

Defining and Living with the Past

Temporal and narrative layers in Art Spiegelman's Maus

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Oslo, May 2013

Stine Cecilie Øverås

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1 Introduction

In *Requiem for a Nun*, William Faulkner writes that “The past is never dead. It’s not even the past”. Two points are made by this statement; firstly, the past never dies because it is impossible to point out when we went from past to present. Separating the two times causes problems because the present is, inevitably, the consequence of the past. Therefore, the two times are not separate platforms, but rather gliding platforms that are constantly linked. Secondly, the past is never dead because humans have a way of adapting the past to suit their present needs. This happens on the personal level, as well as on the political, collective level. I argue that these two ways of understanding the past and present structure the narrative of Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus*.

Maus is both an autobiography and a biography that visually presents human beings as animals. It is the autobiography of Art, the son, and a biography of the father, Vladek. Spiegelman uses his comic avatar (Ewert 87) Artie, to interview his father, Vladek Spiegelman. The text depicts Vladek’s fight for survival from pre-war Poland, and through the Holocaust. By interviewing his father, and showing us the process, the story works as a frame story where present and past tense continuously overlap. The present tense takes place in Rego Park, New York, in 1978, where Artie starts to interview his father with a tape-recorder. As Vladek narrates his distressing story of surviving the Holocaust, Artie guides his father onto the paths he wants to learn about, as well as he guides the readers through his minimalistic drawings. In addition to narrating the story of the Holocaust, *Maus* also allows us to see how the process of witnessing affects Artie. Through metacomments made by Artie, in addition to the inclusion of “Prisoner on the Hell Planet”, we are invited to see how Vladek’s memories have a major impact on Artie’s life. It is the discrepancies and tension between father and son, present and past, which makes this story interesting and important.

Through *Maus*, Spiegelman presses the issue of the past’s presence in the present. As argued above, there are two points represented in Faulkner’s quote. Firstly, the past is never dead because the present is the continuum of the past. To draw a line between two supposedly temporal times, will make it impossible to properly understand how the present came to be. This is the case whether we are dealing with psychoanalysis, collective memory, or history in general. Because the present is, predictably, the result of the past, the past never really dies,

but simply dissolves into the present. Secondly, the presentation of the past never ends, never dies, because the past is continuously altered in the present. Scholars on historical revisionism have argued this for years. Whether it is an individual trying to alter his or her past to suppress it, or a society not willing to engage in their own historical mistakes, both “Individuals and societies choose what they will remember about the past- and what they will forget “ (McMahon 163).

1.1 Thesis argument

My thesis argument is therefore: By layering narration and time, both visually and verbally, *Maus* is able to demonstrate how the “past is never dead. It’s not even the past”. The significance of this is that it makes Artie and Vladek’s roles equally important. Together they illustrate the practice of narrating, processing, and living with the memory of the past. The graphic novel’s characteristic way of demonstrating narrative levels and time makes this story excel as not only a narration *of* memory, but also a narration *on* memory. My chapters will deal with two main issues: that of representing the past, and that of living with the past. Both chapters therefore treat the past and present as linked temporal layers.

While many scholarly studies have done extensive work on the use of the animal metaphor, and the complicated relationship between father and son, few have, according to Jeanne C. Ewe “focused on *Maus* as a visual narrative: its graphic arrangement of narrative layers and frames, its pictorial treatment of narrative time...” (Ewert 87). I will critically look at what Jeanne C. Ewert felt was missing: a visual analysis, as well as a verbal analysis. From this I want to clarify the way a graphic novel can challenge conventional literary expectations of how time and narrative power are exercised. This will be done separately; chapter two focuses on narrative layers, and chapter three deals with temporal layers. The goal is to analyze how *Maus* uses the strengths of the comic medium to demonstrate the process of memory. The idea is that by layering both narration and time, *Maus* has an original way of representing memory which would not have been achieved through a solely verbal narrative. My argument is that the comic medium is especially effective when it comes to representing the complexity of memory.

Both chapters will deal with Spiegelman’s effective use of layers. By stacking narratives, narrators, and time, *Maus* refuses to tell one objective, chronological narrative of

the past. Instead, it becomes a narrative that explores the subjective process of memory. Layering Artie and Vladek as different narrators with different importance to the story, as well as situating them both within a variation of time levels, *Maus* makes it possible to view a broader spectrum of the memory process. I want to show that as a graphic novel, *Maus*' use of layers makes it possible to see processes and connections that otherwise would not be as obvious. *Maus* is therefore able to present a broader aspect of memory than what is usually the case with biographies, or memoirs.

1.2 The choice of medium

As I am analyzing a graphic novel, attention will be given to the choice of format. This will be discussed in depth in both body chapters, but some comments on the choice of medium should be made. Holocaust narratives are found in a variety of mediums, ranging from poetry, to books, to films, and now also represented in the graphic novel. The question that should be raised is how much power and responsibility should be ascribed to the medium chosen? This matter has long been debated from Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase "the medium is the message", to the structuralist narratologists who will argue that the medium itself is not of any importance, as the story is "a mental construct that is completely independent of the medium used" (Lefèvre 14). Between these two poles, we find Pascal Lefèvre. He argues that there are variable "degrees of influence of media on the process of telling a story" (14). It is Lefèvre's position that is most suitable for my analysis. The comic medium can showcase new ways of communicating memory, narrative levels, and time. The medium chosen to narrate Spiegelman's story is not the message in itself, but rather helps guide the reader to the difficulties involved in retrieving a traumatic memory, and the difficulties of retaining authenticity and authority.

Spiegelman's choice of creating the Holocaust memory in the format of a graphic novel opens up for the exploration of the representation of time and narration. It also allows Spiegelman to explore the depiction of the Holocaust, enabling him to circumvent the professed *Bilderverbot* (Huysen 67). Traditionally, a visual depiction of the Holocaust has been refused by the conviction of iconoclasm. Jewish customs refuse visual representation of people, largely because of the Biblical prohibition against "graven images" (Stier 46). The Biblical prohibition is skeptical to visual representation because such depiction can risk being understood as icons and thereby idols. While visual representations are off limits, verbal

representations are permitted. This is a peculiar regulation, as verbal descriptions do after all paint mental images. Oren Baruch Stier urges us not to accept this segregation, as it is mostly political and not rigid enough (with the exception of the representation of YHWH) (47). Stier's argument is that the representation of the Holocaust should be distinct from an idol by being self-conscious and serve to provide a journey "through the icon to the memory to discover our relationship to the past" (47). *Maus*' representation of the Holocaust does exactly that. It does not idolize or sentimentalize the Holocaust, but rather serves as a journey through the self-reflexive agony of representing the "unimaginable". Spiegelman achieves this by including a level of meta-comments by Artie as well as by inviting the reader into not one, but a spectrum of interpretations of the specific memory.

Maus was not universally accepted, but this was not because of the issue of iconoclasm, but rather because of the format. The format itself both allows, and prohibits the Holocaust narrative to be accepted. The medium is usually associated with the happy-ever-after-narratives in the style of Walt Disney, and the inclusion of such a grave theme was by many understood as disrespectful. However, the choice of the comic format is also a clever way to work around the prohibition of visual representation of the Shoah. There is a general agreement that Spiegelman managed to not only treat the matter with great respect, but at the same time change the general appreciation and perception of what a graphic novel can be, and also "what can be accomplished by creators who take seriously the sequential art medium" (Witek 118). By morphing text and image, Spiegelman not only avoids the issue of iconoclasm, but also does what a graphic novel does best; "explore the conflicting boundaries between what can be said and what can be shown" (Chute, "Comics as Literature" 459).

