

**“The Remnant is the Whole”: Collage, Serial
Self-Representation, and Recovering Fragments
in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée***

Nicole McDaniel

“We are in an era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered. We exist at a moment when the world is experiencing, I believe, something less like a great life line that would develop through time than like a network that connects points and weaves its skein.”

Michel Foucault, “Different Spaces” (175)

“The decapitated forms. Worn. Marred, recording a past, of previous forms. The present form face to face reveals the missing, the absent. Would-be-said remnant, memory. But the remnant is the whole.”

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée* (38)

Widely accepted as a self-referential text, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée* (1982) often confounds readers because of its heterogeneous and collaged narrative, its alinear structure, and its resistance to the traditional generic forms of autobiography.¹ Anne Cheng writes that, while *Dictée* is often read as Cha’s autobiography, “it is hard to pinpoint what it is exactly that makes this text an autobiography, since we are not offered a name or a consistent narrating voice. If anything, this text exhibits a great deal of *resistance toward autobiography as a traditional genre* where an author might appear to be retrieving or chronicling her life” (140; emphasis added). In a similar vein, Serena Fusco suggests that, “[i]f *Dictée* is to be considered an autobiographical narrative ... it is at some conditions that definitely enlarge the traditional scope of that genre” as it “straddles across autobiography and biography ... play[ing] with the conventions of both genres, blending these conventions with strategies

coming from other genres, and moving beyond all of them" (180). The generic classification of *Dictée*, along with many other contemporary life writing texts, is both complicated and significant to the ways in which the text gets read. Autobiography, Roy Pascal asserts in his foundational work *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, "involves the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived. Its centre of interest is the self, not the outside world, though necessarily the outside world must appear so that ... the personality finds its particular shape" (9).² The strict focus on the self, often at the expense of a larger cultural context, is crucial to the definition of a traditional autobiography.

Moreover, as autobiography scholar Georges Gusdorf suggests, the author of autobiography tries "to reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and to regroup them in a *comprehensive sketch*. The historian of himself wishes to produce his own portrait, but while the painter captures only a moment of external experience, the autobiographer strains toward a *complete* and coherent expression of his entire destiny" (35; emphasis added). Gusdorf's emphasis on the entirety of the autobiographer's project is placed in contrast to Pascal's position that the autobiography can involve either the "movement of a life" or, simply, of "part of a life." And yet, both Pascal and Gusdorf stress that the autobiographer moves toward a final moment: the present. If the writer, as Gusdorf says, is an "historian of himself" (35), then that author will want to move his discussion of the self toward the present: the point at which he is able to write the autobiography and pen his final thoughts. 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 "movement" in autobiography, then, must be toward the present in order to illustrate the achievements of the autobiographer to the reader and to discover, as Pascal writes, "the concrete reality of the meaning of their life" (10). The definitions of autobiography posited by Pascal and Gusdorf, among others, however, do not adequately describe the self-referential texts written by many contemporary authors, including Cha's *Dictée*.³ *Dictée* is alinear and achronological, multivocal and

multilingual, heterogeneous and collaged, decontextualized and without a central narrating voice; it challenges the construction and theorization of conventional autobiographies and monolithic narratives at every turn. Rather than read Cha's text as an autobiography, I propose that *Dictée* be read as a memoir which uses the heterogeneous technique of collage to emphasize the extent to which identity construction, self-representation, and the recovery of memory fragments are inter-relational and serial.

Memoir, as its mnemonic etymology suggests, is concerned with uncovering the past instead of the “revelation of the present situation” or with being the “historian of [one]self.” As Nancy K. Miller points out, the etymology of “memoir” is foundational to an understanding of the genre: “By its roots, memoir encompasses both acts of memory and acts of recording—personal reminiscences and documentation.... In this way, memoir is fashionably postmodern, since it hesitates to define the boundaries between private and public, subject and object” (2). Rather than moving toward a present self, movement in memoir is often across the seemingly established and impermeable boundaries between memory and history, time and place, or self and other, in search of memories. “Although *DICTÉE* is generally regarded as Cha's autobiography,” writes Stella Oh, “it is not so much an autobiography, but a compilation of multiple fragments of voices, images, and memories that echoes the haunting beauty and horror of that which had been forgotten and erased from the pages of formal records, traditional history, and familiar notions of identity and memory” (2). Not only does the genre of memoir allow for the collage or assemblage of memories and fragments, its flexibility supports recreation of stories and histories. 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. Linda Hutcheon points out that “the most important boundaries crossed [in postmodern texts] have been those between fiction and non-fiction—and by extension—between art and life” (“Beginning” 250),⁴ and memoir is a genre that allows for and encourages permeability between boundaries. Moreover, this permeability also allows for heterogeneous

composition, enabling authors to more accurately represent memories by including photographs, recipes, sheet music, maps, or other forms of documentation.

