that the decline in ratings are due to “lifestyle changes” (30). Further, Romano quotes the editorial director of *Soap Opera Digest* and *Soap Opera Weekly*, who agrees with Sweeney; the coup of SoapNet is not that they are “changing viewing patterns but [they are] getting this whole audience that they lost to tune in again” because they provide “soap-viewing flexibility” (30).

²⁷ This memoir fits into the larger genre of *kunstslerroman*, and it is near the end of this memoir that readers are given a glimpse of how Burroughs entered into the writing profession, even as the narrative action of *Running with Scissors* stops when Augusten is merely seventeen years old. Although the span of all of his memoirs together cover a long period of time in national and international politics, he does not discuss Vietnam, or the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the conflicts in Iraq. Instead, the larger context into which Burroughs places himself is that of contemporary American media culture.

Registered as a pre-med student because he thinks that doctors are flashy, Augusten is asked to the office of his anatomy professor toward the end of one semester, where she read to him from one of his recent exams in which he responded with a “witty answer” instead of providing the correct one. Burroughs writes that his professor asked him:

“Do you really want to be a doctor? Or do you want to play a doctor on a soap opera?”

At first, I thought this was a terrible insult. But then I saw her face, saw that she was not being nasty, merely asking an honest question. I said, “I really want the respect of a doctor. And I want the white jacket. And I want the title. *But* ... I guess I would like to have my own time slot opposite a game show.” (295)

His professor’s attentive question, once he realizes that it is genuine, becomes a chance for him to realize that he has multiple opportunities for performance, and while becoming a doctor might sound like something he could do, what he really wants are the accoutrements of the profession. That is, he is attracted to the aesthetics of the profession, wanting to play a particular role. If, as Sontag notes, camp is the ability to understand oneself as “Being-in-a-Role,” Burroughs here presents his interaction with televisual culture as providing a number of opportunities for possible roles to perform. At the beginning of *Running with Scissors*, Burroughs writes: “Besides clothing and jewelry, there were two other things I valued in life: medical doctors and celebrities. I valued them for their white jackets and stretch limousines. I knew for sure that I wanted to be either a doctor or a celebrity when I grew up. The ideal would have been to play a

doctor on a TV show” (19). These examples present Burroughs’ integration of and simultaneous investment in different ways to represent the pervasiveness of mediated serial culture in daily life and self-construction.

In other words, he is invested in the possibility of serial self-performances and of trying on different identities, advocating the usefulness of choice. Soap operas rely on what Marshall terms the “discourse of familiarity” as they engage with familial drama (126). As Katzman suggests, in the earlier decades of their existence, soap operas worked as a parallel to the domestic situation of their audience members, particularly through their engagement with interpersonal relationships.²⁸ Broadcast daily, and taped only a few weeks in advance, soap operas are able to incorporate current events (like holidays) into the domestic or neighborhood space of the program. Similar to the currency of the talk show, audiences temporally move along with the narratives. As the decades progressed in the twentieth century, though, the amount of personally intimate material revealed to the soap opera audience increased. Just as television brought popular celebrity culture into the viewers’ living rooms, so the soap opera reciprocally transports viewers into the “bedrooms of the characters, into the details of their relationships through private conversations, and into dream sequences that identify characters’ desires and aspirations” (Marshall 128). The disintegration of the public/private boundary, therefore, in fictional soap operas and situation comedies as well as the purportedly non-fiction genres of talk shows and reality television illustrate a significant shift in the desires and expectations of audiences. As in memoir, audiences

²⁸ In the film version of *Running with Scissors*, the character of Agnes, Dr. Finch’s wife, is featured watching the supernatural soap opera *Dark Shadows* on several different occasions.

are often given highly intimate information; audiences expect information about the aspirations or private practices of the memoirist. Ultimately, Burroughs uses forms of serial culture in memoir in order to reflect on those very cultural forms. Rather than solely solipsistic, the self-reflexivity of contemporary memoir allows readers to step back from the cultural systems in which they live, and question the narratives which, often, structure the ways in which we engage with one another and with ourselves. These narrative models, Burroughs' memoirs point out, are consumed by viewers in large quantities and do influence how we understand possibilities for self, other, and narrative representation.

The Camp of Celebrity Culture

CAMP is character limited to context. [...]
CAMP is first of all a second childhood. [...]
CAMP is a biography written by the subject
as if it were about another person. [...]
CAMP is a lie which tells the truth.
 —Philip Core, *Camp: The Lie that Tells the Truth*

A large part of the seriality of television culture is embodied in the figures of the television personalities; *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* would have been an entirely different program if Mary Tyler Moore had not been cast. This program, like so many others, trades in and on the celebrity of the television personality for its success. In his serial memoir, Augusten Burroughs uses celebrities as a shared language through which to communicate with his readers about the role of explicit and public self-construction. When Augusten reads his mother's performances through the lens of Bea Arthur and Maude, his readers have a clear point of reference. The shared language of celebrity and

fame, combined with the implicit tension between private and public, make these figures ideal cultural touchstones. Augusten presents the ability to play a role in the simultaneously public and domestic space of television as a dream career. And yet, in the essay “I’m Gonna Live Forever,” in *Magical Thinking*, Burroughs points out what he sees as differences in “level” of celebrity, writing that there are different levels of fame and different genres. “The ‘classic’ famous person is a movie star,” he explains, “and even here there are different grades, like eggs. There are grade-B actors, like Susan Anton, has-beens such as Ann Archer or the star of *Flashdance* herself, Jennifer Beals. Then, of course, there are top-tier movie stars like Ms. Streep” (211). All celebrity is not created equal: television personalities, film stars, Broadway actors, politicians, athletes, etc., have different routes to fame.²⁹ Burroughs’ sense of camp is evident in his construction of this list as he emphasizes “grade-B” celebrities; he provides a direct allusion to the musical *Fame* in its title; and he ultimately negotiates the gray area between high and low culture. In particular, this middle ground exposes the artifice of celebrity while it simultaneously points to contemporary culture’s inextricability from it.³⁰

²⁹ Chris Rojek delineates several kinds of celebrity, which he defines as “the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere” (10): ascribed celebrity, which concerns lineage, as “status typically follows from bloodline” (17), such as Caroline Kennedy or Prince William; achieved celebrity, attained through individual accomplishments of the person in question, such as Brad Pitt, Venus and Serena Williams, or Monica Seles (18); and attributed celebrity, which “is largely the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries” (19). Rojek also coins the term “celetoid” in order to explain the phenomenon of “media-generated, compressed, [and] concentrated form of attributed celebrity” (18). Alternatively, James Monaco proposes a different set of terms: “Heroes gain their celebrityhood for what they do, stars for what they are, and quasars for what we *think* or surmise they are” (10, emphasis original).

