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Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract


Tutkielmassa perehdytään Art Spiegelmanin sarjakuvateoksiin *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) ja *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991) muistitutkimuksen näkökulmasta. Tutkielma tarkastelee teosten kykyä vaikuttaa amerikkalaisten lukijoiden mielikuvaan Holokaustista. Tutkielman on tarkoitus osoittaa, että *Maus* I ja II ovat kulttuurimuistin objekteja (objects of cultural memory) joilla on kyky muokata ja rakentaa yhteiskunnan kollektiivista muistia Holokaustista.

Tutkielman kolme analyysilukua tutkivat kukin yhtä Astrid Erllin kolmesta kriteeristä, jotka määrittävät fiktiivisen teoksen kyvyn vaikuttaa yhteiskunnan kollektiiviseen muistiin. Ensimmäinen analyysikappale tarkastelee kulttuurillista kontekstia, jossa *Maus* I ja II ovat saaneet alkunsa. Toinen analyysikappale perehtyy sarjakuvien sisäisiin piirteisiin, joihin sisältyvät muun muassa rakenne, temporaalisuus, hahmot ja genre. Kyseinen kappale pyrkii myös osoittamaan, että *Maus* I ja II lähestyvät Spiegelmanin isän tarinaa rekonstruktiivisestä näkökulmasta. Elina Liikasen (2015) ehdottaman rekonstruktiivisen lähestymistavan mukaan teoksen kertojana toimiva päähenkilö rekonstruoi menneisyyden tapahtumia nykyhetkestä käsin. Näiden teosten rakenne on rinnastettavissa klassiseen salapoliisitarinan kaavaan, ja niiden todistusaineistoa ovat yleensä valokuvat, historialliset dokumentit sekä silminnäkijäkuvaukset. Viimeinen analyysikappale pyrkii osoittamaan, että *Maus* I ja II ovat osa laajempaa Holokaustikuvausten jatkumoa. Niiden monet piirteet ovat saaneet vaikutteita aikaisemmista kuvauksista ja siten vahvistavat jo tiettyjä vallallaan olevia käsityksiä Holokaustista amerikkalaisessa kulttuurimuistissa. Tutkielman lopuksi perehdytään kulttuurimuistamisen ongelmiin sekä kulutusyhteiskunnan vaikutukseen menneisyyden representaatioihin.



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# Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as an object of Cultural Memory in the US

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Contents

1 Introduction.........................................................................................1

2 *Maus* and the ‘‘memory boom’’............................................................7

2.1 Shifting attitudes and the Americanization of the Holocaust.............8

2.2 The emergence of trauma culture in the US: from memory boom to memoir boom........................................................................................................12

2.3 *Maus* and the explosion of the comic book genre...............................14

2.4 Conclusions..........................................................................................16

3 *Maus* and memory: internal characteristics...........................................18

3.1 The reconstructive mode and comics.................................................18

3.2 Structure and temporality....................................................................20

3.3 Genre and characters...........................................................................23

3.4 Referentiality and the visual side of *Maus*.........................................28

3.5 Conclusions: The memory offered by *Maus*......................................29

4 *Maus* and inter-medial dynamics..........................................................32

4.1 Premediation in *Maus*: aesthetics and narratives...............................33

4.2 Mediation in *In the Shadow of No Towers*.........................................41

4.3 *Maus* as remediation.............................................................................44

4.4 Conclusions..........................................................................................46

5 Final considerations and discussion......................................................47

Bibliography..............................................................................................53

# 1 Introduction

Art Spiegelman's graphic novels *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991) have proven to be popular objects of study in the field of memory studies (Hirsch 1997; Young 1998; Merino 2010; Kohli 2012). Collectively known as *Maus*, Spiegelman's story continuously problematizes memory and remembering as the artist exposes the challenging task of reconstructing his family's Holocaust experiences through his father's oral account. Many scholars writing on *Maus* and memory tend to focus precisely on this intergenerational transmission of memories and trauma in families of Holocaust survivors. Marianne Hirsch (2008, 103) uses the term *postmemory* to refer to this "relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to constitute memories in their own right". Kohli (2012, 4) notes that descendants of survivors often strive to both learn about the influence of the family trauma on their present, and to work through and understand their relationship and identity in the context of this traumatic and absent past. Many descendants, like Spiegelman, then turn to art and literature to further express and understand the complicated feelings created by their inherited memories.

With the focus being mostly on the individual memory and trauma in descendants of survivors, slightly less attention has been paid to the way Holocaust depictions in literature and the visual arts can have an impact on larger society. These depictions, given the right circumstances, can have a powerful effect on a culture's Holocaust memory. Astrid Erll (2011, 8) defines the central characteristics of memory as being its constructed nature and its relation to the present. Memories are not objective images of the past, but subjective and highly selective reconstructions that depend on the situation in which they are recalled. Remembering, that is, the act of assembling available data, takes place in the present. The intersection of memory and culture in the concept of *cultural memory*, then, postulates that memory is not only a subjective and private phenomenon. In fact, memory is very much a collective phenomenon heavily influenced by media and societal structures (98). As an abstract concept, memory can only be observed through concrete acts of remembering. These memorializations can comprise a wide network of symbols, religious texts, historical painting, historiography, TV documentaries, films, public debates, commemorative rituals, and so on. Together, these networks construct, maintain, and represent versions of a shared past. Different media will then elicit different ways of remembering and will leave a trace on the memory it creates (Erll 2008, 388).

In this thesis I argue that *Maus* works as a medium of cultural memory in the context of American Holocaust memory culture because of the optimal context in which it was created, its internal characteristics, and the way it interacts with similar works. As a medium of cultural memory,

*Maus* constructs, maintains, and represents a particular version of the past, which gives it the power to influence images an ideas about the Holocaust in the collective American consciousness. Moreover, I argue that *Maus* takes a reconstructive approach in its examination of the Holocaust. According to Elina Liikanen (2015, iv), reconstructive works include a process of investigation and reconstruction of past events led by a narrator-character set in the present day. The reconstruction, that is, the piecing together of past events in the present is an important aspect to examine, given that different representations will give birth to different kinds of memories. Taking these observations into account, the use of the reconstructive approach in *Maus* would then contribute to the creation of a specific type of remembering in the American cultural consciousness.

In recent years memory and remembering have become an increasingly studied topic not only in academic fields, but also in popular media. The process of how memories are formed and how different memories often compete with one another has been explored in a variety of artistic media, such as TV documentaries, comics, painting, film, music, poetry and playwriting. Erll (2011, 3) uses the term ''memory boom'' to refer to this intense sociocultural, interdisciplinary and international interest in memory that has now been going on for decades. However, this interest in remembering the past is in no way a new thing in the United States. Historical depictions of American culture can already be found in the early colonial literature depicting Puritan New England's commemorations of the Pilgrim Fathers' arrival at Plymouth Rock in 1620. Such historical depictions continue all the way to the nineteenth century with literature dealing with the British-American War, the American Civil War, the ''mythical'' Old South, slavery, and so on (Hebel 2008, 48-49). The 20th century too brought its own major and traumatic events, such as two world wars and the Holocaust, which have been represented in a vast number of books, films, TV series, photography, and so on. This fascination with memory and remembering has carried on all the way to the 21st century, and seems to be constantly expanding rather than waning.

What could then be the reason for this ongoing fascination with memory in the US? Michael Kammen (1995, 247-251) for instance identifies no less than nine factors, such as the Vietnam War, Holocaust denial, multiculturalism, the end of the Cold War, and the increasingly authoritative role of films and docudramas. The high amount of controversy generated by Holocaust denial, that is, the act of denying the Jewish genocide during World War II, has been a particularly strong stimulus. Erll (2011, 5-4) on the other hand divides her arguments concisely into three main factors, the first one being *developments within academia*. Here Erll mentions the impact of post-structuralism in the 80's as well as postmodern philosophies. These theories emphasize social constructionism, a key aspect of memory studies. Indeed, the field of memory studies focuses on the past as a ''human construct'' instead of ''how it really was''. It is thus not surprising that commemorative rituals and the way societies remember are a great source of interest for scholars. Secondly, Erll mentions *historical*

*transformation*. This refers to the loss of the generation who had first-hand experienced the Holocaust and WWII. Needless to say, without eye-witnesses to history, societies depend on media-supported ways of remembering. Thirdly, Erll mentions *changes in media technology and the role of popular media*. The era of information made possible by technological developments and the internet has given birth to a global ''mega archive'', which provides people around the world access to immense quantities of information. This mega archive has greatly facilitated the access to media and popular culture representations of the past.

Both Kammen and Erll mention the Holocaust as a factor for the ongoing ''memory boom'' of recent decades. Erll (2011, 11) goes on to note that in the US specifically, a significant strand of academic memory research has its origins in Holocaust studies. The Holocaust no doubt stands amongst some of the most widely studied *lieu de mémoire* or ''sites of memory'', which French philosopher Pierre Nora defined as entities of great importance, which by dint of human will or the work of time have become symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of a community (1998, xvii). This can be seen in the vast amount of Holocaust museums, monuments, official memorial days and NGOs that exist today in many parts of the world to ensure *remembering*. Besides these formal ways of remembrance, Holocaust memorialization has a strong presence in more informal popular media, where the visual arts have had a crucial role. Mainstream media representations of the Holocaust have been prolific in past decades; a significant number of paintings, sculptures, documentaries and TV series have sprung up to shape the public opinion about the Holocaust. The immensely popular TV miniseries *Holocaust* (1978), movies like *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), or books like *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947), *The Book Thief* (2005), and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) can be seen as cultural points of reference that connect the Holocaust past to the present. As Barry Schwartz (1991, 222) notes, all societies, regardless of their ideological climate, require a sense of continuity with the past, and their enduring memories maintain this continuity. Popular culture representations thus aid in shaping and preserving nations' memories while creating a sense of continuity.

Spiegelman's *Maus* is arguably the most cited example of Holocaust representations in comics. The story switches continuously between two time lines, with the frame story taking place in the present as Art interviews his father Vladek between 1978 and 1979 about his experiences during the Holocaust. The story told by Vladek takes place in the narrative past, beginning somewhere in the mid-1930s in Poland and continuing until the end of the Holocaust in 1945. Published originally in *Raw* magazine between 1980 and 1991, all the chapters of *Maus* were later compiled into two separate books by Pantheon Books called *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991). *Maus* was considered groundbreaking in its choice of topic and approach, particularly due to the depiction of its characters as anthropomorphic animals. Indeed, using the

animal fable to represent such a serious subject was deemed controversial by some critics. Nonetheless, *Maus* became the first comic to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and it has been credited with bringing more respectability to the graphic novel and setting the stage for an alternative comic scene aimed at adults (Bramlett, Cook, and Meskin 2017, 39).

Many scholars classify *Maus* as a mix of genres (Sicher 1998; Saphiro 2001; Kokkola 2003; Hescher 2016). Hescher (2016, 112) notes that it is precisely because of this genre mix that *Maus* is often seen as an example of postmodern Holocaust works. *Maus* combines biographical, autobiographical, historical and fictional elements. The main narratives are accompanied by excerpts from some of Spiegelman's earlier comics, family pictures, and quotes from Nazi newspapers or Adolf Hitler himself. All these different pieces are then woven together in an attempt to construct a cohesive story. As Kokkola (2003, 123) notes, *Maus* continuously draws attention to its own ''constructed nature''. With true post-modern reflexivity, readers are simultaneously presented with Vladek and Art's story as well as the construction process of said stories. Liikanen (2015, iv) uses the term *reconstructive mode* to refer to works that focus on the process of investigation and reconstruction of past events led by a narrator-character set in the present day. She uses this term to describe a particular way of representing the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship in Spanish novels written by third-generation authors:

> The novels examine the intergenerational transmission of memories and emphasize the meaning of the past as a source of personal and collective identity in the present. Even if the novels represent the past as a subjective reconstruction and often employ metafictional and auto-fictional techniques to explore the limits of art and reality, history and fiction, they still end up presenting one version of the past as the "true" one. By depicting the narrator-character's search for historical truth and personal and cultural self-understanding, the reconstructive mode tries to convince the reader of the importance of knowing the past in order to understand the present (2015, iv, language original).

Indeed, this definition can in many ways be applied to *Maus*. Art, the narrator-protagonist in the story, interrogates his father about the family's past. Piece by piece, through Vladek's testimony and his own childhood memories, the son attempts to uncover the traumatic events that shaped his parents and, through their parenting, shaped the artist himself. However, Art is fully aware that this is not necessarily a very realistic task. In the comic, he notes that ''[…] reality is too complex for comics...so much is left out or distorted'' (Spiegelman 1986, 16). Reconstructing a story completely accurately only through memories from decades ago is practically an impossible task, but Spiegelman still presents readers with his own interpretation of his father's story. However, on some occasions he offers alternative versions of an event: in one scene, Art asks Vladek about the marching band that

supposedly played at Auschwitz when prisoners marched to work. Vladek, however, denies the presence of any band at the camp, dismissing such claims as absurd. Spiegelman draws both versions, first introducing a panel with the marching band, and then another without it (54). Besides the existence of competing memories, another factor that hinders the author's attempts to uncover past events are the important blanks left in the comic: the diaries of Art's mother, Anja, are never retrieved, which means readers are deprived of her Holocaust memories. Because of the ambiguous and uncertain nature of *Maus*, readers are invited to make out − or construct − their own conclusions. It is precisely this use of the reconstructive mode that likens *Maus* to detective fiction. Liikanen (2015, 267) goes on to note that works which take the reconstructive approach can seem particularly interesting and engaging for readers: the detective-like narrative creates suspense and often incorporates moving stories. Besides picturing the horrors of a cruel past, these works often include acts of heroism, solidarity and idealism. Following this approach, *Maus* not only presents readers with war, concentration camps, and murderous SS-officers: it also shows humans deeply caring about each other in a world where camaraderie, kindness and ingenuity prove to be crucial for survival.

How does something then become a medium of cultural memory, that is, an object with the capacity to shape and create collective ideas and images about the past? All representations of the Holocaust are potentially equipped with this capacity, however, some representations will prove more influential than others. Erll (2008, 390) notes the importance of looking into the phenomena *within*, *between*, and *around* those media which have the power to produce and shape cultural memory. Based on these phenomena, she has postulated three factors that determine a work's ability to influence a society's collective memory. The first one is found in a work's internal, formal and thematical characteristics. Certain features in the narrative will affect the kind of memory we retain of the past. Many aspects of the main narrative found in *Maus* conform to previously existing schemes and cultural images about the Holocaust that already existed in the American consciousness prior to the comic's publication. These ideas and images include, for instance, the depiction of Nazi brutality, the morality and camaraderie of the Jewish victims, as well as the role of American troops in the liberation of Nazi camps. Because these familiar images that *Maus* offers were already present in the collective Holocaust memory in the United States, readers are able to grant *Maus* a certain amount of referentiality. This allows the comic to shape and influence American readers' ideas about the Holocaust. Secondly, Erll (2008, 392-393) notes the importance of looking into how a work interacts with previous and subsequent works. Previous representations of the Holocaust form a tight network of medial representations that prepare the ground for the work in question, lead reception along certain paths, and open up and channel public discussion. This will then give a work its memorial meaning, that is, it will serve to preserve Holocaust remembrance. *Maus* appears to take a post-structuralist approach to the Holocaust, which many works have taken on since the 80's. These types

of works constantly question whether it is even possible or ethical to truthfully and respectfully represent such horrible events. This shows that *Maus* clearly interacts with contemporary Holocaust discourse and the ethics of representation. The third crucial characteristic has to do with the cultural context surrounding the work. Erll (2008, 395-396) argues that an ideal context is populated with a large amount of representations of the past circulating in various media, accompanied by a lively public debate on the topic in question. The vast amount of Holocaust discussions, media representations, controversies, memorials and so on provided an adequate context for *Maus* to realize its potential as memory-shaping media in the US. It is also worth mentioning that a work's impact will, of course, depend on the popularity it achieves. If a work is not consumed, no matter how great its potential, it will have little effect on collective memory.