Documentation is central to *Dictée's* story and to its structure. As Cha examines nationalism and citizenship in her narrative through formal and official documents, she also incorporates many different types of unusual self-imaging texts into her memoir, including photographs and film stills, handwritten and typed letters, poetry, prose, political petitions, two pages of the memoir's own handwritten manuscript, Chinese characters, French translation exercises, charts, and geographic maps. Collaged together, these texts provide the memoir with a heterogeneous foundation, presenting the reader with a self-representational archive. Memoir scholar Helen Buss asserts that "collage, expressed as a formal choice in the episodic, genre-blending style of memoir, is a good word to describe the aesthetic practice of women seeking [...] a 'self which could include difference, connection, and heterogeneity'" (68), and Marjorie Perloff points out that "[t]he basic structural principle [of collage] is that of parataxis: anything can appear in the collage that is an attribute [of the collaged] or refers to [her] in some way" (6–7). The ability to include "anything" in a memoir with which to represent or illuminate the self is significant to the genre's inclusive boundaries and is foundational to contemporary strategies for self-representation, particularly as it challenges the idea of a homogenous self-narrative.

In order to represent a heterogeneous self, one that is multilingual, transnational, and mediated by images and documents, Cha deftly uses the form of collage. Perloff explains in her essay, "The Invention of Collage," that artists and authors choose the form of collage for specific reasons: "collagists [...] assume [] that (1) expository linear discourse cannot convey all the desired meaning, and (2) the transfer of words and images from their original sources to the collage construction involves new possibilities" (10). Cha's decision to work in the expansive genre of memoir, rather than the often restrictive form of traditional autobiography, illustrates her desire to present a version of self that works outside established generic and textual boundaries. "She wanted," Cha writes, "to abolish it quickly, the formula, the ritual. All too quickly the form

and the skin that resembles a past. Any past” (140). Instead of composing a text that follows the formula, that looks like a past assembled in a “comprehensive sketch” of the autobiographer’s life, Cha assembles a collage which examines the past without resembling the traditional, self-referential texts with which she and her readers are familiar. By challenging the established forms, she challenges the idea that narratives must be told in a linear, chronological fashion, and critiques the possibility of representing a complete life, choosing instead to represent an episodic, serialized version of self.

As a way to structure this episodic self, Cha arranges her memoir using the nine muses first individualized by Hesiod in the *Theogony* as the daughters of Mnemosyne—the goddess of memory—as a foundation. Each section in *Dictée* corresponds with one of the nine Greek Muses and the art she traditionally represents: “Clio: History,” “Calliope: Epic Poetry,” “Urania: Astronomy,” “Melpomene: Tragedy,” “Erato: Love Poetry,” “Elitere: Lyric Poetry,” “Thalia: Comedy,” “Terpsichore: Choral Dance,” and “Polymnia: Sacred Poetry.” Structuring the text this way, Cha immediately positions herself in a tradition of women in the arts and learning. Of the nine muses, one is altered by Cha: the Greek Muse “Euterpe” is omitted, and Cha’s refashioned muse, “Elitere,” takes her place. This is a significant alteration because the etymology of “Euterpe” means “to please,” and this memoir does not attempt to please its readers through simplification. Instead, Cha constantly challenges her readers to rethink assumptions about gender, nation, language, and self-representation. As Pablo Picasso wrote, the purpose of collage is to make audiences think about things in a new way: “Th[e] displaced object [in collage] has entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this strangeness was what we wanted to make people think about because we were quite aware that our world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring” (qtd. in Perloff 5). Cha is dedicated to foregrounding the “strangeness” and un-reassuring postcolonial, transnational, and multilingual contexts in which she lives and about which she writes. Thus instead of “Euterpe,” the muse traditionally associated with music, Cha includes a section titled “Elitere: Lyric Poetry.”