³⁰ The list of celebrities Burroughs provides is compelling because it provides a cross-section of a variety of ways for a person to achieve notoriety: Susan Anton appeared in the television shows “Stop Susan Williams” (1979) and “Presenting Susan Anton” (1979), the latter of which was a variety show

In her essay, “Notes on Camp” (1964), Susan Sontag proposes that camp “sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman.’ To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.”³¹

Performing a self, or selves, is central to Burroughs’ serial memoir as he illustrates, over and over again, how he sees himself in relation to the larger world of popular culture. This relationality, Esther Newton argues, is central to camp: “Camp is not a thing. Most broadly, it signifies a *relationship between* things, people, and activities or qualities, and homosexuality” (105). I propose that Burroughs’ repeated acts of self-representation use the foundation of camp to expose and engage contemporary celebrity culture and its ramifications for understanding the construction of subjectivity and self-narratives. Celebrities are often presented as a site for camp because they represent public spaces of knowledge in mass culture.³² They are highly visible examples of the permeable boundaries between public and private life in postindustrial America, figures whose

highlighting Anton’s comedic and musical skills; Ann Archer starred in television shows like “Hawaii Five-O” (1968-1980), the drama “Little House on the Prairie” (1974-1983), and the primetime soap “Falcon Crest” (1981-1990), as well as the films *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Clear and Present Danger* (1994), and she co-starred with Madonna in *Body of Evidence* (1993); and Jennifer Beals, the star of *Flashdance* (1983), has made her career in films like *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), *The Last Days of Disco* (1998), and the self-reflexive *The Anniversary Party* (2001). Most recently, however, Beals has played the central role of Bette Porter in Showtime’s critically acclaimed show “The L Word” (2004-2009), a televised series about a group of lesbians and their families in Los Angeles. Meryl Streep, on the other hand, is a notable cinema actress with multiple academy awards. Delineating different kinds of celebrity is an important task because audiences interact with celebrities in different ways.

³¹ Sontag’s essay is foundational in studies of camp, although it has been widely taken to task by scholars. Cleto’s introduction to *Camp* is an excellent and comprehensive source which chronicles this critical conversation.

³² Sontag includes Greta Garbo, Jane Mansfield, Jane Russell, Steve Reeves, Victor Mature, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, and Tallulah Bankhead (280), while celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, David Bowie, Madonna, Judy Garland, Diana Ross, Mae West, James Dean, Liza Minnelli, Andy Warhol, and television shows like *Batman*, *Bewitched*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, and *Lost in Space* are read by critics as incidents of camp. See, Ross’ “Uses of Camp” and Sasha Torres’ “The Caped Crusader of Camp: Pop, Camp, and the *Batman* Television Series,” both available in Cleto’s *Camp*.

actions are documented incessantly, and whose behavior becomes, as Harvey Levin of the celebrity gossip website *TMZ.com* puts it, “serialized.”³³

As celebrity culture continues to dominate the televisual sphere, celebrities play an increasingly significant role for as they model possibilities for contemporary American experiences and ways to understand or narrate everyday life. In *Understanding Celebrity* (2004), Graeme Turner suggests that celebrity gets “implicated in debates about how identities are constructed in contemporary cultures, and about how the individual self is culturally defined” (9). Culturally constructed, selfhood and contemporary subjectivity rely on a variety of structures through which to understand and narrativize that identity production. Additionally, as Nicole Eschen points out, celebrities are seen as icons of gender, who are able to denaturalize and historicize gender performances (32). In his serial memoir, Burroughs presents himself as having a desire for fame at a young age and as always already engaged with serialized systems of celebrity culture. Burroughs writes in one essay: “Obsessions with television talk shows, movie stars, mirrors, and anything gold-plated had defined my personality from an early age” (*Magical Thinking* 11). In another, he continues this train of thought: “I was obsessed with my hair, with all things vapid or flashy, and with celebrity in general” (*Magical Thinking* 36). The possibilities for camp and celebrity run through Burroughs’ serial memoir reoccurring in his childhood fantasies as well as manifesting as reality in his adult life.

³³ Sasha Frere-Jones writes in the *New Yorker* that pop singer Amy Winehouse seems like “a dedicated tearaway” because her movements are always recorded: “the lens [...] doesn’t switch off, and continually feeds a twenty-four-hour newsstand. (Winehouse is one of the five or six celebrities—mostly women—whose every action has been ‘serialized,’ to borrow the phrase Harvey Levin used to describe the coverage of Britney Spears on his Web site, *TMZ.com*)” (emphasis mine).

These repeated acts of reflexive self-performance are crucial to Burroughs' memoirs, and his engagement of celebrity's serial production through the lens of camp is one of the ways Burroughs underscores the artificiality of self-creation. According to Sontag, an affinity for the artificial and for exaggeration is essential to camp: it is a highly stylized aesthetic; it is "disengaged" and "apolitical" (277); it privileges elements of visual décor and the decorative arts, as camp often "emphasiz[es] texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content" (278); and it is extravagant and glamorous. Critiquing Sontag's essay, Mark Booth compellingly asserts camp as a kind of self-publicity, claiming that camp has more to do with self-presentation than sensibility.³⁴ Booth hazards his own definition: "*To be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits*" (69, emphasis original). Camp, he continues, parodies femininity as the primary site of marginalization, "throwing an ironical light not only on the abstract concept of the sexual stereotype, but also on the parodist him or herself" (69). That is, examining the relationship between the thing parodied and oneself illustrates the artificiality of both the object of parody and the presentation of selfhood.³⁵

³⁴ In *Camp* (1983), Booth notes many "difficulties" in Sontag's discussions as he takes her to task for her essay's unorganized structure and the expanse of her examples (68). "The seriously worrying thing about the examples," he writes, "is not their intermittent inappropriateness or factual inaccuracy, but their sheer number" (68).

³⁵ A number of critics in the 1970s examine how identity politics and queer studies are reflected in the concept of camp, which used a model based on ethnicity in order to locate camp in the gay community; camp could, then, "be said to operate for (and to *belong to*) gay people just as soul did for the African-American community" (Cleto 89). The reappropriation of camp by and for gay communities was not intended to essentialize either camp or the gay community, as not everyone engages camp strategies, but to reclaim it as a viable and self-reflexive aesthetic for power. Fabio Cleto writes that he believes this strategy fails, though, "because it relies on a set of categories that are, once again, not *discrete*, that is to say, categories which can't in fact be separate within the production of a camp effect, and which at the same time don't discriminate camp from other ironic, theatrical, humorous, and incongruous artifacts that

It is within these complicated and unsettled discourses that Burroughs positions his narrative. As a gay man growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, and coming into his own in the 1980s and 1990s, the conversations about camp and the political or historical situation out of which those theorizations rose have directly influenced the ways in which he chooses to represent himself. I suggest that Burroughs himself actively imagines new possibilities for what camp can do and how it can be used in self-representational discourse, particularly as it is recursive, citational, and serial. In his introduction to the collection, *Camp*, Cleto writes that “[r]epresentational excess, heterogeneity, and *gratuitousness* of reference, in constituting a major *raison d’être* of camp’s fun and exclusiveness, both signal and contribute to an overall resistance to definition” (3, emphasis original), and these are two of the central features of Burroughs’ serial memoir. Writing in the genre of serial memoir is one way to underscore the hyper-referentiality and fun of Burroughs’ project, which is frequently read as simple narcissism.

In a scathing review of Burroughs’ most recent memoir, *A Wolf at the Table*, for example, *New York Times* writer Hugo Lindgren points directly to the serial memoir/ist as a site of excess and contestation.³⁶ “More than 200 pages into [*A Wolf at the Table*],”

‘the camp’ wouldn’t possibly establish his relationship with” (90). Again, the indeterminacy of definitions and deployment of camp is a problem. At this cultural moment, however, and in the “first wave” of gay activism (Cleto 91), repoliticizing camp was a significant strategy. Since that time, Sontag revisited camp, explaining in an interview with Maxine Bernstein and Robert Boyers (1975), thinking about it a way to describe feeling separated from the culturally constructed self, and playing with those constructions. Additionally, with the publication of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, camp is placed in conversations with the notion of performativity and spectatorship.