This thesis will approach its subject from a memory studies framework, relying primarily on Erll's work on collective memory. I will also use narratological theory to dissect the reconstructive approach visible in *Maus*' structure and theme. By closely examining how *Maus* reflects the three characteristics proposed by Erll, this work will try to show that Spiegelman's comic has been received as a ''medium of cultural memory'', that is, a medium with the power to create and shape collective images of the Holocaust in the American consciousness. This work will also attempt to show that the reconstructive approach is an effective way to present a Holocaust narrative, making it engaging for readers and resulting in a wide societal impact on US Holocaust cultural memory. For the sake of simplicity, this thesis will refer to both *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991) collectively as *Maus* when discussing the story as a whole.

## 2 *Maus* and the ‘‘memory boom’’

This chapter will focus on some of the main aspects of the cultural, political and social contexts in which *Maus* was created. As previously mentioned, Astrid Erll sees context as crucial in determining a work's ability to influence a society's collective memory. Although a work's internal characteristics and the way it interacts with other similar works are important in turning it into a medium of collective memory, such characteristics only give a work the *potential* for memory-making and memory-shaping, but do not guarantee it. Erll (2008, 395) stresses that this potential needs to be realized in the process of reception: a work must be read and viewed by a community as a medium of collective memory. Films that are not watched or books that are not read may be filled with fascinating images of the past, but will obviously have no impact on a society's collective memory. What is needed is a particular kind of context in which works of fiction are prepared and received as memory-shaping media. In this context, readers must perceive a work as relevant for understanding the past it represents. The specific form of reception which turns fictions into memory-making fictions is not an individual, but a collective phenomenon.

A context that is receptive and welcoming of Holocaust depictions is thus vital for them to become media of collective memory. An optimal context will guarantee that said works are spread and consumed in the first place. As already noted in the introduction, the ideal context is populated by a large amount of representations of the past circulating in various media, accompanied by a lively public debate on the topic in question. This context, comprising a tight network of medial representations, awards, political speeches, TV documentaries, advertisements, comments, discussions, controversies, and so on, form *pluri-medial networks*. Accoring to Erll (2011, 164-165) pluri-medial networks dictate how a particular work is received in a particular culture, and allow a text to achieve the status of ‘‘collective text’’. The concept of collective text describes literature's function as a circulation medium that disseminates and shapes cultural memory. Collective texts emerge from, intervene in, and can only be understood in connection to these pluri-medial networks of cultural memory (166). Indeed, what is established around these texts is of vital importance for them to become media of cultural memory.

The first sections of this chapter will look into some of the most important historical events, cultural texts and developments in academia that were responsible for integrating the Holocaust into the American consciousness. Later sections will focus more specifically on American comics culture and the way US audiences reacted to *Maus*. I will argue that the acceptance of the Holocaust as part of American cultural memory, the emergence of trauma culture, as well as the explosion of the comic-book genre provided an adequate context for *Maus* to be received as a memory-shaping medium in

the US. These factors guaranteed US audiences' interest and receptiveness towards *Maus*, resulting in record sales and a wide circulation.

## 2.1 Shifting attitudes and the Americanization of the Holocaust

Representations of the Holocaust and its victims were not immediately welcome in the United States after WWII. According to Alan Mintz (2001, 4-5), there was a long silence in the 1940's and 1950's, both in Europe and the United States. The Holocaust had little room in the great celebrations of American victory over the Axis powers, and this rhetoric of victory and celebration could not accommodate survivors. After the initial outrage at Nazi atrocities sparked by the Nuremberg trials, the attention in the US soon shifted towards its ambitious former ally, the Soviet Union. Additionally, most American Jews were too deeply engaged in entering American society and seizing the opportunities offered to them to mourn the Holocaust. This was particularly true for Holocaust survivors who had immigrated to the United States after the war. Survivors tended to concentrate on integrating themselves in America, and telling one's story was not a priority. The emphasis was put on moving on and letting the past stay in the past (7). Matthias Hass (2004, 10) notes that the modern concept of ''survivor'', with its connotations of resilience and heroism, did not exist at the time. On the contrary, Jewish Holocaust victims were often accused of ''not fighting back'' and going to Nazi camps like ''sheep to the slaughter''. In this context, it is unsurprising that such attitudes would have discouraged many Holocaust survivors from telling their stories.

How did American Jewry then overcome this avoidance of discussing the Holocaust publicly? Moreover, how did the Holocaust become a focus of attention for the United States as a whole? Mintz (2010, 10) mentions the importance of events such as the Vietnam War (1954-1975) and the Eichmann trial (1961), racial tensions in the US particularly in the 50's and 60's, the founding of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (1993), as well as the impact of a number of cultural texts which shaped the perception of the Holocaust and its victims. To begin with, the horrors that resulted from American involvement in the Vietnam War and the struggle of African Americans in the civil rights movement cast doubts on the conception of the US as the most free and just nation in the world:

> The critique of the justness of American society and its use of power opened up the prospect of seeing America not just as a shining example to the world but as a country that caused suffering both at home and abroad. A growing awareness of the catastrophic consequences of ''man's inhumanity to man'' was epitomized in the hopelessness of the black underclass in the inner cities and by the burned flesh and torn limbs of Vietnamese peasants. In this context, it is not surprising, then, that the Holocaust eventually became the ultimate analogy for reflecting on the evils humans have inflicted upon other humans (Mintz 2010, 10).

This context of suffering effectively complicated and challenged the perception many US citizens had of their country as an example of freedom, heroism and justice to the rest of the world. It appears to also have complicated the attitudes of many American Jews regarding Jewish historical experience. As Mintz (2001, 11) argues, the awakening ‘‘identity politics’’ of the 1960s resulted in many Jews – who until then had involuntarily been separated from civil rights movements – to reflect upon their own Jewishness and the constrains placed upon the public expression of Jewishness. Indeed, the Vietnam War and racial violence signaled to many Americans an increasing fragmentation of their society and the erosion of traditional American values. The downplaying of one’s distinctiveness to fit into the so called American ‘‘melting pot’’ had been replaced by an emphasis on asserting one’s difference and heritage. Anne Rothe (2014, 12) argues that these years were characterized by a ‘‘longing for simple moral certainties’’ in an increasingly complex and divided late-capitalist society. Thus, the Holocaust could be adopted as a ‘‘cornerstone’’ of US national memory because it was cast as the ultimate evil and thus provided the ‘‘lowest common denominator for American values’’.

Another important event that helped bring the vastness of the Holocaust disaster into American consciousness – while also dissipating Jewish shame and arousing empathy in gentiles – was the Eichmann trial in 1960 (Mintz 2001, 11). German Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann had been captured in Argentina by Israel’s Secret Intelligence Service, and brought to Israel for a public trial. Eichmann’s public trial in Israel, with the testimony of various Holocaust survivors, had a great impact on American society. Many Americans at that time were not fully aware of the extent of the atrocities committed by the Third Reich. According to Cesarani (2004, 325), Eichmann’s trial and the surrounding media coverage sparked a strong interest in WWII events, which resulted in a great increase in publication of memoirs and scholarly works that helped raise public awareness of the Holocaust. Jewish philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt wrote a series of reports for the *New Yorker* titled ‘‘Eichmann in Jerusalem’’, providing a detailed account of the trial. Mintz (2001, 14) argues that these reports had the effect of provoking many – especially Jewish intellectuals who had been distant from Jewish issues – into a better-informed and more empathic connection to the Holocaust, its victims and survivors. Burdon et al. (2014, 428) note that the way Arendt’s reports characterized Eichmann’s crimes as well as and the nature of his criminality shocked, outraged and hurt many within the public, the Jewish community, and the academic community.

It thus appears that Eichmann’s trial and its wide coverage were important factors that helped shift preconceptions about Holocaust victims in the minds of both Jewish and gentile Americans. As Mintz (2001, 13) notes, the helpless victims now became *survivors* or *witnesses* with key knowledge to share with the world in order to punish a monstrous criminal. Cultural texts such as Arendt’s reports helped create a more compassionate image of Holocaust survivors. Newspaper articles, books, TV series, and movies not only shifted the role of Jews from victim to survivors, but also awakened an

interest in the Holocaust. Many survivors began sharing their memories publicly, and books such as Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947) and Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960) provided American audiences with starkly grim descriptions of concentration camps. Among important Holocaust narratives is also, of course, *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Published in the US in 1952 and made later into a stage play in 1955, it was eventually rendered into a movie in 1959. Mintz (2001, 17) argues that the book had the ability to ''create a bridge of emphatic connection, of even identification, between the fate of European Jewry and ordinary American readers who had no ethnic or religious link to the victims and often no knowledge whatsoever of the event''. The identification factor is crucial here, given that it made possible the process of Americanization which Holocaust representations inevitably went through.

Soon, film and television too seized on the topic of the Holocaust. In the first decades of the 20th century, the American feature film had become conspicuous after having spent years in the shadow of Europe. After World War I, Hollywood began to emerge as the epicenter of American cinema, leading to the prominence of the American feature film both home and abroad (Bolton and Olsson 2010, 13). Unsurprisingly, film soon became a popular medium to portray Holocaust stories, with notable examples including *Exodus* (1960) and *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), both of which won multiple academy awards. The post war decades were certainly a time where media representations of social themes in every artistic medium were becoming increasingly popular. As Mintz notes, the power of so called ''cultural artifacts'' made possible the move from simple awareness to memorialization. The success of the miniseries *Roots* (1977) adapted from Alex Haley's novel detailing the life of captured slave Kunta Kinte and his descendants in the United States prepared the ground for the miniseries *Holocaust* (1978). Presented by NBC-TV to an audience of 120 million viewers – 50 percent of the American population at the time – the show had a major impact American society. The docudrama-style depicting the troubles and tribulations of the fictional German-Jewish Weiss family gained both acclaim and criticism, but essentially, it was a key piece that contributed to the universalization – and especially Americanization – of the Holocaust. As Mintz puts it:

> The success of *Holocaust* represented, in a sense, something even more stunning than the marriage of art and commerce. It represented the intersection of a mass medium that was a quintessentially American invention with a virulent mode of Jewish persecution that was a quintessentially European invention. A catastrophe that had taken place far from the soil of American consciousness had gained admittance through the engine of entertainment that Americans had devised to protect their historical innocence (2001, 26).

This great power and value placed on the entertainment industry in the Unites States was crucial for the formation and acceptance of the Holocaust as part of the country's cultural memory and heritage. As Mintz (2001, 26) goes on to explain, the miniseries marked a turning point at which the Holocaust emerged as a moral metaphor of great power in American society.

In this context, it is not surprising that eventually a widespread consensus developed in the US that stressed the need for public remembrance of the Holocaust by both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans. As Mintz (2001, 26) argues, the Holocaust had now become the referent for collective suffering, and many politicians used this to their advantage. Certainly, a political leader who championed Holocaust memorialization could be sure their actions would be praised by many and criticized by very few. Because of this, on the 30th anniversary of the creation of Israel in May 1st of 1978 and two weeks after the miniseries *Holocaust* had been aired in the US, President Jimmy Carter announced the creation of a commission to recommend a national Holocaust memorial. He affirmed to have been deeply affected by Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died*, another important Holocaust cultural text. Carter described the book as ''the tragic account of the ultimate in man's inhumanity to man, the Holocaust'', once again echoing this line which strongly conceptualizes the Holocaust as a universal manifestation of human nature.

Because of the context presented above, the Holocaust eventually moved from simply being the focus of attention for a whole nation into an integral part of American cultural memory. Its relevance and presence in the media and public discourse was alive and well in the years surrounding the publication of *Maus*, often due to a great amount of controversies. After a long process filled with disputes over who ''owned'' the Holocaust and how much the events could be universalized, the US Holocaust Museum finally opened in 1993. Matthias Hass (2004, 13) notes that in the process of the opening of the Museum, the Holocaust was further ''Americanized'' to help non-Jews identify with the history. This was done firstly through integrating stories of American war veterans; after all, American heroism and the role of US troops in the liberation of Nazi camps had been an important source of pride ever since WWII. The second strategy was incorporating the stories of survivors who made their way to the US after the war, and finally, the memorial incorporated direct references to American values. The Holocaust showed, it was argued, the horrors that can happen if ''fundamental American values'' are missing. The direct relation to these American values was made evident through two quotations engraved at the entrance to the museum. One from George Washington reads: "The government of the United States … gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance" and another one from the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal, … they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness". The central focus was in transferring an event of European history to the American society. As Young (2008, 358) aptly points out, the shape of Holocaust memory in America

is guided by distinctly American ideals and experiences, such as liberty, pluralism, and immigration. American Holocaust memorials enshrine not just the history of the Holocaust but also American democratic and egalitarian ideals as counterpoints to the Holocaust. In such memorials, American memory is enlarged to include the histories of its immigrants together with the memory of events on distant shores that drove these immigrants to America in the first place. This fits quite well with Erll's (2011, 8) arguments regarding the selective aspect of collective memory. Individual and collective memories are never a mirror image of the past, but rather an expression of the needs and interests of the individual or group doing the remembering in the present.

Besides the opening of the US Holocaust Museum, Rothe (2014, 10) has examined some other important Holocaust controversies taking place in the 80's in the US. During an official visit to West Germany in 1985, President Ronald Reagan attended a commemoration ceremony with Chancellor Helmut Kohl at a Bitburg cemetery, where not only Wehrmacht soldiers, but also SS men are buried. Regan caused a major public relations fiasco when commenting that ''German soldiers buried in the Bitburg cemetery were victims of the Nazis just as surely as the victims of the concentration camps''. A year later, the Nazi past of former UN secretary and new president of Austria, Kurt Waldheim, made major headline in the US, raising the question whether he should be placed on the American watch list of Nazi criminals and thus barring him from entering the Unites States. In 1987, once again the trial of another Nazi criminal became the focus of attention for US citizens. John Demnjanjuk had been extradited from the US to Israel, where he was sentenced to death in 1988. This sentence was later overturned in 1993. All the controversies were accompanied by a wide amount of public commentary, TV broadcast, articles and so on. It may thus be argued the Holocaust was a pressing topic around the publication of *Maus*. Comic scholars such as Ian Gordon (2010, 183) agree with this notion, pointing out that *Maus* appeared at a moment when interest in the Holocaust as a topic of historical inquiry and memorialization was at a crescendo in America.

### 2.2 The emergence of trauma culture in the US: from memory boom to memoir boom

Besides the various social and political events, cultural texts, films, and controversies that helped to integrate the Holocaust into American memory culture, it might also be useful to look into the emergence of so called ''trauma culture'' in the US. Many have criticized the keen interest shown by US audiences towards Holocaust stories for being voyeuristic in nature, reflecting Western cultures' overall contemporary fascination with personal stories of trauma. Miller and Tougaw (2002, 2) go as far as accusing the American public of having become accustomed to ''stories of pain, even addicted to them […] In a culture of trauma, accounts of extreme situations sell. Narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture, or death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventures as a test of limits that offers the readers the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion''. Ross Chambers (2002, 92)

talks about a culture ‘‘haunted by collective memory – the memory of painful events that few, if any, living members of a culture may have directly perpetrated or suffered from in their own persons’’. Although controversial, the notion of trauma culture still persists in academic works – particularly those centering on the Holocaust. Rothe (2011, 2) identifies the Eichmann trial in 1961 – which focused strongly on the dramatic and raw testimonies of Holocaust survivors – as the ‘‘first key instance of popular trauma culture’’ as well as the event responsible for the emergence of the *trauma memoir*, sometimes pejoratively referred to as ‘‘misery memoir’’. Although there was a growing body of work in the trauma memoir genre already in the 70’s, this didn’t take off properly until the early 90’s. Many critics have attributed this surge in trauma memoirs to the influence of Oprah Winfrey and the popularization of therapeutic culture and the interest in victimhood, as well as the overall interest in the private being made public (Rak 2013; Rothe 2014 ). Angel Loureiro sees this as a symptom of a larger global phenomenon, which has switched our attention towards victims and memories of pain and suffering:

> It could be argued that the teleological view of history has been replaced by a radically new sense of history that focuses more on the past that on the future – a future that seems ideologically unpredictable and ecologically bound for disaster. From the emphasis on progress, attention has switched to the containment and reparation of the havoc wreaked by a history that is perceived more as a threat than as progress (2008, 231).