Both parts of this segment's title, the word "elitere" and lyric poetry, are significant to this memoir's construction. "Elitere" is an invention of Cha's, so the etymology must be speculated upon. It seems, however, that the "litere" must be etymologically related to *littera*, or "letter." Shelley Sunn Wong suggests that "Elitere" is a play on "*elite* and *litterare*," and that it "emerges to critique the privileged place of epic as high literature" (51; emphasis original), while Stella Oh remarks that "Elitere" "call[s] attention to her own literary power to record the missing memories through her lyrical prose poetry" (3). Clearly, Cha challenges the ways in which her audience perceives and understands the distinction between letters and images. As evidenced by the inclusion of Chinese and Korean ideograms, and the incorporation of handwritten pages from *Dictée's* own manuscript and handwritten correspondence, all of which are texts that are simultaneously letters and images, the boundaries between what constitutes a letter and what makes an image are blurred.

The association of "Elitere" with lyric poetry, moreover, underscores the significance of locating a self with unfixed boundaries, as the need for a self-imagining lyric poet persists in contemporary society. According to Helen Buss, this lyric self-referential voice "re-emerge[s] in the memoirs of women who find the same need as the earlier lyric poets. They too had to relocate their personal identity in terms of a world in which their old self-definitions had been swept away and new identities demanded a search through past and present realities" (15). Rather than simply recalling events from the past or transcribing historical events, Buss continues, these contemporary memoirists attempt to retrieve objects from the past with "a voice that speaks neither from complete present involvement in the event nor from complete objective removal from the event" (15). Through her own reworking of the Hesiodic tradition, then, Cha aligns herself with the lyric poets who attempted to redefine definitions and representations of self through their relationship with the past. This new way to understand the self's connection to both the past and the present also highlights Cha's decision to use the Muses as an explicit structure for her memoir. The Muses were believed to be "divine and remote, creat[ors] [of] the narrative" (MacCurtain 255), while the

narrator was simply their vessel. In *Dictée*, however, Cha foregrounds her own authorial and narratorial presence through the heterogeneity of collage, by challenging the traditional formula of autobiography, and with the powerful voices included throughout the narrative. Indeed, to further emphasize the significance of the authorial prerogative, Cha links each section, while titled with the name of a muse, to other female figures. There is no doubt that Cha is in charge of the narrative and that, by connecting the muses with other women, both she and they are rendered less “remote.”

Revising Hesiod’s *Theogony* is significant to *Dictée*, as many scholars have suggested. In an essay comparing the texts of Hesiod and Cha, Kun Jong Lee points out that, while Cha invokes the Muses twice in her narrative, her “imitation of Hesiod is rather off the beat,” as she “deletes ‘Muse,’ ‘Goddess,’ and ‘daughter of Zeus’ in her second invocation” (78). Further, Lee asserts, while studies of the intertextuality between *Theogony* and *Dictée* center on Cha’s “subversive rewriting” of Hesiod, Cha presents her readers with a different kind of collection of women than Hesiod. While “the women in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* are remembered and celebrated precisely because they are bearers of divine seed and mothers of heroic sons” (Lee 79), the women discussed in *Dictée* are themselves revolutionaries, like Joan of Arc or Yu Guan Soon, or support matrilinearity, as is the case with the frequent allusions to Cha’s own mother. Further, these female figures come from transnational contexts and are presented as women who “reject the roles prescribed by patriarchy and ultimately transcend the limitations of their short lives by asserting their voices and/or through female bonding” (Lee 80). Lee and other scholars point out many significant ways that Cha reworks and revises Hesiod,⁵ yet absent from their analyses are any discussions about how the “catalogue of women” presented in *Dictée* relates to Cha’s own serial self-representation therein.

Rather than read the many female personages included in *Dictée* as simply, as Lee suggests, “a gallery of the portraits of women,” I read the depictions of these women as reflections and refractions of Cha’s own self-representation. While Cha looks to other women for inspiration and understanding, evidenced by the fact that she frames the chapters

in her text with the brief biographies of different women, both family members and historic figures, in creating her collaged memoir she also finds these women central to her own construction and comprehension of self. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest in their introduction to *Interfaces* that