³⁶ Lindgren also laments the fact that *A Wolf at the Table* is “rarely entertaining,” without the comic language or “fun” situations for which Burroughs is so well-known, pointing obliquely to the lack of camp sensibility on the surface of *A Wolf at the Table*. Other reviewers took issue with the fact that *A Wolf at the Table* does not engage with humor in the same way as Burroughs’ preceding memoirs and they argue

he writes, “we reach the point where the story collides with the start of *Running with Scissors*, a period that Burroughs describes here as ‘the defining years of my life.’ Oh yeah? So what have we just read then? The third most defining period of his life? The fourth? The fifth? Such is *the problem with serial memoirists*. If all this material is so important and personally illuminating, how come we never caught a whiff of it before?” (emphasis mine). Excess is generically inherent in serial texts; Jennifer Hayward notes that serials “privilege abundance, even excess” (29) and are, ultimately, a “celebration of excess” (2). Always presented as over-the-top, Burroughs’ serial memoir revels in excess and notes its possibilities and significance in his own life since childhood.³⁷ What Lindgren reads as solipsistic in Burroughs’ memoirs, I argue is a textual manifestation of the representational excess that has a market in contemporary popular and televisual culture, and that may be particularly productive for gay self-

that it ultimately engages in hysterics. I would argue, however, that this memoir provides space for examining the deployment of camp across his serial memoir. Each of Burroughs’ memoirs engage difficult subject matter—from alcoholism to his molestation as a child to the loss of his best friend to AIDS—but the references still come from popular culture. In *A Wolf at the Table*, Burroughs’ strategy shifts and he does not engage larger elements of contemporary culture often. Instead, his focus remains trained on his immediate familial relationships.

³⁷ Lindgren’s article begins: “Oh, the memoir,” and moves on to pose a series of questions: “Am I being conned? Is this just another pack of half-truths or outright confabulations? What can be believed? Augusten Burroughs bears serious responsibility for this — not necessarily because he has made up stuff himself (although numerous allegations to this effect have been made, including a comprehensive debunking in *Vanity Fair*) but because his 2002 memoir *Running with Scissors* raised the bar on autobiographical writing to an impossible level. His account of an adolescence spent living with the deranged family of his mother’s psychiatrist was dark, twisted and shockingly entertaining. Also, it sold extremely well. So well that Burroughs has made a career of autobiography.” All genres of life writing engage questions of veracity, embellishment, and representation—from slave narratives to unbridled celebrity confessions. I provide an extended discussion of veracity’s role in life writing in the introduction and first chapter to this dissertation. Readers can also examine the case of Harriet Jacobs’ slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), the veracity of which was in question for a century before Jean Fagin Yellin was able to provide copious documentation testifying to its truth.

narrativization.³⁸ Many read Burroughs' memoirs, along with the others examined in this dissertation, to see a variety of ways in which memory is represented and interrogated in the second-half of the twentieth-century. In some cases, perhaps, as with many reality programs like *Big Brother*, there is an element of the voyeuristic: audiences want a glimpse into the lives of others, what Mark Andrejevic terms the "reality trend" (8). The position of the voyeur in this reality-hungry society is a complicated one, as the viewer participates through their spectatorship. Andrejevic's observations about voyeurism and reality television are also applicable to memoir, as he suggests that the "threefold equation of participation (empowerment), access to reality, and total transparency (guaranteed by comprehensive monitoring) align themselves in the voyeuristic appeal" (174). For readers of memoir, the possibilities seem endless, and audiences—as did Augusten himself—begin to see themselves as potential subjects of study. I suggest, though, that Burroughs uses the strategies of camp in his serial memoir in order to distance his readers somewhat from the "reality" of his daily life; while he writes and re-writes episodes from his life, he is able to maintain a great deal of control over his own self-representation. Burroughs recognizes the requisite elements of performance in memoir and, indeed, in various genres which cater to the "reality trend."

³⁸ Lindgren's chagrin at the excess valued in the contemporary literary marketplace, moreover, is clear as he admits that he is made suspicious by the very genre of memoir. At the beginning of his review of *A Wolf at the Table*, he writes: "You feel like a sucker these days for even picking [a memoir] up." Using the second-person, Lindgren assumes that most readers will agree with him, and similarly feel as though they have been repeatedly duped by writers and publishers of memoir because of the genre's slippery genre boundaries. While many do feel duped—after James Frey appeared on *Oprah*, for example, readers were able to receive refunds on the memoir—Frey's books remained on the bestseller lists. More recently, in May 2009, Oprah called Frey to apologize for her harsh treatment of him when he appeared on her show in 2006. In addition to *A Million Little Pieces*, Frey also published the memoir *My Friend Leonard* (2006) and the novel *Bright, Shiny Morning* (2009).

As a child, Burroughs notes that his favorite outfit was a navy blazer worn with a white shirt and a red clip-on tie, and that he “flatly refused to go to school if [his] hair was not perfect, if the light didn’t fall across it in a smooth, blond sheet” (*Running* 9). Unable to control the incessant arguing between his parents, who would occasionally move their fights “next door to the kitchen, providing them with better lighting as well as potential weapons” (*Running* 17), Augusten “became consumed with making sure [his] jewelry was just as reflective as Donnie [*sic*] Osmond’s and [his] hair was perfectly smooth, like plastic” (*Running* 19). Imagining how the light looks on his hair, a trope which recurs throughout Burroughs’ serial memoir, extends the notion of self-presentation through the perspectives of others. Living in a house with glass walls in the woods becomes like the set of a television show for Augusten:

Because in desperation, pine trees can become Panavision cameras. Their broken branches, boom mics. This allowed me to walk through the woods or down the dirt road we lived on, imagining that there was always a camera trained on my every move, zooming in close to capture my facial expression. When I looked up at a bird in the sky, I wondered how the light was falling on my face and if that branch was catching it just right. (*Running* 20)

Augusten imagines his every move is recorded by Panavision, a company which was at the fore of the widescreen film lens business, and “acts” accordingly. Understanding “Being-as-Playing-a-Role,” Augusten is able to visualize a mode of self-presentation that is simultaneously artificial—he imagines that he is constantly watched—and yet his

own. The seriality of television and celebrity culture allows him to engage with his self-construction as a performance, queering the concept of natural behavior.

Further challenging the concept of acting normal, in “Model Behavior,” from *Magical Thinking*, Burroughs writes that he spent hours each day practicing his facial expressions in a mirror in order to “memorize every single facial expression [he] was capable of making” (39). “I spent so much time making facial expressions in the mirror that to this day,” he writes, “more than two decades later, when I laugh people say it looks fake. // Which it is. // I am now wholly incapable of making a normal, natural facial expression. All my reactions seem studied and rehearsed because they are” (40). Expressing his desire throughout this essay to become a celebrity model—a figure whose role is to publicly perform serial costume changes—Burroughs engages humor and theatricality in order to expose the performativity of both gender and celebrity, and in so doing, queers the notion of celebrity. The studied, thematic process of celebritization, Burroughs suggests, necessitates an extreme level of artificiality. His serial memoir, moreover, presents Augusten in various scenarios in which his expressions and reactions are not rehearsed, complicating his admission in this section. These two excerpts in which Augusten imagines that his movements are recorded or studied, illustrate the public nature of the celebrity. James Monaco points out that, in every category of fame, “celebrity permits a public voice; it shifts opinions, acts, decisions, feelings from the private stage to the public. [...] And, until the time comes when everyone is famous forever, it happens that the public life is the only one recorded. The media are history; history is media, distorted though it may be” (Monaco 14).

The reader's reaction to Augusten's repeated concerns about flattering lighting is placed in relief as the harsh materiality of his situation becomes increasingly apparent. One example of the contrast between the materiality of Augusten's living situation and the self-reflexive emphasis on aesthetics appears in *Running with Scissors*: after living with the Finches for several months, the Finches decided to have a tag sale in order to raise money because Dr. Finch was having trouble with the IRS. As the Finches bring objects outside, Burroughs writes: "we saw that we had enough major furnishings to create a sort of room. The love seat in front of the TV, the kitchen table in the middle, the cabinet next to the washer. And although the old stove didn't work, it did help create a homey feeling. We all liked the setup so much," he concludes, "we decided to remove all the price tags and move outside for the summer" (228). Taking domestic objects outside, recreating the interior space in an exterior and unexpected setting, and physically "mov[ing] outside" for the duration of the season speaks to the height of excess. In fact, refashioning the domestic scene outside exposes its artificiality. As Sontag quips, "[t]he hallmark of Camp is the spirit of extravagance" (283).