The point I am making here is that of Lefèvre's; the choice of medium matters. The medium specific qualities of the graphic novel allows for the Holocaust narrative to be told in a new setting, with new tools of narration and depiction. The graphic medium allows us to see the mental language of our characters. By juxtaposing text and image, Spiegelman engages different parts of our brain at once. As our language center works to decode the linguistic level, our eyes wander the page, the frames, and the gutters in search of bigger clues than what the text might provide. It is between these two acts, that of reading, and that of seeing iconic images, that the mental language is properly played out. Like Spiegelman argues, this type of narrative is "closer to the actual human thought than of either words or pictures alone" (qtd. in Young 172).

For example, our verbal language can easily describe scenery, people, and settings. It is when we are to explain an emotional, cognitive sensation that the verbal language becomes inadequate. When describing an emotion, whether traumatic or ecstatic, we tend to fall back on the safety of metaphors and analogues. Expressions like “he was nervous like a cat on a hot tin roof”, or the opposite, “he had nerves of steel” are so picturesque that even though they are verbally transmitted, they paint visual images. The graphic novel can make metaphors and analogues like this obvious by both representing the verbal and the visual



image. This is especially important in consideration of memory, as trauma is not a physical object easy to describe, but emotions that are better presented in analogues and pictures. For example, in the frame to the left (Spiegelman, *Maus* 86) Vladek describes the situation after Anja’s three friends were hanged. Verbally, all we are introduced to is “I was frightened to go outside for a few days... I didn’t want to pass where they were hanging”. It is visually, not verbally, that we comprehend the actual trauma of the situation. Vladek and Anja are drawn very small, and in the shadow of the three hanged mice. It is the visual depiction

that confirms the weight of the impression, not the text. This is an example of where the comic format allows us to visually see the oppressive past looming over the present. Another brief and valuable example is found with Spiegelman’s depiction of the letter S. Throughout the novel it is drawn/written in a manner that resembles the S in the SS, the Nazi military. This small detail becomes a visual reference to the Nazi ideology. It visualizes how everything said and experienced by survivors and post-survivors is penetrated by the past. With details like this, the graphic novel demonstrates a mental language that gives us far more information of how something actually feels, instead of only factual, verbal presentations.

1.3 The chapters

In connection to what has been discussed, my chapters will deal with how the graphic novel uses its specificity to demonstrate the past’s place in the present. I aim to show that, as a graphic novel, *Maus* conveys narrators, narrative levels and time in interesting and medium

specific ways. I want to do this because this type of analysis has only briefly been done with *Maus*.

Chapter two will deal with the issue of narrators and narrative levels. In this chapter, I want to demonstrate the many levels of narration and narrators we find in *Maus* and how they intertwine. I will point out what the importance of this intertwining is and especially highlight this in connection to the issue of authenticity and legitimacy. The graphic novel can demonstrate the possibility of making the reader aware of the subjectivity of memory, as both active and passive decisions made by the narrator. By presenting two characters together defining a memory, the difficulties of presenting an objective past becomes clear. By placing the story in both present and past, where the present narrates the past, we are allowed to see how decisions made in the present can alter the portrayal of the past. This can demonstrate that “history is never definite or finally known” (Anderson 58).

By allowing us to see both characters’ view on the past, both visually and verbally, Spiegelman points out the subjective choices made in conveying a past time. He demonstrates how the past is still open for discussion. This makes both Vladek and Artie’s role highly necessary. Vladek is our eye-witness generation with his natural authority in the field of Holocaust memories, while Artie becomes our connection to the factual level, as well as being a guide through Vladek’s memories for both the reader and Vladek himself. The inclusion of Artie will not prove that this Holocaust story is perfectly faultless, but by including both characters’ views on the past, we are reminded of the subjectivity of memories.

For Jan Baetens, the graphic novel has the possibility of increasing “our awareness of the possible polyphony of the narrative voice in the non-visual autobiographical novel” (84). While focalization is seemingly character or narrator-specific in textual instances, the combination of text and image allows the graphic novel to challenge this assumption. By letting us visually see the act of narrating and processing memory it allows the reader to see what can usually be hidden behind a wall of text. The layers of narration can highlight the issue of *authenticity* and *unreliability* that has usually been dealt with in autobiographical novels, but as Baetens argues, “looks different when considering graphic novels” (83). I will demonstrate how a graphic novel allows for multiple narrators at once, and what the effect of this is.

Chapter three will deal with the graphic novel's unique way of presenting time. It demonstrates how a page, or a frame, can present a spectrum of different temporal platforms simply by layering the visual and verbal. The effect of this is that the past's power over the present becomes both visually and verbally visible. I will look at how the past both slides into Vladek and Artie's struggles in daily life, by analyzing the comic's way of dealing with time both spatially and visually. This is possible because graphic novels make presentation of past and present morph, collide, or crash into each other, instead of having restricted zones which tend to be overrepresented in other mediums.

The chapter will focus on time in general in comics, time in *Maus*, and time as a mental state for both Artie and Vladek. I aim to provide a complex analysis of the past's control of the present and how these temporal layers are far from split processes. The deep and post-memory that is represented do not belong simply to the past or the present, and the medium specific qualities of the graphic novel will be highlighted to demonstrate this.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how *Maus* gives us a new and medium-specific way of portraying the problematic repercussions of the Holocaust, which, I will argue, is rarely represented among Holocaust literature.

1.4 A recap

My aim with this thesis is to analyze how layers of narration and time, visually and verbally, make *Maus* demonstrate how the past is never dead, because it is not even the past. I will argue for a Holocaust narrative where both the survivor and the survivor's child are necessary for depicting an authentic story. Both chapters will demonstrate how the story is not only a narration *of* memory, but also *on* memory. Both Artie's and Vladek's contributions will be dealt with. I will examine how they both interfere and shape our understanding of the Holocaust memory. Their roles will be discussed both in connection to the role and power of a narrator, and how their lives are connected to the past. In this way I hope to map out the connections between past and present, and the subjectivity in both narration and experience of the past. This is especially important in connection to *Maus*, as there is still a strong debate on "who has the right to speak" in connection to the Holocaust. My aim is to conclude that it is the composition of Artie and Vladek and their respective roles that allows for *Maus* to not

only be a proper, but also a necessary depiction of the process of memory and the consequences of the Holocaust.

2 Defining the past: Narrative layers

Maus demonstrates the challenges of creating a truthful Holocaust memoir, which represents both emotional and factual authenticity. The graphic novel permits the layering of both narrators and narratives, which is thoroughly used by Spiegelman to tell multiple stories and perspectives at once. This allows him to visualize the challenging hunt for an accurate memory. By giving both Artie and Vladek a voice, Spiegelman lets us see several interpretations of the past. This is done verbally, by what is spoken and/or unspoken, and also visually, as we are able to see how memory is processed and understood between people. My main argument is that memory is never an objective, unanimous, finished subject, but rather a question of perspective and politics. Using both Artie and Vladek as narrators and focalizers, Spiegelman effectively visualizes the power struggle involved in recreating the past.

This chapter aims to provide a proper analysis of the different narrator and narrative levels found in *Maus*. The goal with this is to analyze Vladek and Artie's different roles as narrators and the different types of power that they possess in these roles. My aim is to demonstrate how the "past is never dead. It's not even the past" because it is never unanimously defined by the present. Making an analysis of the different narrative levels and narrators will provide examples of how individuals have different perspectives on the same past. My argument is that both voices are necessary to the story, not only because they provide us with multiple perspectives, but mainly because they demonstrate that there are various perceptions of the past, and the past is, therefore, never really a finished chapter. This makes *Maus* into a narrative not only *of* memory, but also *on* memory.

2.1 A trinity of narratives

Maus contains at least three main narratives. Each of these narratives is connected to different temporal platforms, which will be dealt with in chapter three. Erin McGlothlin sorts the different narratives in the inner, middle, and outer (184).