Women's artistic production of the autobiographical occurs frequently at the interface of the domains of visibility (image) and textuality (the aural and written word, the extended narrative, the dramatic script). In these heterogeneous self-displays, textuality implicates visibility as, in different ways, the visual image engages components of textuality at material, voiced, and/or virtual sites. Thus it is essential to expand the concept of visual autobiography as self-portraiture to include visual, textual, voiced, and material modes of embodied self-representation. These self-referential displays at the visual/textual interface in hybrid or pastiche modes materialize self-inquiry and self-knowledge, not through a mirror for seeing and reproducing the artist's face and torso but as the artists' engagement with the history of seeing women's bodies. (7)

The production of *Dictée* as memoir happens at the interface of visibility and textuality, and it is through the presentation of other women that the artist's own self-representation takes place. Sue-Im Lee writes that the "non-identity of *Dictée's* subject is first and foremost founded on the fact that she has no textual body within the nine chapter-like segments that constitute the text. There is no linguistic representation of the subject as a corporeal identity" (243), yet the reader has multiple impressions of the narrator through the stories and histories she presents as part of her own self-representational project.

While Lee suggests that the narrator is not corporally present within the memoir, she is outlined throughout the text. As Cha herself writes, "Her portrait is not represented in a still photograph, nor in a painting. All along, you see her without actually seeing, actually having seen her. You do not see her yet. For the moment, you only see her traces" (100). Rather than give readers the/a corporeal self, Cha reflects her-

self textually; as she points out, the narrator’s self-image is not given as a visual text—neither in a photograph nor in a painting—yet she has represented herself “all along.” “She allows others,” Cha writes on the first page of the memoir, “In place of her. Admits others to make full” (3). Literally and formally incorporating the stories and bodies of other women, Cha avoids giving readers a mirrored image of herself, yet she sees and presents herself in an interrelational fashion through those other bodies and histories. Relationality is significant, argues Buss, because women’s memoirs often “proceed in a series of incremental scenes of realization that always involve relationships with significant others as well as efforts to achieve autonomy. Such memoirs often end not with resolution, but with a condition of continuing renegotiation with whatever material conditions and actual persons represent community for the memoirist” (13). Rather than present readers with a “non-identity,” the character of the narrator is transmitted through the stories of others that represent community for Cha as she examines and critiques the ways in which identities are constructed, translated, and textualized.

In *Dictée*, readers are given sketches, information, photographs, and/or histories of figures like Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Hyung Soon [Huo] Cha, Saint Theresa of Lisieux, and a *disease*. Each section, and each story within that section, reflects back to the reader information about the way Cha characterizes herself and how she understands lineage. Presenting her readers with a horizontal, serial version of kinship, Cha writes

From A Far
what nationality
or what kindred and relation
what blood relation
what blood ties of blood
what ancestry
what race generation
what house clan tribe stock strain
what lineage extraction
what breed sect gender denomination caste
what stray ejection misplaced

Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other
Tombe des nues de naturalized
what transplant to dispel on (20)

Delineating different ways that people are and have been labeled, categorized, and thus subjugated, this poem presents ideas of generations and ancestry in a manner that folds back on itself, underscoring the cyclical and refracted way she has chosen to represent her ‘self.’ In a traditional, vertical assessment of lineage: “blood relation” is synonymous with “ancestry,” which is synonymous with “generation” as well as “house clan tribe stock strain.” Moreover, the refusal to punctuate or otherwise textually demarcate these words from one another emphasizes their interchangeability. This poem is placed within the text on one page; it faces another, shorter poem:

IN NOMINE
LE NOM
NOMINE (21)

Visually, these two texts challenge each other; one represents a serial, recursive, horizontal understanding of ancestry while the other emphasizes the significance and power of naming, and of keeping the name. Significant in discussions of images and graphic narratives, the placement of these two texts on opposing page forces the reader to understand them both together and in conflict with each other. In his critical examination of form in comic books and graphic novels, Will Eisner emphasizes the importance of the total page in analyzing frames, and readers must either read these two pages together—and try to reconcile them in some way—or physically turn the page (41).