Burroughs extends the extravagance of living outside with the Finches as he illustrates the degree to which his self-performances are not just taken from his interpersonal interactions, but are modeled on celebrity culture. After the Finches and Augusten move outside for the summer, they notice that cars driving past their outdoor living room would slow down. "Sometimes," he writes, "a window would slide down and a camera would be raised. The flashing made us feel like celebrities" (228). Rather than feel embarrassed or uncomfortable being photographed in this unconventional

living arrangement, Augusten and the Finches understand their situation through the rhetoric of celebrity culture: they are interesting because they are notorious, and the physical boundaries separating the indoors from the outdoors—i.e. the walls of the house—have been removed. Curious passers-by have immediate access into the home, just as they would hope to have driving by the homes of “real” celebrities.³⁹ Celebrity culture alters how contemporary Americans understand the construction of cultural identity, how we interact with one another, and how we understand ourselves as socially mediated.⁴⁰ Turner defines celebrity as a genre of representation which is a commodity and “*a cultural formation that has a social function we can better understand*” (9, emphasis in original). The social function of celebrity, particularly through its iteration and reiteration, and by different cultural groups, influences self-narrativization.

Serial culture and celebrity culture rely on one another in order to perpetuate discourses of self-construction and performance. “We seem to be witnessing a new process of identity formation as media content mutates,” Turner argues. Notions of celebrity play an increasingly significant role in this shift and, continues Turner, “celebrity itself begins to mutate: from being an elite and magical condition to being an almost reasonable expectation of everyday life” (84). An expectation of fame is one that Burroughs presents as having had from a young age: he writes that he had an expectation

³⁹ An interesting parallel to the Finch family’s move outside for the summer is the description of Augusten’s family’s home, a “glass house surrounded by trees” (6).

⁴⁰ Dr. Drew Pinsky, a psychiatrist known for his work with celebrities on televised reality shows like *Celebrity Rehab* and *Sober House*, recently published *The Mirror Effect: How Celebrity Narcissism Is Seducing America* (2009) with fellow practitioner S. Mark Young. In this book, they argue that celebrities have more psychological damage than average Americans, which may lead to their increasingly public struggles with substance abuse. Taking their observations farther, however, Pinsky and Young examine how the constant public exposure of celebrities influences the ways in which the rest of contemporary American culture understands itself.

of fame, even if he didn't know “*what [he] would be famous for*” (*Magical Thinking* 205, emphasis original).⁴¹ Moreover, because of the exposure contemporary audiences have to celebrities—particularly since the rise of television culture and the possibilities of appearing on a reality television program—many people do feel that fame is an entirely reasonable expectation for one's life. In Burroughs' serial memoir, however, he queers the concept of celebrity as he exposes the hyper-performativity that must go into this kind of public and serial self-construction. The interconnections between television and celebrity are central for contemporary audiences, who believe that they will attain renown simply for being themselves.

Burroughs' memoirs expose a significant shift in the second half of the twentieth-century in our cultural interactions with ideas of celebrity and publicity. As Marshall suggests, our cultural relation to celebrity and celebrities is a system in which some expressions of individuality are presented as normal and are thus normativized, while others are dismissed. “In some instances,” Marshall writes, “we accept the kinds of subjectivity that are represented for us; at other times we actively reject them. The types of subjectivity offered by celebrities, then, are the products of a system specifically designed to construct types of subjectivity that emphasize individuality and personality” (65). For the practices of self-construction and textual or public self-representation, the

⁴¹ In *Possible Side Effects*, Burroughs explicitly examines his own rise to fame after the publication of *Running with Scissors*. This collection of essays begins with an early memory of being “star-struck” by an Eastern Airlines flight attendant, when he was eight. Here, Burroughs examines the construction of celebrity in contemporary culture and through his own experience as a celebrity author, including moments in which he is recognized on an international flight even though he had a bloody nose, his anxieties about giving talks at universities where all he does is “stand on display like a zoo animal” (37), or his anxieties about his extra-dry fingertips when he goes on publicity tours: “I became a writer who publishes books, then goes on book tours, meeting people and shaking their hands. Signing their books. Posing for photographs with them while I hold up a copy of my book. It's rather like being a porn star with two festering, open wounds—one on each breast” (241).

potential subjectivities offered by celebrities work as a model for non-celebrities, and the allure of fame and fortune is consistently a powerful force in American society.

Occasionally, however, the possibilities for self-production are challenged and reinscribed with meaning, through alternate perspectives and performances. Burroughs' narratives provide excessive space in which to examine, accept, and decline various possible forms of subjectivity. In the process, he queers the concept of self-performance through the seriality of camp strategies.

Camp Strategies for Self-Serialization

[A]pparently the other students had naturally gravitated toward a certain comfort zone, a safety area without risks: mediocrity.
—Augusten Burroughs, *Magical Thinking*

“Commercial Break,” the first chapter in *Magical Thinking*, presents the story of seven-year old Augusten's role in a Tang Instant Breakfast Drink commercial.

Advertisers happen upon his elementary school because, Burroughs writes, they were in a “small New England town that was so ‘small New England town’ one had the sensation of existing within a snow globe at a souvenir shop” (1). The executives discuss the possibility of making a commercial with the teacher, who agrees and announces it to the class. Augusten reacts:

She might as well have told me that as of today, I never had to come to school ever again and for that matter was free to hit anybody I wanted to, without being punished. I *lived* for television commercials. The only reason I watched TV was so that I could see the commercials. Faberge

Organics Shampoo: “I told two friends. And they told two friends. And so on ... and so on ... and so on.” Or my current favorite: “Gee, your hair smells terrific!” (5)

While Burroughs presents himself as having an aptitude for remembering and rehearsing the slogans and dialogues from television commercials, he also illustrates his youthful investment in the visual strategies for representation. The Faberge Organics Shampoo commercial he remembers uses Warhol’s visual technique of serial repetition of images, and is similar to the opening credits of *The Brady Bunch*.⁴² Rather than presenting the people with whom the person in the ad speaks, it is the image of the female shampooer that gets serially replicated and which dominates the frame. Additionally, in an extant Faberge Organics Shampoo commercial, television celebrity Farrah Fawcett is the shampooer, and it is her image that multiplies onscreen as she repeats the phrase “and so on.” Using this commercial as a touchstone, Burroughs points to how he understands the possibilities for self-representation and seriality refracted through a contemporary serial culture that uses ever-evolving technologies as a way to repeatedly produce selves.

In the early 1960s, Andy Warhol famously created a series of paintings that used a film still of Marilyn Monroe from the movie *Niagara* (1953), which presents and represents Monroe’s image as serial.⁴³ The seriality of Warhol’s *Colored Marylins*

⁴² See Figures 1 and 2 in the appendix for this chapter.