First (inner) narrative (story)	Second (middle) narrative (discourse)	Third (outer) narrative (narrating)
Vladek's Holocaust experience (epic narrative)	scene of Vladek's testimony (<i>Bildungsroman</i>)	memory and representation (<i>Künstlerroman</i>)

The deepest (inner) narrative is Vladek's quest for survival. Here, we follow Vladek from pre-war Poland in the 1940s, searching for love and employment, through his struggle with, and survival of, the Holocaust. Without Vladek's experiences, there would be no reason for *Maus*. Vladek is our eye-witness of the horror and therefore has a natural authenticity.

The middle story is the communication between father and son. Here, Artie interviews Vladek and they discuss his testimony. This is where we see Vladek's impressions of the past being triggered and questioned by his son. This narrative is where past and present meet and the discussions and problems of how to represent the past take place.

The third (outer) story is that of Artie's meta-comments. This story can be categorized as outer because it does not really take place within the communication between father and son, but is instead Artie's story alone, paralleled with him interviewing his father. This is where Artie philosophizes and gives meta-commentary on the creation of *Maus*, and this is where the narration *on* memory is very apparent.

The three different narratives are not as separate as they might seem. The graphic medium's ability to mix the verbal with the visual, in addition to how a full page can present all levels simultaneously, makes the three different layers become a complex trinity. The different levels comment on and through each other, both verbally, and visually by interconnecting elements. One famous example of this can be found on page 229, where it looks like the chimney in the inner narrative produces Artie's cigarette smoke in the middle narrative.

The parts of the trinity need each other to exist. First, there is a need for the inner narrative to have a story to be told. Second, there is the need for Artie and Vladek's conversation to take place so that we can view the communication and the disagreements on what parts of the past should be represented. Third, the outer narrative is a meta-level requiring at least the inner narrative to work. This level makes obvious the ethical dilemmas of producing such a narrative, as well as the issue of "who has the right to speak". Artie is, after all, not an eye-witness, but as an illustrator he possesses a substantial amount of narrative power.

Whether we follow McGlothlin's categorization, or refer to Gérard Genette's three layers of diegesis; diegetic, extradiegetic and metadiegetic, or simply view the story as an advanced frame story, the levels are nonetheless interdependent. Removing one of the levels

will decrease our knowledge of the creation of *Maus* and especially reduce our understanding of the narration *on* the creation of memory.

The story is not only complex as the different levels are interconnecting through visual communication, such as the chimney example, but it is also interconnected through Artie's role as visualizer. Artie's role as a visualizer penetrates all levels of the narrative. Because he draws all the images, he can never be excluded from any of the layers. Therefore, none of the narrative layers, not even the inner Holocaust narrative, are independent. Even if Artie is not verbally narrating the story, he is still allowed a voice through the visual language. This makes a graphic novel challenge traditional ideas of focalization and narration, as we are not faced with only a single narrator, but rather "concerned with two narrative voices" (Horstkotte and Pedri 339).

The two tracks in this graphic novel therefore make it impossible to have the memory told from only one perspective. Even if we were only met with Vladek's verbal descriptions (as opposed to Artie's verbal narration), there would still be the need for Artie as an illustrator, a visual commentator. Because the different levels include both Artie and Vladek, with the exception of the outer narrative level, which at times only includes Artie, there is a dual focalization, a dual narration. This provides a memory which is not the work of Vladek alone, but of both main characters. In a textual narrative this would not have been as apparent, as the text would hide the different powers involved in the creation. With biographies in general we rarely see the discrepancies between the writer and the person in question and we are not invited to properly see how the different powers challenge each other. When the past is to be commemorated or narrated, a medium is always required. *Maus* lets us see the process and the powers involved, instead of simply giving the reader a finished, polished work of memory. As we are aware of how Artie is present in all levels, we are also aware of how this memory is not only the product of Vladek, but becomes a cooperative effort. The power struggle involved in this will be dealt with later in the thesis.

2.2 Focalization in the graphic narrative

The graphic novel allows us to see how the past is never completely defined, but is always an unfinished process, relying on the narrator, be that visually or verbally. The medium has the

possibility of visually showing us this process and the challenges involved in trying to convey an authentic, legitimate Holocaust narrative.

When examining the narration of memory in a graphic novel, focalization becomes an interesting subject. Both because of the way *Maus* is built up, allowing both a verbal focalizer, and a visual focalizer, and because memory in itself is highly connected to point of view. Genette coined the term *focalization* in connection to narrative authority. Focalization is the “relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen’” (Bal 146). In other words, the point of view or perspective of a character. Usually, a narrative only gives way for one focalizer at a time, where either the character, or the narrator works as the filter. For us, the main focalizer is supposedly Vladek, the survivor. However, as I have argued, no frame is ever without Artie’s influence as an illustrator. Artie’s role as a visual focalizer can therefore confront and object to Vladek’s verbal focalization. This challenges Genette’s way of categorizing the narrator, as well as opening up for the possibility of dual, or even triple focalization.

Traditional, verbal narratives would have problems matching this technique, because they only deal with one channel of communication. For instance, epistolary novels work with many narrators and focalizers. However, their different narrators and focalizers are all communicated through the verbal language, only allowing one perspective at a time. Even though an epistolary novel can involve many focalizers and narrators, they are clearly separated on the page. They are presented linearly, consecutively, and not in the same moment as can be achieved in the comics medium. Even though an author using stream of consciousness has the possibility of swiftly, and not always noticeably, changing focalizers, there is still a change from one focalizer to the other. It is not possible to present more than one focalizer at one time, because there is no alternative route than the verbal language.

The possibility of multi-focalization gives the graphic novel a unique opportunity to be self-commenting, allowing us to visually see discrepancies that might otherwise be hidden by one superior focalizer. The exciting thing about this is that it allows us to see the practice of processing memory, processing other people's narration. A clear example of this can be found in the image below (Spiegelman, *Maus* 210).

Beneath, Vladek and Artie are presented as interviewer and interviewee. Vladek is supposedly narrating the story, while Artie's role is seemingly only that of an illustrator. According to Genette, focalization is understood as an optical perspective or point of view (Horstkotte and Pedri 330). The panel below exemplifies a very literal understanding of Genette's term.



This panel (Spiegelman, *Maus* 210) provides two narrative levels at once. We have the inner narrative which is set in the camp and the middle narrative which takes place between father and son. The panel demonstrates how Vladek narrates verbally, how Artie then guides him through questions, and how Artie is controlling the illustrations. The narrative presented is that of a German who was sent to prison camp, but argues that he does not belong there, because he was a “German like you” and had “medals from the Kaiser.” Vladek is telling us this story from the middle narrative, but it is Artie who is in control of the

visual focalization. In Genette's term, we would therefore view Artie as the true focalizer, even though this is Vladek's memory. At first, in the first two frames, the prisoner is drawn as a mouse, as we presume his ethnicity is Jewish. However, as Vladek tells us how the prisoner claims to be "**German** like you", Artie changes the visualization of the man. As he draws him as a cat, the illustrations follow that of Vladek's narrative, still actually making Vladek the lead narrator. However, as Artie questions Vladek in the middle narrative "Was he really a German?" and his father can't give a proper answer, Artie must take a stand. Either he can draw the prisoner as a mouse, guessing that he was indeed Jewish, or draw him as a cat adhering to his father's story. Because Vladek is no longer completely sure of the past, it becomes Artie's job to decide on a fitting visual focalization. This short panel demonstrates both how memory, or perception, is elusive, and also the responsibility of Artie. We do not know if it is Vladek's memory that is faulty, or if he never had complete knowledge of the situation. Nevertheless, Artie has no way to verify this story and must rely solely on his father's narration of the past. By allowing us to see both the inner and middle story, we can see the discrepancies between the narrative layers and how Artie struggles to find an appropriate illustration. The example in question visualizes the problems of memory, how it is far from waterproof, and how Artie has a lot of responsibility when conveying his father's story.

