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INTRODUCTION

A Shared Space

TAHNEER OKSMAN

Early on in *Lucky* (2006), a collection of autobiographical comics, Gabrielle Bell draws a journal entry in which her persona laments having difficulty getting to work, riddled as she is with "mixed feelings" and a sense of being "too self-conscious" (7). Two panels later, she is pictured perched on hands and knees, pulling open a disproportionately small, striped door, as if she were embarked on an Alice-in-Wonderland adventure (Figure 1). The narrative above the image reads, "An artist once told me that in order to be creative you need to go into a place inside yourself and to do that you need to be alone." Ironically, Gabrielle is not drawn alone in any of the other five panels that make up the page, in which she endures a "rollercoaster" of feelings in the company of others as the outside world pulls her from her work desk. Nor is the journal itself meant to be a solitary experience; here, as elsewhere, we, her readers, are clearly invited to enter into Bell's self-chronicling project.

Along with Julie Doucet, an artist Bell has referred to as a "foremost influence," Bell's comics page is an exploration of this very tension: between the presumably solitary nature of one's internal, creative-making world and the social, responsive, and thus apparently creatively stifling atmosphere of the external world (Cometbus). If, as Sarah Ahmed puts it, "[a] masculinist model of creativity is premised on withdrawal," these artists reflect the productive consequences of probing such a paradigm, as their creations scrutinize and ultimately challenge the problematic notion of the artist, or even the individual artwork, as an island (217). Throughout their oeuvres, embedded in their designs, styles, stories, and lines, we witness an aesthetics of resistance, a kind of wariness—or weariness—almost always following, or followed by, a swelling, forceful energy.

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Figure 1. Page from *Lucky.*

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By exploring the works of these two contemporary cartoonists together in this edited volume housed in a series devoted to single-creator studies, my co-editor, Seamus O'Malley, and I hope to show how, despite the importance of finding "a place inside yourself" in order to create, this space is always, for better or worse, also a shared space, culled from, and subject to, surrounding lives, experiences, and subjectivities. Reading their bodies of work alongside each other is a way of honoring the feminist legacy of connection and engagement, an intervention that takes as its premise that even when we are most alone we are still connected to, and in conversation with, the world around us.

A household name, by now, in alternative comics fan communities who started publishing in the late 1980s, Julie Doucet, an often autobiographical cartoonist who famously left comics at the turn of the century, frequently depicted herself towards the end of that run, both via her drawn personas and in interviews, as an outsider, or someone who did not always feel at home in the world of comics. "I don't care too much about the comic crowd," Doucet told Andrea Juno in an extensive interview published in Juno's notable collection, *Dangerous drawings: interviews with comix & graphix artists* (1997). "I'm completely sick of them. . . . I just can't relate to that scene anymore" (65). In a series called "Men of Our Times," drawn in 1997 and 1998, Doucet presents portraits satirizing the comics industry.[1] Her collection includes, as she notes in its contents: "one director of a comic art museum," "eight comic artists," "three fan-boys," "two publishers," "two editors of magazines specialized in comic-art," "one journalist," "one concierge," "one grand-father," "one stranger," and "six discouraged girls" (Figure 2; *Long Time Relationship*). Only the final six images, cordoned off in a "Ladies Section" that ends with a self-portrait of the artist holding a glass of wine and shedding a heavy tear, are illustrations of women.

Though her renunciation of certain aspects of comics culture is more ambivalent, Bell too has depicted herself as not always completely in sync with that world, whether socially, professionally, stylistically, or even affectively. Speaking in a 2016 interview with Aaron Cometbus, republished in full in this volume, Bell explained her move out of New York City as an expression of that anxiety: "I was trying to get away from all the cartoonists when I moved, but now I miss the cartoonists."[2] As with Doucet, despite her own publishing successes creating in this medium—she has issued five books in addition to countless shorter pieces published in significant online and print venues—Bell does not always seem to easily identify with it. Even in her many comics diaries picturing her adventures with other

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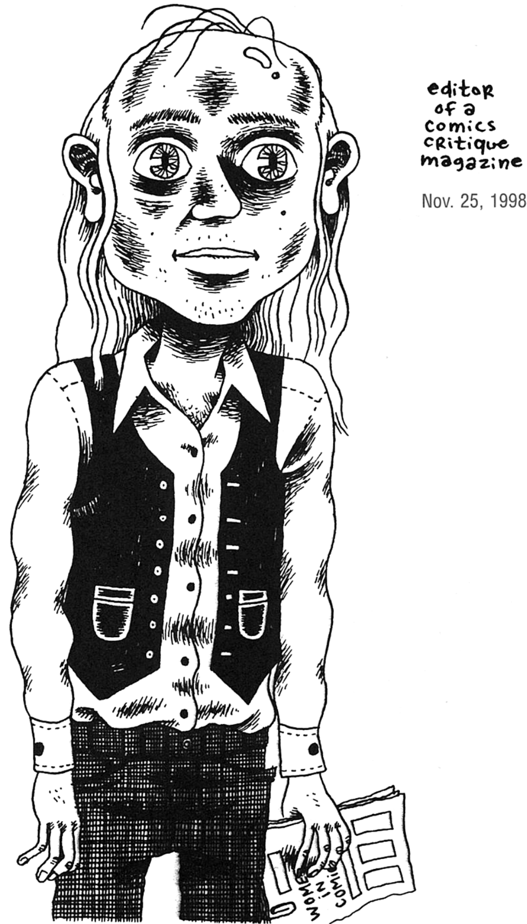

Figure 2. Page from "Men of Our Times" in *Long Time Relationship.*

notable cartoonists at comics festivals and events, she often depicts herself as feeling out of place or uncomfortable (Figure 3; *Truth is Fragmentary* 66). Her inspirations and passions, too, as she recounts them both in and out of her work, do not always easily align with her chosen vocation. "I'm not so obsessive about comics, actually," Bell states in a 2005 interview in response to the question of getting started in her career (Groth). "I don't really read that many comics as much as I would like to. I've always been more interested in novels and movies. I've often been really impatient with most comics."[3]

In addition to the shared perspective of being industry outsiders looking in, the two cartoonists' approaches and styles are also recognizably

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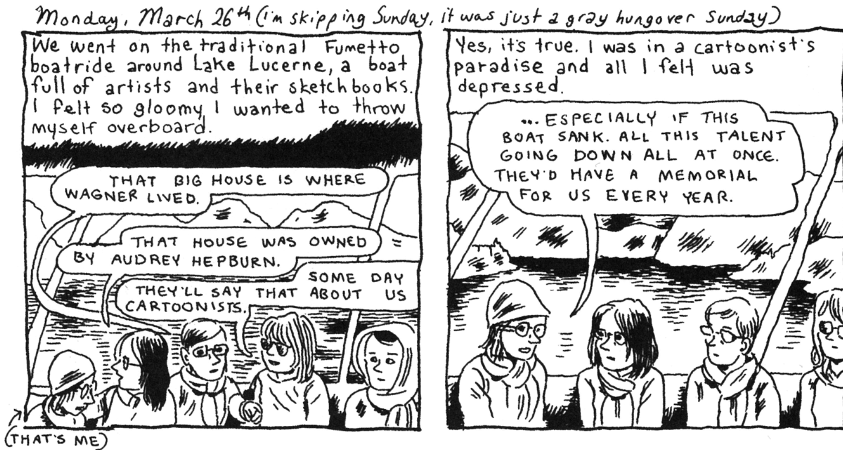

Figure 3. Two panels from *Truth is Fragmentary.*

related, as Douglas Wolk notes when he includes Bell as part of a cohort of cartoonists at least "ideologically" aligned with a "rough wave" aesthetic (367). The movement, which he traces back to Doucet, marking her, along with S. Clay Wilson, as one of its two "godparents," is for him today characterized by "the anti-Hollywood narrative, anti-representational, labor-intensive, make-it-nasty tendencies of contemporary visual art" (367). Wolk groups artists including Gabrielle Bell alongside Anders Nilsen, Marc Bell, Brian Chippendale, and Andrice Arp, as invested in "experimenting with styles that are deliberately difficult, going beyond the unpretty cartooning of the '80s and '90s art-comics scene" to a range of approaches that include "storytelling techniques that hurl conventional plot dynamics out the window" (366, 367). Both Doucet and Bell also frequently utilize more conventional layout schemes, even as they play with narrative form and tempo, the amount of empty space left on the page, the dynamic between words and pictures, and the architecture of individual panels. Additionally, despite their wide-ranging output, both cartoonists have often been known for their explorations of the autobiographical, a preoccupation that has both attracted critics and fans as well as, at times, created misreadings of their texts.

Despite these commonalities, Bell, unlike Doucet, has singularly concentrated, at least for now, on publishing comics. In fact, she has maintained a steady output with some of the best known independent comics-focused publishers, including Alternative Comics, Uncivilized Books, and Drawn

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& Quarterly, since her first collection of originally self-published works was published as *When I'm Old and Other Stories* (2003). Bell's immersion in a world that she frequently portrays, in interviews as in her comics, as alienating and isolating sets a compelling contrast to Doucet's eventual, if potentially reversible, renunciation of comics. But reading these two cartoonists alongside each other ultimately reveals how their professions and portfolios have followed paths more similar than not, with "burning out," for example, cited by each as a consequence of engagement, a form of collateral damage.[4] In a brief 2014 profile on Julie Doucet published in *Artforum*, Hillary Chute describes her as having "not so much left comics as moved to the far edges" ("Hillary Chute on Julie Doucet"). Exploring Bell's comics in the context of Doucet's, and vice versa, reveals how in fact both of these artists have spent certain parts of their careers composing along the "edges," each carefully negotiating, prodding, and stimulating an art and industry that often compels them to situate themselves as at a distance.

"Julie Doucet is the female Crumb. Discuss." So begins "Strip Teaser," a 2001 review essay of Doucet's work published in the *Village Voice* (Press). Calling Montreal-born Doucet "the female Crumb" is an act that ironically hints at the very assumptions and strictures that convinced her, two years before the review was published, to quit the comics business.[5] In describing Doucet as the female Crumb, this critic calls attention not only to the formal attraction of her clean, beautiful lines (it is, after all, *meant* as a compliment), but also to the juxtaposition between that aesthetic and the ostensibly confessional, no-holds-barred aspects of her comics works, which engage with everything from the unruly, leaky, and abject nature of her alter ego's *plotte* (Québec French slang for female genitalia) to her unadulterated sexual experiences and fantasies. As in Robert Crumb's comics, the combination often unsettles readers in powerful ways.