⁴³ In *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe*, Sarah Bartlett Churchwell writes: “Andy Warhol’s familiar *Colored Marylins* silkscreens are a comment upon Marilyn as a stereotype: his Marilyn is an image mechanically, invariably reproduced from a mold. The first *Marilyn* silkscreens were made in 1962 immediately after Monroe’s death, as a memento mori. Although eventually Warhol would repeat the technique with other celebrities, including Elizabeth Taylor and Chairman Mao, Marilyn was the first to be figured in this way, and helped make the technique itself iconic. The same picture is repeated over and over: that is the portrait’s most salient characteristic. But each image is also slightly different from the one

foregrounds issues of repetition and representation, as it also exposes the production of celebrity and aesthetics. For example, Jeffrey Karnicky argues that it was through the serial repetition of Monroe's image, "via Warhol and other media forms, that her identity as a celebrity becomes formed" (342). Monroe's celebrity is figured as a process of reproduction in Warhol's *Colored Marilyns*, but it is also presented as a site for camp. In regard to Warhol's art, Fredric Jameson suggests that there is an emergent "depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (9), which helps to characterize some of the formal features of postmodernism. This commodification, Jameson continues, is also evident in Warhol's engagement with human subjects, celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, "who are themselves commodified and transformed into their own images" (11). The artifice, the elevation of glamour, and the serial repetition and production of her image is thus imitative of the contemporary creation of celebrity; even as Warhol canonizes Monroe, he reveals the public image as a carefully crafted performance of self. Now a part of contemporary discourse, Warhol's images of Monroe underscore the role of celebrity for the ways in which self-construction and self-presentation is understood.

In fact, the Warholesque proliferation of the image of a celebrity provides an interesting frame for Burroughs' memoir, as Burroughs' self-portraiture takes a similar strategy. While he doesn't visually represent himself, as Spiegelman does, Burroughs does reflect his self-performances through celebrity culture and television, imagining that *he* is—or soon will be—the celebrity. A significant difference, however, between

that precedes it: Warhol's technique allowed for variations in the reproduction so that they are recognizably Marilyn, but a different Marilyn every time" (16).

Warhol's camp production of Marilyn's celebrity image, and the self-portraits of Spiegelman and Burroughs is the role of subjectivity in the work. While Jameson suggests that the serial presentation of Marilyn in a text like *Colored Marylins* is indicative of the superficiality of postmodernity, the serial self-narratives of Burroughs—and of Mary McCarthy, Maya Angelou, and Art Spiegelman—indicate a recuperation of depth in contemporary lived experience. Additionally, the visual similarities between Warhol's *Colored Marylins*, the Fabergé Organics Shampoo commercial starring Fawcett, and the opening sequence of *The Brady Bunch* parallel many of the sequences in Spiegelman's serial memoir, in which he presents a proliferation of equally sized frames in which he is able to present his memoir. For Spiegelman, the possibilities for seriality inherent in this graphic depiction of subjectivity are part of what attracts him to this form of self-representation. In Burroughs' memoirs, however, it is how the seriality of the celebrity in presentations like these that provides fodder for his own self-representational strategies. What happens, Burroughs' memoirs ask, when audience members are continually confronted with this seemingly superficial construction of celebrities? How does seriality alter how we understand ourselves, and how we present those selves in narrative form?

Burroughs has become a celebrity in his own right since the publication of *Running with Scissors*, and, while he presents fame as something he had always wanted, in his post-*Scissors* memoirs he engages with celebrity in a different way. In "Bloody Sunday," for example, he gives readers an anecdote in which he gets a nosebleed on an international flight. On his way to the lavatory to clean up, he passed a woman reading a

book: “The cover was orange and featured a young boy with a box on his head,” Burroughs writes. “I couldn’t read the title but I didn’t need to because it was burned into my brain. I’d written the book. [...] Her lips parted and she turned my book over in her hands, examining the author photograph. // Then she looked back up at me” (11). The serial repetition of selves within the text of *Running with Scissors* does not preclude the physicality of Augusten—the person who gets nosebleeds easily, or the person who travels—but it also engages the seriality of representation in a way distinct from Warhol’s Marilyn. Because of his presence in the intimate space of the plane—when everyone else is asleep, this passenger is reading this memoir—Burroughs’ celebrity, like the television personalities through whom he also reflects his perception of self-construction, is familiar.

Likewise, in “I’m Gonna Live Forever,” from *Magical Thinking*, Burroughs writes about a few occasions in which he had been approached after the publication of *Running with Scissors*. “Because my memoir was extremely confessional and contained scenes that were both mortifying and humiliating,” he writes, “people automatically felt comfortable approaching me in public and confessing their innermost secrets” (207). He relays several stories in which strangers approach him and tell him extremely intimate information; these stories often begin with the stranger stopping Augusten by saying, ““Hey, I know you”” (208). The familiarity the reader feels with Augusten, because of the genre of memoir and the permeability between life and representation makes the reader confident that they “know” Augusten. Because celebrities seem to be ubiquitous,

and perhaps due to their status as product, they are often seen as the property of the consumer.

Burroughs addresses his surprise at finally becoming a celebrity because of his memoirs in the chapter “Killing John Updike,” in *Possible Side Effects*. After buying first editions of Updike’s texts because his friend was sure Updike would “BE DEAD BY MORNING” (48, capitals in original), Burroughs decided to look up his own texts.⁴⁴ “I’d never looked up my own name on a used-book Website before,” Burroughs writes. “It never occurred to me that I could be collectible, like a cup from Burger King. So I went back to the Web site where I bought the Updike books and typed in my own name” (48). He finds a new, unread copy of *Running with Scissors*, signed on the title page, selling for \$200. Intrigued, he enters his own name into a search box on eBay, and finds “his” watch, for sale by his own brother. While Burroughs writes that he had given his brother permission to sell the watch, he also explains that finding the watch on eBay was a surprise because the language of the advertisement characterized it as an object of celebrity memorabilia: “Watch worn for publicity during promotion of #1 bestselling book, RUNNING WITH SCISSORS. Watch appears on author’s wrist in many magazine photographs, including ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY, PEOPLE” (49, capitals in original). The boundaries between private and public blur at this moment for Burroughs, as he sees part of his own material self-construction—something that he wore when he was photographed for publicity purposes—auctioned off to another.

⁴⁴ Many of the fan posts on Burroughs’ Facebook site following Updike’s death in January 2009 mention this chapter, extending the concept of real-time interaction with the “host” personality. A more detailed discussion of Burroughs’ use of hypermedia like Facebook follows in the conclusion.

Burroughs reflects himself through a larger culture which materializes subjectivity through objects and mass production, such as when he presents the collections of shiny and kitschy objects in his room or when he describes the plane passenger's book as "my book" or his for-sale watch as "my watch. Many of the manifestations of camp in Burroughs' memoirs are positioned through his attention to physical objects like shag carpeting, shiny objects, and architecture. One of the reasons Augusten stopped going to school, for example, was because of the aesthetics of his junior high school building. He writes, that "the large gray one-level building looked like some sort of factory that might churn out ground meat products or just the plastic eyes for stuffed animals," and that he would rather spend time at the cinema or the Chess King store at the mall, which "sold reflective shirts and fantastic white dress pants with permanent creases" (84). Susan Stewart theorizes the significance of kitsch objects in *On Longing*, writing that kitsch and camp objects

destroy the last frontier of intrinsicity. Baudrillard has suggested in a brief passage on kitsch in *La Société de consommation* that kitsch represents a saturation of the object with details. [...] Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the kitsch object offers a saturation of materiality, a saturation which takes place to such a degree that materiality is ironic, split into contrasting voices: past and present, mass production and individual subject, oblivion and reification. [...] Kitsch objects are not apprehended as the souvenir proper is apprehended, that is, on the level of the individual autobiography; rather, they are

apprehended on the level of collective identity. They are souvenirs of an era and not of a self. (167)

The collected self of the serial memoir mirrors Stewart's position on kitsch and camp objects, which render an "era" of collective rather than individual identity. The seriality of kitsch or camp objects, Stewart posits, "is articulated by the constant self-periodization of popular culture," which is dependent upon "the fluctuations of a self-referential collector's market" but dependent upon "fashion" (167). Contemporary objects, replete with meanings and ironic materiality, influence how contemporary memoirists negotiate the "contrasting voices" which are frequently constructed—as in her discussion—as opposite. Representing and recreating the past from the position of the present, navigating the ways in which mass production and popular culture influence an individual subject, is precisely the project of Burroughs' serial memoir.