This notion fits well with the observations made by Rothe, who argues that the central gospel of trauma culture – and incidentally that of the trauma memoir – reiterates the importance of looking into the past and learning a victim’s story in every horrific detail, for it will protect others from a similar experience. However, this is not because it will contribute to punishing perpetrators, but because it teaches so called ‘‘core life’’ or ‘‘survival lessons’’. Indeed, survivors are the new heroes of Western societies, as trauma culture preaches that suffering produces meaning and that overcoming victimization is the most meaningful or ennobling experience one can have (Rothe 2014, 89). Rothe’s arguments may be overgeneralizations and oversimplifications, but they nonetheless provide some insightful observations about the most extreme and exploitative side of trauma culture.

It would be unfair to dismiss *Maus* as a ‘‘misery memoir’’ given the offensive and overused tropes associated with the genre, but the comic is nonetheless an autobiographical work dealing with trauma that came out around the time when interest in survivor stories was beginning to thrive. As Rothe (2014, 88) points out, publishers responded to declining readership by cultivating an insatiable appetite for books that come with ‘‘author survivors’’ attached. This ‘‘memoir craze’’ went as far as to produce some fully or partially fabricated Holocaust autobiographies, such as Misha Defonseca’s *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years* (1997) or Binjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments: Memories*

*of a Wartime Childhood* (1997). Even if Spiegelman himself is not an author-survivor who experienced concentration camps first hand, the comic still focuses heavily on his parent's – especially his father's – survival. This is made evident already in the comic's subtitle ''A survivor's tale''.

The notion of the US as a *trauma culture*, carrying the weight of centuries of colonialism, slavery, and ultimately the Holocaust, is strongly reflected in the emergence of trauma studies as a prominent branch of memory studies in the US. The Holocaust has certainly been the favorite subject of study in this field has for a while, and it is thus unsurprising that *Maus* has been extensively researched with many studies concentrating precisely on the trauma aspect of the comic (Meskin and Cook 2011, xxiv). Some famous examples include Marianne Hirsch's influential essay on post-memory titled ''Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory'', which was later expanded into a book called *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997). Joshua Brown's 1988 piece ''Of Mice and Memory'' from the *Oral History Review* looked into the challenges Spiegelman faced presenting his father's story. Other well-known Holocaust scholars like Linda Hutcheon, Dominick LaCapra, and Terrence Des Pres have also published works on *Maus*. Most of these earlier works have approached *Maus* as Holocaust history or from a film or literary perspective, rather than as a comic — perhaps due to the lack of an academic comics tradition.

### 2.3 *Maus* and the explosion of the comic book genre

Some may doubt the power comics have in shaping cultural memory, given that these kinds of texts are rarely seen as ''high literature''. However, Erll (2011, 164) notes that it is vital for us to distance ourselves from the notion that literature considered ''popular'' or ''trivial'' cannot have an important impact on a culture. Literary works of all origins and qualities can produce and transmit images of the past within the framework of cultural memory. LaCapra (1998, 139) argues that there is no greater icon of popular culture and mass diffusion than the comic book, given that it's messages can be simple and straightforward enough to reach anyone. Lambert goes on to note that the comic book had exploded as a phenomenon precisely during the years of World War II, and matured both aesthetically and in terms of subject matter in the postwar decades, just as the Holocaust grew as a subject of memorialization and study in Europe and America (2017). *Maus* can still be considered the most famous example of comics dealing with the Holocaust, but it is not the first one. Earlier works are few and far between, but include for instance *Mickey au Camp du Gurs* (''*Mickey* Mouse in the Gurs Internment Camp'') from 1942 by German Jewish artist Horst Rosenthal, an inmate of the French internment and transit camp Gurs. The comic depicts Mickey Mouse stumbling upon the Gurs camp while on a trip in France and depicts life in the camp, its inmates and guards. Another early example mentioned by Tal Bruttmann (2009, 183-184) is *La Bête Est Morte*! ("The Beast Is Dead!") by French

artist Edmond-François Calvo. Published in 1944, the comic retells World War II using a style strongly influenced by Disney. The comic is drawn as an animal fable with Nazis as wolves, the British as dogs and the French as rabbits, frogs and storks. Even though the comic does not explicitly identify Hitler's victims, it is not hard to guess who they are based on panels describing the swastika-wearing ''Great Wolf'' as attempting the "total annihilation" of "certain tribes of harmless animals". In another panel, *La Bête Est Morte*! depicts wolves in uniforms gunning down a lineup of rabbits next to a poster declaring Jews "sentenced to death." Unlike *Maus*, *La Bête Est Morte*! represents both Jewish and gentile French as part of the same species (rabbits), and it contains depictions of Nazi brutality, cattle carts used for deportations – which later became a symbol of the Holocaust – the separation of children from mothers, as well as Jewish resistance. Bruttmann (2009, 184) calls this "the first mention of the Holocaust in comics", which suggest he was not familiar with Rosenthal's works. In any case, *La Bête Est Morte*! is another powerful antecedent to *Maus*, though Spiegelman says he discovered it only after beginning to publish his own grim animal fable. Another example of Holocaust representations in comics is Bernard Krigstein and Al Feldstein's *Master Race* published in 1955. The eight-page comic pictures the commander of the "Belsen concentration camp" encountering one of his former prisoners on the subway in America. Spiegelman was apparently greatly impressed by the comic, and he wrote a college term paper back in 1967 titled "Autopsy of a masterpiece" (Lambert 2017).

In search of respectability, at the end of the 1980's the comic industry and the media heralded the transformation of comics into graphic novels, now sold as books in ''proper'' bookshops rather than as stories printed on cheap paper sold in newsstands (Gordon 2010, 179-180). *Maus* has been a critical and commercial success ever since the publication of the first part of the story *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* in 1986 Pantheon Books, and it garnered hundreds of reviews – almost all of them favorable – while quickly drawing worldwide attention as the ''Holocaust comic'' (Witek 1989, 96). *Maus* also drew some criticism and controversy when many questioned the ethics of representing Jews as mice and Nazis as cats. Comics critic Robert C. Harvey argued that the animal metaphor depicting Jews as vermin played directly into Nazi race ideology (1996, 244). Harvey Pekar offered similar criticism, calling Spiegelman's animal metaphor a ''gimmick'' to make *Maus* more commercially successful (1989). In any case, the comic resonated well with most of Spiegelman's contemporaries, something which Gordon (2010, 183) believes to be precisely due to the Nazi/Cat and Jews/Mice metaphors. These metaphors offered those of the generation who participated in a youthful rebellion of the 1960's – such as protests against the Vietnam War – an opportunity to reconcile themselves with the world of their parents. Gordon further argues that trying to understand a parent by recovering their experience of war has become an important pursuit for Americans who in the years since *Maus* have anointed their parents as ''The Greatest Generation''. A comic book

about the Holocaust and its effects on survivors such as Vladek and his son Artie could in this way have provided a symbolical form through which to patch up generational conflict. As Spiegelman (2011, 75) himself notes in *MetaMaus*, even though not everyone's father lived through Auschwitz, parent-child tensions are more or less universal, which is something that allowed for an emphatic identification with the book. The praise strongly outnumbers the criticism, with some scholars going as far as claiming *Maus* has achieved a canonical status in US literature. Andrew Loman (2010, 211) agrees with this notion, citing as proof the fact that within a decade of its publication, *Maus* began appearing in anthologies published by W. W. Norton, Inc. Excerpts from *Maus* were published in *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* (1st ed., 1997), *The Norton Anthology of Jewish American Literature* (1st ed., 2001), and *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (7th ed., 2007). Since Norton's anthologies are widely used in university literature departments, its editorial decisions govern much of what is read in university courses. Inclusion in these anthologies can thus be seen as evidence that *Maus* has become ''great'' or ''canonical''.

### 2.4 Conclusions

Because the Holocaust past has become deeply ingrained into American memory culture, there was and still is a keen interest towards Holocaust narratives in the US. As Rothe (2014, 11) notes, the Holocaust is ubiquitous in the US politics and culture, with polls regularly showing it is an important subject. Because of this, there was a tight network of medial representations as well as a lively public discourse on the Holocaust before, during, and after the publication of *Maus*. This provided an adequate context for the comic to gain a wide circulation and thus be received by readers as a medium of collective cultural memory. Due to the context in which *Maus* was produced, it is fair to assume that readers did not perceive it as a mere work of fiction. As Loman (2010, 213-214) notes, Spiegelman himself sent a protesting letter to *The Times* for classifying his work as fiction, and the newspaper finally agreed to move it to the non-fiction section. Because of this, most readers were likely able to ascribe to *Maus* some kind of referentiality. According to Erll (2011, 164), the impact a given work has on collective memory depends heavily on this referentiality and not on veracity, on how *factual* it is. Instead, what makes audiences ascribe literary texts (or TV shows, movies, articles etc.) any referentiality depends on how well the object in question already fits the memory culture's horizon of meaning, its narrative schemata, and its existing images of the past. Of course, as mentioned earlier, a receptive context is not yet enough to guarantee the acceptance of a work as media of cultural memory. What turn something into a collective text is found also in its internal characteristics, with all the images and narratives that it offers regarding the past that is being represented. Some of the most relevant internal characteristics of *Maus* will be explored in the subsequent chapter.

# 3 *Maus* and memory: internal characteristics

Whenever the past is represented, the choice of media and forms has an effect on the kind of memory that is created. A *rhetoric of collective memory* can thus be found in all literary genres which represent the past. Erll (2011, 157) uses this term to refer to the potential of a text to transmit versions of a socially shared past. This rhetoric is constituted of an ensemble of narrative forms which result in the naturalization of a literary text as a medium of memory. Literature molds memory culture through its structure and forms, as well as its contents. Representations of historical events (such as war and genocide) and characters (such as victims and survivors), of myth and imagined memory can have an impact on readers and shape perception, knowledge and everyday communication. Even though we cannot predict how individual readers will interpret stories, Erll (158) nonetheless argues that certain kinds of narrative representations result in particular modes of remembering. This allows us to hypothesize on the potential memorial power or effects of literary works.

Surprisingly perhaps, a literary work's ability to influence collective memory does not necessarily depend on how accurately it represents historical events. Erll (2011, 165-166) argues that what really gives works of fiction their perceived authenticity depends on how well their narrative conforms to previously existing schemes and cultural images about the past. Even though readers may perceive literary works as fiction, they are still likely to grant these works some referentiality regarding the historical events they depict. This referentiality does not relate to the historical events seen in works, but to the historical memory they offer. This referentiality is the reason why, for example, some forged Holocaust autobiographies have been able to get published: the narratives they offered fit into a culture used to fragmented representations of the Holocaust. In order to find out what kind of historical memory *Maus* offers about the Holocaust and the reason American readers are willing to grant it some referentiality, this chapter will focus on examining the comic's genre and characters, structure and temporality, as well as its visual side and imagery. Indeed, internal characteristics make up the second factor deemed by Erll as crucial in determining a work's ability to influence collective memory. This chapter aims to prove that the kind of memory *Maus* offers resonates with American readers and fits American memory culture's horizon of meaning and its existing images of the Holocaust. Moreover, this chapter will attempt to show that the narrative forms in *Maus* represents the reconstructive mode proposed by Liikanen, which consequently affects the kind of Holocaust memory found in *Maus*.

## 3.1 The reconstructive mode and comics

Literary works that use the reconstructive mode proposed by Liikanen (2015, 141) share a number of characteristics. These types of works look into the experiences of those who try to understand the past

and its protagonists from the present. The process of investigation and reconstruction of said past is led by a narrator-character set in the present day. These works examine the intergenerational transmission of memories while emphasizing the meaning of the past as a source of personal and collective identity in the present. Reconstructive novels focus on the need to know and the difficulties of getting hold of the truth, following the narrator-protagonist as he or she tries to uncover a hidden or forgotten truth about the past (144). In some ways, this approach shares similarities with detective novels, which are built around the investigation of a crime or crimes. There is a victim and a victimizer, and the plot focuses on identifying the latter. In more classical detective fiction, readers are invited to solve the mystery together with the detective (Rzepka and Horley 2010, 3).

The focus of *Maus* is not so much on pinning down the ‘‘criminal’’ in the story; most American readers will automatically identify Nazis as the perpetrators and Jews as the victims. However, this does not mean there is no mystery or ‘‘puzzle’’ to be solved in *Maus*. As Spiegelman (2011, 73) himself notes, *Maus* is about the Holocaust and its impact on the survivors and those who survive the survivors. The focus of the comic is in trying to understand how damaged his father Vladek was, and whether he had been as damaged before the war or not, as well as what the implications of those psychological issues might be. The subject of *Maus* is the retrieval of memory and ultimately, the creation of memory. In this way, works that take the reconstructive approach can seem particularly engaging to readers, as they are ‘‘invited’’ to solve the mystery presented and draw their own conclusions. Readers of *Maus* become more involved in the story, as they, together with the narrator-protagonist, try to retrieve, reconstruct, and interpret Vladek’s memories. Davida Pines (2013, 188-191) aptly argues that the comic medium involves the reader in the construction and reconstruction of history and specifically individual and collective memory. She notes that comics depend on the reader to commit closure, that is, to make connections and to fill in the gaps. Every act committed to paper by the comic artist is aided and abetted by a ‘‘silent accomplice’’. In requiring that readers take an active role in meaning (and memory) making, the medium of comics works against the passive consumption of prescribed verbal and visual narratives and encourages reader’s participation in the construction of complex history. Indeed, readers feel the need to fill the gaps in the narrative for it to make sense. Comics are a particularly effective way of representing trauma precisely due to the inherent gap between experience and understanding. In this way, as we read along and manage to piece together Vladek’s story, this gap slowly narrows and readers begin to understand him better.

Works that take a reconstructive approach present the past as a subjective reconstruction and often employ metafictional and auto-fictional techniques to explore the limits of art and reality, history and fiction. However, even though the narrator makes readers aware of his subjective approach and the difficulties of representing the past accurately, these novels still end up presenting

one version of the past as the "true" one (Liikanen 2015, 143). Even though *Maus* is, as Linda Hutcheon (1999, 11) puts it, a highly ''self-conscious'' narrative that enacts critical commentary on the making of history, it seems obvious that Spiegelman's comic nonetheless holds a positivist view of history. Although the comic asks readers to think about how much can really be known about what happened to Spiegelman's family during the Holocaust, Spiegelman still attempts to take an ''empirical'' approach to his father's story. As Liikanen (2015, 143) notes, in order to further prove the authenticity of the narrative they offer, reconstructive works often include different kinds of evidence to support their version, ranging from witness testimonies to photographs and historical documents. *Maus* contains multiple examples of such devices, which will be examined in later sections.

### 3.2 Structure and temporality

In 1986, Pantheon published the first six chapters of Spiegelman's comic in *Maus* I, and later in 1991 *Maus* II followed with the remaining five chapters. Regarding the structure of his comic, Spiegelman notes that he took an ''architectural'' approach to *Maus*. Each page is a ''building'' with windows in it, allowing readers to peek inside the narrative (2011, 166). The building blocks that make up the pages are carefully pieced together in a way that makes reading *Maus* a smooth experience. However, Spiegelman's commentary in *MetaMaus* reveals that he struggled piecing together a cohesive and gap-less narrative out of his father's testimony:

> What is being portrayed is, specifically, *his* [Vladek's] story, based on *his* memories. This kind of reconstruction is fraught with dangers. My father could only remember/understand a part of what he lived through. He could only tell a part of that. I, in turn, could only understand a part of what he was able to tell, and could only communicate a part of that. What remains are ghosts of ghosts, standing on the fragile foundations of memory (2011, 154, emphasis original).