The third frame censors what the prisoner supposedly said and is also shadowed out and covered by the middle story. This tells us how Artie questions his father's memory and also demonstrates how the present takes a dominating place over the past. In the third frame the past is nothing more than the shadow of the present, relying on the present to allow it to be visible or not. This frame works as a beautiful analogy on the recreation of the past in light of the present.

It should be mentioned that Genette is a victim of time, arguing for a type of focalization long before the graphic novel was a well established medium. Nonetheless, the example above becomes a very literal understanding of Genette's term, as he limits focalization to that of the optical, visual narration (Horstkotte and Pedri 330). In connection to the textual novel, the role would be that of the main character or a narrator filtering the story. Therefore, Vladek is our first focalizer, as he verbally narrates the story and what he remembers. However, the inclusion of the visual track leaves us with a second narrative which is controlled by Artie and makes him also responsible for a type of visual focalization.

In other words, the graphic novel proposes a *dual focalization*, between father and son, between the verbal and the visual. This gives us the possibility of seeing the discrepancies and tension between two narrators trying to convey the past truthfully. By layering two levels of narratives, the middle and the inner, Spiegelman also layers narration and focalization, allowing us to visually see the difficulties Artie has with visualizing Vladek's elusive memory.

2.3 To focalize the past

Genette's understanding of a focalizer is not enough to properly grasp the subjectivity of memory and the subjectivity of focalizing the past. The problem with Genette's description is that it separates perspective from narration (Rimmon-Kenan 71). According to Genette, the cognitive and emotional processes do not influence the focalizer, because a focalizer is simply restricted to the optical-photographical. I want to exemplify why I view this as problematic by turning to Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*. In *Atonement*, Briony Tallis, a 13-year-old girl, witnesses a moment of sexual tension between her sister Cecilia and the gardener Robbie. What she is actually, optically witnessing is consensual sex. However, she interprets this vision as a moment of aggression. This misunderstanding later leads to Robbie being falsely accused, and found guilty, of rape. This is an example which causes Genette's description to be problematic. Optically she sees two bodies physically engaged, but because she is not mentally mature enough, she has problems placing and interpreting what she is witnessing. It is not until later in the novel that the reader realizes the misunderstanding and that we have been tricked by the focalization, and thereby the filtering of events, through the mind of a 13-year-old. This is why Genette's description is not enough, but demands, like Rimmon-Kenan argued, the inclusion of the "cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation" (Rimmon-Kenan 71).

Artie is always the visual focalizer and most of the time Vladek is the verbal focalizer. However, if we include Rimmon-Kenan's aspects, we find that Artie's focalization is not synonymous to Vladek's, but actually at times competes with Vladek's. Just like 13-year-old Briony cannot properly understand the concept of sex, Artie cannot properly understand the concept of Holocaust. This demonstrates how difficult it is to properly communicate memory. Mieke Bal points out how memory is an act of 'vision' in itself (Bal 150). Artie and Vladek will view the past differently because they are situated differently in the present. Vladek has

seen the horrors of the Holocaust, Artie has only witnessed them through his father. Artie and Vladek will have different ways of relating to the past and also different ways of presenting and focalizing it. This makes Artie's role much more complex than only as an illustrator. It gives Artie the possibility of filtering the story his father is narrating through his own visualized world. The use of the animal metaphor, and details on Artie's power, will be dealt with later. For now, the importance is to highlight how Artie is much more than only an illustrator. He has a mind of his own, making the two tracks of the graphic novel tell several narratives at once. This is how the graphic novel challenges traditional ways of viewing focalizers and narrators, by including both Artie and Vladek to be focalizers at once, in the same frame.

2.4 The possibility of objectivity

Genette suggests the option of an *omniscient* narrator, or *zero focalization*, where a third person narrator has the possibility to report what happens in an impartial and objective way (189). However, with an authentic story like *Maus*, the question becomes whether it is possible to narrate anything objectively. We have the issue of whether or not Vladek can retell his memory objectively and we have the question of whether or not Artie can retell his father's story objectively. As argued, both Artie and Vladek are focalizers, thereby ideological and emotional elements are already present in their narration. Second, to narrate history objectively is almost always impossible, because every time you include one thing you exclude something else. There is simply not enough space and time to include everything.

Therefore, even if the time and the space were never-ending, there is the issue of language. Language can never be objective. Language is meaning and no language is without connotations. This is supported by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Mieke Bal, as they also argue that no focalization can ever be objective, because "As soon as there is a language, there is a speaker who utters it" (Bal 20). Even if the characters were drawn as humans and the meta-comments made by Artie had not been included, we would not be able to avoid language, be that verbal or visual.

If we accept that Vladek does not have the possibility of narrating the past objectively, could we then argue that the story is at least authentic in the way that it is an objective depiction of Vladek's memory? Most likely not, as Artie's role in the story is not passive. He

questions his father on details, guiding him onto the paths he wishes to know more of. With the example above we saw how Artie tried his best to draw the story according to his father's narration, but when his father was unsure, Artie's interpretations took precedence. In the last frame of the example given (see image above), we can see how Artie decided that the prisoner was to be remembered as a mouse, despite his father not being sure about it.

While a clear verbal narrative has the possibility of only narrating with one focalizer at a time, the graphic novel has the possibility of portraying competing interpretations of the same memory. As Vladek narrates and focalizes his past, Artie, in turn, visually focalizes both how he understands his father's words, as well as adding information for the reader. He braids both facts and doubt into the story, in a way which would not be possible to do in a narrative that is only verbal. This is a strong argument for why a graphic novel can show us the process of memory in detail.

Therefore, because the possibility of an omniscient narrator of memory is impossible, we end up with a need for more than one narrator. Artie and Vladek have alternating views on the same history, which allows us to see, if not an objective take on history, then at least multiple interpretations of history. In the search for an authentic Holocaust memory, the importance is not whether one interpretation of the past is more correct than the other, but perhaps to make visible that there are different ways of viewing and comprehending the past and its consequences. Artie therefore provides a different view on the importance of the past, as well as authenticating his father's story through fact-checking.

2.5 Subjective memory: Erasing the past

With the example above we saw how Spiegelman used the comics form to visualize the dialectical relationship between telling and transmitting memory. I argued how Vladek's narration is the main narrative, but that Artie also controls and executes power through visualization. In the next part of this thesis I want to look at how both Artie and Vladek control the memory in *Maus*. By close-reading their roles I will demonstrate how the past is not dead, but is still altered and controlled by the present.

Vladek is first and foremost our main informant of the horrors of the Holocaust. He has felt the trauma on his body and he has, literally, lived to tell the tale. Vladek's words are what make this narrative become a deep narrative on the experienced Holocaust. Had Vladek

not lived, Artie would not be here to communicate the memory. Vladek is portrayed as stubborn, racist, forgetful, and most importantly still haunted by the memories of the Holocaust. The authenticity of his memory as well as the authenticity of his words can be confirmed through *MetaMaus*. *MetaMaus*, the book which came out in 2011, contains meta-comments on the creation and existence of *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman and *Maus*-enthusiast Hilary Chute. As shown in *Maus*, Artie tape-records his interviews with his father. In *MetaMaus* we have the possibility of reading the transcripts of these recordings from 1972. This information validates the categorization of *Maus* as biographic. It does not, however, validate Vladek's words as absolute objective truths.

Because memory is a process of selection, the quality of memory is hard to guarantee. Firstly, it is hard to guarantee a truthful narration because the issue of memory is a process of the unconscious, or as Spiegelman comments "Memory is a very fugitive thing" (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 28). Vladek is, like all of us, a victim of time. Even if he wished to tell the truth, the brain has its own way of suppressing details of painful experiences. Secondly, narrating memory is also a conscious decision of selection. Vladek's narrative weighs heavy and his way of both selecting proper pieces of memory for the public, and for himself, impacts memory. Because Vladek can choose what he wants to say and what he wants to exclude, he has a dominating control over this Holocaust memory. This means that Vladek can still control and alter the past according to his present needs.