The relationality of memoir challenges how objects—and, in the case of Burroughs' use of objects, camp and kitsch—factor into narratives of self. Audiences, familiar with his self-representational texts, are thus under the illusion of intimacy with Burroughs, himself now a celebrity. Yet, by including these scenes in his serial memoir, Burroughs also presents these moments as queered in important ways; they are made strange, not solely through the physical discomfort of the scenes, but also in the ways that they address the boundary between public and private. A memoirist, even a serial memoirist, will never be able to represent their lived reality *in toto*, and this is not the project. Instead, contemporary serial memoirists, like Burroughs, present the seriality of

the daily, of the familial, of the familiar, as inseparable from the project of self-narrativization.

The seriality of materiality, and the irony of materiality in relation to kitsch and camp objects, plays an important role for how readers understand Burroughs' self-representational project. While Art Spiegelman's serial memoir emphasized the materiality of seriality through the repetition of left thumbs holding *Maus*, a textual representation of images from the past, Burroughs' materiality is ironic and self-reflexive. The possibilities that serial strategies of self-representation allow Burroughs, particularly through the cultural rarification of celebrities and the sensibilities of camp, cohere in his discussion of modeling. In "Model Behavior," Burroughs writes about his time at the Barbizon School of Modeling. After choosing an advanced pose to demonstrate to the class, Burroughs explains that he wanted to show his pose to the class last so he could alter it if he needed; he didn't want to duplicate the pose of another student. Burroughs writes:

I was going to be the star of the class, that much I had decided. But to my surprise, the poses were very ordinary. The men chose standing poses, mostly from the Sears catalogue. They stood, and they looked off into the distance, and they pointed. This, I knew, was a pose that only worked if you were standing next to another person. Other people chose to lean against the wall, legs crossed in front, face turned to the side. And while I thought this was a legitimate pose for a bathrobe or perhaps a scoop-neck sweater, I felt it was a limiting pose and not one I would have

selected. Amazingly, nobody chose the Brooke Shields Calvin Klein pose. I had felt certain that I wouldn't be the only student to bring this electrifying pose to class. But apparently the other students had naturally gravitated toward a certain comfort zone, a safety area without risks: mediocrity. (33)⁴⁵

The Brooke Shields Calvin Klein pose, in the narrative space of this episode, illustrates Augusten's self-assured nature, his ambition, and his critical gaze; he is aware of the diegetic requirements of each advertisement—if more than one person should have been included for the pose to make sense, or if the pose was limited to selling a bathrobe. His selection, on the other hand, characterizes him as daring, unordinary, and unafraid to take risks. He describes the Brooke Shields advertisement in critical but decidedly familiar terms: “Brooke was leaning back on her hands, butt off of the floor, chest turned toward the camera. Her huge right foot was flat on the floor, and her left leg was extended up and out” (33). Describing her foot as “huge,” and dissecting the placement of each part of her body could diminish the aesthetic beauty of the advertisement, which gave him “goose bumps” as soon as he saw it (33). The aesthetics and style of the advertisement, however, are not made any less incredible for Augusten's analysis of why the pose works. In fact, recognizing the power of her “huge foot” to be arresting for a reader illustrates Augusten's critical sensibility. He chooses this pose, a pose that is excessive and over the top, and models it successfully.

⁴⁵ See Figure 3 in the Appendix for this chapter.

Modeling this pose is akin, I argue, to crafting a serial self-narrative for others to model. Traditional life narratives simply look into the distant past and point, without including the other people which make those life narratives compelling. Other forms of self-reflexive writing present one version of subjectivity as they cross their arms in front of their audience; they do not engage with the construction of their subject positions, nor with the readers. These narrative poses, Burroughs' memoirs insist, do not allow for the excess, the play, or the artifice of self-presentation. Rather than follow conventional poses for self-representation, Burroughs looks to contemporary serial culture for models, and finds them in the strategies used by celebrities and performed on television. Burroughs takes a number of risks in his narratives, presenting a serial memoir that embraces popular culture, camp sensibilities, queer subjectivity, and seriality as a viable—and “electrifying”—way to represent a postmodern self.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: “VENERATION OF THE TRACE”:

SERIAL MEMOIR INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The quest for memory is the search for one’s history.
—Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History”

On February 1, 2009, Augusten Burroughs wrote an almost 3,000 word response to fans on his “Q&A” discussion space on the social networking site Facebook. A self-confessed “early adopter,” Burroughs positions himself throughout his memoirs as technologically savvy and compulsive: “I had a laptop computer in 1984, when they were rare and the size of briefcases. I also had a cell phone that was larger than a loaf of bread. So new technologies have never frightened me” (*Magical Thinking* 144). Burroughs’ relationship to technologies serves him well in an age that is increasingly digitized and hyper-serial. The response begins as Burroughs responds to the individual questions fans posed to him, working as a talk show host might. “Christine asks,” he begins, and then he proceeds to answer her question. Concluding his response, he writes:

Okay, that’s all I have time for tonight. I’m about to get clobbered by [my partner] Dennis if I keep him awake anymore with my typing. I have to move on to quieter things. But I really want to thank all of you for your questions. And I am sorry I didn’t get to answer everybody. [...] I had to write a book, though. And I had another project that I had to work on -

something I can't quite discuss yet but which is very exciting. Then, of course, there was vacation. ("Q & A")¹

As I argued in the last chapter, Burroughs uses the discourse of celebrity and televisual genres through the sensibility of camp and queerness of seriality in order to represent himself and his lived experiences at the turn of the twenty-first century. Yet, in his use of online interfaces like Facebook and Twitter, he illustrates a shift in the way we, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, engage in serial self-narrative.

These social networking sites usher in the age of the hyper-serial, distinct from the serial self-representational strategies I have discussed in this dissertation because of their seeming immediacy and constant metatextuality.² Burroughs' use of Facebook is distinct from others in that his serial self-representational project relies heavily on the ways in which he advertises his life narrative as a commodity. While his conversations on Facebook and Twitter are often innocuous and concern the everyday, more frequently they are part and parcel of his serial memoir. On May 25, 2009, for example, Burroughs wrote that he found a box of slides dating from 1989-1999, the decade about which *Dry* is written. Uploading these images to an online slideshow site, flickr, Burroughs supplements his serial memoir in much the same way that Mary McCarthy's incorporation of photographs into *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* underscores her narrative, but Burroughs does this electronically; whereas McCarthy wrote "Hold on!" in

¹ By mid-May, 2009, he ceased the Q&A on Facebook, but "does interact" on Twitter.

² On his Facebook page, for example, Burroughs presents photographs of himself and his dogs, he uploads short (30-second) videos into which he talks to the camera or shows footage of his dogs playing in the backyard. Burroughs' use of sites like Facebook, moreover, are keenly aware of the hyper-ness of their self-representational strategies. While many individuals have access to these sites, rarely are they on multiple sites simultaneously; Burroughs, however, has a Facebook page, a MySpace page, a Twitter, and a blog on his own webpage, www.augustenburroughs.com.

How I Grew, through his use of hyper-serial media for self-narrativization, Burroughs disseminates this information to his audiences immediately. The speed with which he is able to provide this information to his readers, or his “friends,” and how those audience members understand all of his self-representational performances is central to the next shift in serial self-narrative.