Despite these ghosts, Spiegelman nonetheless strives to deliver a narrative as cohesive as he possibly can. An example of this is seen in *Maus* II, when Vladek tells Art about working as a shoemaker in Auschwitz (Spiegelman 1991, 60). The page contains a meticulous illustration showing how to fix the sole of a boot. Spiegelman (2011, 53) notes in *MetaMaus* that he did not remember how his father had explained it to him, and in any case, he would not have understood the process. To solve the problem regarding shoe-making, he resorted to library books (in the pre-internet era) in order to find out how to fix the soles of shoes. In this way, Spiegelman was able to work around the inherent gap between his father's memories and his own understanding. In *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman admits that some of the things that came out in the interviews with Vladek had to be ''structured – things had to be suppressed, pulled forward, and shaped to make the narrative'' (2011, 29). Similarly, the way time

functions in *Maus* clearly reflects this attempt to provide readers with a story as complete and ''true'' as possible. Art tries to reconstruct a meticulous timeline for the events, especially regarding the time Vladek spent at Auschwitz. Vladek expresses frustration at his son's quasi-empirical approach to his story, noting that ''In Auschwitz we didn't wear watches'' (1986, 68). Some pages earlier, Art has already shown his obsession regarding facts and numbers, drawing parallels between the past and the present: ''Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944…I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987. In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby…Between May 16, 1944, and May 24, 1944 over 100 000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz…'' (1991, 41). This fascination and fixation with time most likely has its roots in the second-generation's profound need to understand their parent's story. Smith notes that ''those who are born after the mass killing ceased can understand, in an academic sense, certain empirical details – chronology, numbers, place names, maps, and the industrial processes and bureaucracy that facilitated the killing – but the essential horror of genocide remains beyond understanding'' (2016, 47). Indeed, for members of the second generation, these traumatic memories will remain distant and impossible to fully grasp, leading many children of survivors to attempt to replace the previous generation's direct experience with detailed information about the events. It is evident that Spiegelman has done his research and *Maus* does not lack dates, numbers, maps or detailed drawings of gas chambers. Even though Spiegelman is clearly preoccupied with the factuality of his father's story, towards the end and as Art continues to grow as a character, concerns about timelines or other historical details significantly lessen.

In general, the story alternates between past and present, and both the story in the past and the story in the present unravel chronologically. The son Art – or ''Artie'' – is the narrator-protagonist in the parts that take place in the present, and his father Vladek acts as a narrator whenever the focus of the comic jumps into the past. However, past and present are not kept strictly separate in the comic. In fact, many panels illustrate the blending of time. In reconstructive novels, the past becomes important, for in many ways it determines the lives of the characters in the present (Liikanen 2015, 141). Spiegelman himself notes in *MetaMaus* that what is most interesting about comics is precisely the juxtaposing of past and present, something which effectively illustrates how both are always present – something that, for instance, is harder to do in the film medium (2011, 165). An example of this blending of time includes a panel where Vladek, Art and his wife Françoise are driving through the woods with people hanging from the trees as Vladek tells the fate of the young girls who rebelled at Auschwitz (Spiegelman 1991, 79). Another clear instance of the past bleeding into the present is seen in *Maus* I: as Vladek narrates from the present how he was not able to save his in-laws, he is drawn standing over an image of his screaming father-in-law (Spiegelman 1986, 115). Kohli (2012, 13) notes that this collapse of temporal space in *Maus* shows that memory and history are not

exclusively divorced and objective entities. Memory and history have no definable beginning, middle, or end. Instead, one's story is continuous and fluid. This conveyance of memory and history is enhanced through the combination of image and text, which, according to Kohli, would not be as apparent or powerful if represented in any other form. Thus, in *Maus* the past is part of the present and the present is part of how we understand the past. In a comic format in particular, where scenes depicting past and present can ''blend'' together, it can be easier for readers to visualize and understand the weight past traumas still have on the characters living in the present.

Critics such as Gavrila (2017, 66) argue that *Maus* does not offer ''any kind of redemptory closure since the traumatic past cannot have any meaning or cathartic quality to it, which runs directly counter to the traditional format of the Holocaust literature''. Similarly, LaCapra (1998, 142) notes that *Maus* succeeds because it "presents material without resorting to misplaced sentimentality or a Hollywood format, and it is able to render certain complexities simply, without unduly distorting them". However, it might still be argued that these views are overly simplistic and ignore that closure does not have to include obvious clichés and melodrama for it to count as closure. Even though *Maus* does not have a happy ending *per se*, nonetheless it ends with the symbolic reunion of Spiegelman's parents in death, illustrated with a tombstone on the last page of *Maus* II (1991, 136). Romero-Jódar (2017, 129) argues that the tombstone represents a visual final full stop to the narrative. The names of Spiegelman's parents with their dates of birth and death appear under the bigger name of the family, Spiegelman, written in capitals and under the Star of David. Their Jewishness, their family, and their own stories are all integrated in the symbolic drawing of the tombstone. The last page also has written the timeline 1978-1991, during which Spiegelman spent creating his story and which now has been brought to an end, completed and finalized. Spiegelman (2011, 185) notes that the last pages of *Maus* II suggest that the narrative in his comic can be seen as a classic ''Boy meets, Boy loses, Boy finds girl'', which culminated in a happy ending where his parents are reunited in death. Spiegelman goes on to suggest that this allows readers the ''illusions and satisfactions'' of closure that is characteristic to Hollywood. Indeed, in the last page of *Maus* II, this reunion happens both in Vladek's story in the past, when Vladek and Anja finally find each other after the war, as well as in the present when Vladek passes away and the couple is reunited in death (1991, 136). This closure can only happen after Spiegelman has purposely broken the linearity of the story, by presenting some pages earlier what happened to the Spiegelman's after the war when they emigrated to Sweden. Spiegelman (2011, 233) admits that the ''forced'' happy ending does not necessarily hold up in reality, as Anja killed herself and Vladek was haunted by trauma till the very end. As Morris (2012, 14) aptly observes, by his own admission, Spiegelman does resort to sentimentality and Hollywood tropes with the text's pivotal last frames, where he ''purposely manipulates narrative, characterization, and setting to achieve what he believes to be a crucial tripartite ending: boy-gets-girl, the resurrection of Richieu,

and the ‘reunion in dirt’ of Vladek, Anja, and Art’’. Even though the reconstructive mode emphasizes the subjectivity of the narrator-protagonist, the narrative is not immune to manipulation by the author. This shows that despite an author’s attempts to provide a story as true and honest as possible, it is evident from these works that the past is impossible to fully recover. Therefore, reconstructive works must fill in the gaps in the narrative with fiction in order to provide a cohesive story which will endow the past with meaning and a sense of morality (Liikanen 2015, 268). Even if *Maus* does not offer closure in the form of a ‘‘traditional’’ narrative structure, it still does have a satisfying enough ending.

### 3.3 Genre and characters

Genres can be a way of dealing with challenges that emerge in a memory culture. Erll (2011, 148) argues that in uncommon, difficult, or dangerous circumstances, writers often resort to traditional and strongly conventionalized genres in order to provide familiar and meaningful patterns of representation for experiences which would otherwise be hard to interpret. The complex and controversial nature of the Holocaust might be a reason why many conventional genres are present in *Maus*. Stephen E. Tabachnick (1993, 155) sees in *Maus* clear instances of the bildungsroman, the *künstlerroman*, as well as the epic, all of which form distinct but interwoven ‘‘narrative layers’’. The epic layer found in the story is, as Tabachnick puts it, the story of Vladek, the ‘‘incredible Sinbad the Sailor who has passed through the most perilous straits and lived to tell the tale, like a monstrous Odyssey, to his only surviving son’’ (156). Vladek is an important narrator in *Maus*, sharing his story with his son from the present. Vladek’s narrative does not directly jump to the deportations or the concentration camps. Like with any mythical hero, we first learn Vladek’s origin story as a young man in Poland long before the war. Even though Spiegelman exposes his father’s many faults in the present – his racism, stubbornness, and manipulative tendencies – young Vladek is portrayed in a very positive light. His physical strength is noted multiple times in the comic: even after he has marched out of Auschwitz with other prisoners, Vladek tells that he was still strong and able to carry heavy soup containers (Spiegelman 1991, 84). His attractiveness and popularity with women are also emphasized from the first chapter of *Maus* I. Vladek tells Art that people would often compare his appearance to that of Hollywood actor Rudolf Valentino, and that he had many girls ‘‘running after’’ him. When he first begins to tell this part of the story, there is a poster of the 1921 silent film *The Sheikh* on the background of the panel, making the connection to Hollywood obvious (Spiegelman 1986, 13). In order to ‘‘prove’’ that Vladek was a good-looking young man, *Maus* II contains a photograph of Vladek as a young man (Spiegelman 1991, 134). Spiegelman (2011, 220) himself notes how the photograph provides readers with ‘‘real information’’ and helps verify the fact that Vladek really was good looking: ‘‘You get to find out he was a fairly good-looking guy. You can verify that this Rudolph Valentino stuff wasn’t only self-aggrandizement; he was perceived as attractive by

women''. In general, the multiple photos found in the comic serve to remind readers about the real humans behind the mice-masks and thus support the veracity to the story. Additionally, the realism of Vladek's character is aided by the fact that Spiegelman did not correct his father's grammar for the comic. This helps to remind readers continuously about Vladek's status as a Polish-Jewish immigrant.

Besides his beauty and strength, Vladek is an incredibly resourceful jack-of-all trades. Despite dropping out of school at age 14, he has managed to teach himself English and has ''always dreamed about going to America'' (Spiegelman 1986, 16). He is a self-made man who rises from humble beginnings to become a factory owner. Even after losing everything during the Holocaust and moving to Sweden as a refugee, Vladek once again rises to the top from a simple salesman to partner in a retail chain with barely a rudimentary knowledge of Swedish (Spiegelman 1991, 124). His survival in Auschwitz is in many ways an individualist enterprise, and many Jews come to him for guidance and advice. Spiegelman (2011, 21) suggest that his father's survival may resonate with the American notion of the individual who triumphs. It may also be noteworthy to mention Vladek's aversion to communism: when he first finds out Anja had been involved in communist activities, Vladek immediately gives her an ultimatum, telling her he will dissolve the marriage if she does not stop such activities immediately. Putting his hands up in disgust, he makes the point that he ''always kept far away from communist people'' (Spiegelman 1986, 26). Indeed, the only communist that appears in *Maus* – a Russian Jew named Yidl – is in many ways a mean, greedy and zealous stereotype who calls Vladek a ''dirty capitalist'' and accuses him of exploiting his factory workers (Spiegelman 1991, 47). We might tentatively argue that this depiction of Vladek might have been particularly appealing to American readers. The capitalist, anti-communist and individualist self-made man with a strong work ethic who dreams about going to America in many ways reflects certain stereotypical ''American values''. Americans might not have accepted the narrative and memory offered by *Maus* in the same way if Vladek had been, for instance, a socialist, like many European Jews were at the time. In 1986, while the Cold War was still ongoing, it might have been particularly risky to portray communism even in a neutral way, let alone positively. All nations have a set of ''myths'' and values that help to construct the identity of its citizens. Because young Vladek exhibits such heroic and admirable characteristics, both Art and readers are able to better understand old Vladek in the present, and perhaps even forgive many of his faults.

The *künstlerroman* layer in *Maus* tells the story of Art's development as the troubled artist creating *Maus*. As the narrator-protagonist in the story, he tries to find about his family's experiences during the Holocaust by interviewing his elderly father. Art reflects continuously on the creation of his graphic novel, and expresses particular worry about whether or not he can make it authentic, since he is not a Holocaust survivor himself. His worry goes as far as breaking the fourth wall when he tells

his wife Françoise that ‘‘reality is too complex for comics’’ and that in real life Françoise would not let him talk as much as he does in the comic (Spiegelman 1991, 16). Similarly, Art is honest about the weakness of the story he is offering when he acknowledges to his father’s second wife, Mala, that without his mother’s version of the events the story can seem unbalanced (Spiegelman 1986, 132). As Liikanen points out, metafictional elements that draw attention to a text’s constructed and fictional nature are characteristic of reconstructive texts (2015, 143). Indeed, almost four pages in *Maus* II are devoted to a deep meta-conversation between Art and his therapist Pavel about his comic. Art once again reiterates that he cannot even begin to imagine what Auschwitz felt like, and he worries about whether his portrayal of Vladek has been fair. Nonetheless, Art expresses that he tried to ‘‘be fair and still show how angry (he) felt’’ about his relationship with Vladek. The presence of an elderly father-like figure in the form of a therapist adds credibility and serves to validate Art’s concerns, while still reassuring him that he is doing the best he can with his comic with the knowledge he has as Art was not ‘‘in Auschwitz…you were in Rego Park’’ (Spiegelman 1991, 44). Pavel goes even further with his encouragement when he notes that Art is the ‘‘real survivor’’ who did not have to experience the camps (Spiegelman 1991, 44-46). What gives Pavel’s encouragement and validation even more weight is the fact that, besides being around Vladek’s age, he too is a Jewish Holocaust survivor and can thus be seen as a kind of authority when it comes to discussing the issue. Pavel’s reassurance extends also to readers of the comic, who in this way are given the blessing of a Jewish therapist and Holocaust survivor to trust Spiegelman’s narrative.

Despite the constant metafictional self-reflexivity, Spiegelman is keen to prove readers that they are reading a true story. Liikanen (2015, 265-266) explains that reconstructive novels often pay close attention to the historical, political and social context of the events they depict. The thoroughly researched information offered by the author serves to educate readers as well as to enrich their reading experience, making it easier for them to understand the characters and the events depicted. As seen in *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman did extensive research for his comic, and provides readers with detailed knowledge about the expansion of the Third Reich, life in Auschwitz, the mechanism of a gas chamber, and so on. He traveled to Auschwitz a few times while working on the story, to get a better understanding of the facilities and the distribution of the barracks (Spiegelman 2011, 60). A good example of this background research can be seen in the detailed maps of Auschwitz and Auschwitz Birkenau found in *Maus* II, as well as in the way Art challenges his father regarding some of the details of the camp. In *Maus* II (1991, 54), Spiegelman and his father are discussing the presence of a marching band at Auschwitz. Art insists the band existed and their presence at the camp is well documented, while Vladek dismisses such claims as nonsense. Spiegelman draws both ‘‘competing truths’’ into the comic, with one panel depicting the marching band next to a panel with just men marching. However, in the panel depicting Vladek’s version, the marching band is still

visible behind the marching men, thus emphasizing this ‘‘correct’’ version which Art reiterates is ‘‘pretty well documented’’. Spiegelman (2011, 31) notes in *MetaMaus* that by presenting his own ‘‘true’’ version he ‘‘wins’’ the argument. Thus, even if *Maus* occasionally presents competing memories, it tends to nonetheless lean towards the one the artist finds more reliable.

Mala, Vladek's second wife and a Polish Holocaust survivor herself, serves as an additional supporting figure who corroborates many of the memories shared by Vladek. For instance, after reading Art’s old comic *Prisoner of the Hell Planet* retelling Art’s mother’s suicide (included in *Maus* I) she comments: ‘‘it’s so personal! But very accurate ... objective. I spent a lot of time helping out here after Anja’s funeral. It was just as you said’’ (Spiegelman 1986 104). Similarly, after Vladek tells Art about the day when all Jews from the Polish town Sosnowiec were rounded up at the local stadium to register, Mala ‘‘corroborates’’ this by telling Art about her family’s experience at the stadium on that same day. Indeed, even though Spiegelman’s tone is highly self-aware and self-reflective, peppered with tortured artist angst, *Maus* still presents one version of the past as the ‘‘truth’’. Despite fictional and metafictional elements, novels that use the reconstructive mode still try to convince readers that they are reading a true story. The inclusion of an old, realistically drawn comic drawn by Spiegelman in his 20’s about his mother’s suicide allows the author to once again reiterate to readers that *Maus* is a ‘‘true story’’ about real people. As Gavrila notes, ‘‘the metaphoric panels of *Prisoner of the Hell Planet* add a lot more nuance to the narrative, offering through the use of photography (of Anja Spiegelman and young Artie) and the expressionist drawing style a sense of verisimilitude and authenticity, which solidifies the comic strip as a true story’’ (2017, 64). Tabachnick agrees *Maus* tries to offer readers a ‘‘true’’ version of the events, arguing that although Spiegelman refers more than once to the problem of truth in autobiography, he nonetheless seems driven to prove that *Maus* is an ‘‘authentic story’’ (1993, 156). Indeed, the function of the narrators’ wives, Mala and Françoise, is mostly that of providing additional evidence and support for the narrative presented as well as to work as a surface for Art to bounce off his ideas and concerns regarding the book.