One example of this can be seen with the issue of the lost voices. The lost voices mean the victims who suffered and died during the Holocaust, as well as those who died in the aftermath, such as Artie's mother Anja. It is hard to reach an accurate analysis of the horrors of the Holocaust, when most of the victim's stories never got to be told. One story that was told is, obviously, Vladek's. This gives Vladek's voice a considerable amount of power in controlling the presentation of the lost voices of the past. Firstly, because he has a natural authority as a survivor, secondly because he can, personally, control certain memories like that of his wife Anja.

Maus is not only created to narrate Vladek's story, but is also Artie's wish to come to terms with the past, and to terms with what happened to his mother, Anja. Several times throughout the book, Artie raises the wish to know more about his mother. This shows how Artie has not let go of the past, but he is still wishing to revise what he knows of it.

Interviewing his father, the very first thing Artie asks for is to “Start with Mom... tell me how you met” (Spiegelman, *Maus* 14). This question takes place in the middle narrative between father and son and demonstrates how Artie tries to guide his father onto the paths he wants to know more of. By including conversations like these, it becomes obvious for the reader how Vladek is not narrating alone, but is also directed by Artie. However, as Vladek



refuses to tell us much about Anja, we realize how much power the present has in defining and controlling the past.

As Vladek decides to hold back information on Anja, he is filtering the past, focalizing the past through his own emotional and cognitive will. This is not an issue of what Genette would call optical-photographic focalization, but is a focalization of the cognitive. Most likely

Vladek remembers his wife, but for some reason he refuses to tell us. This makes Anja’s voice lost and alters our understanding of the past.

Vladek’s way of filtering Anja’s story does not have to be a conscious choice or a wish to design a specific past. This is because Vladek is a victim of time and details of the past can disappear as well as be suppressed. Reading in *MetaMaus* Spiegelman supports this by arguing that both Vladek and Anja knew each other’s stories. “Though when I would ask Vladek about Anja’s story, he didn’t seem to have clear memory of her specifics” (*MetaMaus* 21). Therefore, Vladek’s filtration might not be as sly as it seems at first. The aftermath of the Holocaust is a time that is heavily influenced by the experienced horrors and one survival technique could be to suppress and ignore painful chapters of memory.

However, I will argue that the choice is also an active choice by Vladek. On the page above (Spiegelman, *Maus* 161) we see the conversation between Vladek and Artie. Vladek briefly tells about him and Anja as Artie instantly argues how “mom’s diaries will be **ESPECIALLY** useful...they’ll give me some idea of what she went through while you were apart”. Here, Artie expresses a wish to bring in Anja’s lost voice, the part that Vladek cannot tell him about. Artie wishes that the memory should reflect more than one viewpoint and that her diaries would be an effective way to do this. Vladek has, seemingly, lost the diaries. He excuses himself by saying how they are “not to find anymore”, but suddenly “I remind myself what happened... One time I had a very bad day... and all of things I destroyed”. With this, Vladek tells us straight out how he destroyed Artie's only way to properly and truthfully understand Anja’s experience of the Holocaust. This is not shocking or surprising to us, as surviving the Holocaust probably means that certain actions must be taken to be able to live on. For Vladek, the removal of his wife’s diaries can be seen as the removal of a painful memory. Diaries can be extremely personal and the opportunity to open her diaries, read her thoughts, and reconnect with a lost person, can be an unbearable experience. Therefore, the destruction of Anja’s diaries could be a survival technique of Vladek.

Nevertheless, it is how Vladek suddenly “reminds” himself of what happens, that makes us question his motives. How can we believe that a man who gets into an argument for one dollar at the grocery store, saves useless telephone wire because it might be useful one day, repeatedly counts his pills to know what he has, and is obsessed with losing/spending money, has suddenly forgotten that he has burnt a whole pile of diaries? This act is very out of character for Vladek and makes us doubt his “forgetful” comment. The act might be the reaction to a bad day, but it ends up being the ultimate act of power and control. By ruining another memory of the past, Vladek is in complete control of how we are to remember Anja’s destiny, as no evidence can be found to contradict his memory of her. Because Vladek took physical control of Anja’s diary, he is in control of how her story should be remembered: as an absence, a lost voice.

Had it not been for Artie, *Maus* would not contain as much about Anja and other lost voices. In *MetaMaus* Spiegelman tells us how he contacted Anja’s family and friends (the few who survived) to be able to include more voices in the story. The interviews with Anja’s neighbor, Renye Ostry, her second cousin, Marusia Winogron, and several others can all be found in the last few pages of *MetaMaus*. Where Vladek tries to control Anja’s memory,

Artie does his best to present several voices and thereby balance the memory. The significance of *Maus* as a work with more than two authors is that it allows us to view a more nuanced picture of the past.

The quarrel between Artie and Vladek takes place in the middle narrative, but defines how we view the inner narrative. Without this scene we would not know how Vladek controls Anja's voice and we would not know how much Artie wishes to include her voice. The inclusion of the middle narrative lets us see Artie's discourse with his father on which voices should be included in the definition of the past. It makes obvious a discussion that would never see the light of day without the inclusion of a middle narrative. This is therefore one example of how the different narrative levels in *Maus* are interdependent, explaining each other on different narrative and temporal layers. The effect of this is that it lets the reader not only read a work of memory, but be a part of the creation and struggles in defining memory. The middle narrative is situated in the present, making obvious how the present has the power to define and alter the past.

2.6 Subjective memory: Withholding information

With the example above, we saw how Vladek used the present to define the past. He did not simply withhold information, but physically destroyed a piece of the past in exchange for absolute control of a lost life. This would not be visible to the reader if it had not been for the middle narrative with the communication between father and son. This example demonstrates the physical power the present has over the past, allowing it to delete and destroy evidence that no longer fit the present.

The middle narrative also provides another example on the present's ability and wish to alter the past. In this case the issue is not Vladek's physical power over the past, but rather his unwillingness to share the story with the public. As argued earlier, this is Vladek's power as he is our focalizer of the past, deciding what he wants to share. However, as *Maus* is the work of Artie, he is also the one making the final decisions of what gets told, thereby becoming the ultimate focalizer of Vladek's narrative.

The example below (Spiegelman, *Metamaus* 25) takes place as Vladek has just narrated his relationship with Lucia, the woman he met prior to Anja. The story of Lucia has already been presented to the reader, but we are now met with the discussion on whether this

should be included in the inner narrative or not. The debate might resemble the earlier example with Anja, but the issue here is not whether Vladek wants to withhold information to Artie, but whether he wants to share the story with the public or not. According to Hilary Chute “the most important graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories” (“Comics as Literature” 459). Chute’s comment is aimed at works like Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* where the novel can only be bought on the black market in her home country, Iran, as well as referring to *Maus*’ refusal to hide behind “the lens of unspeakability” (“Comics as Literature” 459) connected to the display of the horrors of the Holocaust. However, her comment can also be connected to that of representing memory. My reason for arguing this is because the inclusion of the middle narrative gives *Maus* the unique ability to demonstrate the



conflicted boundaries between what can be said and shown at the crossroad between public and personal memory. Not in the way of what the public can deal with, or what governments will allow, but by demonstrating the personal conflict between collective and personal memory. *Maus* is a public, but also personal memory, raising the ethical dilemma of what can and should be shared with the public, versus what you would like to keep private. This is an issue rarely dealt with in biographical works, because we are seldom met with a self-referential biographical frame story.