Of course, Doucet is the so-called *female* Crumb, because Crumb does not engage with tampons or catcalls or the loss of a girl's virginity—at least not from the point of view of that girl. The *Village Voice* piece goes on to establish Doucet's foray into comics as directly evolving from her reading of his works: "Back in the late '80s, when grunge and underground were terms of endearment, a 21-year-old college girl from Montreal read a Robert Crumb cartoon translated into Québécois French. Something stirred. A year later, Julie Doucet self-published her first comic—a miniature version of *Dirty Plotte*, the series that would make her a cult heroine." This oversimplified account misrepresents Doucet's particular history and point

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of view, one that shows her to be far from, simply, a convenient analogue to a more familiar male reference point. In that Juno interview, published four years before the *Voice* piece, Doucet dispenses her own different story of how she got her start in comics:

> I grew up in suburban Montreal, but studied fine art at a university in the city. I met some guys there who were putting out a fanzine. Since I already had a really naïve and cartoony style of drawing, they asked me if I'd drawn any comics. This is how I was first published, when I was 22 or 23 years old. (57)

This version of her early ascent into comics points to an incongruity that winds through her professional trajectory, at least in her telling of it: the often simultaneously mindful and unexpected progression of her career. She represents herself as almost accidentally having fallen into the world of comics ("I met some guys"), while acknowledging, by way of describing her "cartoony" drawing style, having always been connected to this practice, even before the official, and unofficial, world of comics publishing entered into her life firsthand. In fact, in the same interview, she remarks that she "grew up with comics," listing as early reading experiences "*Tintin*, *Astérix*, *Lucky Luke*, the regular, mainstream French-European comics." It was only "[m]uch later," she adds, "at university, [that] I was introduced to American underground comics." Almost a decade later, on the other end of that narrative, she notes in a 2010 interview the irony of having quit the comics industry only to find herself living off works published in what had become, for her, an anachronous mode: "I'm making more money with comics now than when I was drawing them" (Moore, "Julie Doucet").

For Doucet—and, we shall see, to some extent for Bell as well—her foray into the comics industry, the widespread success that followed, and the aftermath to that success have been accompanied by a persistent sense of unease, tension, and occasional disappointment. This somewhat paradoxical disquiet—she is, after all, in North American and European comics circles, an almost universally agreed-upon "cult heroine"—is not a position that can easily be tracked, though it certainly echoes her designation as "the female Crumb."[6] In terms of her shifting aesthetic, her social and cultural ties, and the subjects she engages with, Doucet persistently resists, against all odds, the very modes of categorization and comparison that have largely dominated the record of her success, and most prominently the labels of "confessional" and "cartoonist." "Her stories are so honest that

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they could be mistaken for a documentary about growing up in Montreal," writes one journalist in a 1999 article in the Canadian English-language newspaper, *National Post* (Chevalier). A more recent 2008 review of *365 Days: A Diary* (2007), a book that includes daily entries tracking a year in her life, told in handwritten prose, illustrations, doodles, and collage cutouts, laments Doucet's turn to what the *Bookforum* reviewer Jessa Crispin describes as a narrative that is "self-protective" and "infuriatingly shallow." As Crispin explains of Doucet's shift from more traditionally recognizable "confessional" comics to the experimental artistic forms that have shaped her output since her 1999 decision to quit comics, "It's a shame that, for Doucet, gaining stability has meant losing dramatic tension and narrative drive in her work. . . . Here's hoping that when she finishes her metamorphosis, she'll let readers back into her world."[7] As in the ascription of Doucet as a direct descendent of an underground comics tradition, critics who focus on her as a confessional cartoonist seem bent on championing a narrow, prescriptive role for the artist.

Looking through Doucet's works, which include everything from early, vibrant issues of her *Dirty Plotte* fanzine to her iconic graphic memoir, *My New York Diary* (1999), to the countless artist's books, photonovels, animation films, linocuts, collage poems, silkscreens, and drawings that make up her more recent pieces, one can see that, perhaps even against all odds, an attachment to the autobiographical threads through all of her aesthetic permutations and experimentations. Indeed, in discussing her interests both before and after she "quit comics," Doucet describes herself as a reluctant but persistent autobiographer. "I take all my material from my own life experience, I'm afraid," she says in another 2010 interview, adding, "For me autobiography is a disease" ("Interview with Julie Doucet!"). But this very fixation that, for some, accounts for her earlier success—her "straightforward depictions," how she seems "[u]nafraid to share her dirtiest thoughts" (Crispin)—has always, she admits, been something of a facade, an intentional manipulation. Of her early comics work, such as the pieces she published (or sometimes republished) in *Dirty Plotte* and *My New York Diary*, she explains, "it is not as transparent as you would think. I use only the one aspect of the event/story I am comfortable with" (Howard). Elsewhere, she points out, "[y]ou know I have my own limits, of what I would *never* put in my work, I have my taboos" (Moore, "Julie Doucet," emphasis hers).

Here, Doucet targets the presumption that is at the heart of such critical responses, and that follows, though in different ways, for many

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contemporary autobiographical cartoonists rendering, as it were, from somewhere along the edges: the notion that her early works—comics that feature an alter ego who, for all intents and purposes, represents some version of the real life Julie Doucet—were shot directly from the heart, that they are closer to direct admissions, of guilt, ecstasy, desire, of what's underneath, than they are compositions, or works of artistic imagination and vision. Bell brings up similar concerns in discussions of her comics. In response to interviewer Gary Groth's query about how she puts together a story, she responded, "I try to actually leave no room for spontaneity. . . . They're [the comics] so labor intensive they never feel spontaneous when you're working on them. You feel like you're building a house brick by brick or something" (Groth). In her more recent interview with Aaron Cometbus, she stated even more directly, "I'm not that forthcoming. My comics are not that personal." As with Doucet, Bell's invocation of the toil that goes into making her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works comes as a response to frequent misconceptions of the genre as a form of uncrafted navel-gazing, interesting to audiences for all the wrong reasons. "Everything about the newest collection of diaristic ephemera and agitations from Bell (*The Voyeurs*) would point to another twee, myopic graphic memoir about nothing much in particular," reads the opening to a recent *Publisher's Weekly* review of Bell's latest book, *Everything is Flammable* (Review of *Everything*). The writer goes on to praise the memoir, Bell's first to read more like a chronologically arranged, plot-based narrative rather than a set of fragmented diary pieces and stories. This critical assessment echoes a sentiment Bell expresses in a 2013 interview with Dan Nadel: "There's . . . the split between graphic novels, novels, and short fiction. The general mindset is that the full-length graphic novel is the thing, which leaves out a lot of potential" (Nadel, "A Conversation"). Like the valuation of fiction over autobiography, a critical hierarchy seems in place, in comics as elsewhere, between shorter and longer narrative texts.[8] As with Doucet, Bell's works have been unremittingly picked apart in criticism that values certain autobiographical gestures over others, a kind of aesthetic policing that too often confuses the strength and significance of the work by whether or not its (critical) reader believes in the legitimacy of the cartoonist's claim over a particular voice and aesthetic. "Women in autobio can't win, really," writes Kim O'Connor in a piece reflecting on the language of a review published in the *Comics Journal* discussing Bell's *Truth is Fragmentary* (2014) ("Existential Angst"). "If they portray themselves as happy, their stories are too light to be taken seriously. If they explore any

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sort of negative emotion, they're perceived as complaining. And women who mix the two approaches run the risk of being deemed uneven."

In *Reading Autobiography* (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson recount how the work of autobiography scholars from roughly the 1970s and beyond has led to "the elevation of autobiography to the status of a literary genre" as "self-referential narratives" have been "[r]econceiv[ed] . . . not as sites of the truth of a life but as creative self-engagements" (203).[9] Feminist scholars in particular have emphasized this distinction, noting how the reception of women's works is frequently gendered. Indeed, in Smith and Watson's introduction to *Interfaces* (2002), an anthology on women's autobiographical performances and practices, they build on Domna C. Stanton's arguments about the "gendered reading practices" of literary historians, among others (12). They argue that the perceived "inability of the woman writer—and by extension the woman artist—to rise above 'the personal' and achieve a 'universal vision' condemns her to an inevitable second-rate status."[10] Reading women's autobiographical (and fictional) works as a "transparent canvas" of their lives reduces their handiwork to the status of appropriation, as they themselves come to be regarded as knock-off creators (11). "There's a sort of disdain for autobiographical work," Bell admits in that same interview (Nadel, "A Conversation"). Later, speaking of the derision people often show for comics as well, she adds, referring to both of them, "And I think I've been trying to get over that in my own mind. I think in things that people do look down on, there's a lot of potential growth, for that very reason."

As Hillary Chute argues in *Graphic Women* (2010), a book that opened up discussions of women's statuses in and contributions to the industry, the comics medium offers countless possibilities for responding, from this very canvas, to such assumptions, and many women cartoonists have taken up the cause. As a number of essays in this volume reflect, Julie Doucet's and Gabrielle Bell's comics, like those of the five women Chute offers as her central case studies, powerfully display, through a variety of means, a "self-reflexive demystification of the project of representation" (9). As with the cartoonists Chute writes about, as well as the ones I address in *"How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses": Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs* (2016), this is one of the lenses we can use to read Doucet's and Bell's works as explicitly feminist. Not only do they offer us women's perspectives, but they do so by provocatively calling to mind the complicated, multivalent frameworks of such engagements. For Doucet, whether or not she intended it to be so, leaving the comics world

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behind was another, unexpected approach to calling attention to how material conditions affect the ways we create, and regard, literature and the arts.[11] The implications of her withdrawal extend as much to her individual artistic developments as they do to the ways we might, in light of that decision, regard the current state of contemporary comics. "I just felt trapped, needed to try other things, other forms of art," Doucet recently recalled in an interview, also republished in this volume (Mok). Rejecting the label of a form that has often been regarded, on its own, as "outsider art" (though this status, as many including Doucet have pointed out, has shifted considerably), she reveals herself to be a figure whose life and works demand closer inspection, a vital cartoonist whose contributions mark her as allied as much to the various histories of comics and visual narratives that precede her as to the movements that have followed, some in fact directly inspired by her work.[12]