However, an extended treatment of hyper-serial self-representational practices of individuals on Facebook or other similar social networking sites sits on the outer edge of my conceptualization of serial memoir, even as those practices are unquestionably serial and do fall into the domain of life writing. Rather than go into great depth about the proliferation of social networking sites or multimedia/visual serial self-representative acts for this project, I want to ground the phenomenon in non-digital and not-yet-hyper-serial texts. Instead, I present this excerpt from Burroughs’ Facebook page because it illustrates some of the ways in which he, like Mary McCarthy, Maya Angelou, and Art Spiegelman before him, sits at a transitional moment in American life writing. Interestingly for this project, the rise of hyper-serial self-representation underscores the ubiquity of serial self-narrative, and serial memoir in particular, during the second-half of the twentieth-century in the United States.

The other authors examined in this dissertation also engage with their audiences: McCarthy’s “To the Reader” chapter in *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* works as an open letter to her audience; *The Welcome Table* invites readers to join Maya Angelou in the intimate act of sharing recipes and memories, as her culinary memoir encourages embodied textual participation; and the panels in the second installment of *Maus* present

Spiegelman's thoughts and anxieties about the successes he found in the first volume. Burroughs' digital engagement with his audience, however, is markedly distinct from the analog practices of his predecessors as it marks a constant, hyper-serial construction of self-performance. The strategies he uses throughout his serial memoir are significantly distinct from those he uses to engage audiences on a monthly basis online—both textually and visually.

Throughout this project, I argue that serial memoir is a version of serial self-archivization, and that the role of archives in memoir—in their material, structural, and metaphorical sense—is significant for how authors represent and understand the relationship between history and the present. The materiality of lived experience, these memoirists' use of archives suggests, becomes more and more important as does the cultural impulse to immediately record and transmit information. This impulse to “share” is one of preservation, and speaks to a larger, cultural fear of forgetting. Derrida also points to the shift in the late twentieth-century toward digital archivization, writing that there is an “unlimited upheaval under way in archival technology” (*Archive Fever* 18). He continues, asserting that email, in particular,

is on the way to transforming the entire public and private space of humanity, and first of all the limit between the private, the secret (private or public), and the public or the phenomenal. It is not only a technique, in the ordinary and limited sense of the term: at an unprecedented rhythm, in quasi-instantaneous fashion, this instrumental possibility of production, of printing, of conversation, and of destruction of the archive must

inevitably be accompanied by juridical and thus political transformations. These affect nothing less than property rights, publishing, and reproduction rights. (19)

The ways in which email and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter change our perception of public and private, along with their attendant possibilities for production and writing, are central for how we approach the serial memoir in the twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. The memoirs I examine in this dissertation, including Burroughs' memoirs, privilege the materiality of seriality, the textuality of memoir, and the significance of archiving memory.

Art Spiegelman, in a recent interview, says that his works try to build a model for how memory works, a model for "what happens when people remember," and one of the ways in which he engages memory is through the recursive and fragmented structures of his graphic serial memoir. His memoirs, like McCarthy's, Angelou's, and Burroughs', perform the transformation Derrida notes in archival technology as they simultaneously cleave to the materiality of texts. Serial memoirs enact the in-process nature of memory and of narrative, even as serial texts are often treated as moments of cultural excess: they are over-the-top, in poor taste, and seen as without the same sort of inherent value as other kinds of texts because they expose the material conditions of their production. The genre of memoir, too, is frequently considered a lesser genre for similar reasons, as Julie Rak writes, memoir "has often stood in for problems that a wide variety of autobiography critics have had with popular writing, and with writing when it is considered a commodity" (306). The commodity status of memoir, or its associations

with “non-professional or non-literary textual production” (Rak 306), is directly related to its focus on the everyday or the intimate. And yet, it is in serial memoir that tensions between history and memory, witnessing and testimony, and anonymity and celebrity illustrate the endless process of making meaning of our lived and narrated experiences. In fact, Spiegelman points to the trend of digitizing and uploading images from older comic books, and while he says that that’s very good for the dissemination of ideas, he’s “ambivalent” about these online productions. “I love the book as an object,” he says, and it is the tangible qualities of the physical book that make it his work. This dedication to the materiality of the book is shared by the other serial memoirists I examine; along with the seriality of the archive, they are invested in the materiality of memory. The relationship between the process of writing and of memory is exposed as a process in serial memoir.

Memoir functions as a generic form of counter-memory to the historical prose genres of history, fiction, and autobiography, as it presents stories of ex-centricity in which the limits between the aforementioned oppositions are interrogated. Along with other postmodern narratives which are similarly invested in providing counter-narratives and challenging traditional generic boundaries, these texts revel in their embrace of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and the materiality of textuality. In the liminal space between memory and history, written by the most public or celebrated individuals in a given society as well as by the most invisible, constructed in a myriad of available languages, and unapologetically grounded in a particular historical moment, memoir provides space for unconventional and innovative self-representation. “Modern memory

is, above all, archival,” Pierre Nora writes. “It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image” (13). The archival foundation of memory and the performances of memory through documentation are borne out by the rise of the serial memoir in the second-half of the twentieth-century.

Nora argues that “no society has ever produced archives as deliberately as our own,” in the amount we preserve, in the increased digitization and other technical modes of preservation, and particularly in our “veneration of the trace” for which we “collect remains, testimonies, documents, images, speeches, any visible signs of what has been” (13). At the end of, in Ellis’ words, the “century of witness,” in which people have seen more than any other generation through photographs, television, and the hyper-seriality of online image uploads from cellular telephones, the impulse to record and to share is evident. But, Ellis also suggests, too often “we are witnesses not to the events themselves but to their immediate aftermaths” (10); it is only after the destruction has taken place, lives have been lost, and atrocities have occurred that global or international communities are made aware. Serial modes of self-representation, and the ways in which contemporary serial memoirists foreground the role of the archive in twentieth-century life, is a material manifestation of Nora’s claim that we venerate the trace. Not only do we collect any signs of it, we have shifted the role of memory and the possibilities for witness and testimony in order to communicate the traces. We read serial memoir in order to, with the memoirist, retrace the steps of memory.

Seriality in contemporary American memoir is a very large topic with many unique serial performances; the texts I chose I did for their illustrative value, rather than

for their status as “representative” or generally indicative of the self-representational strategies of others. Rather, this project is meant to open up a conversation about the myriad of possibilities for serial narrative in life writing. Sean O’Sullivan asserts that “serial narrative, at its best, traffics in possibility more fully and creatively than any other medium” (O’Sullivan and Gardner), and one of the most compelling avenues serial narrative has taken in the last fifty years is in its relation to life writing. The chronological approach as an organizing principles for this dissertation emphasizes the importance in recognizing and interrogating the technological and postindustrial formations which make seriality an effective and evanescent mode of transmission. Much in life writing studies examines the construction and representation of subjectivity, but without interrogating how multiple serial forays into self-narrativization must inherently shift the ways in which memoirists understand and perform their multiple, fragmented, and ever in-process selves.

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APPENDIX

**Chapter Three:
Objects from Hallmark's Maya Angelou Life Mosaic collection.**

Figure 1



A tea set (2003), whose inscription reads, "Solitude can be a much-to-be-desired condition."

Figure 2



A candle (2001), whose inscription reads, "We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike."

Figure 3



A photo album (2001), whose inscription reads:

Praise bright blue skies
and dark rain clouds.

Lift happy voices
upon the morning air.

Murmur sweet words softly
in the evening breeze.

Be present
in all things
and *thankful*
for all things.