Dictée’s cyclical, polyvocal, and serial movement emphasizes the recollection and (re)collection of memories and images that are both personal and cultural; the “Clio: History” section gives a brief biography of Yu Guan Soon, a Korean revolutionary, along with the narrator’s thoughts about history. “There is no people without a nation,” Cha writes, “no people without ancestry” (28). To emphasize ancestry and the people through whom history is understood, Cha provides readers with a ver-

sion of Japan's colonization of Korea through the lens of Yu Guan Soon's biography; she inscribes her memories of the ancestral country on the cultural myth of a female revolutionary. Cha emphasizes the significance of recording history, as she explains the difficulty of witnessing: “To other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recording” (32). Those unfathomable words and decontextualized images represent memories, collected in *Dictée* as a significant and forceful counternarrative to the kinds of records “History” keeps. This memoir is committed to documenting and recording Cha's particular history, and thus, by extension, a specific cultural memory that does not aim to be representative on a larger scale. Representing the self through the bodies and stories of other women, emphasizing the interrelational ways in which she understands herself and history, she is able to provide an archive of memories that presents the unfathomable.

Her interrelational understanding of history also surfaces in “Melpomene: Tragedy,” in a letter to her mother. Remembering the story of her mother's exile from her homeland when South Korea was under Japan's rule, Cha writes, “You carried not a single piece, not a photograph, nothing to evoke your memory” (81). The use of second person, here in the guise of a letter, serves to distance the reader even farther from the narrative, as “you” implicates the reader in an unfamiliar and extremely personal historical moment. Indeed, Cha uses the second person frequently in *Dictée*, often without the frame of the letter and without presenting readers with a clear addressee, emphasizing her memoir's heterogeneous and fragmented structure and challenging the ability of any text to claim representative status. Further, this quotation centers on Cha's mother's lack of archival documents, contrasting sharply with *Dictée*'s commitment to presenting the collaged memories of its author. Cha unveils how important documents and images are in a contemporary, transcultural and international context; questions about what documents a person has in their possession, how those documents are read by both individuals and by officials, and whether or not those

documents are passed down through ancestors are all exposed in this memoir. Ultimately, as she exposes both the importance and insignificance of “objects” in constructing a life narrative, it is through the stories of the other women that readers learn the most about the narrator. Reflecting and refracting Cha’s memories through the stories, histories, and biographies of other women foregrounds the multiplicity and seriality of identity.

Like many contemporary memoirists who also struggle with structuring fragments of memory and history in order to represent the self, Cha relies on seriality and serial self-representation to illustrate the insufficiency of one image or text to represent a life narrative. The idea of seriality is not new, particularly as it has been documented in fiction and visual media, but seriality in memoir and other forms of self-representation is undertheorized. The concept of seriality itself is in transition; no longer strictly associated with sequelization (as in the serial and sequential publication of the Victorian novel, for example), seriality is closely linked with repetition and recursivity.⁶ Seriality can be either recursive and episodic or sequential and chronological. In *Dictée*, seriality is emphasized by Cha’s self-representational strategies of refraction and reflection, and in the frequent loss and recovery of fragments—fragments of memory, of identity, of history—within the narrative. Memories, Cha writes, are not stuck in a particular time: “It is burned into your over-present memory. Memory-less. Because it is not in the past. It cannot be. Not in the least of all pasts” (45). Memory, Cha asserts, is serial and multiple, and the form of her self-representational text must follow suit. Smith and Watson suggest that “[t]emporal succession may also create a *serial* relationship in which multiple instances of self-referencing unfold as a process” (34). Moreover, they continue, the subject of serial self-representation is “[a]t once discrete and multiple” as the subject “stages life narrative as sequence with unpredictable variation. The serialized personal narrative thus enacts a larger story about women’s relationship to historical representations of woman and gendered sexuality” (“Introduction” 35). Each of the nine chapters in *Dictée* presents a different narrative mediated through a different cultural or historical perspective, and thus each section represents a differ-

ent moment in the serial self-representation of the narrator. What some scholars have pointed to as “non-sequiturs” or “unreadable” movements in her memoir, I propose are Cha’s way to present serial accounts of the self. Using images and texts in a discordant and alinear fashion, she illustrates the act of construction inherent in identity creation—whether gendered, national, linguistic, or cultural. Serially representing her self, Cha underscores the significance of fragments and remnants in identity construction. Choosing the genre of memoir, and incorporating heterogenic elements in a collage, Cha sutures personal, historical, aural, and mediated fragments in order to present her likeness in the written and visual form of a book.