The issue at stake is Vladek’s earlier romance with a woman named Lucia. We can see from the first frame how Vladek very clearly expresses that

he does not wish for this story to be a part of *Maus*. The affair is not something Vladek is proud of: “I don’t want you should write this in your book”, because “It has nothing to do with Hitler, with the Holocaust” and it is “not so **proper**, so respectful”. However, Artie would like to have this piece of memory in the novel, as he feels it makes his father “more human”. In the last frame Vladek again asks Artie not to include this specific memory in *Maus*, and Artie lifts his hand, promising not to do so. Obviously, Artie did not respect his father’s wish. This example displays two things. It demonstrates the difference between what an individual might allow to be communicated in the personal versus collective space. In other words, memory is again seen as subjective, adapted to the context in which it is to be used. Vladek has no problems telling this secret to his son, as long as it stays in the private sphere. The problem arises when he realizes that Artie could make this a part of *Maus*, openly revealing his father’s secret to the public. This example also displays Artie’s persistence on telling the whole truth, keeping nothing hidden from the reader, even if it means overriding his father’s wishes. Artie not only visualizes the story of Lucia in the deep narrative, but the middle narrative reveals how his father tries to change and arrange past experiences by excluding certain aspects of the past.

The panel above also exemplifies how Artie and Vladek have different opinions on what should be represented in the text and not. As mentioned, it is not possible to include everything from the past, therefore some alterations are always necessary. Vladek does not agree with including the story of Lucia because it has “nothing to do with Hitler, with the Holocaust!” (Spiegelman, *Maus* 25), while Artie believes it should be included because it paints a human picture of his father. The discussion is not whether this incident happened or not, as Vladek openly tells this to his son. The discussion is whether this memory constitutes a natural part of a Holocaust memory. It is the inclusion of a middle narrative and two narrators that makes this discussion available to the reader. It demonstrates the necessity of Artie to paint a nuanced and balanced picture of his father, as well as proving to the reader that he is willing to ignore his father's wishes to tell the story as authentically as possible.

2.7 The power of the visual: Richieu

The graphic novel’s major advantage compared to a verbal novel is its possibility to have a double narration. I previously argued for how graphic novels open for the possibility of dual focalization, where we saw how Artie confirmed and questioned Vladek’s memory in

connection to the prisoner that was killed by the guard. That example used two narrators to discuss the incident and two focalizers to narrate the incident visually and verbally. However, the narrative layers also allow for another alternative way of narrating; telling two things at once. Because the graphic novels operate with picture and text, it can tell at least two stories at the exact same time. This double narration cannot be done in a verbal novel, because it lacks the second, visual channel of communication. To narrate two tales in the *same* moment becomes a discussion on its own, because a *moment* in a graphic narrative can be anything from one frame, to a frame and a gutter, to a page or a double page. This issue will be dealt with extensively in chapter three, but the point I am making here is that whether we view the moment as one frame or an entire page, the graphic novel has the possibility of telling narratives in parallels. In *Maus*, the power of the verbal narrative alternates between Artie and Vladek, but the power of the visual always belongs to Artie.

One example of this can be found on pages 76-77, where Vladek is having dinner with Anja, her family, and their son Richieu. The scene is verbally narrated by Vladek in the middle story, seen in the upper left corner, peeking in at the past. Vladek tells us how they discussed the problems with food rationing and the issue of the black market. This is visually illustrated by Artie's hand. However, simultaneously with Vladek's story, Artie sneaks in a visual narrative which has nothing to do with Vladek's verbal narrative. On page 77, from the second to fifth frame, we find a short visual narrative unfolding in the background. Simultaneously with the discussions on food rations, Richieu is depicted spilling his food and getting reprimanded by Anja. This narrative is not mentioned at all by Vladek and must therefore be the work of Artie. The scene is easily overlooked if you only view the visual depictions as illustrations to Vladek's narrative, following Vladek's focalization of the past. However, it is when we closely study the panels that we see Artie's control shine through, making his power obvious. Commenting on the comic medium, Spiegelman said that it is effective because of how it "gets to essences" (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 168). This comment, in addition to *Maus* in general being drawn in a very simplistic manner, makes it impossible not to draw any further conclusions from this small visual narrative.

The mini-story of Richieu is important because it very obviously demonstrates Artie's role as more than that of Vladek's illustrator and interviewer. When Artie draws in a mini-story which is not mentioned by Vladek, his voice becomes very present, even though it is not part of the verbal narrative. This demonstrates the graphic mediums ability to narrate two or

more things at once. We have Vladek's verbal story, Artie's depiction of it, and the third narrative between Richieu and his parents. The example also shows how Artie is not necessarily as objective as we might first expect. With the example of Anja and Lucia we saw Artie as an interviewer going in for the authentic truth, arguing that he wished to include the story of Lucia because this was "the way it really happened" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 25). However, the inclusion of the mini-tale has nothing to do with the authentic truth. Vladek's verbal narrative does not confirm Richieu spilling his food and getting reprimanded. This story is simply Artie's own assumption. The question then becomes; what does this assumption mean? According to Jeanne C. Ewert this could be Artie/Spiegelman's way of expressing anger "over his parent's idolizing the dead Richieu" (88). This is an issue brought up several times by Artie, frustrated by how his dead brother was romanticized as a photo which "never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble... It was an ideal kid" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 175). The scene shows us that even though Artie might seem like he is after a truthful Holocaust narrative, he is also biased, carrying his own motifs and interpretations. Through the seemingly objective illustrations of Vladek's story, Artie is able to define a piece of the past which he has never experienced, never witnessed. This alters our perception of Artie as a completely trustworthy narrator, demonstrating how he is willing to tamper with Vladek's narrative to get across his own narrative.

The incident with Richieu does not necessarily make the story less trustworthy, but it reminds the reader of the subtle changes that can be made to alter the past. Even though Artie had no experiences with Richieu, his frustration over his dead brother makes him want to redefine him as something else than his parent's impression. It is the graphic novel's two juxtaposing layers of text and image that makes the discrepancies between Artie's and Vladek's narratives visible. Artie's influence does not make Vladek's narration less important, but it reveals a power struggle on how to define past memories. This is only visible to the readers because Spiegelman's choice of medium allows for two narrators and several narrative levels to exist. However, this demands a reader who is active and thorough in analyzing Vladek and Artie's different narrative powers.

2.8 The power of the visual: the animal metaphor

As demonstrated, Artie's role as an illustrator is not completely objective. At times, like with Lucia, he tries to come across as unbiased, simply retelling the narrative, but at other times,

like with Richieu, he reveals himself as a biased narrator. Artie's narrative powers are actually stronger than Vladek's because he is present on all levels, even when Vladek is not. Everything goes through his hands, literally, and through his sight. One subject that cannot go unmentioned is his choice of drawing the characters as animals.

The animal metaphor is an act of focalization. I argue for this because it is a visual filter for the story and it changes our perception of the narrative in general. It might look like an external focalization, but its semantics lie much deeper than the visual. I will argue that this is a type internal focalization, representing Artie's perspective on the Holocaust and the politics of the past. Therefore, the choice of working with the animal metaphor is not simply an issue of narration, but also an act of focalization. However, this only works if we include Rimmon-Kenan's definition of focalization, where the "cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation" (71) are included as aspects in focalization.

The animal metaphor forces the reader to face the serious prejudice towards certain human "races" in the Holocaust period. The metaphor is Artie's way of communicating his own opinion on the politics in action at the time of his father's sufferings. It rarely comes up in conversations in the novel, but rather works as Artie's political and ideological filter for the story. While *Maus* in general never states any clear moral or ethical stance, this is implicit through Artie's use of the animal metaphor.