The *künstlerroman* layer in *Maus* is in many ways connected to the bildungsroman layer, and it focuses on Art as a son who struggles with his relationship with his parents Vladek and Anja, as well as his inherited trauma. This is made apparent when Art tells Françoise: ‘‘I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through! … I guess it’s some kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did’’ (Spiegelman 1991, 16). Tabachnick (1993, 155-156) argues that Art struggles with an ‘‘Oedipal conflict’’ as a son who faces a very powerful, epic, amazing, if cranky and alien father to whose experience he can never rise. As a result, the son is filled with awe and guilt, and Spiegelman will forever remain the child of survivors. His attempt to understand this imposed and perpetually inescapable role of his, and to

honestly represent his parents as they really seem to be, is largely what the bildungsroman aspect of *Maus* is about. Indeed, as a second generation ''survivor'', Art is keen to learn about the family trauma, which has had a major impact on his life and mental health. This is illustrated in more detail in *Prisoner of the Hell Planet*, which shows how he was committed to an asylum as a young man due to his psychosis. Drawing himself wearing a camp uniform standing behind bars, Spiegelman illustrates how he is forced to carry his parents' trauma without actually having experienced it himself.

The bildungsroman genre in *Maus* is easy to connect to the reconstructive mode. The narrator-protagonist in reconstructive works goes through a moral and personal growth as he or she finds out more about the past. Past events explored in these works acquire a personal meaning for the narrator-protagonist, who incorporates them into his or her own memory, thus affirming their identity as a member of a particular community (Liikanen 2015, 144). In this context, that identity would be that of the descendant of Jewish Holocaust survivors. As LaCapra (1998, 155) observes, Art has turned his need to find some satisfying or redemptive meaning through memory and commemoration into a ''quest''. He notes that ''Through this quest, the Holocaust, which for the father was a source of traumatic disorientation in a past that will not pass away, seems to be transfigured into a founding trauma holding the elusive (perhaps illusory) promise of meaning and identity for the son in the present''. This identity is a troubled one and the quest practically impossible, as Art's journey is plagued with continuous self-doubts and unanswered questions. Towards the end of *Maus* II, it may not be completely clear whether Art has made peace with his identity and heritage. However, he does seem to make peace with his father. The last chapters of *Maus* II contain little inner conflict regarding the artistic representation and only very little worry over Art's relationship with Vladek. It seems that the lengthy process of recovering his father's story has made Art understand and make peace with Vladek. The project is concluded and Art gets the answers to his questions: he sees the extent of the trauma his father has gone through and how that is reflected in the man he is today. In earlier chapters, Vladek has expressed little sentimentality or grief when telling his story, using a strictly matter-of-fact tone. However, the fourth chapter of *Maus* II contains a whole album filled with photos of dead relatives accompanied by Vladek's laments, emphasizing the gravity of the loss and trauma (Spiegelman 1991, 114-116). Art concludes his goal of retrieving and re-creating his father's memory, noting in *Maus* II that, despite everything, perhaps Vladek did not really survive (90), something which his therapist Pavel had suggested earlier to him in chapter II.

Other relevant characters in *Maus* include American soldiers, drawn as helpful dogs, ''friendly if somewhat goofy'', as expressed by LaCapra (1998, 160). These dogs are kind to mice and naturally situated more highly above Germans, depicted as cats. As Spiegelman comments in *MetaMau*s, dogs are ''the heroic vanquishers of cats'' (2011, 129). Indeed, chapter four in *Maus* II –

aptly titled *Saved* – begins with an illustration of Jewish mice in prisoner uniforms standing against a patriotic background of stars and stripes (Spiegelman 1991, 101). Soviet troops are absent and British troops only make a brief appearance in the form of two fish driving a jeep at the bottom of a panel, thus making Americans the only – or at least most relevant – liberators. The comic makes clear the antisemitism of not only Germans, but also Poles, who are drawn as pigs. French antisemitism too is commented upon, as Spiegelman brings up the centuries of antisemitism in the country as well as France's collaboration with the Nazis, noting to his French wife that he can't choose an animal too cute to depict the French (in the end, the French are depicted as frogs) (Spiegelman 1991, 11-12). However, no mention is made of antisemitism in the US, nor the US government's failure to assist Jews, which went as far as turning away boats transporting Jewish refugees to the US (Krasner 2014, 61). It is unlikely that Spiegelman was unaware of this, given his extensive research into the Holocaust subject, made more than evident both in the comic and in *MetaMaus*. We can only speculate why Spiegelman chose not to touch upon the history of American antisemitism in *Maus*, but we can perhaps tentatively suggest that any negative depictions of American history might have alienated some American readers. Including criticism of the US in the story might not have resonated too strongly with America's victorious and heroic collective memory regarding their role in WWII.

### 3.4 Referentiality and the visual side of *Maus*

In order to have an effect on memory culture, it is important for Holocaust representations to resonate somehow with images and ideas about the Holocaust already present in a society's memory culture. Because of this, it is common for media memory to strive for ''realism''. According to Spiegelman, most dramatic films have a hard time with the Holocaust as a subject precisely because ''the medium's tendency towards verisimilitude and reproduction of reality through moving photographic images''. He argues that *Maus* tries to depict the Holocaust more as a ''mental zone'', as opposed to a close reconstruction of the original (2011, 166). However, we might still argue that Spiegelman also strived for this verisimilitude that, according to him, the film medium over-focuses on. This is made evident in the way he used an extensive amount of Holocaust photographs and video material as a basis for his comic. During the process of creating *Maus*, Spiegelman watched a number of documentaries about Hitler and Nazi concentration camps, such as *Night and Fog* (1956). He would videotape them and freeze-frame them in order to draw from them (Spiegelman 2011, 54). Spiegelman also used photographs he came across while researching the Holocaust as reference to draw many of the panels in *Maus*. Images depicting, for instance, crammed barracks, piles of dead bodies, public humiliations faced by Jews of the Reich, and the gates of Auschwitz accompanied by the infamous Nazi slogan ''Arbeit mach frei'' are all popular Holocaust imagery represented time and time again in the media, which also make an appearance in *Maus*. The first chapter in *Maus* II

begins with an image of Vladek in a camp uniform standing behind barbed wire, a panel clearly influenced by Margaret Bourke-White's famous photograph ''The Living Dead of Buchenwald'' (1945). Similarly, drawings made by prisoners at Auschwitz about camp life also served as a reference for Spiegelman. They helped him further understand what barracks looked like and how camp guards used sticks to beat up prisoners. Some of the most important artistic references were created by Polish artist Mieczyslaw Koscielnial, who himself was imprisoned at Auschwitz (Spiegelman 2011, 50-51). Many of Koscielnial's drawings depicting roll calls and the hauling of massive soup cans have clearly been used as references in *Maus* II in the chapters depicting life in Auschwitz (Spiegelman 1991, 34, 50, 84). In this way, we can easily see that past representations of the Holocaust influenced the way Spiegelman represented the Holocaust in *Maus*. He re-used popular and familiar Holocaust media, which in turn is something that can make it easier for readers to grant *Maus* a certain amount of referentiality. As Erll and Rigney note, the recycling of existent media is a way of strengthening the new medium's claim to immediacy and offering ''an experience of the real'' (2009, 4). As previously mentioned, the reference material used for depicting historical events does not need to be factual; it is simply enough for it to conform to media consumers' expectations and preconceptions regarding the historical event being depicted. This aspect will be further discussed in chapter four in connection with the processes of *premediation* and *remediation*.

### 3.5 Conclusions: The memory offered by *Maus*

Following the characteristics of these kinds of reconstructive works, *Maus* focuses on victims and witnesses by drawing attention to the injustices they endured. *Maus* thus offers readers a close look into the fascist persecution of Jews in parts of Nazi-controlled Europe – specifically in Poland – before and during World War II. The comic shows how the Nazi government's repression step by step deprived Jews of the most basic human rights. This repression escalated from restricting the movements of Jews and confiscating their wealth to physical violence, enslavement in concentration camps and executions. Despite this horrible situation, *Maus* shows Jews resisting as they fight for their lives and families. As previously noted, besides dealing with injustices of the past, reconstructive works also tend to incorporate moving stories with acts of heroism, solidarity and idealism. On occasions when Jewish resistance is not possible, *Maus* gives readers reasonable and understandable justifications. For instance, when asking Vladek why he thought his family would be safer from Nazi persecution in the town of Sosnowiec rather than in Bielsko, Vladek explains that at the time Polish Jews thought Hitler only wanted to invade the parts of Poland which had been part of Germany before World War I (Spiegelman 1986, 37). Similarly, when Art later asks why Vladek thought escaping from Poland to Hungary was a viable option, Vladek explains that for a time, Hungary was much safer for Jews (146). In *Maus* II, Art once again asks ''why didn't the Jews at least try to resist'' to

which Vladek answers ''It wasn't so easy like you think. Everyone was so starving and frightened, and tired that they couldn't believe even what's in front of their eyes'' (Spiegelman 1991, 73). In this way, *Maus* makes the fair and sympathetic argument that Jews could not have had the same information about Hitler and the expansion of the Third Reich as contemporary readers.

In general, *Maus* seems to advocate for an empathetic understanding of victims, as well as a respectful treatment of their memories and trauma. Katharina Donn sees the evidence for this in the long, deep conversations Art has with his therapist-survivor Pavel:

> […] *Maus* is more than an expression of suffering; it also denotes the empathic act of listening, and thus an ethical attitude towards the victim of trauma. The play of disguises and transformations, therefore, implies an ethics of witnessing that does not judge or hierarchize the victims and extends towards the reader as well (2016, 122).

Indeed, Donn observes that *Maus* does not appear to create hierarchies between victimized groups and their suffering. Even though the suffering of Jews is a core subject of *Maus*, Spiegelman does note the hardships of other groups. Poles in *Maus* are also sent to concentration camps and suffer many of the same hardships as Jews. Even though Jews were disproportionately targeted by Nazi violence, they are not portrayed as morally superior to others. A good example of this is included in *Maus* II when Vladek gets angry at Françoise for picking up a black hitch-hiker while they are driving home from the grocery store (Spiegelman 1991, 98). In this way, the comic includes commentary about prejudice against African Americans, noting that Jews can also be racist and that suffering does not make one noble or tolerant. Michael Rothberg (2009, 42) argues for a multidirectional trauma theory against narratives that position the suffering of different groups into hierarchies. Instead of a competition of memories, he proposes a multidirectional memory, which draws attention to possibilities of solidarity as well as distinction. Shared histories of violence and oppression, survival and resistance can provide the grounds for new forms of collectivity that ''would not ignore equally powerful histories of division and difference'' (23). Even though *Maus* makes the fair argument that Jews suffered disproportionately during the Holocaust compared to some other groups, it still includes instances of solidarity between victimized groups. Despite the multiple betrayals and cruelties suffered at the hands of Polish citizens, some still offered their help to Spiegelman's parents. In *Maus* I, the former janitor of Spiegelman's mother agrees to hide her and Vladek in a shed, at great personal risk and, apparently, for no compensation at all (Spiegelman 1986, 136-137). When Vladek first arrives at Auschwitz in *Maus* II, he is deeply demoralized, sitting crying and exhausted in the corner of a barrack. His suffering is ignored by everyone except by a Polish Catholic priest, who approaches him and comforts him. Vladek tells Art that the priest's words ''put another life'' in him (Spiegelman 1991, 28). Another such instance of solidarity – this time between Jews and French citizens – appears

later in the book, when a gentile Frenchman approaches Vladek for company and conversation. Vladek is later rewarded by the Frenchman as he insists on sharing a food package with him, something which saves Vladek's life (1991, 93). In this way, *Maus* seems to offer a more nuanced narrative than some other Holocaust representations.

The way the role of Americans in WWII is remembered in *Maus* largely reflects established preconception in the US. *Maus* pictures Americans as the main liberators of Nazi camps – or perhaps the only ones, since soviet troops are only briefly mentioned and British forces appear only in passing at the end of *Maus* II. Vladek's experience with American troops is a purely positive one, as he is given a job, protection, gifts, and medical help. This rather faithfully reflects how American society in general has viewed their role in WWII. Rothe (2014, 11) argues that the lack of accurate historical knowledge regarding the Holocaust that minimizes the substantial effort by the Allies and positions the US as ''Nazi evil's innocent Other'' serves to minimize America's own past and present crimes regarding the treatment of Native Americans and African Americans, as well as the numerous wars against foreign powers. This ignorance has been a necessary prerequisite in the adoption of the Holocaust as part of American national memory.

Finally, memory is presented in *Maus* in an acutely self-aware and self-reflexive way, asking readers to question how much can truly be known about the past. The continuous problematizing of memory and remembering reflects a characteristic of what Hirsch (1997, 8-9) has termed post-memory. In her words, post-memory reflects back on memory by revealing its constructed nature, intrinsically mediated by the processes of narration and imagination. Indeed, the narrative in *Maus* thus combines both historical events as well as how those events are transmitted from one generation to another. The author both creates a narrative as complete and coherent as possible while at the same time emphasizing the subjectivity of the narrator-protagonist and recognizing that the past cannot be fully recovered.

# 4 *Maus* and inter-medial dynamics

Besides a work's context and internal characteristics, the way it interacts with other similar works also determines its status as a medium of cultural memory. As Erll and Rigney (2009, 2-3) explain, novels, films and other media play an important role in sparking public debate on historical topics that have until that point been marginalized or forgotten. In these cases, certain media can become ''agenda-setters'' for collective remembrance and it is then through inter-medial reiteration of the story across different platforms in the public arena (comics, internet, social media) that the topic takes root in a particular community. Remembered events are transmedial phenomena, meaning their representation is not tied to any specific medium. Thus, they can be represented across the spectrum of available media. According to Erll (2008, 394-393), this is precisely what turns these events into powerful sites of memory. Remediation tends to solidify cultural memory, creating and stabilizing certain narratives and icons of the past.

Indeed, a memorable event is often represented over and over again in different media for decades, centuries, or even millennia. The birth of Christ has been depicted in western art for over a thousand years. Erll refers to this continuous representation of an event as *remediation* – a term developed by David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their work *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). Here Bolter and Grusin (55) explain remediation as a process whereby media are continuously commenting, reproducing and replacing one another. Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation, which is why media need each other in order to function as media in the first place. Using Bolter and Grusin's theory, Erll (2011, 140) further postulates that our knowledge about events that have become sites of memory is often marked less by the factual, real historical events and more by the pre-existing narratives and images circulating in a media culture. Erll (2008, 392) uses the term *premediation* to draw attention to the way this existent media circulating in a society provide schemata for future experience and its representation i.e. the remediation process. Not only depictions of earlier, comparable events shape our understanding of later events. In fact, media which belong to even more remote cultural spheres, such as art, mythology, religion, or law, can also act as premediators. As an example, Erll (393) notes how the American understanding and representation of 9/11 has clearly been premediated by disaster movies, the crusader narrative, and Biblical stories. In this way, premediation refers to cultural practices of looking, naming, and narrating. It is the effect of and the starting point for mediatized memories. Understandably, every new representation of a historical event or figure, cultural myth, or canonical narrative will in some way be a reflection of the dominant social, historical and political context where it is created. For example, new Sherlock Holmes adaptations produced in the 21st century are often set in the present day and incorporate advanced technologies into the process of murder investigation. However, no matter how ''modern'',

each of these new remediations will generally contain some canonical elements that connect them to previous representations, such as character names, plot settings, narrative patterns, dialogue, and so on.

Indeed, the Holocaust has been represented in American media over and over again for decades. These representations influence one another and recycle (or remediate) key Holocaust images, narratives, and aesthetics. These include, for instance, the yellow star, the swastika, the uniform-clad prisoners standing behind barbed wire, the separation of mother's from their children, the extreme cruelty perpetrated by Nazis, the heroic liberation of the camps by American troops, and so on. The many Holocaust films that Spiegelman watched while doing his research quite obviously *premediated* the making of *Maus*. Thus, as a remediation of Holocaust representations, *Maus* contains many canonical Holocaust images, narratives, and aesthetics. This link between new and old representations of the past, between the double dynamic of remediation and premediation, is a crucial one: it perpetuates the process whereby a particular work of fiction becomes media of memory. According to Erll (2008, 395), the processes of remediation and premediation have a key role in making the past intelligible, endowing media representations with authenticity, and stabilizing the memory of historical events and thus turning them into sites of memory. This chapter will look into how *Maus* is a product of a remediation and premediation process, acting as a link in a larger chain of Holocaust representations. Some attention will also be paid to the way *Maus* remediates some canonical tropes found in American comics. Given the broadness of this topic, I will cover only some of the most important observations I have made.