As readers, however, Anne Cheng points out, “[o]ur compositional desires are constantly evoked, exposed, and thwarted. Thus the deployment of photographs and other fragments in the text precludes imaginary identification and obscures collective memories” (150). The thwarted desires of the reader are significant because, as Wong says in the first line of her essay, “*Dictée* is not a representative work” (43). Often, readers of an autobiographical text will feel as if they “know” the author/narrator, and will identify too closely with that character, or they may assume that one narrative can stand in for all other narratives and, as many scholars have pointed out, this conflation happens more often for autobiographical texts written by marginalized individuals.⁷ Cha’s memoir is constructed specifically against this tendency to conflate the author with her text and the tendency for readers to subsume memoirs under the category of “representative” works. “In order to faithfully represent the disparate tensions and the interplay between them,” Jennifer Gurano-Trier suggests, “Cha does not attempt to create one cohesive narrative of Korean history or of Korean American identity, but instead presents the pieces, the fragments, in their ruptured and discordant state” (254). This is not a memoir of a collective experience, no matter how many different narratives Cha includes, nor does it attempt to reconcile the fragments with one another in a cohesive, linear text. As Cha writes, “Would-be-said remnant, memory. But the remnant is the whole. The memory is the entire” (38). There are no final words in this memoir, nor, in Gusdorf’s words, is there any “comprehensive sketch” of the author/narrator.

The collaged, heterogenic structure does not allow for the reader's compositional desires, or, as Sue-Im Lee writes, the "realist readerly orientation is missing" (244). Cha goes as far as to historically decontextualize the images and texts incorporated within the narrative as much as possible, ensuring that "the remnant is the whole." Instead, Cha integrates her reader into the text through the powerful individualized voices of the collection of women, including herself that she provides, with an overt and clear structure provided by the Muses, and by choosing some photographs and illustrations that readers may be able to identify. The photograph of Maria Falconetti, from the 1928 film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and included in the "Erato: Love Poetry" chapter, for example, may be a recognizable image for many Western readers. Those familiar with that particular film still, however, may not be familiar with other images or experiences presented in this memoir, thereby giving different audience members varying perspectives on the text. This decontextualization reaffirms the narrative as Cha's own self-representational memoir because, when assembled, the images presented serve to represent herself and only her self. "The collage," writes Aleida Assmann, "breaks the homogeneous surface of the canvas, rendering it jagged and uneven" (77); through this memoir the surface of "identity" is revealed to be discordant and fragmented.

The form of collage is also important because the images are not labeled, titled, or footnoted. Removing the images from any context outside this memoir emphasizes its metatextuality and, as Picasso pointed out, makes the collaged "objects" even more "displaced." Indeed, it can be difficult to know what the image represents outside the context of the memoir, or from which contexts Cha takes the images. "To Cha," Cheng asserts, "the photograph can often offer a visual and facile mask of identification and sympathy. By refusing a unidirectional correspondence between the image and the referent it supposedly guards, Cha resists photography's easy promise to furnish evidence and to animate the desire to collect data" (144). While, as Cheng suggests, Cha resists contextualizing the photos and film stills included in the memoir, she also refuses to narrate the maps, graphs, calligraphied characters, and other atypical self-referential, nonverbal "objects" incorporated into the

narrative. Without the historical and cultural contexts with which to approach the images and texts presented in *Dictée*, Cha engages in a radical otherness that places the reader in a position of never being able to completely identify with this narrative. Even so, readers can engage with the recovery of cultural and personal fragments and memories Cha presents and archives in *Dictée*.

One of the most powerful images comes at the end of the “Elitere: Lyric Poetry” section. The final page of that chapter is a cave painting of a woman’s hand; the thin white hand contrasts with the darker rock of the cave wall. The textures of the rock are easily discernable through the painted hand, creating a powerful suggestion of the continuity and fortitude of the natural world in contrast with other kinds of texts and objects, like those included as proof of citizenship or other highly valued transnational documents provided in *Dictée*. This image is further significant because of its placement at the end of the “Elitere” chapter, for while Cha’s hands have created and assembled the text, this section of the memoir is comprised solely of her poetry. It does not include letters or political documents; rather, “Elitere” seeks to be a testament to the skill with which Cha arranges and presents words. Indeed, many of her poems speak as much to the creation of this memoir and the way memory works as they do to any other subject:

Within those limits,
resurrect, as much as
possible, possibly could hold
possibly ever hold
a segment of it
segment by segment
segmented
sequence, narrative, variation
on make believe. (129)

Here, the art of constructing a text in which “as much as possible” is contained, in which memory is collected and re-collected, in which the book—her narrative physically contained “Within those limits”—contains all it could “possibly ever hold,” is given poetic representation.