"Doucet is central to our understanding of comics as a particularly vibrant platform for telling and showing women's stories," writes Chute in her 2014 *Artforum* profile. "Her work . . . ushered in an era of comics as a feminist art form . . . Doucet became part of a wide-ranging punk-and Riot Grrrl-inflected cultural uptake" ("Hillary Chute on Julie Doucet"). In this volume, by pairing Doucet with Gabrielle Bell, a cult figure in her own right who was born eleven years later and who has claimed Doucet as a key influence, we hope to emphasize, as a multitude of feminist scholars before us have done, the importance of "concentrat[ing] on relationships *between women*" (Moraga, emphasis hers) in order to establish how social and cultural connections, associations, and conditions shape every work of art.[13] This is something, for example, that Margaret Galvan does explicitly in her opening essay to our book, taking a closer look at "feminist genealogies of comics anthologies." In this way, she connects both Bell and Doucet with "multiple temporalities and intersecting feminist waves" to bring their bodies of work into contact with those of other female artists, from Dori Seda, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Debbie Drechsler, and Carol Tyler to Megan Kelso, Vanessa Davis, and Eleanor Davis. These connections are also established in the broader arrangement of this volume, which holds together essays by and about these two women's works, along with interviews, in order to help readers recognize threads of common, and uncommon, subjects, themes, aesthetic modes, and concerns. "[T]he female tradition in American literature is not the result of biology, anatomy, or psychology," writes Elaine Showalter in the introduction to her literary history, *A Jury of Her Peers* (2009). "It comes from women's

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relation to the literary marketplace, and from literary influence rather than essential sexual difference" (xv). Similarly, our pairing of these two cartoonists is not meant to suggest that they firmly or uncomplicatedly share a particular aesthetic or worldview, though there are certainly resonances between their themes and styles, such as what I referred to earlier as their shared "aesthetics of resistance." These similarities also include carefully documented domestic scenes, a penchant for the diaristic, the fantastic, and the murky spaces in between, a sense of the experimental often juxtaposed with more conventional formats and modalities, and a heavy investment in explorations of speech, rhythm, color, sound, and movement. Nor is this pairing meant to suggest that there are not other important cartoonists who have experienced varying levels of success but whose works have nonetheless been marginalized, under-theorized, or misread, in many cases much more so than these two. Indeed, we hope this volume will serve as a starting rather than an ending point, not just for further reflections on the many projects undertaken by these particular artists, but for the scores of other unexpected, potentially illuminating couplings and combinations waiting to be conjured up.[14]

Lives and Works

Born on December 31, 1965, Julie Doucet grew up in the predominantly French-speaking Saint-Lambert, a suburb of Montréal, Québec, where she attended an all-girls Catholic school followed by the Cégep du Vieux Montréal, a publicly funded pre-university or what she describes, in her comics documenting this period of her life, as junior college.[15] From there, she went on to receive her degree in printing arts from the Université du Québec à Montréal. Having contributed to several Montréal-based comics publications, Doucet produced and self-published fourteen issues of her multilingual (French and English) fanzine, *Dirty Plotte*, from September 1988 through 1990 (Figure 4).[16] In her interview with Juno, she explains how, at the time she was producing it, she had quit art school, was living on welfare, and was working at a gallery that, fortuitously, "was actually a photocopy shop as well" (57). Doucet's work reached a wider audience when her now infamous comic, "Heavy Flow," was published in *Weirdo* no. 26, an issue edited by Aline Kominsky-Crumb in 1989, the same year that Doucet was also published in Bruce Hilvitz's *Heck! Comic Art of the Late 1980s* as

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Figure 4. Cover of original *Dirty Plotte* fanzine, vol. 1, no. 2, self-published, 1988.

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well as *Wimmen's Comix* no. 15.[17] In March 1990, Doucet met with Chris Oliveros, the founder of the brand-new *Drawn & Quarterly* magazine, whose first issue would come out one month later; Oliveros was looking to publish single-artist comic book series in addition to his quarterly magazine (Rogers 21, 18). As Sean Rogers writes in his history of the Montreal-based comics publisher, basing his narrative on conversations with Doucet, after several more meetings, "Oliveros drew up a one-page handwritten contract with Doucet, and the first comic-book version of *Dirty Plotte* came out in October 1990" (22).[18] Doucet, who was one of the cartoonists who thus helped establish the early reputation of *Drawn & Quarterly*, would go on to win the Harvey Award for Best New Talent in 1991, and her series would run in *Drawn & Quarterly* for twelve issues, concluding with the publication of its final one in August 1998.

Doucet's pioneering explicit and autobiographical comics connected with, in some cases preceding, the likes of other early *Drawn & Quarterly* contributors Seth, Chester Brown, and Joe Matt, though hers were set apart by her female-driven perspective.[19] On the brightly colored cover of the first issue of the comic book *Dirty Plotte*, she draws her alter ego solo: she is sitting in her underwear, slightly hunched on a purple stool, with saggy tights and a loose tank top awkwardly dangling around her wiry body (Figure 5). One of her hands holds a brush dripping with blood-red paint, which has been generously applied to her fingernails and lips, to a vulgar effect, and grotesquely drips from them onto her body as well as the work table in front of her. A pair of pink pumps, scissors, glue, and empty beer bottles crowd the space near her legs as the table top is covered in a motley assortment of drawing implements, a bowl and spoon, more beer bottles, a coffee press, and a mirror smeared with a thick, twisting drop of that same red paint. With this cover, which recalls the opening of Justin Brown's comic *Binky Brown* (1972), Doucet offers a glimpse of many of the themes and issues she takes up in the series, including the hazy boundaries between work and life engendered especially by the autobiographical project, and the contradictory impulses, pressures, and desires simultaneously stemming from, and heaped onto, the female artist.[20]

In 2009, Anne Elizabeth Moore shared the impact that *Dirty Plotte* had on her, effectively summarizing some of the most prevalent subjects to be found in Doucet's series. As a recent college graduate living in Madison, Wisconsin, in the mid-1990s, and starting out as a writer and activist, Moore reflected:

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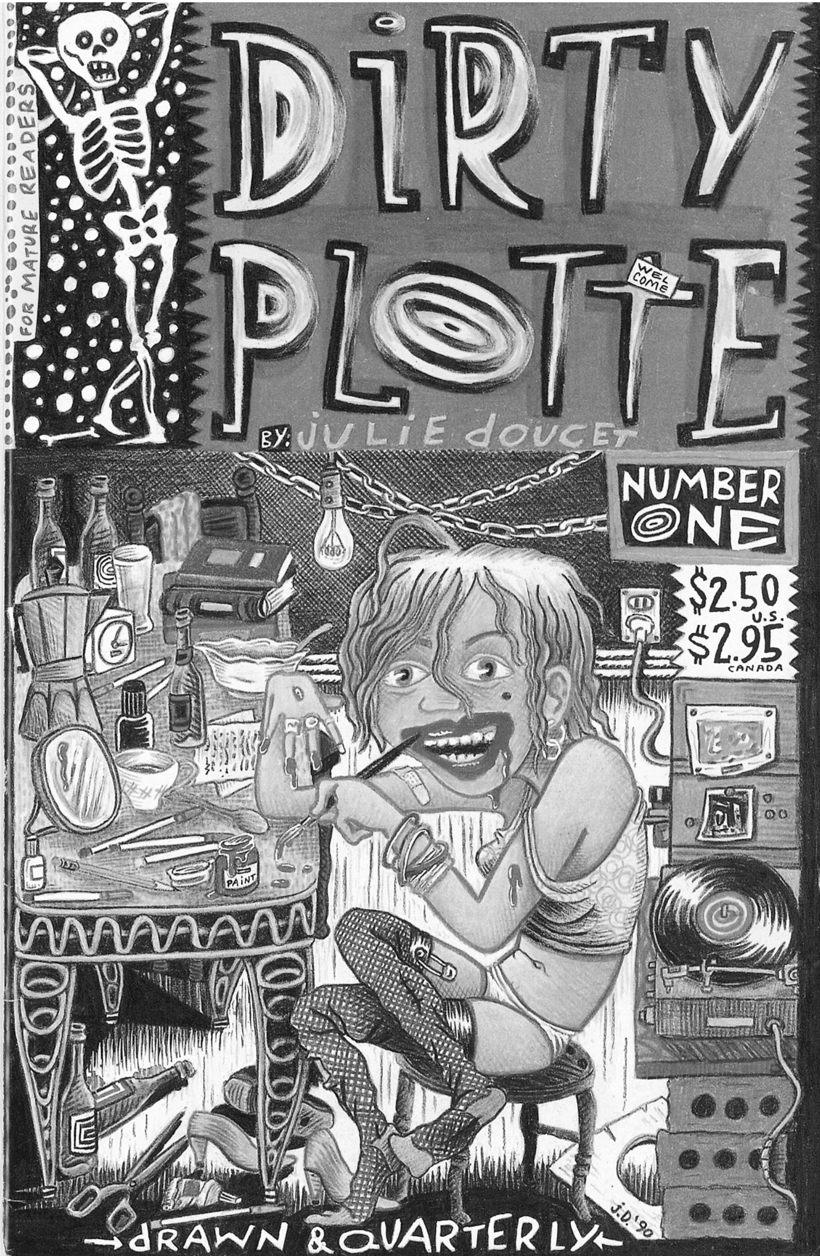

Figure 5. Cover of *Dirty Plotte* no. 1 comic book, Drawn & Quarterly, January 1991.

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> These were the things that *Dirty Plotte* was about: the isolation of being a driven female creative; the jealousy in personal relationships that come[s] out of that; the ever-present push from the outside to be maternal and nurturing, but the absolute interior knowledge that that is not your way; and the incredibly shifting sense of gender that a strong, smart woman must feel in order to move about in the world. These were all very important themes, and they still resonate with me when I get into frustrating situations. ("Rave On")

Coupled with her characteristically loose, inky, and detailed drawing style, which shifted to a sharper, more consistent, and increasingly pronounced look by the end of the series, the power of Doucet's works emerges from the savvy, seemingly carefree way she grapples with such thorny tensions.[21] While she engages with a full range of topics and events, from the quotidian to the momentous, including the stress of periods, unwanted pregnancies, sexual proclivities and imaginings, and the trials and excitement of living alone as a woman in a city, her delivery nonetheless often manages to come across as blithe, if not gleeful, even when presenting horrifying and surreal scenarios or fantasies. Using this uniquely blended style and tone—an often unsettling combination that, as Sarah Richardson argues in her chapter in this volume, building on the recent work of Sianne Ngai, "draw[s] on the aesthetic power of cuteness"—she imbibes each and every recalled experience with a spectrum of sensations and affects, leaving no figurative stone of emotion unturned.