Only a few times in *Maus*, does Artie discuss his metaphor. The main dialogue on this representation takes place between Artie and his wife, Françoise, on the outer narrative level. The discussion revolves around how different nationalities/ethnicities are to be presented. Artie presents Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Swedes as reindeer, Poles as pigs, Gypsies as moths, and finally Americans as dogs. The different animal races present different characteristics closely tied to the prejudice and expectations of the linked nationality/ethnicity. Already in this discussion, we can sense the humor and inconsistency of Artie's metaphor. As his wife is to be drawn, he debates on whether he should draw her as a frog, because she is French, or as a mouse, because she has converted to Judaism. The dialogue between them demonstrates Artie's wish to communicate his own political ideas (questioning the classification of different races) through the visual focalization.

The opening pages of *Maus* can help us understand Artie's choice of metaphor. Here, Adolf Hitler is quoted claiming that "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not

human” (Hitler in Spiegelman, *Maus* 10). This exclamation reflects the views shared by many at the time, where people of Jewish descent were considered less human than others, being stigmatized as different and unwanted. Hitler’s quote proves how he did not acknowledge the Jewish people as a human race, rather categorizing them as inhuman. This was a political thought heavily exploited by the Nazi propaganda, depicting Jews as rats, mice, and other vermin. Of course, in the war no Germans were actual cats and no Jews were actual mice, but by drawing this metaphor Spiegelman gets the chance to ridicule and defuse the rather bizarre categorization. The metaphor plays on the assumptions of the human race as not one, but divided into several. It makes the reader contemplate on the idea of a natural hierarchy between “races”. While cats are the natural predators, and mice are the natural prey, Germans and Jews are the same race; the human race. However, by depicting humans as different races, the absurdity of the Nazi doctrine is highlighted.

In addition to the political argument, the choice of metaphor can also be understood as an act of universalizing (McCloud 48). The different animals are grouped together and besides the variation of clothes, glasses, and hats, there are few things that make an individual stand out. As all the characters are molded into an animal cartoon standard, Artie takes away the possibility of focusing on the individual. Every mouse looks the same, because they share the same destiny. Also, Scott McCloud argues that by drawing faces as simple cartoons, far away from the realistic style, it is easier for the reader to relate. Because of this, the reader can feel closer to the characters and easier identify with the narrative.

Despite arguments like these, several critics still refused to accept the metaphor. Many have uttered that they did not approve of the metaphor, as it was dehumanizing. Robert C. Harvey was one of the critics especially negative to Spiegelman’s choice of metaphor and treatment of his father’s memoirs. Harvey claims that Spiegelman “plays directly into [Nazism’s] racist vision” (qtd. in Hatfield 139) and that the use of the metaphor “threatens to erode [the story’s]moral underpinnings” (qtd. in Hatfield 139). These types of misunderstandings threaten Spiegelman’s choice, because critics like Harvey seem to misunderstand Spiegelman’s message. The metaphor is not aiming at fulfilling Hitler’s ideology, but to ridicule the absurdity of it. This can be supported by many choices made in *Maus*. The metaphor is not waterproof, but is rather continuously scrutinized by Artie both visually and verbally. Visually, we can several times see Artie wearing a mask, with threads sticking out on the sides and back, reminding us of what might be beneath the category of

mouse/Jew. At one point a mouse and a cat have children and this results in strange small mice with stripes. Another time, Artie even contemplates whether he can mention his therapist's cats or whether this might "louse up my metaphor?" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 203). Artie also jokes whether Francoise should be depicted as a frog or a mouse and humorously points out how Anja is scared of rats in the basement. This inconsistency of the animal metaphor is both humorous and offers a critical attitude to the idea of a master race. As Spiegelman comments: "The metaphor is meant to be shucked like a snakeskin" (qtd. in Witek 112). It is not a fulfillment of the ideology which Harvey fears, it is actually an intellectual satire.

Whether you understand the self-destructiveness of the metaphor, or simply disagree with Spiegelman's choice, the visual representation is nonetheless important. It contributes a layer of political focalization that can only be attributed to Artie. Had the metaphor not been discussed in the outer or middle narrative, we could have placed it as the choice of the author. However, as the metaphor is of concern to Artie in the narrative, it is obviously a factor controlled by Artie. This removes the possibility of Artie as an omniscient narrator, since every narrative layer in the book is formed and focalized through the metaphor.

Therefore, the choice of the metaphor becomes Artie's way of commentating on past happenings. Through the political coating he has the possibility of questioning the justification of the Holocaust and the rationalization behind it. It does not change how we view the past, but it makes us question how things were. It also helps bring the narrative out of the personal sphere, into a bigger, collective issue. While making the reader question the past, he also makes us question the present. Artie's metaphor exemplifies how we in the past segregated humans into different boxes because of their different characteristics. Hopefully, the reader will also find a link between these past actions and present attitudes. Even though the story deals with a, hopefully, outdated view of humanity, we do not have to look far to see it still reflected in our daily life. Especially the treatment of Muslims in the U.S. after the 9/11 bears a strong resemblance to the categorization Artie tries to ridicule. This proves that even though we like to view such attitudes as aged and outdated, the past is not really dead, as many of these attitudes still exist. The power that comes with the visualization of *Maus* is therefore of political value, making us view the present in light of the past, just as we view the past in light of the present.

2.9 Authenticity

In my introduction I claimed that both Artie and Vladek's roles were necessary and important to narrate this Holocaust memory. One of the main arguments for this is that they represent different types of authenticity. In the next chapter, I will deal with how they both represent a deep-felt Holocaust trauma and are therefore both carriers of emotional authenticity in connection to the Holocaust. However, as I will now demonstrate, Artie is the one who is our main source of factual authenticity. This is extremely important in a story like *Maus*, where Holocausters do their best to delete the past. Factual confirmation becomes an important work for Spiegelman as an author and this is reflected in Artie.

Artie's ability to question his father's deep memory and check up on the facts presented to him, is what makes this story into something more than a memoir and therefore legitimizes the narrative's place in collective memory. While Vladek is no doubt our authentic human link to the past, Artie is *Maus*' own checks and balances, imbuing the story with the validity it deserves.

The general authenticity of the story is confirmed through Artie's use of the tape-recorder and its transcripts found in *MetaMaus*. In addition to this, Artie continuously questions his father's memory both through the middle narrative, like we will see below and through the visual in the deep narrative, like the example with the German guard earlier on. Artie's strength is that he is able and willing to argue with a Holocaust survivor. Artie does not only view his father as a victim, but can see more dimensions to him than an outsider would. This is what lets Artie be brutally honest with his father and enables him to speak where the general norm is to listen. This gives Artie the possibility to demonstrate how memory can be faulty and that questioning a memory does not deprive it of legitimacy, but can actually make it more truthful. In the example below, one famous incident of this type of discourse is found.

In the panel below (Spiegelman, *Maus* 230) we can see how Artie weighs the factual statement he has read, against the experienced subjective memory of his father. The verbal discussion takes place in the middle narrative, but glides into the deep narrative with both verbal and visual presentation. Artie claims to have "just read about the camp orchestra that played as you marched out the gate", while Vladek claims that he "remember only **marching**, not any orchestras". The orchestra in Auschwitz is visible in several photos and is as "well

documented as anything in Auschwitz might have been” (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 30). Therefore, ignoring the facts and only relying on Vladek’s memory will prove self-destructive. This shows the obvious need for Artie as a balance to Vladek’s memory. We do not know whether Vladek simply has forgotten the band, or if he might never have experienced it, but since the existence of the orchestra has been proven, it cannot simply be ignored.