Chapter Four:

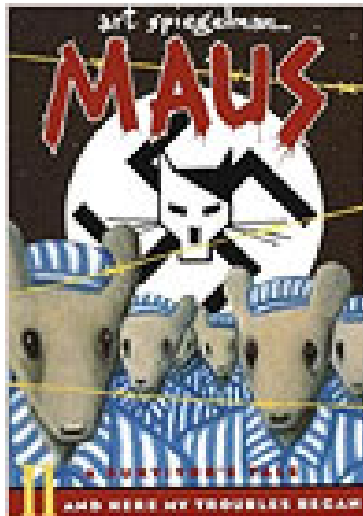
Figure 1



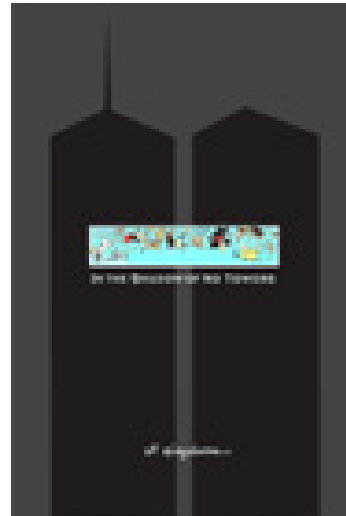
(1977),



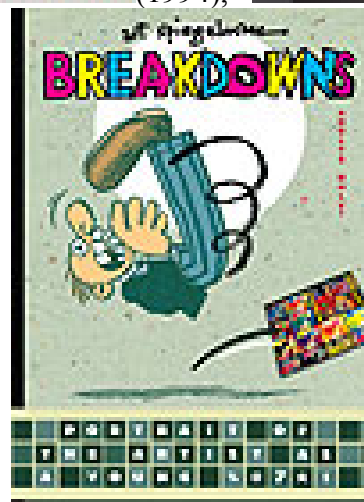
(1986),



(1994),



(2005),



(2008)

Figure 2



From Kartalopoulos, "Part Two."

Figure 3

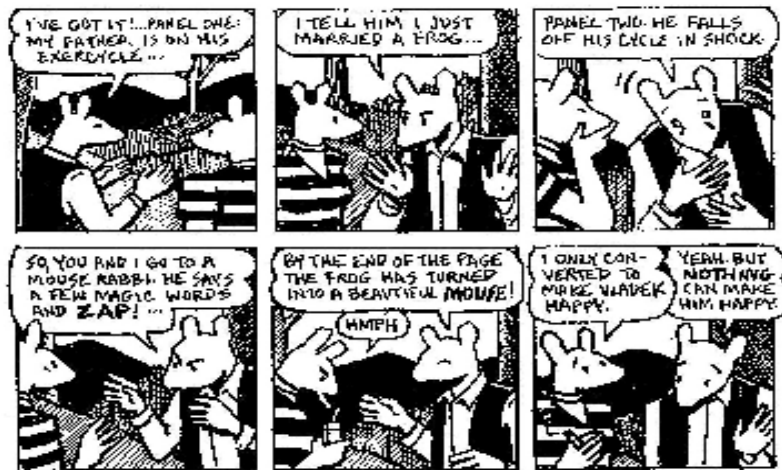


11

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II, A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*. New York: Pantheon, 1991. 11.

Permission granted by Random House.

Figure 4



Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II, A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*. New York: Pantheon, 1991. 12.

Permission granted by Random House.

Figure 5



Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I, A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon, 1986. 12.

Permission granted by Random House.

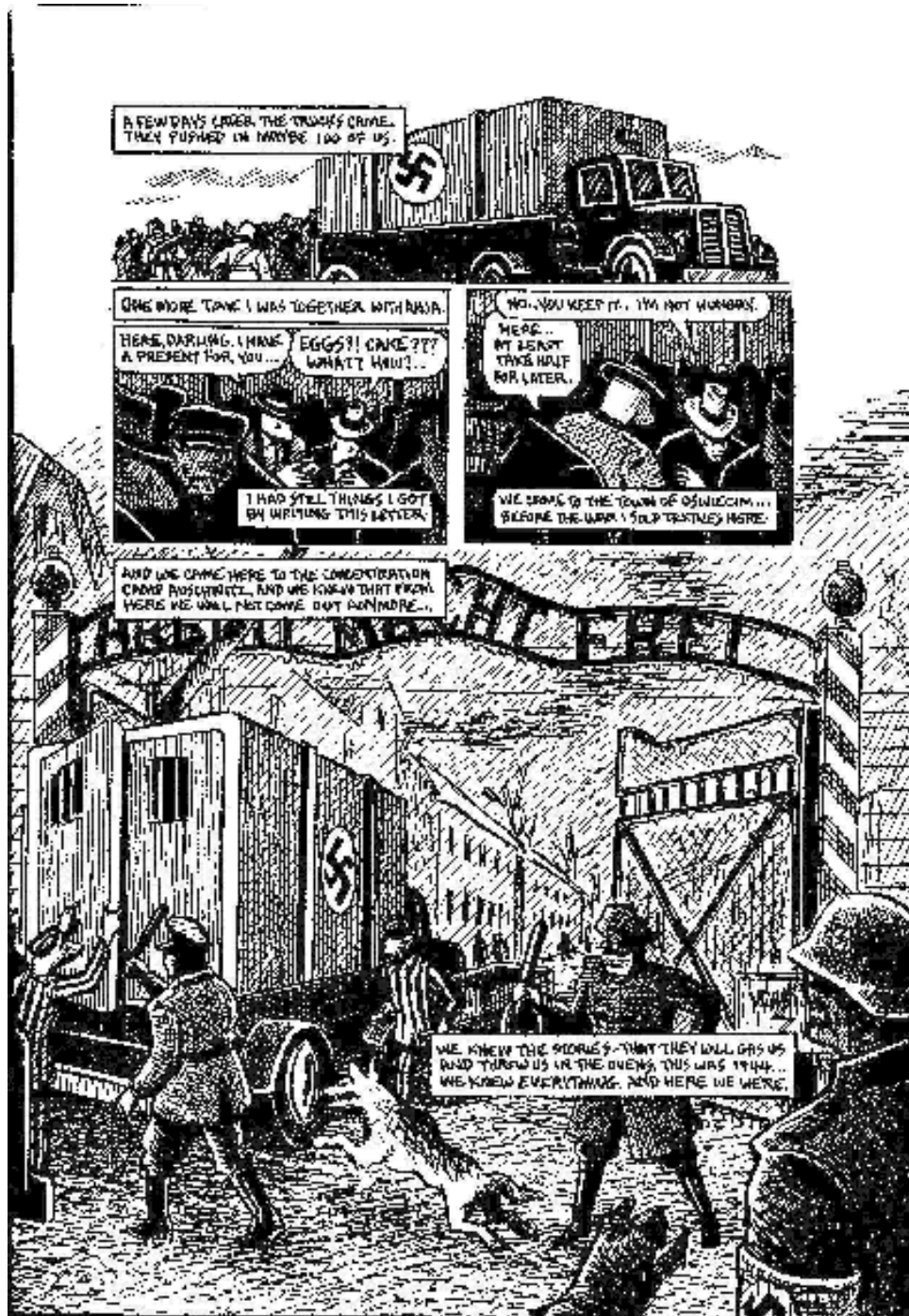
Figure 6



Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I, A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon, 1986. 100.

Permission granted by Random House.

Figure 7



Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I, A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon, 1986. 157.

Permission granted by Random House.

Figure 8



Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II, A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*. New York: Pantheon, 1991. 63.

Permission granted by Random House.

Chapter Five

Figure 1



Farrah Fawcett's serially repeated image from a Fabergé Organics Shampoo Commercial.

Figure 2



A still from the opening sequence of *The Brady Bunch*.

Figure 3



The Brooke Shields Calvin Klein advertisement.

VITA

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