Many of the pieces in Doucet's *Dirty Plotte* anticipate the explorations that she exhaustively engages with in the collected and often partly or wholly recycled books that follow, including: *Lève ta jambe mon poisson est mort!* (1993), published in English by Drawn & Quarterly; *Monkey and the Living Dead* (1994), published in French by Chacal Puant, with a second edition published in 1999 by the famous publishing house L'Association; *My Most Secret Desire* (1995; expanded edition 2006), published in English by *Drawn & Quarterly*; *Ciboire de criss!* (1996), published in French by L'Association, a translation of the stories first collected as *My Most Secret Desire*; *Changements d'Adresses* (1998), published in French by L'Association and including the same previously published *Dirty Plotte* stories as would appear in *My New York Diary;* and *My New York Diary* (1999; revised softcover 2004), published by Drawn & Quarterly.[22] Doucet often reinserts bits and pieces of her work, from fanzines and comic books to anthologies and collections, and she also playfully moves between French and English.[23] The

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republished and often revised and/or expanded works take on new meanings, depending on the context in which they are presented. For example, in *Dirty Plotte* no. 7 (1993), she includes her well-known story, "The First Time," which is one of the rare glimpses we get of her life before she fell into the world of cartooning. (However, in 2004, post-comics, she would publish *J comme je*, an autobiography from birth to age sixteen, composed in French using word collage.) "The First Time" is immediately set apart by its full-page splash panel announcing that it is "a true story," offering background about how she was seventeen at the time of the events, a recent graduate of "a convent girls only!" It follows Julie and her friend Nathalie as they leave the suburbs for Montreal, meeting up with older, seemingly jobless men hanging out in a park and attempting, clumsily and sometimes forcefully, to seduce them. Julie finds herself reluctantly following a bearded and mustachioed man to his apartment, where she loses her virginity. The comic ends unsentimentally, with the protagonist walking along at night on a street back in her suburb, her body a white silhouette, explaining, into the dark night, "I did it!!!"[24]

On the back page of the issue, Doucet includes a note explaining how she originally penned what she calls that "poor me" story back in 1989, that it was originally published in *Weirdo* no. 27, and that, in spite of its positive reception, she wanted to redraw it before she could include it here. She points to a small drawing beside the text by way of explanation, describing it as the final panel of the original story, and it pictures a morose-looking teenaged Julie sitting cross-legged on a bed, with the words "I wish to die" inscribed on the wall behind her. The transformation, from one version to the updated one, is of a young girl regretting losing her virginity to one feeling confident and excited, if not likely by the experience then by her rendition of it, a free agent in charge of her own story. This piece would later be incorporated into Doucet's best known book, *My New York Diary*. As the opener to a book that tracks first Doucet's relationship with a deadbeat boyfriend in junior college, and later her relationship with an emotionally abusive, jealous boyfriend after she moves to New York, the revised "The First Time" becomes not an anachronistic, self-pitying return to the past but a reflective, hard-edged, and even potentially empowering antecedent to a much more extensive, conflicted struggle: of how to balance art, ambition, a desire to connect with men in a misogynistic world, and a thirst for new experiences.

By the time Doucet stopped publishing her *Dirty Plotte* series with Drawn & Quarterly, she had spent most of the 1990s traveling and living

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outside of Canada, in cities including New York, Seattle, and Berlin (with a year in Montreal squeezed in between). *Dirty Plotte* no. 5 (1992) opens with a narrative about arriving in New York (an "intense city!"), and her persona finds herself conversing, over the course of the three-page story, with a walking fire hydrant, a hot dog, and a miniature Mickey Mouse-like character. In these and later travel comics, which range from the quirky to the surreal, Doucet's character's excitement at visiting and exploring new places is often tempered by angst and exhaustion, a feeling that the objects around her, bursting with a quivering energy, seem to express most directly. Her emotional energy can be traced back not only to her interactions with the unpleasant men who live and lurk both on city streets and inside the places where she lives, but also to the tensions she experiences between the pull of work and the distractions that keep her from it. In the central storyline of her "New York Diary," a narrative conveyed in four parts, we see too how the Julie character, in addition to being continually sabotaged by her jealous, unsuccessful boyfriend, is often reluctantly driven away from writing and drawing in service to her body: not only because of its seemingly endless appetites (for sex and stimulants, for the feel of her cat's fur), but also due to its limitations, the epileptic fits that increase in intensity as she finds ever more solace, in her stressful domestic situation, in copious amounts of beer, coffee, and a variety of street drugs. These, in the end, seem like symptoms of a broader, unarticulated restlessness and weariness, of her general discomfort as someone both entrenched in the world of comics but also feeling like an outsider in relation to it. In the final, three-page section of "My New York Diary," Julie, having escaped her boyfriend, sits alone in an apartment in Brooklyn. She describes the four-and-a half months that have passed since she escaped the apartment she shared with her boyfriend in Washington Heights: "i went back to Montréal for a couple of weeks, for Christmas. i sure needed a big break, then!. . i dropped acid for the last time with my friend Martin. We stayed up all night. Early in the morning i had a seizure. That was the last time i took drugs, at all" (*My New York Diary* 53). On the last page of the comic, Julie-the-character is somberly leaving her apartment for Seattle with no plan in mind, muttering that "I don't have any regrets" while, on the rainy street, an all-male orchestra solemnly plays the notes to the famous Édith Piaf song.

Doucet ends her "New York Diary" (the second-to-last story of her final issue of *Dirty Plotte*) on this comedic yet ultimately sour note. We hear an echo of this unidentified uneasiness towards the end of Doucet's 1997

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interview with Juno (an interview that took place as she was penning the eleventh issue of *Dirty Plotte*). As Doucet brings up receiving fewer fan letters of late, adding that she thinks "people are not reading me as much," her interviewer seems to attempt to reassure her, declaring that "the comic market is undergoing a huge sea change right now" (73). Doucet responds that she is not worried about people's responses to her work, that she is "stubborn," but she goes on to convey how "horrible" it would be if she continued on the same path of autobiographical comics, of "doing stories about my periods for forty years!" As she explains, "You have to change. You have to keep yourself interested, otherwise you're dead. . . . I kind of wish I could do different things that would take my mind away from my comics." She asks the interviewer if she received the book she mailed to her, "drawing with colored inks, and text in bad German." Though it is not clear what book she is specifically referring to, the interview reveals that Doucet had already started by then, two years before officially quitting, to turn away from comics, to look elsewhere for inspiration and expression. In hindsight, the breakup story at the end of "My New York Diary" can be read as a foretelling of Doucet's eventual break with comics.

Following the 2000 publication of *The Madame Paul Affair* with Drawn & Quarterly, Doucet joined a printing studio and focused initially on creating woodcut portraits, including linocuts (Moore, "Julie Doucet"; Køhlert, "Words into Pictures"). As she reflected in a 2010 interview, "My specialty at the university was printing, and then when I quit the university I never ever thought about it again, until now. And so, when I quit comics and I did my first print, I was completely shocked. It felt like, 'That's what I was supposed to do all that time'" (Moore, "Julie Doucet"). Within several years, Doucet had started her own series of handmade magazines/artist books, titled Sophie Punt, which include everything from sketches and collages to word art, musings, and drawings. Some of these works, as well as her experiments in printing, were incorporated into collections like *Melek* (2002), published by L'Oie de Cravan; *Lady Pep* (2004), published as part of Drawn & Quarterly's Petit Livre art book series; and the aforementioned *Long Time Relationship*, a collection, also published by Drawn & Quarterly, that includes selections from three issues of Sophie Punt alongside compilations of drawings like "Men of Our Times" and an assortment of photographs and Doucet's drawings of them, "Lost & Found Pictures" (Figure 6). These projects were built out of what Doucet refers to as the Slow Action Movement, a concept she came up with along with poet and editor Benoît Chaput in 2000 that calls for "the promotion of slowness" (Nadel 49).[25]

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Figure 6. Facing pages from "Lost and Found Pictures" in *Long Time Relationship.*

Indeed, these works seem as much efforts to resist memories of the frantic process of drawing comics under (often self-imposed) deadlines as they are testaments to Doucet's career-long investment in material, line, color, design, in the unexpected ways images and words speak to each other, and in "rendering the familiar . . . unfamiliar" (Nadel 44).[26]

Besides these early turn-of-the-century projects, Doucet plunged back into the diary mode with her 2004 work, *Journal* (published in French by L'Association; it was published three years later in English as *365 Days*). In some ways, this intensive, mostly drawn work approaches, in a new, sketchbook-like format, many of the subjects that the *Dirty Plotte* series covered, including the labor that goes into creating art, descriptions of her dreams, and brief recountings of her travels (Figure 7). But here, we become in some ways even more privy to the behind-the-scenes efforts and interactions that Doucet often only obliquely addresses in her earlier comics: grant applications, specific details of conversations with publishers,

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and the particulars of sales and how they affect her everyday struggle to continue making art. Soon after the publication of *365 Days*, Doucet unexpectedly jumped into another drawing project when she was contacted by filmmaker Michel Gondry, who was interested in creating a "film-book" collaboration. This endeavor, which would become PictureBox's *My New New York Diary* (2010), brought her, a bit uncomfortably, back in touch with her pre-post-comics self. Indeed, in her 2016 interview with Annie Mok, she makes a connection between her increased frustration with drawing, which peaked in the Gondry collaboration, and her turn to collaging. As she explains, "I had to make about 80 and some more drawings, but I couldn't make it. At one point, I just broke down and—how do you say that?—burnout. I got mononucleosis, and since then, I had a mental block. I just couldn't draw anymore, not at all. I was already into making collages, so I ended up doing only collages from then on. And I did quite a lot of different projects with that."

Doucet's interest in collage, which is visible in her Sophie Punt-related works, and has, for the reasons she explains, increasingly become a focus, is most apparent in publications from *J comme je*, an autobiography of her early years composed in linocuts and word collage, on through her most recent publication, *Carpet Sweeper Tales* (2016), a work made up of clippings from old magazines and harkening back to Italian *fumetti* (Figure 8).[27] As Doucet's work comes at times close to resembling poetry, she continues to demonstrate a heavy investment in the visual, in words and letters as images, and her attention to typography and word-image pairings reflects this. Nonetheless, Doucet also told Mok how more recently, in response to her shock at the deadly 2015 shooting at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, she actually returned to drawing. "The mental block is over," she explained (Mok, "The Starting Point"). In the end, in spite of these various, winding trajectories, between figurative and abstract imaging, for example, or between image-heavy and word-focused projects, it seems impossible to trace a clear-cut course of where Doucet has been, or to predict where she might go from here. "I'm just drawing and experimenting at the moment," Doucet explained of her latest pivot. "I have no idea where I'm going with that" (Mok, "The Starting Point"). This penchant, both for surprising others and for allowing herself to be surprised, has accompanied Doucet all along and accounts for the compelling, and continued, attractiveness of both her individual works and her oeuvre as a whole.