### 4.1 Premediation in *Maus*: aesthetics and narratives

The worldview of most individuals will, to some degree, be shaped by the popular narratives and images of the surrounding media culture in which they are brought up. The way media consumers both understand and create media representations of past events will be a process inherently mediated by previous media. Spiegelman is no exception, as he insightfully admits in *MetaMaus*, noting that: ''So much of what I know and experience is shaped by mass media'' (2011, 139). Spiegelman was exposed to American comic culture from an early age, which is something that is reflected strongly in *Maus*. He was an avid admirer of cartoonist and writer Will Eisner, and some of his most canonical devices make an appearance in Spiegelman's comic. For instance, a panel in *Maus* I (1986, 15) includes a text bubble in the form of a train ticket. Spiegelman admits the train ticket is a clear ''Will Eisner trope''. Another well-known Eisner trope is conceptualizing panels as windows that offer a peek into the narrative (2011, 197). Eisner's comics were not the only works that premediated the making of *Maus*. Harvey Kurtzman's war comics from the early '50s – *Frontline Combat* and *Two-fisted Tales* – were also an important influence on Spiegelman. As he points out in *MetaMaus*:

''Kurtzman's GIs were scared little children in uniform who are about to get killed in something too big for them to understand. The stories were somehow profound, historically accurate and they undoubtedly informed the making of *Maus*'' (Spiegelman 2011, 190). It seems that a slightly naïve and shallow understanding of military life has marked the depiction of American troops in *Maus*, as was already discussed in the previous chapter.

Perhaps the most important visual element remediated in *Maus* is the animal metaphor. For comic artists like Spiegelman, using the animal metaphor fits well into the long tradition of funny animal comics that is characteristic of American comics culture. According to Jared Gardner, the funny animals-genre played a significant role in early comics history in the US, and *Maus*' connection to it is obvious. Like many others who have studied *Maus* and its reception in the US, Gardner (2014) too points out how the animal metaphors in *Maus* at first generated a great deal of confusion and even outrage. Even though American comic artists had commonly used the funny animal genre to criticized sensitive topics, some critics did not immediately accept it as an appropriate medium to discuss the Holocaust. Yet for Spiegelman, who knew this earlier work well, the genre was an obvious choice to tell his family's story. Spiegelman (2011, 118) notes that, like most American children of his generation, he too had grown up watching cartoons like Tom and Jerry and reading World War II comics, where Japanese soldiers were shown as monstrous creatures with fangs. Ultimately, Spiegelman got the idea of depicting Jews as mice while drawing for an underground comic book titled ''Funny Animals'' (114). However, Spiegelman's use of the animal metaphors in *Maus* is intrinsically mediated by the anti-Semitic propaganda he came across while researching the Holocaust. Nazi propaganda often depicted Jews as mice, bats, spiders, rats, or other vermin. Spiegelman came across numerous such depictions in Nazi propaganda posters and in Franz Hippler's anti-Semitic documentary *The Eternal Jew* (1940), which compared Jews to rats (Spiegelman 2011, 115-116). The very first pages of each comic remind readers of the anti-Semitic and dehumanizing origin of the mouse metaphor. The epigraph in *Maus* I is a quote by Adolf Hitler saying ''*The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human''*. Similarly, *Maus* II includes a quotation from a Pomeranian Nazi newspaper from the 1930's, which seems to draw a connection not only between Jews and vermin, but also between mice and the quintessential American cartoon character, Mickey Mouse:

> Mickey Mouse is the most miserable ideal ever revealed… Healthy emotions tell every independent young man and every honorable youth that the dirty and filth-covered vermin, the greatest bacteria carrier in the animal kingdom, cannot be the ideal type of animal … Away with Jewish brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse! Wear the Swastika Cross! (Spiegelman 1991)

In any case, Spiegelman's animal metaphor does not intend to portray Jews as a plague on humanity. Spiegelman's version is intended to emphasize the vulnerability of Jewish communities in the face of the Nazi threat. The animal metaphor in general has been used for centuries to depict social inequality, from the cautionary children's stories about the big bad wolf to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. These types of representations are familiar and generally easy to understand, as they effectively illustrate the power struggle between social hierarchies. Additionally, the remediation of the animal metaphor can be an easy way to engage readers and help them immerse themselves in the story. Spiegelman agrees that the animal metaphors allowed him and others to get further inside the material in a way that would have been difficult with a more realistic representation, which could have led to someone questioning details in the story: ''It [the animal metaphor] gave me a certain degree of wiggle room […], about getting something wrong despite all my research. […] having that mask as a prophylactic, I was able to protect myself from inaccuracies'' (Spiegelman 2011, 149). This may seem paradoxical, as the animal metaphor can also be perceived as an element that creates distance between readers and victims. However, the use of this familiar metaphor can make readers forget the very presence of it, as it soothes away many doubts readers might have about the characters. Had Spiegelman chosen a realistic style for *Maus*, readers might have, for instance, wondered whether a particular character that Spiegelman never met really looked a certain way.

The decision to depict Poles as pigs, while partly stemming from Vladek's negative sentiment towards his countrymen, also has its roots in Looney Tunes character Porky Pig. As Spiegelman (2011, 121) explains in *MetaMaus*: ''[I was] trying to find an animal outside the cat-mouse food chain, and I found Porky Pig''. The pig as an animal is not only outside the cat-mouse food chain, but it is also a reflection of Hitler's racial ideology. As Spiegelman explains his understanding of Nazi eugenics: ''[…] The Slavic races, including the Poles, were not meant to be exterminated like the Jews but rather worked to death. […]. In my bestiary, pigs on a farm are used for meat. You raise them, you eat them, you kill them'' (122). Mice on the other hand have ''no use'' and can thus be directly exterminated. Even though Spiegelman's animal metaphor can be read as subversive, it is nonetheless obvious that it was premediated by Nazi race theory. Spiegelman to some extent acknowledges this, referring to Hitler as his ''collaborator'' in the creative process (121).

Indeed, the animal metaphor in *Maus* has in many ways been adapted to conform to an American world view and understanding of race dynamics, mediated by American popular media. Regarding this Americanization of the animal metaphor, Phillip Smith argues that:

> The allusion to Disney and Mickey Mouse, and Vladek's hope that Artie will 'make it big' as a cartoonist, serves in part as a commentary by Spiegelman on American cultural imperialism. [...]. It [the Disney comic] is an American cultural export that is recognized worldwide. The animal

> allegory, in this context, represents the vision of an individual who spent his childhood watching American cartoons and believes (perhaps ironically) in the transformative potential of American citizenship. […]. Artie, when he approaches the Holocaust, filters the events through the dominant iconography of global American media machinery. He chooses cats to represent the Germans because he has been taught by American World War II comics that Japanese (and sometimes German) soldiers have fangs (2016, 51).

Even if it is unlikely that Spiegelman literally believed Japanese and German soldiers had fangs, he nonetheless adopted this familiar allegory for his comic. Spiegelman's animal metaphor is highly culture-specific, mediated not only by Nazi race theory, but also by a number of animal allegories, national propaganda, and cultural values already present in the US. As Thomas Doherty aptly observes: ''Vladek's past and his son's present encompass a graphic aesthetic bound by Der Sturmer and Steamboat Willie, Joseph Goebbels and Walt Disney. The cartoon world is an apt if disjointed recreation of their shared experience'' (1996, 74-75).

The effects of what Smith refers to as the ''global American media machinery'' is likely to explain not only the culture-specific animal metaphor, but also the inclusion of certain images and narrative patterns connected to Hollywood. The parallels drawn between Vladek and Rudolph Valentino in *Maus* I mediate our understanding of Vladek as a character through an archetypal Hollywood hero, with all its implications regarding physical beauty, strength, and success. Similarly, the re-working of the parents' story into a classical boy meets, boy loses and boy finds girl similarly reflects a common Hollywood trope, which is familiar enough for readers as to conform to their expectations.

The depiction of Nazis in *Maus* is also to some extent influenced by Hollywood. In *Maus* II (1991, 51) we find a strong-looking, leather-clad Nazi officer threatening Vladek and other Jewish prisoners of war captured by German troops. Spiegelman discusses in *MetaMaus* the possible influences on the aesthetic of this particular character:

> There was one rendering of a cat in full Nazi drag that looked sort of like Marlon Brando in *The Young Lions*. It was the most noble and savage version of the Nazis, tying it into the stereotypes that presented Nazis as somehow sexy. It reminded me of the whole *Night Porter* genre of pornography that involved SS uniforms and scared me away from drawing *Maus* with really large-scale cats (2011, 143).

Brando is certainly an exceptionally attractive actor choice to play the role of a Nazi. This seems to greatly exemplify the now common depictions of Nazis as sexually desirable, no doubt stemming from the sexualization of power and power imbalances in Western societies. Unsurprisingly, this phenomenon has resulted in the appropriation of the Nazi aesthetic by the pornographic industry and

the like. The ‘‘sexy Nazi’’ trope was already felt by Spiegelman in his youth when he read works like *House of Dolls* by Auschwitz survivor Yehiel De-Nur’s, which depicted the brothels of Auschwitz where female prisoners were forced to service Nazi officers. Spiegelman mentions having read De-Nur’s book as ‘‘part of the whole leather-bondage sexy-Nazi pathology’’ (2011, 48). *Maus* contains no sexual scenarios or sexual violence involving Nazis, but a sexualized Nazi aesthetic can nonetheless be said to have influenced – to some degree – the depiction of these characters in the comic.

Besides American comics and cartoons, the material Spiegelman came across while studying the Holocaust also influenced the comic’s narrative and visual design. The numerous books and memoirs about the Holocaust that Spiegelman came across during his research gave him ‘‘some indispensable help in trying to envision life in a death camp’’. Picture books like *The Hitler File* were a source of references for Nazi uniforms, and wartime magazines like *Signal* provided images of Eastern European shtetl life before the war (Spiegelman 2011, 46). The aesthetics of post WWII European small-press publications also had an effect on *Maus*. The humble design and printing characteristic of many Holocaust-related books and pamphlets published in Polish and Yiddish immediately after WWII were particularly appealing to Spiegelman, and they worked as models for *Maus* (Spiegelman 2011, 15-16). This European, post-war vintage aesthetic exclusively in black and white colors strengthens the impression that the events depicted in *Maus* have taken place in a distant past, far away in the ‘‘Old World’’. Similarly, Hillary Chute (2006, 207) notes that Spiegelman’s old comic *Prisoner of the Hell Planet*, drawn in a wood-cut style with human characters, evokes German Expressionism. This powerfully emotional and raw style was the primary film movement in Germany during the interwar period. As Erll (2008, 394) has observed, what is often integrated through remediation into media depicting the past is not merely actual documentary material, but also its specific ‘‘look’’. This look usually derives from the media technology available at the time, but also from historical aesthetics. The most common ‘‘media technology’’ available at the time of WWII and the Holocaust resulted in most photographs and videos captured of Nazi atrocities being in black and white. As Spiegelman playfully notes in *MetaMaus*: ‘‘From years of looking at documentary photos I unconsciously believed the war had taken place in black and white’’ (2011, 145). Because of this notion, the aesthetics in *Maus* tell us more about the artist’s own impressions and ideas about WWII and the Holocaust and less about what that period of time ‘‘actually looked like’’. This is indeed ironic: Spiegelman’s attempt to stay faithful to the media he used as reference for his comic in a way results in him being ‘‘unfaithful’’ to the *actual* events of the Holocaust, which obviously took place in a world with colors and outside of camera filters. This is a stark example of remediation in the comic, as it so poignantly illustrates the normalization of the media that premediates each new remediation of the past. As Bolter and Grusin (1999, 17) put it: ‘‘though each medium promises to

reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus, immediacy leads to hypermediacy''. In an effort to provide readers with a sense of authenticity by relying heavily on source material and dominant historical aesthetics, the mediation effects of said material and aesthetics become remarkably evident upon closer inspection.

As previously noted, Spiegelman described in both *Maus* I and II the pains he went to in order to ensure the ''authenticity'' of Vladek's transcribed voice. Authenticity in turn is – as previously noted – a key factor that helps turn a work of fiction into media of memory. Again, authenticity here does not refer to the real historical events, aesthetics and characters *per se*, but rather to reader expectations and preconceptions regarding the past. Michael Rothberg (1994, 671-672) notes that many readers have testified that much of the power of *Maus* comes from the heavily accented cadences – the so called shtetl effect – of Vladek's narrative. This perception, as Rothberg further explains, is born out of Spiegelman's slight manipulation of his father's speech:

> A particularly good example of Spiegelman's (unconscious) tendency to overdo his father's accent comes in a passage […] in which Vladek recounts the shooting of a prisoner, a shooting which reminds him of having seen a neighbor shoot a rabid dog. In the book, Art has Vladek say, ''How amazing it is that a human being reacts the same like this neighbor's dog'' (*Maus* II 82). But on tape, Vladek says simply and grammatically, ''How amazing it is that a human being is like a dog.'' This passage also contradicts Spiegelman's assertion that the changes he made were dictated by the necessity of condensing Vladek's speech, since in this case he adds words (1994, 672).

We might tentatively suggest that the slight manipulation of Vladek's speech that creates the so called ''shtetl effect'' makes Vladek's character conform better to some stereotypes regarding European Jewish immigrants in the US. Spiegelman's need to alter and exaggerate his father's speech may thus give us a survivor-character that conform better to the expectations and preconceptions many American readers have regarding Holocaust survivors from the other side of the Atlantic.

A factor remediated in *Maus* which does not need to be exaggerated – as the reality itself was cruel beyond belief – is the brutality of Nazi atrocities. The piles of naked, dead Jewish bodies constitute some of the most iconic images associated with the Holocaust, as they serve to illustrate the magnitude of the genocide and the thorough dehumanization of Jews. These piles appear on a number of occasions in *Maus* II (41-43, 49, 70, 95). Similarly, various forms of torture and abuse are represented in *Maus*, many of them based on previous media representations. In *Maus* II (48), a man is being tortured by ''hand binde'', a punishment whereby an inmate is hanging from a tree with his hands twisted behind his back. The drawing Spiegelman used as reference for this panel is found in

*MetaMaus* (49). This piece depicting a man being tortured in this brutal way was drawn in 1946 by survivor Paladij Osynka, and is only one of the many picture by survivor-witnesses that Spiegelman used as reference for *Maus*. Another example found in *Maus* II (1991, 72) depicting the burning of Hungarian Jews used as a close reference a photograph taken at the burning pits of Auschwitz (Spiegelman 2011, 54). Both the premediation and the remediation of this particular event contain a man awkwardly stepping through the piles of dead bodies. However, in Spiegelman's version, the man is dragging one of the dead bodies by its foot, and another one is clearly throwing a body into the smoking pit. This is possibly due to Vladek mentioning that the bodies were really dragged and thrown into burning pits by other inmates (Spiegelman 1991, 72). Spiegelman's version is thus detailed, with the lines more defined and the characters more dynamic compared to the slightly blurry and ambiguous photograph used as a reference. In this way, the remediation process often contains a lot of interpretation, and many narratives and images are combined and altered to achieve the desired result. This does not mean the events in question never took place, but that each of these new renderings represent the artist's subjective interpretation and reconstruction of an event.