The fact that this poem comes in the chapter of the non-traditional muse, Cha's revision of Hesiod, is indicative of her investment in creation and memory. By repeating the words "possible" and "segment" in this section of the poem, Cha underscores the importance of assembling fragments and remnants in order to present a narrative of the self as she simultaneously nods to the difficulty in characterizing and representing that self.

Cha writes: "To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (33). The seriality in reconstructing memories, she suggests, in extracting the fragmented texts and images, contests both the traditional records of "History" and the conventional ways to represent the self. Inherent in a serial and interrelational strategy of self-construction is the desire to expose the significance of others on our own self-imagining. Recovering and (re)collecting the stories and embodied histories of others allows their stories to continue; while the simple collection and repetition of their stories and bodies does nothing to alter conventional notions about women and identity, seeing the self through the bodies of others allows their stories to continue beyond their physical existence. This continuation beyond death is a driving force behind seriality and serial self-representation, as objects that are lost may also be found. Leigh Gilmore asserts that "the limit implied by seriality represents an engagement with the ultimate limit of life and death" (97), and *Dictée* exists in that liminal space between life and death as Cha's own self-representation is figured through characters who no longer exist, and the construction of her text emphasizes the ways in which objects and stories last beyond their embodied owners. The form of collage itself emphasizes the presentation, collection, and persistence of texts, and the self-representational archive Cha presents to her readers is a testament to recovering those fragments of memory.

Notes

- 1 A few examples: Fusco writes, "Something like embarrassment grips us, when it comes to the generic definition of Cha's text. Such 'embarrassment' is perfectly understandable: confronted with such a challenging blend of genres, both liter-

ary and nonliterary, it is somehow difficult to refer to *Dictée* as anything else than *Dictée* itself” (176); Kang suggests that “[t]he temporal gap between the initial 1982 publication and the current critical interest in the book could be attributed partially to [...] the fragmented and elliptical quality of the book” (34); Cheng mentions its “narrative opacity” (142) while Lee writes of its “aesthetic of fragmentation and non-cohesiveness” (246), its “deliberate aesthetic of disorder” and its “incoherent voice” (247); Frost points to *Dictée*’s pages, “crowded with such instances of language that impedes signification, images whose figural content belies their hermeticism. Such impasses reveal the degree to which image and text in *Dictée* function as unreadable signifiers” (182).

- 2 Adams begins his book with a chapter titled “Design and Lie in Modern American Autobiography,” by 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. The word *autobiography* has frequently been analyzed in terms of its three separate components: *autos* or self, *bios* or life, and *graphe* or writing” (1). Gilmore calls Pascal’s text a “critical precursor to the renewed interest in autobiography studies” (“Mark” 16).
- 3 Smith and Watson present a comprehensive discussion of autobiographies and autobiography studies. Chapter Five, “A History of Autobiography Criticism Part 1: Defining the Genre,” is particularly relevant to this discussion as they place Pascal and Gusdorf, among others, in the “second wave” of autobiographical criticism. The second wave, they argue, “opened up the discussion of autobiographical narrating by insisting on its status as an act of creation rather than mere transcription of the past,” but “an ideology of the autonomous selfhood of autobiography underlies much of the theorizing in this second wave and informs the texts privileged and the practices of self-creation valued” (128). In the contemporary, “third wave” of autobiographical scholarship, as is the case with genre studies more generally, postmodern understandings of narrative and of the self have complicated the way self-representational narratives are read and understood. Criticism, however, frequently returns to these second-wave discussions of autobiography for definition and boundaries.
- 4 The 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 support a need for those boundaries. As Cohen argues: “though [the assumption that genre theory must underplay literary artifice, be coherent, and linear] may apply to some generic theories, there are others that are per-

fectly 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.

5 See Oh and Wong.

6 There is an important difference between “serial” and “sequel.” According to Budra and Schellenberg, the sequel is always aligned with the word “sequence,” from the Latin root *sequi*, meaning “to follow.” The sequel is linked with temporality in a way that the series may not be. Also fundamental to a definition of sequel is “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). There is, Budra and Schellenberg assert, a “requirement of internal sequentiality” so that the “story continues, and the story remains the same” (8, 9).

7 See, for example, Kingston’s essay “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers.”

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