Born in London just a little over ten years later, in 1976, Gabrielle Bell's early years, like Doucet's, have become fodder for some of her

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Figure 7. Selection from page dated 18.12.02 in *365 Days.*

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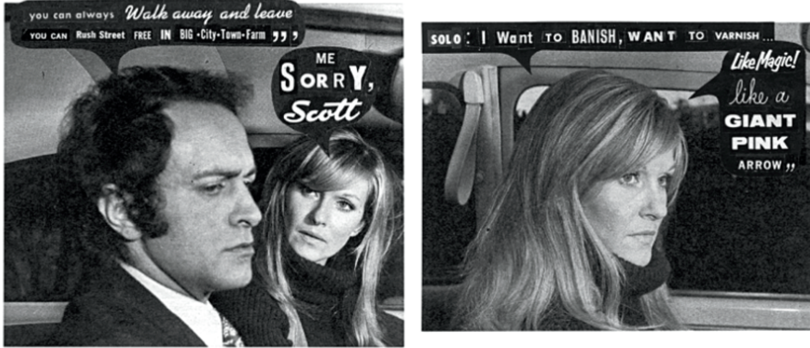

Figure 8. Facing pages from *Carpet Sweeper Tales.*

autobiographical, semi-autobiographical, and fictional works, though she too emphasizes that all of her creative texts are constructs. "I use myself as a character," she explained in a recent interview, when asked why she frequently refers to her more explicitly autobiographical comics, such as her diary comics, as "semi-autobiographical" (Lightman 370). From England, a two-year old Bell, her brother, and her American mother moved first to Michigan and soon after, when she was five years old, to Mendocino, California, where she spent most of her youth.[28] As she has said in a number of interviews, she lived an isolated childhood in a rural area in the mountains. "We didn't have a phone most of the time," Bell explained in 2007 on the Canadian podcast *Inkstuds*. "We were trying to be self-sufficient" (McConnell). Bell spent much of her youth reading: everything from the "hippie literature" on her mother's bookshelves (like Carlos Castenada) to the *Archie* comics she would send for to the preteen literature her grandmother would mail her to the more classical novels and short story collections she became interested in as she grew older (McConnell). At seventeen, she left home to travel through Europe and get to know her English family, but soon she settled down in San Francisco and began to produce comics. On a video posted on the *Paris Review* blog in which she talks about her earliest works, she describes "sort of" recruiting another woman from one of the art classes she took at San Francisco Community College (Bean, Brooks, and Poling). As she explains of this initial plunge, in a narrative that closely resembles Doucet's own almost-accidental engagement with the comics world, she approached the woman and said, "I'm drawing comics. Do you want to draw comics with me?" The pair produced a small comic book together and took it to a convention; Bell immediately felt connected to this

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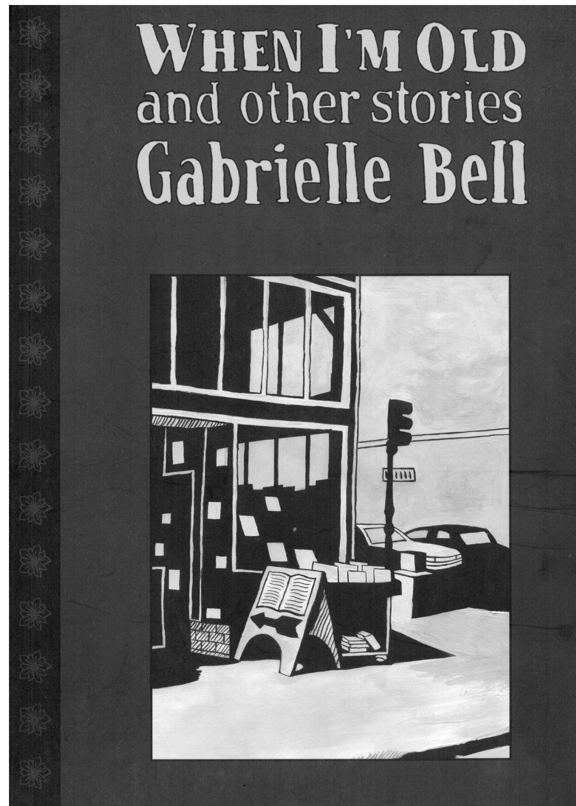

Figure 9. Cover of *When I'm Old and Other Stories.*

community of cartoonists, though, as we have seen, this easy connection eventually transformed into a more ambivalent association.

Bell's earliest works following this joint venture were her *Book of . . .* series, which she started self-publishing in the late 1990s, using Kinko's to print them (Groth). Specifically, from 1998 through 2002, she produced a yearly thirty-two-page comic, which she would sell at comics conventions for roughly three dollars apiece, which also happened to be about the cost of making them (Bean, Brooks, and Poling). Many of the black-and-white comics from these self-published works—*Book of Insomnia*, *Book of Sleep*, *Book of Black*, *Book of Lies*, and *Book of Ordinary Things*—were eventually collected in her debut book, *When I'm Old and Other Stories* (2003), published by Alternative Comics (Figure 9). The stories in the collection reflect an artist in the making, an undeniably talented cartoonist still experimenting with crosshatching, shading, panel breakdowns, and the balance of word and image. Indeed, Bell has often described herself

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Figure 10. Page from *When I'm Old and Other Stories.*

as largely self-taught, citing Betty Edwards's instructional book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, as one of her strongest influences, along with the works of cartoonists including Julie Doucet, Robert Crumb, and Jamie Hernandez (Bean, Brooks, and Poling; Lightman 374). Many of her early stories reference themes of work, money, and personal fulfillment, calling to mind some of the tensions similarly considered in Doucet's *Dirty Plotte* series. The stories also exhibit Bell's penchant for integrating the

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fantastical alongside realistic scenarios and explorations, a tactic she has continued to employ over the course of her career and into her diary comics. In "Graveyard Shift," a story reminiscent of Doucet's famous "Heavy Flow," the protagonist, who is called "Gabby," finds herself growing larger and larger until she is a giant crashing her waitressing job at a diner (Figure 10; *When I'm Old . . .* 25). In these and other comics, incorporating a diverse array of characters into her repertoire, from a juvenile-delinquent-turned-murderer to a young, "dissatisfied babysitter," Bell probes what it is like to be a woman trying to find her place in the world and maintaining a sense of power and agency against the backdrop of men, bars, roommates, odd jobs, cityscapes, and a frequently nagging sense of anxiety and depression. In "Gabrielle Picker-Packer in the Garden," one of the later pieces in this first collection and spanning seven pages, each (with one small exception) displaying three rows of three panels each, the narrator, who finds herself in conversation with a hypnotist, explains why she has been seeking different kinds of therapy (91–98). As she describes, in a word bubble crowding a hand-drawn, slightly irregular rectangular panel, "Oh I don't know, I just feel like there's something more to this, y'know? It's just like wake up, go to work, come home . . . It sort of feels like I'm going around in circles. There must be something more meaningful underneath, and I don't want to rule anything out, know what I mean?" (93). Bell here introduces a cluster of themes that she later devotes whole volumes to considering, using a careful combination of images and words: that is, the relationship between ennui, melancholy, and the search for a sense of purpose. In the words of one reviewer describing *The Voyeurs*, Bell "studies different kinds of loneliness with the sort of singular interest that most people reserve for more pleasant tasks, like sampling wedding cakes" (O'Connor, Review of *The Voyeurs*).

Of these earlier years immersed in comics, Bell describes a strong sense of "wanting to have some kind of guidance but not really knowing where to get it" (Bean, Brooks, and Poling). As she recalls, "I remember having fantasies of some great cartoonist just taking me under their wing and teaching me everything they knew." This feeling of being an outsider in relation to a broader world of comics brings to mind Julie Doucet's history and reveals how, in many ways, despite the ten-year gap, both women's biographies and creative histories reflect the limitations they faced entering into comics' "very strong tradition of male whiteness" (Bell qtd. in McCarthy James, "Life Drawing"). Of being asked, in regards to sexism, whether the industry had changed since the start of her career in 1998, Bell expounded in a 2012 interview:

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> When I started there were very few of us, and we were anomalies, and more often than not, not taken seriously. Things have changed drastically, but it doesn't mean things are all good now. . . . I think in comics, women, transgender, gay, and nonwhite people have to work harder to prove themselves and not be corralled into some "niche" identity. (McCarthy James)

In Bell's longstanding *Lucky* series, as well as in her later diary and travelogue comics, we see many of these issues of gender and genre play out, not only in terms of how her works have been discussed and received but also in the revealing themes and arrangements taken up in her reconstructed life.

Bell originally self-published three short *Lucky* comic books, roughly the same lengths as her *Book of* . . . series, in May 2003, September 2003, and May 2004. The third issue of the series, *Lucky* no. 3, received an Ignatz "Outstanding Mini-comic" award in 2004. These were later collected by Drawn & Quarterly, along with a brief section of "Extra Stories," and published in the 2006 hardcover volume mentioned at the opening of this introduction and titled, simply, *Lucky*. In her one-page comics introduction to the collection, Bell writes a brief history of how the series came about. As she explains, "Every morning in the spring of 2003 I'd go to a cafe and work on *Lucky* no. 1. In the afternoon I'd go home to do my more serious work" (1). From the get-go, both building on and simultaneously contending with a longstanding tradition of equating the diaristic (and, by extension, the autobiographical), with the trivial, or "non-serious"—one of several threads that Kylie Cardell takes up in her article in this volume—Bell develops a narrative of coming to diary comics as a kind of accident, the extension of what she describes as "my experiment" (1). Within this narrative, too, she shapes an ancillary account of an artist coming into her own, developing "more introspective and revealing" work, or transforming a daily "chronicling" into something that "began to look more like short stories and less like a diary." Of course, through at least the first section of the volume, each page of four, six, or eight neat but slightly wobbly hand-drawn panels headed by a date ("Tuesday, April 22nd," for example, leads the opening page), the book clearly reveals itself to be nothing if not a narrative chronicling the ins and outs of the writing life and shaped very much like a diary.[29] Above all else, this introduction anticipates how Bell invests her diary experiments with tensions between work and play, the personal and public, literature and daily life.

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The themes addressed in this collected *Lucky* volume are very much in line with Bell's earlier work, though the self-consciousness of the diary structure, as well as its slow, daily tempo, freshly shape the ways this persona's anxieties about work, money, and apartment-hunting play out on the page. In fact, many of the diary comics record Bell's persona as she works non-comics jobs (or jobs in making comics that are not, ultimately, her own) or searches for other jobs, in order, presumably, to pay for her diary "habit." In addition, as Bell's work becomes more known, over the course of the series, she begins to take up a topic that will thread through many of her diary and travel comics, which is what it means to have to market and sell your own work. This subject often overlaps with meditations on some of the challenges of working in a male-dominated industry. About halfway through *Lucky* no. 2 (included in the *Lucky* volume), she pictures her persona selling her comics in front of a bookstore (55–60). She spends two and a half pages recording a conversation with a passing man who first puts down her work before asking, "So who's your favorite woman cartoonist?" (58–60). When she cites Julie Doucet, his qualified response, "Yeah, I have to admit, she's pretty good," is followed by a hostile bidding for her contact information (59). Later, in *Lucky* no. 3, Bell's persona finds herself as an assistant to an artist, finishing up drawings that said artist does not have time for, "with my work and my kids" (80). Bell's persona soon finds herself daydreaming, imagining her own influence will be picked up on at the artist's next show (Figure 11, 83). In both of these cases, Bell's diary comics engage with the trials and stresses of being a cartoonist still developing her name, but the focus extends from the practice of creating the artworks themselves to the less-often-discussed, though inarguably connected, struggles of the various judgments leveled at the cartoonist in a variety of contexts, her ever transforming sense of visibility apace with invisibility.