Similarly, *Maus* II (1991, 33) incorporates a number of panels depicting the persecution of Jews and the degrading punishments they were subjected to under Nazi authorities. Some of these panels are based on a number of photographs taken during the expansion of the Third Reich, as seen in *MetaMaus* (2011, 54). One of these photographs that Spiegelman used as a reference was taken soon after the Nazi invasion of Poland. It depicts a Jewish man being humiliated by being driven through the streets of Lodz in a cart and carrying a sign in German with the text ''Wir Wollten den Krieg'' (*We wanted the war*). In Spiegelman's rendition, the Jewish man is not only drawn as a mouse, but the original text in German has also been replaced. The sign now carries the text in English with the words ''I am a filthy Jew''. Similarly, another photograph used as a reference for the comic depicts the German village of Brücken with a banner hanging over it with the text ''Die Juden sind unser Üngluck'' (*Jews are our misfortune*). In the comic panel based on this photograph, the text has been changed to ''This town is Jew Free'', thus emphasizing how anti-Semitism materialized as ethnic cleansing in every part of the Reich. Indeed, Spiegelman's versions are altered in order for them to communicate more strongly an anti-Semitic sentiment. Moreover, although the original texts in the reference pictures are in German, Spiegelman uses English in his versions. This detail no doubt has a lot to do with practicality, as the sudden appearance of full German sentences might have disturbed an American reader's reading experience. Adding a translation to the bottom of the page might have also proved impractical and bothersome for readers. On one hand, we might say that the use of English instead of German provides readers a sense of ''immediacy'', that is, a sense that they are directly accessing the events being depicted without any mediation. The use of English allows the reading experience to flow more smoothly, as readers with no knowledge of German do not have to

stop and find a translation. Preserving the text in German and adding a translation to the corner of the panel might have resulted in American readers feeling distanced from the events depicted. The appearance of the original language might have worked as a reminder of the *medium* through which the tragedy is being depicted, a tragedy that indeed happened far away in another country, in another cultural context, in another language. Looking at the use of English from another perspective however, we might counter argue that the use of English in place of German is in fact something that reminds readers about the fact that *Maus* is a remediation created by an American comic artist from Queens with no knowledge of German himself. From these observations, it becomes obvious that many media of memory have to balance between providing a ''real'' experience of past events and providing an experience of the *medium* mediating those events. Bolter and Grusin (1999, 5) refer to this as the ''double logic of remediation'', which moves between ''mediacy'' and ''hypermediacy'', transparency and opacity. Our culture wants to both multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation. Spiegelman does incorporate some words and sentences in other languages (mostly German, Polish and Yiddish), and when used in carefully selected places, these bits may provide the text with a stronger feeling of authenticity and thus solidify the sense of immediacy, rather than weaken it.

To make the Nazi threat even starker, the panels in *Maus* II (1991, 33) incorporate a giant swastika looming in the background, as well as gestapo officers. As it often happens with Holocaust media, the Nazi swastika is the symbol most subjected to remediation in *Maus*. It appears throughout the comic, understandably, as Vladek's story takes place in a Poland invaded by the Third Reich. However, the presence of the swastika is in no way limited to the presence of Nazi officers, but is, as in the panels described above, often incorporated to add emphasis. It appears as a looming threat in the covers of *Maus* I and II, incorporating a cat-Hitler, as dictated by the animal metaphor. It appears again in *Maus* I when Vladek and Anja manage to escape the ghetto and find themselves at a crossroads, thinking where to escape (1991, 125). The ''crossroads'' is drawn as a swastika, grimly hinting that there is very little escape from the situation. In *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman talks about the importance of not only of the swastika itself but of the circles as a tool for focusing meaning: ''Circular motifs do have a privileged role in the book, if nothing else, because it's integral to the swastika logo-design'' (2011, 183). The remediation of the swastika circle in the comic creates a ''spotlight'' that captures important moments, such as those related to the boy meets, boy loses, boy finds girl- narrative. The content page in *Maus* I already contains Anja and Vladek, the perfect couple, dancing together in the spotlight of a circle (Spiegelman 1986, 6). Similarly, the happy couple is shown reuniting inside a spotlight after Vladek is released from a prisoner of war camp, and again at the end of *Maus* II when Vladek and Anja find each other after escaping Auschwitz (Spiegelman

1991, 136). The remediation of the swastika thus works as a compositional element to both emphasize the Nazi threat as well as to draw attention to important moments in the narrative.

The incorporation of detailed depictions of gas chambers and other material in the form of family photos, exact dates and reconstructions of timelines are clearly proof of a mediated understanding of Spiegelman's family past through available Holocaust media. At the same time, the use of such material represents a desire to mask the fact that the narrative presented in *Maus* has been mediated. As Erll (2011, 140) notes, most media of memory strive to give their consumers a strong sense of authenticity. Memory media attempts to create a seemingly unmediated ''window'' into the past, which is usually achieved by ''hypermediacy'', that is, by the recycling and multiplication of already existing media. An effective way to achieve this tends to include the integration of historical documents, witness testimonies or photographs into memory media, which creates a strong link to the events it depicts. Hirsch (1993, 8) sees the family photographs in *Maus* as documents of both the survivor's memory as well as the son's post-memory, as they ''connect the two levels of Spiegelman's text, the past and the present, the story of the father and the story of the son''. Thus, this mediation brings the past into the present, making it more real and immediate.

### 4.2 Mediation in *In the Shadow of No Towers*

Hopefully, the previous section will have convincingly established that *Maus* is a work marked by the premediation of previous Holocaust remediations. It might now be adequate to examine whether *Maus* itself has premediated any Holocaust-related works that have come after it. As previously stated, here premediation refers to the process whereby previous representations provide material for future representatios of a particular past event. It would be exceedingly taxing to conduct a detailed research into Holocaust-related cultural objects that have come after *Maus* in an effort to connect them back to Spiegelman's work. The length of this text would certainly not allow for it, which is why this section will concentrate first on examining one specific work with links to *Maus*, and a later section will look briefly into the comic scene that came after *Maus*.

Indeed, an interesting and more precise example of *Maus* acting as a premediator can be found in a later work by Spiegelman. Originally published in the *New Yorker* in 2004, *In the Shadow of No Towers* deals with Spiegelman and his family's experiences during 9/11 as New York residents. The 10-page comic depicts Spiegelman and his wife Françoise walking in their lower Manhattan neighborhood while their teenage daughter Nadia is at school. Spiegelman narrates the panic that unleashes after the first tower is hit and the couple races to Nadia's school, located close to the twin towers. Besides his family's traumatic experiences that fateful day, *No Towers* contains plenty of political commentary and anger at the US government for co-opting the events to push its own agenda.

Evoking the classic newspaper comic genre, *No Towers* includes remediations of some of the most characteristic American comic characters and tropes.

However, from the perspective of this thesis, what is most striking is how thoroughly *No Towers* has been influenced by *Maus*. As Chute (2007, 229) observes, both *Maus* and *No Towers* present characters who brush up against and try to make sense of ‘‘brutal historical realities’’. According to *No Towers*, Spiegelman has now finally acquired what his own parents had and what his character so keenly tried to achieve in *Maus*: the status of a witness. As previously discusses, this sentiment was expressed explicitly in *Maus* II when Art wishes to have been in Auschwitz with his parents to understand what they lived through (1991, 16). In the very beginning of *No Towers*, Spiegelman argues that – unlike the Holocaust – he got to experience 9/11 ‘‘all live – unmediated’’ (2004, 1). In a later panel this is again emphasized – albeit comically – when Spiegelman notes that he ‘‘was an eyewitness to the bombardment of kitsch on sale that day…’’ referencing the tacky tourist souvenirs so characteristic of many Manhattan shops (2004, 10). However, in a later sequence, Spiegelman draws himself as the canonical ‘‘falling man’’, which soon after the events became the symbol of the 9/11 terror attacks. The sequence depicting human-Spiegelman falling from one of the towers is accompanied by the text ‘‘he is haunted now by the images he didn't witness…images of the people tumbling to the streets below…especially one man (according to a neighbor) who executed a graceful Olympic dive as his last living act’’ (2004, 6). It is obvious that in the context of memory studies, claiming the existence of unmediated experiences and memories is naïve. It is clear that even as a ‘‘first-hand witness’’, some of Spiegelman's memories are still mediated to some degree (in the case of the falling man, by a neighbor's anecdote). The case of ‘‘The Falling Man’’ in particular has been remediated extensively in media depicting 9/11. Even if Spiegelman did not witness people falling himself, ‘‘The Falling Man’’ nonetheless gets remediated in *No Towers*, solidifying its importance as part of the 9/11 narrative. This again draws attention to the way witnesses can adopt prominent images and narratives into their own understanding of an event, even if they did not witness it themselves. His decisions to include this sequence exemplifies how Spiegelman's memories of 9/11, even as a witness himself, are still mediated by other witness testimonies, news articles, video material and photographs that circulate in the US in a post-9/11 world. What is most important about Spiegelman's status as a 9/11 ‘‘witness-survivor’’, however, is that – just like his parents – he is now forced to drag around his trauma and PTSD like an ‘‘albatross’’ around his neck and to bear witness and ‘‘compulsively retell the calamities of September 11$^{th}$ to anyone who'll listen’’ (2004, 2).

In general, it is clear that *No Towers* has been strongly influenced by *Maus* and the way Spiegelman understands his family history and the Holocaust. Some panels of *No Towers* remediate the familiar mouse-persona, previously seen in *Maus*. In one such sequence, mouse-Spiegelman is drawn smoking ‘‘Cremo’’ cigarettes, an allusion to the term ‘‘Cremo building’’ Vladek uses in *Maus*

II to refer to the crematoriums in Auschwitz (1991, 70). In *No Towers*, mouse-Spiegelman comments that ‘‘I remember my father trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like…The closest he got was telling me it was…‘‘indescribable’’…That’s exactly what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept. 11!’’ (2004, 3). Similarly, mouse-Spiegelman claims to ‘‘finally understand why the Jews didn’t leave Berlin right after Kristallnacht!’’ (4). Chute (2007, 230) argues that ‘‘As with the hugely successful *Maus*, *No Towers* is explicitly about the intersection of past and present, both thematically and formally’’. Indeed, Spiegelman’s understanding and remediation of the 9/11 events in *No Towers* is inevitably pre-mediated by his understanding of the Holocaust and his identity as the child of Jewish Holocaust survivors. The panels taking place in the present are in full color and include human-Spiegelman, whereas those featuring mouse-Spiegelman are in black, white, and gray. This makes a clear statement about the weight of past trauma on the present. Donn (2016, 121) sees this connection to *Maus* as a clear symptom of what she calls the transhistorical presence of human suffering. She notes that: ‘‘The *Maus* figure denotes the history of man-made disaster as a hybrid temporality that oscillates between the Holocaust trauma of the grandparents’ generation, the 9/11 shock of Spiegelman and his wife, and the traumas of his children to come’’. Again, Spiegelman seems confident that he has now – on some level – reached an understanding of his parents’ trauma and experiences, which he sees as comparable to the 9/11 terror attacks. As argued by Erll (2008, 393), the narratives and images we form about any event are generally mediated by narratives and images of similar, earlier events. *No Towers* also includes a sequence depicting anti-Semitism, where a homeless woman threatens Spiegelman: ‘‘Dirty Jew! We’ll hang you from the lamp posts, one by one!’’ (2004, 6). This seems to grimly echo the panels in *Maus* I and II depicting the actual hanging of Jews, which deeply traumatized Spiegelman’s parents (Spiegelman 1986, 83; 1991, 79).

In one of the last panels of *No Towers*, Spiegelman uses the already familiar animal metaphor when he draws his family as mice surrounded by popular American comic characters, threatened by cowboy boots falling from the sky, symbolizing the upcoming Republican Presidential Convention (Spiegelman 2004, 10). Chute (2007, 238) observes that in this sequence, Spiegelman inserts himself explicitly into a historical world of serialized comic characters, to which his serialized autobiographical mouse-character also belongs. He draws himself into a serial space of the past, both claiming the importance of *Maus* in a trajectory while at the same time showing the hold which the past has on him through the characters of comic history. This history includes his own self-created character, a Jewish mouse, who is tormented by the trauma of Auschwitz. Just like *Maus*, *No Towers* makes a statement about how the past is always present. Furthermore, *No Towers* warns about the dangers of forgetting past injustices. This sentiment permeating the short comic is well encapsulated in the statement ‘‘The killer apes learned nothing from the twin towers of Auschwitz and Hiroshima…

And nothing changed on 9/11. His ‘‘president’’ wages his wars and wars on wages – same old deadly business as usual’’ (2004, 8). According to *No Towers*, history is bound to repeat itself and man-made catastrophes will continue to take place as long as the cruelty of governments goes unchecked and humanity refuses to learn about its mistakes, a sentiment echoed by the comic’s last lines: ‘‘The towers have come to loom larger than life…but they seem to get smaller every day…’’ (Spiegelman 2004, 10).

### 4.3 *Maus* as remediation

The process of remediation is important in keeping memory ‘‘updated’’; the way a particular event is remediated will change over time to serve the interests and tastes of these groups. The great interest shown towards comics today seems to reflect a culture fascinated by images. Comics are in some ways more accessible and more intelligible than novels, which can make them a more contemporary and interesting medium for depicting Holocaust narratives. The media that has premediated a work – such as films, photographs, and drawings in the case of *Maus* – can give birth to very different kinds of remediations. Spiegelman’s choice to make a Holocaust comic was unique at the time, and it can be seen as a way to amplify the media of Holocaust narratives. After the publication of *Maus*, a number of Holocaust comics have surfaced. Some well-known examples include *We Are on Our Own* (2006), *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* (2011), and *Karski’s Mission: To Stop the Holocaust* (2015). In *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman goes as far as to say that comics have now ‘‘colonized the Holocaust’’ (2011, 127). Reviews about Holocaust comics often draw a link to *Maus*, which is seen as the ‘‘original’’. Norman Ravvin describes *Karski's Mission To Stop the Holocaust* as a ‘‘worthy successor to *Maus*’’ (2018, CJN).

Indeed, the term ‘‘Holocaust fatigue’’ has consistently come up in recent years to draw attention to a culture saturated with Holocaust narratives, imagery and memorials. In an opinion piece for online newspaper *Forward*, Joshua Lambert argues that comics can help us ‘‘combat’’ this supposed fatigue. He mentions the Holocaust comics exhibition that took place in Paris in 2017 titled ‘‘Shoah et Bande Dessinée’’ (‘‘Shoah and Comics’’). Lambert illustrates how Spiegelman’s work solidified the comic medium as a natural form of representing not only the Holocaust, but all kinds of man-made atrocities:

> Fully half the exhibition concerns the transformation of the field of comics after *Maus*. The curators, comics journalist Didier Pasamoniak and historian Joël Kotek survey the outpouring of Holocaust testimonies and second-generation memoirs in French, English, Hebrew, Japanese and several other languages, some of the most fascinating and visually striking of which are not at all well known in English yet. They argue that “Maus” made the graphic novel a natural home for the memorialization of other atrocities, like the Rwandan and Armenian genocides (2017).

Of course, this does not mean the comic – or any other medium – is free from criticism or controversy. Debates regarding the ethics of representation keep asking whether any medium is appropriate to represent the Holocaust or any other atrocity. Anna Richardson (2005, 2) describes the general sentiment felt in critics of Holocaust media representations as follows: ''Any representation of the Holocaust in literature or art can never adequately convey the reality of a lived experience; it will always be bound to convey a representation of that experience particular to the situation in which it (the representation) was produced''. In the context of remediation, this is indeed true. A representation of any event is bound to reflect more strongly the context that created it than the ''real'', actual event it attempts to portray. Whether the inevitable inaccuracies and subjective interpretations that take place whenever an event is represented in media are always unethical is, of course, a different question. It is certainly not established whether the comic is an acceptable format to represent the Holocaust, and this thesis does not intend to make a claim for or against it. One of the intention of this work is simply to illustrate that in order for a particular event to stay as part of a society's cultural memory, the way that event is represented and memorialized must adapt itself to new groups. The way a particular event is remediated may change over time, but these works will still draw from the original source material and previous representations.