Following this first collected *Lucky* volume, Bell published two more comic books with Drawn & Quarterly: *Lucky Volume Two Number One* (May 2007) and *Lucky Volume Two Number Two* (May 2008). These similarly black-and-white diary comics reflect a style Bell has become known for: inky backgrounds, a heavier line, and direct, meaningful prose. The two volumes also include a consistent layout of six panels per page, an arrangement that has become familiar to her readers. "I just didn't want to think about the layout so much," she explains in a 2014 interview also republished in this volume, when asked how she came up with the six-panel format (Yeh 18). She continues,

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Figure 11. Page from *Lucky.*

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> I wanted to focus on thinking about the story. There's this exercise where I fill out the six panels, and then I make a list on the margin of nine or ten things I can say and then I choose the six most interesting of those. Sometimes I'll give myself six minutes to sketch it all out, six per panel. It seems containable like that. Eight seems too much, but four is too little.

In *Lucky Volume Two Number One*, after some diary comics recalling, once again, Bell's persona's engagement in the comics industry (presenting a slideshow of her work; selling her books), she includes the nineteen-page story, "My Affliction," which would soon be included in *Cecil and Jordan in New York* (2009), and which follows a character named Gabrielle, who looks very much like her diary-comics persona but is continually involved in surreal scenarios (as in the opening panel, which reads, "One day, I was kidnapped by a behemoth," and pictures this character held up in the clouds by a giant hand). With this understood shift from the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical to the impossible, Bell reveals her continued engagement in playing with genre conventions, reader expectations, and the slippery differences between autobiography, fantasy, and fiction.

In March 2009, Drawn & Quarterly would publish the aforementioned book, *Cecil and Jordan in New York*, which has arguably become Bell's most famous book. This collection includes many pieces that had been previously published in anthologies and collections, including *Stuck in the Middle*, *Kramers Ergot*, *MOME*, *Scheherazade*, and the *Comics Journal Special Edition* (Figure 12). The book drew a fair amount of attention for Bell, and its opening title story was the basis for her own Michel Gondry collaboration, a short film adaptation, part of the 2008 anthology film *Tokyo*, another detail that interestingly links Bell's career trajectory with Doucet's.[30] (The Drawn & Quarterly blog describes Gondry's *Tokyo* as the first adaptation connected to the publisher.) In introducing an excerpt from Bell's thirty-two-page, full-color story from the book, "Felix," Vulture.com (part of *New York* magazine) depicts Bell's book as "tell[ing] stories of lost women and confused girls, casting about for connection in a world that often ignores them. Sometimes her stories follow the logic of dreams; sometimes they are brutally realistic" ("Love and Art"). Indeed, in *Cecil and Jordan* we see a more controlled and sophisticated version of Bell's first book, with stories that incorporate a mixture of styles, including some wide-ranging color palettes and panel layouts. The work reads as an interesting complement to Bell's diary experiments, as some of the stories, particularly in the second half of the book, present as deliberately autobiographical, even as

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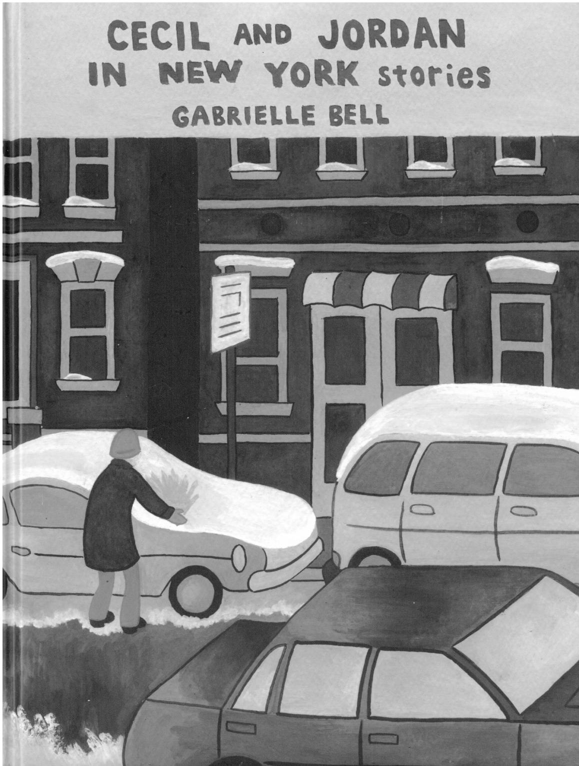

Figure 12. One of two covers of *Cecil and Jordan in New York*, Drawn & Quarterly, 2009.

others, such as "One Afternoon," an adaptation of a Kate Chopin story, are clearly not.

Even with Bell's critically successful publications in the mid-to-late 2000s, she found her *Lucky* series discontinued by Drawn & Quarterly, an event that she says inspired her to start her now well-known blog (*Jeltsen*). As she explained in a 2014 interview,

> It [the blog] increased my readership. The Internet is such an important tool for introverted artists. I don't think I would have done so well in the printed world, in the '90s. On my blog, I would sell watercolor portraits for like $30 just to get by. I would sell original pages. It was a good chunk of money. And I didn't have to see anybody.

The earliest entry on Bell's blog, as it is currently posted online, is dated September 6, 2009, roughly six months after Drawn & Quarterly first published *Cecil and Jordan*.[31] The new medium would enable Bell to move away

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Figure 13. 8 Aug. 2009 "raw" diary page, posted 14 Oct. 2009 on gabriellebell.com/page/64/, accessed 2 Aug. 2017.

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from a life of continually searching for odd jobs to support her comics production, and it would also offer her a more established support system and a broader audience. Around this time, she also began her longstanding relationship with Uncivilized Books, announcing in an early blog entry (October 14, 2009) that they would be publishing a mini-comic of her diary comics. Uncivilized Books, an independent imprint started by Tom Kaczynski, would go on to publish a number of Bell's mini-comics as well as her longer collections: *The Voyeurs* (2012), *Truth is Fragmentary: Travelogues & Diaries* (2014), and the recent *Everything is Flammable* (2017). With Uncivilized Books, Bell's more experimental mindset has taken hold. Her published mini-comics often include what she calls "raw" diary pages, or works that have not been revised, a move that further establishes some of the self-conscious explorations of her diary work (Figure 13). In 2012, she also began a "July Diary," or what she describes as a month-long experiment in creating daily diary comics, a project that she has committed to for every summer since, excepting 2015. In a 2014 interview, she explained why she created this exercise: "I did it to motivate myself. There's also something about it that forces me to pay attention to everything around me. I like that feeling of being in the moment, here and now, and then having to account for it" (Oksman, "Gabrielle Bell shares").

The comics included in Bell's recent volumes, and particularly *The Voyeurs* and *Truth is Fragmentary*, have thus been exposed to a variety of audiences at multiple stages of the process.[32] And, as with Bell's earlier works, these comics present a persona at once withdrawn from the world and, at times, exposed and connected to it, largely by choice. "The cartoonist Gabrielle Bell is what might have happened if Emily Dickinson had ever gotten out of the house," writes Kim O'Connor (review of *The Voyeurs*). In these more recent diary comics, Bell engages with what it means to experience disconnection in the modern world, increasingly addressing issues of the distraction of the internet as well as the ins and outs of being an ever-more in-demand cartoonist. These works also connect an internal sense of disorientation and exhaustion to exterior spaces and events: Bell eventually moves from New York City to Beacon, New York, in order to get away from the mayhem. Nonetheless, she also frequently refers to an inevitable return, in the meantime visiting weekly and incorporating the city into even her most recent work, *Everything is Flammable* (2017), which is otherwise focused on events surrounding her mother's housing situation in Northern California.[33]

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With these two career trajectories, Doucet's and Bell's, still in full swing, we witness creators invested in holding onto their own visions in spite of the many pressures that inevitably plague any writer or artist, but that especially affect those creating along the edges. To make a living from such a labor-intensive medium, to find material in a complicated engagement between autobiography and fiction, to develop an accumulative practice that continues to feel fresh, engaging, and active, not just for readers but for the creator herself, Julie Doucet and Gabrielle Bell, each with her own unique formal and thematic trajectory, emerge as noteworthy, not only in their own right but also for what each creator's life and work illuminates in the other's.

Critical Explorations (Previous Relevant Scholarship and Chapter Breakdowns)

This volume has been designed with two specific aims: the first is to provide an accessible reference point for scholars, students, critics, and fans interested in learning about Doucet's and Bell's works, including those engaged in their own further research. With this possibility in mind, in addition to this extensive introduction, which helps map out some essential biographical and bibliographical details, we have included, at the end of the volume, five republished interviews, two with Doucet and three with Bell. For Julie Doucet, we begin with her 2007 interview with Dan Nadel, originally published in *The Drama*. Here, Nadel engages Doucet with questions about her process, the inspirations for her work, and the reasons she decided to leave comics. This interview has been paired with a 2016 conversation between Doucet and Annie Mok, published in the *Comics Journal*. In this exchange, Doucet discusses some of her more recent influences as well as her "post-comics" publications, including *365 Days* and *Carpet Sweeper Tales*; she also explains, from a more current perspective, why she felt she had to move on from the world of comics when she did. For Gabrielle Bell, we included three interviews, beginning with a 2014 interview with James Yeh, from *Gigantic*, in which they comprehensively discuss some of the problems that come from writing in the autobiographical mode as well as Bell's drawing background and the emergence of her comics form. The second interview with Bell included here is a 2016 conversation with Aaron Cometbus, published in the thirty-fifth anniversary issue of his cartoonists-focused *Cometbus* zine. In this interview, Bell and Cometbus delve into discussions of the

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comics scene, as Bell describes her connections with other cartoonists, some of the competitive tensions of the industry, and the status of comics more broadly. In the third interview with Bell included here, a 2017 conversation with Annie Mok first published in the *Comics Journal*, her most recently published work, *Everything is Flammable*, is discussed, touching on questions of caregiving narratives, and particularly some of the ethical concerns involved in writing about mother-daughter relationships.

The second goal of this volume is to provide engaged and thoughtful academic research that both develops some of the critical conversations already happening in proximity to these cartoonists' works and also identifies further potential directions for investigation. Several important articles stand out in terms of a scholarly engagement with, in particular, the work of Julie Doucet. In Ann Miller and Murray Pratt's foundational 2004 article, "Transgressive Bodies in the Work of Julie Doucet, Fabrice Neaud and Jean-Christophe Menu: Towards a Theory of the 'AutobioBD,'" Doucet's work is read alongside French cartoonists Fabrice Neaud and Jean-Christophe Menu. The authors see Doucet's early autobiographical works especially as reflective of the connections between narrative and the body, and they argue that her comics ultimately "cross" and "blur" boundaries, including "[l]inguistic and cultural" ones, reclaiming "the visual order of the phallocentric and heteronormative." Two later articles build on, and expand, this argument, including a 2012 essay by one of our contributors, Frederik Byrn Køhlert's "Female grotesques: carnivalesque subversion in the comics of Julie Doucet," in which Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque is used to argue that Doucet "align[s]" herself "with a tradition of material and grotesque embodiment" in her early works in order to "capitalize on its subversive potential and take advantage of the transgressive energies inherent in" such an approach (22). Consistent with these earlier pieces, J. Andrew Deman, in his article included in the 2016 anthology, *Canadian Graphic*, focuses on how Doucet's *My New York Diary* subverts earlier traditions of "masculinist portrayals of female sexuality" in underground comics (79).

This early scholarship situates Doucet's comics as potentially emerging from, connected with, or responding to, a variety of traditions, including Franco-Belgian autobiography, Canadian alternative comics, and North American underground comics. In their introduction to *Canadian Graphic*, for example, Candida Rifkind and Linda Warley place Doucet, alongside Seth and Chester Brown, as central to what they describe as "the first generation of alternative Canadian cartoonists" (3). In a 2010 article, "'Picture

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This': Disease and Autobiographic Narration in the Graphic Novels of David B and Julie Doucet," Jonas Engelmann examines Doucet's depictions of her experiences with epilepsy alongside David B's representations of his brother's struggles, arguing that their disparate aesthetic approaches nonetheless reflect a shared interest in the connection between aesthetics and materiality. Finally, in her 2012 article, "Sex and Death in Quebec: Female AutobioBD and Julie Doucet's *Changements d'adresses*," Catriona MacLeod examines Doucet's *Changements d'adresses*, arguing that the work reflects her "occup[ation of] a unique place between the European *bande dessiné* and American comics industries" (61). Taken together, this scholarship reflects how transcontinental, manifold approaches to Doucet's works help us more completely access the transgressive and boundary-breaking nature of her comics. Grace Schneider's 2010 article, "Comics and Everyday Life: From *Ennui* to Contemplation," which preceded her monograph, *What Happens When Nothing Happens: Boredom and Everyday Life in Contemporary Comics* (2016), similarly yokes together Doucet's works with a number of cartoonists, including Bell, from a range of geopolitical backgrounds and positions, seeing in all of them a shared interest in everyday life, "boredom and strangeness" (42). As is reflected in this and other recent scholarship, there are a variety of ways to build on, and start, new conversations between and among the works of cartoonists situated at the borders of a variety of modes and genealogies, as this anthology aims to do.

Along these lines, the articles in this volume are meant to elucidate some of the lenses we might use to read these two cartoonists' works, from forays into feminist, autobiography, affect, and trauma studies to close readings and dissections of narratology and form to historical and materialist examinations. Our first section, "Genealogies," opens with Margaret Galvan's call for "genealogies that connect female creators together in a lineage." For Galvan, one of the places where we can locate such genealogies is in comics anthologies. Galvan discusses Doucet's and Bell's works in the context of the communities formed by such collections and the "indirect collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas" that stems more generally from their production. Galvan's essay is paired with Jessica Stark's "My Most Secret Boredom: (Dis)Affective Narrative in Julie Doucet's 'A Day in Julie Doucet's Life' and Hergé's 'Adventures with Tintin: The Broken Ear.'" As its title reflects, Stark looks at one of Doucet's more well-known books of comics, *My Most Secret Desire*, in relation to Hergé's *Tintin* series, noting its presence in one of the opening panels from her emblematic story, "A Day in Julie Doucet's Life." Stark scrutinizes the two

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cartoonists' "varying approaches to boredom," ultimately arguing that the presence of *Tintin* in Doucet both allies her work with, and distances it from, a male comics lineage.

In our second section, "Drawing Across Autobiography," we look at some of the ways Doucet's and Bell's works challenge, extend, or complicate notions of the autobiographical. In "Julie Doucet's 'Monkey and the Living Dead' as Subliminal Autobiography," Natalie Pendergast reads Doucet's long-running fictional fable, "Monkey and the Living Dead," beside her presumably autobiographical story of losing her virginity, "The First Time," both initially published at different points in Doucet's *Dirty Plotte* series. Building on Ann Miller's work on comics and autobiography as well as Philippe Lejeune's foundational, if imperfect, concept of *Le pacte autobiographique*, Pendergast argues that one can reread the visual symbolism of "Monkey and the Living Dead" through Doucet's later stories, developing the meanings of both and breaking down the barriers between memory and creation, fact and fiction. Following this exploration of autofiction, or the complicated site where fiction meets autobiography, Sarah Hildebrand looks at depictions of trauma in Gabrielle Bell's works, particularly in *The Voyeurs*, *Truth is Fragmentary*, and *Everything is Flammable*. Hildebrand argues that, unlike more canonical graphic memoirs portraying trauma, Bell's persona "distanc[es] herself from victimization and actively avoid[s] the confessional mode," in the end testifying to the alternative reading modes required for engaging with, as she explains, "what Rob Nixon would define as 'slow violence.'"

From investigations of the possibilities and limitations of the autobiographical, our third section, "Transgressive Aesthetics," turns to some of the formal and stylistic strategies to be found in Doucet's and Bell's works. Sarah Richardson utilizes the notion of cuteness as a lens through which we can better understand the gender politics of Doucet's *Lève ta jambe mon poisson est mort!* and *My Most Secret Desire*, arguing that Doucet's use of cuteness, which has yet to be closely explored, critiques patriarchal norms and standards. Richardson pairs her close readings of Julie's drawn body with affect scholar Sianne Ngai's careful delineations of the "pathos of powerlessness" at the heart of cuteness, and the ways that such "cute qualities" interact with, and often subvert, the power dynamics at the heart of such engagements. Following Richardson, Kylie Cardell's "Drawn to Life: The Diary as Method and Politics in the Comics Art of Gabrielle Bell and Julie Doucet" looks at the use of the diary—as method and mode—in works ranging from *My New York Diary* and *365 Days*, for Doucet, to *Truth*

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is Fragmentary and *Lucky*, for Bell. Building on her 2014 monograph, *Dear World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary*, Cardell here argues for the diary as "ideologically a gendered form," reflecting on how Doucet's and Bell's works accordingly "negotiate with the cultural status of the diary as a mode implicitly connected to private life, to female (girlhood) experience, and to subjective self-reflection." For Cardell, as for Richardson, aesthetic choices have political and rhetorical functions, shaping the ways we produce, and regard, texts.

Our final section, "Communal Visions," begins with Frederik Byrn Køhlert's examination of Doucet's *My New New York Diary*, an experimental collaboration with filmmaker Michel Gondry. In the film, which was accompanied by a book, Doucet's drawn autobiographical images eventually transform into a documentarian video image, "calling the relationship between reality and representation into question." Køhlert builds on scholarship investigating the association between images with an indexical connection to reality (such as photographs or videos) and drawn or representational images as well as research looking at how comics and film operate to tell stories. He argues that the assorted, dynamic ways Doucet and Gondry play with the relationship between the two mediums disrupt hierarchical notions of the real in relation to the unreal, the animate in relation to the static. Their film/book also evokes questions of the ethical imperatives at stake in collaborative auto/biographical projections.

In my co-editor Seamus O'Malley's essay, which concludes the book, he considers a different kind of collaboration. His essay looks at Bell's investment in voyeurism, especially in *The Voyeurs* and *Truth is Fragmentary*. O'Malley builds on Lacanian deconstructions of voyeurism, arguing that "the voyeuristic gaze both establishes the viewer and viewed as separate—subject and object—but also as intimately bound so close as to make their separation impossible." In the end, O'Malley invites us to see Bell's works not as narcissistic or self-absorbed, as they have so often been read; instead, he calls for us to recognize in them inclusive, conscientious forms of looking. As he explains of Bell's project, "she exploit[s] the reader's voyeuristic craving as a means to invite us to think about how we see, to contemplate how we situate ourselves in relation to seeing others, and, perhaps most counterintuitively, to envision ways in which communities are formed." As the bookend to our volume, Køhlert's and O'Malley's contributions remind us of how Doucet's and Bell's works endorse comics as collective spaces, of seeing and being seen. This volume finds its way into, and explores, that shared vision.

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Notes

I would like to gratefully acknowledge those who read various versions of this introduction and offered me their generous feedback, including Laurel Harris, Frederik Byrn Køhlert, Nancy K. Miller, Lauren Rosenblum, and two anonymous peer reviewers.

1. The series was reprinted in the opening chapter to *Long Time Relationship* (2001), though Doucet explains in an afternote that it was originally published as a book in 2000 in France by Les étoiles et les cochons.

2. Bell has since returned to live in Brooklyn, as she notes in her 2017 interview with Annie Mok.

3. Echoing this sentiment in an interview that took place five years later, she admits, “I’ve gotten in trouble for saying this, but I have trouble reading other comics artists. I think it’s a very, very difficult medium to get control of. In the meantime, I’m more gratified by prose and film” (Lightman 374).

4. Doucet frequently invokes the term “burnout” in interviews, speaking of her decision to stop drawing comics (as in her interview with Mok). In Bell’s interview with Cometbus, she too uses the phrase “burned out” to describe why her various forays into composing “graphic novels” had, until then, “failed.”

5. In a 2010 interview with Anne Elizabeth Moore, Doucet describes the early, published snippets of what would later become *The Madame Paul Affair* (2000) as her final works of comics. Those shorter versions of the subsequent collections were published in French by *Ici*, a Montreal alternative weekly magazine, between March and November 1999. She also mentions that, following her decision to leave the comics world, “it took me three years to find a way to get out of it.”