Whether ethical or not, *Maus* facilitated a new form of Holocaust remediation, making the comic an acceptable format to depict genocide and trauma. Even though the premediation and remediation process that Holocaust works go through often results in the perpetuation of specific narrative patterns and imagery, every representation will somehow be a mirror of its time. Given that over seventy years have now transpired since the events of the Holocaust and most of its survivor-witnesses are dead, it is not surprising that reconstructive works like *Maus* specifically look into the intergenerational transmission of memories. A strong sense of urgency permeates these types of works as the narrator-characters attempt to recover the story from an elderly survivor before it is completely lost. It may certainly be stressful for descendants of survivors to think about how the Holocaust will be remembered once there are no more witnesses left. Can Holocaust remembrance be respectful and truthful without survivors policing it? Perhaps because of this, many Holocaust comics that have come after *Maus* have taken a didactic approach to the subject. The Anne Frank House has published a number of graphic novels with lesson material targeting schools around the world. Spiegelman notes that *Maus* too has now been forced into a didactic tool for teaching the Holocaust, even though that was not the comic's original purpose (2011, 102). Spiegelman himself is critical of these kinds of comics, arguing that they make the subject more ''pretty'' and ''sentimental'' (2011, 127). Unfortunately, once there are no witness-survivors left, it will be up to media of memory to store memories in order educate new generations about the Holocaust.

### 4.4 Conclusions

As this chapter has intended to show, *Maus* is a remediation of the Holocaust influenced deeply (premediated) by other Holocaust representations as well as the American comic tradition. The way an event has historically been represented and conceptualized will inevitably affect its later representations. New representations of the past often tend to reflect more strongly previous representations instead of the actual, historical events. This does not mean there is nothing unoriginal about *Maus* or that the events it depicts did not happen. Instead, these observations intend to highlight the fact that the making of the comic has been informed by ideas and images already circulating around the Holocaust prior to its conception. The way the Holocaust is understood and represented in *Maus* is premediated by the countless of stories, photographs, books, family anecdotes, documentaries and movies Spiegelman was exposed to both growing up and later while working on his comic. Besides these earlier representations, it can be said that cultural values and narratives also influence the construction of cultural artifacts. Aspects in the comic's narrative – like Spiegelman's choice to highlight the role of American troops in the liberation of Nazi camps – are a continuation of established cultural myths that emphasize ideas about American exceptionalism. Overall, paying attention to the forces that have informed the making of media of memory can help us understand that representations of the past are never completely objective. Our understanding of the past is inherently mediated by the previously existing images, narratives and cultural myths circulating in a society. This can be a harmless phenomenon that in the best case serves to strengthen and unite communities through a common understanding of a shared past. In the worst case, mythologized understandings of the past can serve to silence marginalized groups or to present their experiences as one-dimensional constructions that can be co-opted by political or cultural elites. Thus, bringing awareness to the forces behind the construction of cultural memory artifacts can be essential in the process of de-mythologizing the past. This process can be essential in creating honest and respectful memories that help in the process of reconciliation in societies with a traumatic past.

## 5 Final considerations and discussion

Memory scholars such as Jan Assman (1995, 129-130) agree that works depicting the past influence us not only on the individual level. Collectively speaking, representations of the past play a crucial role in maintaining cultural memory. The memories of the past are carried on through cultural formation in the form of texts, monuments and rituals, as well as in institutional communication in the shape of observation, recitation or practice. The knowledge preserved in cultural memory has an educative, civilizing, and humanizing aspect, effectively acting as a source for rules of conduct. However, it is important to point out that memories do not have the ability to fully capture and preserve the past. After all, cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, by relating its knowledge to modern, contemporary situations. Indeed, remembering requires us to engage with the past from the present, as well as preserving and retrieving earlier stories. As Erll and Rigney (2009, 2) note, canonical ‘‘memory sites’’ (such as Auschwitz) stay relevant in a particular culture only as long as people continue to re-invest in them and use them as points of reference. Once stories about the past are no longer performed in talking, reading, viewing, or in commemorative rituals, they ultimately die out in cultural terms. In the process, they may be replaced or ‘‘overwritten’’ by new stories that speak more directly to new groups.

Even if stories linked to a particular memory site manage to survive the passage of time, they will still go through a process of adaptation. Although *Maus* has been considered controversial due to its use of the comic format, in a hectic and visually driven society this may have been a ‘‘positive’’ development for Holocaust narratives that ensures their survival. Whether the comic can indeed be considered an acceptable format to depict Holocaust narratives or not, comics can nonetheless be a powerful influencer of a society's collective memory. They present past events as appealing, cohesive, and meaningful narratives that are easy to digest by the average reader. When discussing the benefits of reading history in comic books, Ben Lander points out the specific importance of the *closure* that comic books are able to provide:

> Closure is, perhaps, the single most important difference between reading history in the form of graphic novels and traditional historical writing. When reading comic histories the reader is inserted into and becomes involved in the action of past events in a way that is not required when reading a traditional historical text. The reader participates in the development of the narrative, thereby coming much closer to the creative process of representing and understanding the past. […] The act of closure in comics is never-ending, a situation that leaves the reader closing the implied actions and meanings of all sorts of events and scenes, from the mundane to the most significant. Closure incites the reader into a more engaged experience of reading (2005, 116).

It is thus up to readers to connect the panels in their heads and imagine the characters in motion, given that the narratives in comics are inherently fragmented. Furthermore, the careful study of narratives about the past can show us that Holocaust fiction – just like any fiction that intends to represent past events – is far from objective. These narratives always result in the creation of a specific kind of memory with the ability to shape a reader's worldview, values and attitudes, thus influencing their behavior out in the real world. It is fascinating to explore how stories – depending on the point of view they present, genre, temporality, characters and so on – can influence our ideas about the past in different ways.

Indeed, recollecting past events rarely includes remembering only specific dates, events, or individual people. Human memory tends to also draw upon previous narratives circulating in the surrounding community in the form of a neighbor's anecdote, newspaper articles, documentaries, literary fiction, photographs, diaries, comics, and so on. In this work I have focused on showing that *Maus* functions as an object of cultural memory in the US and thus participates in the construction, negotiation, and representation of Holocaust images and ideas in the collective American consciousness. Even though it is still not possible make broad generalizations about how individual American readers interpret *Maus*, it can nonetheless be said that the comic has the ability to act as an object of cultural memory. As I have argued, this has been possible because *Maus* meets reasonably well the criteria proposed by Erll regarding a work's context, internal characteristics, and the way it interacts with other similar works. The Americanization of the Holocaust expanded the Jewish genocide into a universal metaphor of suffering, allowing individual Americans with no connection to the tragedy to adopt it as part of their cultural identity. Decades of extensive media representations and public discourse around the Holocaust created an adequate context for *Maus* to gain extensive circulation and reach a wide audience. The rhetoric of collective memory found in *Maus* resonated with American readers and fit their memory culture's horizon of meaning and existing images of the Holocaust. This was made possible due to the effect of previous Holocaust remediations, which stabilized the memory later offered by *Maus*. As a result, the combination of these three factors helped turn *Maus* into media of memory in the US. Because of this, *Mau*s functions as a medium of cultural memory that fulfills a number of mnemonic functions. According to Erll (2008, 114), some of these functions can include the creation of past life-worlds, the transmission of images of history, the negotiation of competing memories, and the reflection about problems and processes of cultural memory.

Furthermore, the goal of this work has been to show that the combination of narrative forms found in *Maus* are characteristic of the reconstructive mode proposed by Liikanen (2015). The effect of these forms thus result in the creation of a specific type of Holocaust memorialization. Literary works with a reconstructive approach begin in the present while observing and commenting on the

process of investigation and reconstruction of events in the past. These works often explore the intergenerational transmission of memories; a process often fraught with conflict that affects the narrator-protagonist's identity and results in personal growth. The inclusion of extensive historical material while simultaneously drawing attention to the narrator's subjectivity and the text's constructed nature endow reconstructive works with a perceived sincerity and authenticity. Reconstructive works tend to imply that the present can only be understood by knowing the past, and the task of uncovering this past and bringing it to a wider audience can in a way serve as a source of inspiration for readers. *Maus* looks not only into the horrible events taking place in the distant past, but it also explores how the influence of these events extends into the present. Holocaust survivors in the US are not only part of some distant past trapped in ''the Old World'': many survivors are still alive today carrying memories of violence and trauma while going about their lives like regular American citizens. Many second generation writers like Spiegelman have continued to extend the relevance of Holocaust events into today's America while encouraging readers to research the past.

Even though *Maus* explores the Holocaust in a way that was considered unique at the time of its publication, it still re-uses a number of common narrative forms and images. The animal metaphor that many readers found particularly shocking and intriguing at the time had for long been a culturally established trope to depict tyranny, most famously illustrated in George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* (1945). Similarly, the comic's connection to a vast number of Holocaust art, photographs and small-press publications from Eastern Europe is more than evident. Erll and Rigney (2006, 113) aptly point out that literature establishes a ''memory of its own'' in the form of intertextual relations that have the ability to endow old texts with a new cultural life. Indeed, a significant part of literary production consists of the rewriting of canonical texts and, including earlier cultural narratives like folk tales and myths. These rewritings may take the form of pious commemoration (of re-citation) or of critical contestation. The authors point out that ''such acts of literary remembrance contribute in a very specific manner to the ongoing production and reproduction of cultural memory, as well as to our reflection on that memory''. This ''literary remembrance'' can be easily extended to non-literary objects like photographs and documentaries. The source material which works like *Maus* draw upon is re-polished and re-packaged to suit contemporary audiences. This does not have to result in a ''cheapening'' of said material. On the contrary: the process of adapting narratives to suit a given cultural context is a prerequisite for them to acquire a new cultural life.

Indeed, new forms of remediation will always result in the alteration of representations of the past. As Erll (2008, 8) notes, the past must change with every remediation to adapt to the needs and interests of present day populations. Precisely because of this, the field of memory studies is often more interested in the context where the remembering is happening as opposed to the remembered past itself. The way *Maus* continues to resonate with readers seems to indicate that both its content

and format have been constructed in an appealing way. The relevance of *Maus* in understanding the Holocaust in the United States has been considered significant enough for it to enter literary canon. This status as a canonized work ensures that Spiegelman's comic is still widely studied in US schools and universities, hence continuing to participate – together with a myriad of other media representations – in the way Americans conceptualize the Holocaust today. In this way, *Maus* can continue to influence the understanding newer generations have about the Holocaust. As Erll and Rigney (2006, 112) point out, literary works circulating for long periods of time can in this way provide an important bridge between generations.

Moreover, I believe it is fair to suggest that the way reconstructive works like *Maus* problematize how much can be truly known about the past in a way mirrors Western societies' post-modernist zeitgeist, now slowly moving into a post-postmodernist era. This is materialized as a strong emphasis on social constructionism, with these types of works exhibiting a strong criticism of what David Sholle (1992, 275) calls ''Western discourse's desire for certainty and absolutes''. I believe Spiegelman is fair in his criticism of these absolutes, and his critical approach to memory makes *Maus* an honest work. Indeed, it is obvious from reconstructive works that reconstructing a particular past event fully and accurately is an impossible task. Despite their highly self-aware tone, works like *Maus* effectively participate in the more general, collective negotiation of Holocaust memory in the US. Such works present their own particular view regarding what really happened in the past, what can be known about it, what is truly important to remember about it, and what kind of impact it has on those living in the present. This last point in particular can be illustrated rather effectively in comic format, as the medium allows for a smooth juxtaposition of past and present.

Nonetheless, heated discussions regarding how the Holocaust is memorialized keep erupting from time to time. Speculations and worry about the direction that Holocaust memory is taking in the US will most likely increase once there are no more witness-survivors left. In a consumer culture, media of memory do not necessarily serve to create an environment of reconciliation and tolerance. Instead, they may take on the role of entertainment that provides intriguing or exciting without engaging media consumers in ways that promote a deeper reflection about the past and its present implications. Basing himself on French philosopher Guy Debord's critique of societies where modern conditions of production prevail, scholar Timothy W. Luke (1989, 27) argues that all life presents itself to us as ''an accumulation of spectacles''. Everything that was once directly lived by humans has now become a mere representation. Because of this, many of life's most intimate experiences – such as love, sex, or friendship – are increasingly being experienced in a passive way through these endlessly evolving and circulating representations. Although these observations are decades old – and Debord's over a centennial – they still describe the conditions that have, at times, resulted in the commodification of Holocaust narratives in spectacle-driven societies. It certainly poses a serious

concern whether it is possible for modern societies to provide a truly respectful, empathetic and meaningful stage for stories of suffering. As a result of the accumulation of spectacles, both the joys and horrors of the human existence are increasingly represented and lived through commodities such as films, comic books, TV series, and advertisements.

However, there seem to be some optimistic scholars that see image-driven media and internet culture as a new and exciting way of remembrance and memory-making. Gibson and Jones (2012, 112) believe virtual memorials in online content communities ‘‘provide better opportunity for remediation by cultivating fluid, interactive and creative spaces for self-expression. What takes place online is not so different from the processes taking place in social and cultural life elsewhere’’. According to them, a new generation is changing the face of Holocaust remembrance, a ‘‘morally laden subject that continues to captivate public imagination, spark controversy and generate dialogue, now by using social media’’. Alison Landsberg (2004, 20) argues that modernity has challenged many traditional forms of memory and now mass culture has become the main arena where new forms of memory emerge. She uses the concept of *prosthetic memory* to illustrate how these memories – worn on the body like artificial limbs – are a product of the consumption of mass media representations (2004, 20). Prosthetic memory – coupled with a culture's fascination with identity politics – has allowed many media consumers to adopt the Holocaust as a personal experience, even when they did not experience it themselves. The most extreme examples of this are, of course, the already mentioned fake Holocaust memoirs. Surprisingly perhaps, Landsberg sees this commodification – or even appropriation – of memories in a positive light. From her perspective, commodification makes images and narratives widely available to people from across the globe and from different backgrounds. Instead of brainwashing, dominating and deceiving, these media images and narratives can act as grounds where meaning is negotiated, contested and constructed (21).

There are, of course, plenty of reasons to criticize Landsberg's notion regarding prosthetic memory. The accessibility of memories can help outsiders to sympathize with the suffering of marginalized groups, but this collectivization of memories always carries the risk that marginalized groups will no longer have preference in the discussions regarding their own trauma. However, what will truly challenge the spectacle aspect of consumer culture is an active participation of consumers. As Luke (1989, 29) observes, the principle of the spectacle lies in the *passive nonintervention*, which confines and alienates media consumers by tying them into the role of a spectator. A way to overcome spectatorship could be achieved by collectively fighting against a passive consumption of media and to critically examines dominant narratives. Landsberg's postulations seem to ignore that the power structures which have resulted in the victimization of a group are often still in place when a culture is producing media representations of suffering. This often prevents victimized groups from presenting their stories accurately and truthfully, for they may not have access to mass media

technologies or their stories may have to be severely altered to match consumer interests. The presence of a power imbalance may thus result in the co-opting of victim narratives by oppressive classes and the silencing oppressed groups. If, for instance, the Holocaust in Poland is perceived as a national trauma which emphasizes everyone's suffering as equal and puts the blame solely on German Nazi invaders, this may make it harder for Polish Jews to speak out against Polish anti-Semitism. Moreover, the accessibility to Holocaust representations does not necessarily result in individual or collective political action.

Ideally, the role of cultural artifacts would include aspects such as promoting awareness about past injustices, creating an emphatic connection with victimized groups, promoting an environment of reconciliation, and providing a platform for victimized groups to share their stories in creative and therapeutic ways. This may not always be the case, and Holocaust discussions and media representations will inevitably morph and develop to reflect society's changing needs and values. Regardless of the direction Holocaust memorialization takes in the future, it can still be suggested that the abundance of controversies around memories and memorialization can be a way to keep memory alive. Referring to the extensive studies done by Olick, Suleiman, Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, authors Erll and Rigney (2009, 2) note that the history of cultural memory is marked as much by crises and controversies as it is by consensus and canon-building: ''[…] the rise, fall and marginalization of stories as constitutive parts of the dynamics of remembering have emerged as key issues in memory studies. This turn towards memorial dynamics demands, among other things, new insight into the factors that allow certain memories to become hegemonic or, on the contrary, allow marginalized memories to gain prominence in the public arena. Indeed, fighting about memory can be one way to keep it alive''. According to this rather positive perspective, the transformations Holocaust narratives and memory go through in the arena of compering memories is thus part of a larger, ''natural'' process.

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