6. Doucet has claimed in the past that she is known mainly in Europe and the States: “I just don’t exist in Montreal to people,” she told Dan Nadel in a 2006 interview (“A Good Life” 48). An article in Toronto’s *Globe and Mail*, “Tough Times in ’Toon Town” (1997), suggested this was the case for a number of Canadian cartoonists at the time, linking the problem, in part, to the issue of language, in addition to “indifference on the part of readers and retailers, a poor distribution and promotion system as a result of being published outside the country and a reluctance on the part of major publishing houses in Canada to publish new cartoonists” (Niedzviecki). More recently, a number of critics have placed Doucet squarely in a Canadian comics tradition. In *Canadian Graphic* (2016), Rifkind and Warley describe “the trinity of Julie Doucet, Chester Brown, and Seth” as the epicenter of “the first generation of alternative Canadian cartoonists” (3). See also Bart Beaty’s article, “Selective Mutual Reinforcement in the Comics of Chester Brown, Joe Matt, and Seth” (2011). Tracing an overlapping Canadian alternative comics genealogy, Beaty points out how Brown often plugged Doucet’s *Dirty Plotte* to his readers in *Yummy Fur*, alongside his mentions of the works of Canadian Colin Upton and Joe Matt, an American living in Toronto (250, 259). Much of Doucet’s connection to a Canadian tradition has also been established via her pivotal role in the history of the wildly influential Montreal-based independent comics publishing house, Drawn & Quarterly. See Sean Rogers, “A History of Drawn & Quarterly” (2015).

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7. Though Doucet pinpoints *The Madame Paul Affair* as her final comics text in her 2010 interview with Moore, in an interview with Annie Mok she describes *365 Days* as being comics, "of course," adding that her (unspecified) publisher did not agree (the book was published in French and English, respectively, by two different presses). Her most recent book, *Carpet Sweeper Tales* (2016), which clearly builds on a *fumetti* tradition, has also been recognized as comics by a number of reviewers and was published by Drawn & Quarterly, as was the English-language version of *365 Days*. Doucet acknowledges that definitions of comics have broadened since her decision to officially retreat: "Things have changed quite a lot in the comics world in the past 12–13 years" (Mok).

8. For a characteristic analysis of "the crucial role genre plays in a literary career—the short story versus the novel," see, for example, Nancy K. Miller's article comparing the literary careers, including the critical reception of their works, of Grace Paley and Philip Roth. As Miller concludes of Paley, "By choosing to write not novels but stories, poems, and occasional pieces, and to live out daily, often in the streets, her relation to a history that included women as agents and actors, Grace Paley created a distinctive literary universe and continued to perfect the form that most suited its representation" (141, 140).

9. For an overview of autobiography theory, including the ways postmodern and post-structural theorists have influenced autobiographical criticism and developed life writing as both a recognized literary mode and critical field, see "A History of Autobiography Criticism, Part I: Theorizing Autobiography," pp. 193–212, in *Reading Autobiography*.

10. In addition to Smith and Watson's *Interfaces*, see also their earlier collection, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (1998) and Domna C. Stanton's anthology, *The Female Autograph* (1987). See also Griselda Pollock's *Differencing the Canon* (1999), a book that, as Smith and Watson point out, levels a similar feminist critique at the art history world.

11. In *How Come Boys*, I take up these questions of form and critical reception when it comes to women and comics, integrating into the discussion a relevant cartoon by Gabrielle Bell titled "Female Art." See the introduction, "To Unaffiliate Jewishly," pp. 1–21.

12. In *Alternative Comics* (2005), Charles Hatfield, for example, recognizes Doucet, among others, as part of a "new school of contemporary autobiographical comics," inspired by Harvey Pekar, that has "reinvented the comic book hero" (111). In addition to Doucet, Hatfield includes Colin Upton, Ed Brubaker, Dennis Eichhorn, Chester Brown, Seth, Joe Matt, Mary Fleener, and Joe Chiapetta as part of that school (110).

13. Cherríe Moraga makes this statement in her foreword to the second edition of the foundational *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1983), a book that propelled later third wave investments in intersectional feminism. Moraga argues that she and her co-editor Gloria Anzaldúa conceived of a volume filled only with women's writing as a "response to a number of earlier writings by women of color which in the name of feminism focused almost exclusively on relations between the sexes." In regards to Bell's claiming of Doucet as an influence, in addition to the aforementioned reference to Doucet in her interview with Aaron Cometbus, in a 2005 interview with Gary Groth Bell states that she first discovered comics through her friend's "big collection of *Eightball* and *Hate* and *Dirty Plotte*."

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14. A number of astute critics, both from inside and out of the academy, have been scrambling, and often struggling, to reveal the diverse, wide world of those invested in, and creating, comics, from Zainab Akhtar on her important, now extinct, *Comics & Cola* site to cartoonist MariNaomi with her indispensible "Cartoonists of Color," "LGBTQ Cartoonists of Color," and "Non-Male Cartoonists of Color" databases to comics scholars including, as examples, Ramzi Fawaz, Frederick Luis Aldama, Christopher González, Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, and Michelle Ann Abate.

15. Some of these autobiographical details were culled from, or verified by, referencing from the following: Doucet's brief biography, as listed on her website: juliedoucet.net/mavie-mylife, accessed 8 Jan. 2018, and the short biography posted on Drawn & Quarterly's website: www.drawnandquarterly.com/author/julie-doucet, accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

16. The Montreal-based publishing house L'Oie de Cravan has collected the original *Dirty Plotte* fanzine in a volume titled *Fantastic Plotte* (2013), which includes productions from the years 1987–91. As they explain on their website, "It is the new version of the D&Q book *Lève ta jambe mon poisson est mort!* [translated into English as: *Lift your leg my fish is dead!*] that has long been out of print but with lots more: fanzine covers and stuff." See www.oiedecravan.com/, accessed 2 Aug. 2017. Many of Doucet's works have been republished in a variety of outlets. As the copyright page of *Lève ta jambe* reads, for example, "Many of the strips in this book were first published in Julie Doucet's comic *Dirty Plotte* as well as in *Weirdo*, *Drawn & Quarterly*, *Heck!*, *Snake Eyes*, *Twisted Sisters*, and *Buzzard*."

17. As Aline Kominsky-Crumb states in an interview collected in Chute's *Outside the Box* (2014), "a lot of people got their start" in *Weirdo*, including Julie Doucet, Carol Tyler, and Dori Seda (90). Other women with work in that issue of *Weirdo* include Diane Noomin, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, and Phoebe Gloeckner, and other women contributors in Hilvitz's collection include Carol Lay, Mary Fleener, Lee Binswanger, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Carol Tyler, and Carel Moiseiwitsch. The same comic, "Heavy Flow," was republished in Diane Noomin's highly influential edited collection, *Twisted Sisters: A Collection of Bad Girl Art* (1991). For more on issue no. 15 of *Wimmen's Comix*, see Galvan's contribution to this volume.

18. The inside cover of the first issue of *Dirty Plotte* published by Drawn & Quarterly lists January 1991 as the publication date, with the second printing date listed as June 1992. In addition, in a note from Doucet on the same page, she explains, "Before being a comic book *Dirty Plotte* was a fanzine [. . . .] Half of the cartoons in here are reprints of stuff from these old mini comics."

19. Doucet was also distanced from this tight-knit group by the fact that she didn't live near them. As Rogers explains, while Seth, Brown, and Matt were living in Toronto and often contributing to each others' publications in one form or another, Doucet was living in Montreal and other places, which kept her "slightly removed" from them (24).

20. Jared Gardner calls attention to this opening image in *Binky Brown* in his article, "Autography's Biography, 1972–2007."

21. In Ann Miller and Murray Pratt's "Transgressive Bodies in the Work of Julie Doucet, Fabrice Neaud and Jean-Christophe Menu," they describe Doucet's style as "recall[ing] both that of Robert Crumb and the *ligne crade* of Vuillemin": "Doucet's graphic style . . . is messy and swarms with detail, the antithesis of the boundary-reinforcing *ligne-claire*."

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22. For an extensive bibliography, including many of Doucet's self-published artworks, see Julie Doucet's website, juliedoucet.net/, accessed 8 Jan. 2018, as well as a comprehensive bibliographical guide of her works developed at OCAD University: ocad.libguides.com/c.php?g=355283&p=2398097, accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

23. In his 2014 review of *Fantastic Plotte!*, a book that collected much of Doucet's early works, Frederik Byrn Køhlert describes how "[a]lthough a playful use of the two languages has always been present in Doucet's work, this bilingualism has been somewhat obscured by the fact that her work has, until now, only been published in unilingual translations" ("The Plotte Thickens"). Køhlert goes on to note that, from her earliest attempt at composing bilingual comics, Doucet's "imagination seems to have been freed by writing in another language, and as her comics in their original versions switch fluidly between French slang and imperfect English, they underscore her particular position as a Montreal artist."

24. For a close reading of this scene, as well as a later sexual encounter included in *My New York Diary*, see J. Andrew Deman's essay on Doucet, especially pp. 83–90.

25. Included in *Lady Pep*, one can find the Slow Action Movement Utensils Kit (March 2003), the Slow Action Movement Chronometer (March 2003), and the Slow Action Movement Starter's Kit with Membership Card (March 2003). Chaput is the founding editor of the L'Oie de Cravan publishing house.

26. Many theorists and practitioners across academic disciplines have similarly promoted "slow scholarship," though as an emphatically ethical practice. For a group of geographers, this call is tied to "a feminist ethics of care," an endeavor that could be applied to Doucet here as well. See Mountz et al, "For Slow Scholarship" (2015). In her essay in this volume, Sarah Hildebrand identifies this inclination in Bell's works as well.

27. For more on *Carpet Sweeper Tales*, and particularly how it relates to her other post-comics work, see my review, "Reading Aloud with Julie Doucet" (2016).

28. Some of these biographical details have been culled from the Drawn & Quarterly website, www.drawnandquarterly.com, accessed 2 Aug. 2017, as well as Bell's webpage, gabriellebell.com/, accessed 2 Aug. 2017.

29. *Lucky* no. 1 includes almost daily entries starting with Tuesday, April 22, through Monday, June 2. This structure is abandoned in *Lucky* no. 2 and *Lucky* no. 3, though each of those sections in capped off by a date (Sept. 2003 and May 2004). In *Lucky*, vol. 2, no. 1 and vol. 2, no. 2, Bell generally returns to the approach of dating the top of each diary comic separately.

30. In 2008, Drawn & Quarterly published *Kuruma Tohrimasu* via its Petite Livres imprint. This art book collects drawings and photographs related to the making of the film.

31. According to Bell, she had actually been working on the blog over the previous summer, but she later deleted these early blog entries when she published *The Voyeurs* (personal communication, 15 Nov. 2017).

32. The first section of *The Voyeurs*, for instance, includes comics taken from *Lucky*, vol. 2, no. 2.

33. See note 2, on Bell's return.

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