Artie had two ways of dealing with this issue; he could have let Vladek control the visual narrative and covered up the orchestra with rows of prisoners, or he could have let the orchestra be obviously apparent to the reader. However, instead of taking control of the narrative and choosing to visually focalize what research has shown, he morphs the two views of this memory by covering most of the orchestra by prisoners, but not all. For a hasty reader it might seem as though Vladek won the discussion, but looking closely you can see how the wall planks form a musical staff and the top of the instruments almost turns into notes. These are details unique to graphic novels, being able to both visually and verbally display the doubts and compromises of memory. It is the inclusion of both the inner and middle narrative which again provides insight to the power struggle of memory between Artie and his father, and memory’s way of letting go of details. By layering both Artie and Vladek’s narrative voices, and including the two narrative levels, the reader can view the process of interpreting

and questioning memory and the negotiation involved. This demonstrates both the frailty of memory and the power of the narrator. However, as demonstrated, Artie does not override his father's memory, but reaches an interesting compromise.

There are several other examples which support Artie's work as an important authenticator. Throughout the book he is questioning his father's deep narrative through the middle narrative, making him explain discrepancies between what researchers say and Vladek remembers. Through the middle, discourse level, Artie gives us additional facts like detailed drawings of crematoriums (page 230), the cellar/bunker where Vladek and Anja hid (page 112), a referential map of Auschwitz and Birkenau (page 211), and even details on Vladek's shoe fixing (page 220). Artie's involvement makes this story become more than only a subjective representation of the survival of the Holocaust. Because he dares to question his father's memory, he authenticates the story on a level which could never have been reached by only including Vladek's voice, Vladek's focalization, and the inner narrative alone. It lifts the story from being a semi-biography, to a trustworthy piece of both personal and collective history.

2.10 Concluding thoughts

This chapter has dealt with the issues of representing the past. It has demonstrated how the different layers of narrative and narration are needed to highlight the process of recreating memory. Having two main characters has proved to be an effective way of demonstrating the subjectivity of memory, because it allows Artie and Vladek to not simply narrate memory, but to discuss it. This is only available to the reader because the story operates on different narrative levels. The graphic novel's juxtaposition of image and text makes it possible to show two narrators at one time and also two focalizers, where one deals in the verbal and the other the visual. This has demonstrated the difficulties of giving an accurate display of memory and how memory is filtered through a narrator.

The inclusion of both Artie and Vladek makes way for both the emotional and the factual authenticity, heightening *Maus*' validity as a trustworthy memoir. However, it does not guarantee an objective story. As demonstrated, Artie is far from an objective narrator, if there is such a thing, exercising great power and influence as the visualizer and overall narrator. It is the two characters together who demonstrate how the act of defining the past is

closely linked to the present. As we saw, because Artie and Vladek had different connections to the past, they had different ways of interpreting the importance of it.

As this chapter displayed and the next will also, memory is not static, but is a continuous process marked by present conditions. The past is therefore never really a closed chapter, because we keep redefining its importance. The next chapter will argue along the same lines, but focus on temporality.

3 Living with the past: Temporal layers

The last chapter demonstrated how the different narrative layers allowed us to *see* how memory is defined by present circumstances. The chapter looked at different powers involved in forming a representation of the past and how Artie and Vladek had different narrative powers and roles. It was the layering of narratives, narrators, and focalizers that made this process observable for the reader, making this not only a narrative *of* memory, but also *on* memory. The chapter demonstrated how past and present are linked, where the present's power controls the past.

However, it is perhaps *Maus*' use of temporal layers that most powerfully demonstrates the link between present and past. The trinity of narrative (earlier) presented (in chapter two) is closely tied up to different temporal platforms. Just like how the graphic novel can present and merge different focalizers and narratives, it can also braid together a whole spectrum of temporalities. It is by using the graphic medium's ability to play with different timelines both in and between frames, that Spiegelman creates a story representing not only how the present shapes the past, but also the strong influence that the past has over present lives. By analyzing *Maus*' representation of time and close-reading the narrative, I will exemplify how the graphic novel is a powerful medium with which to present time and the interconnection between present and past. I will focus on how both Artie and Vladek are continuously haunted by the past, by the Holocaust.

3.1 Time in graphic novels

Measuring time in a verbal or visual narration is a challenge. With film, we have the advantage that it needs time to move forward and it can show silence and pauses quite effectively. With a traditional, verbal novel, this is much harder to achieve. Rimmon-Kenan argues that a verbal narrative has no effective way of measuring time (51). However, Bal argues that "The amount of time allotted in the story to the various elements of the fabula is determined with respect to the amount of time which these elements take up in the fibula" (8). In other words, Bal argues that we can look at the time given to certain events in the fabula to

understand the importance of that event. The longer and more detailed an event is described, or the more often an event appears, the more important it probably is. Of course, this is not always the case, as authors such as Virginia Woolf often bring forth important incidents in brief sentences. Nonetheless, the amount of time given to an event does increase our attention to it.

Neither verbal nor graphic novels have a set time frame as to how fast or slow they should be read. Therefore, Bal's suggestion that the time given to an incident answers to how important it is, can be transferred to graphic novels. However, with a graphic novel, the attention given to an incident becomes physically visible through the use of size and space. McCloud explains this as "Space does for comics what time does for film!" (100). Panels and gutters become indicators for time or space being divided. The lines around the panel capture a moment, a scene, which then acts as "a containment of the action, or a segment of action" which has "the task of separating or parsing the total statement" (Eisner 26). Time, in graphic novels, therefore becomes a physical, measurable thing, although the problem is that "there's no conversion chart" (McCloud 100). We must therefore, as Bal argued, look at the time, or space in this case, given to an event according to the rest of the story. Lefèvre in addition argues that frequency is important, because it is up to the artist to "decide how many panels he will need to show an event" (26). For example, on page 34, we find the first moment when Anja and Vladek see the swastika. The panel is large, taking up half the page, with the panels above also giving their attention to the swastika. If space is the same as time in graphic novels, this panel should be given longer time to dwell upon than the earlier page with eight panels. The purpose of giving the swastika almost an entire page, in addition to the fact that both panels above look down on the mentioned panel, is to highlight this event for the reader. Vladek states that "here was the first time I saw, with my own eyes, The Swastika". This scene is spatially large, taking up a considerable part of the narrative and is therefore an important event according to Bal's arguments. Because of its size, the scene is very noticeable to the reader. This reflects the importance of this episode in the story and in Vladek's life.

The impression of the importance of this moment is further strengthened by the use of the swastika on the next page. On the page below (Spiegelman, *Maus* 35), the swastika is repeated in the first panel and dominates the background in the next four. Here, Spiegelman uses frequency in moment to moment sequencing, to underscore the importance of this event. The significance of this is that the revealing of the swastika not only becomes a time stopping



moment with the large panel, but it becomes a lingering moment, repeated throughout the page. The swastika is, after all, the ultimate symbol for Nazism. Therefore, while visualizing the swastika one time induces a shock-felt sensation for the reader, it is the repeated use of the swastika that reminds us how Nazism followed Vladek wherever he went. For Vladek it was not just the initial shock that was painful, but the continuation of suppression. The six panels on the page are strictly and rigidly drawn up, reminding us of how strict and inflexible Nazism was. The swastika is not only introduced to Vladek's life, but it lingers on, just like it lingers through the frames. It almost looks as though the swastika

is burnt into the background of the frames, demonstrating how the swastika is burnt into Vladek's memory.

In addition to identifying time with the use of space, graphic novels work with juxtaposing pictures. McCloud defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9). Firstly, this bears great resemblance to how a film works. Juxtaposing different types of pictures is used actively, especially seen in works like *Apocalypse Now* by director Francis Ford Coppola. Here, juxtaposing relaxed, quiet, native Cambodian fields and schools, with loud, flapping Helicopters and a rain of bombs, makes the viewer react with shock and disgust. The difference between this type of juxtaposition and the ones found in graphic novels is that while film is sequential in time, it is not spatially juxtaposed like comics (McCloud 7).

McCloud states that the issue of time in comics is linked to the act of *closure* (107). This means that to be able to decode the juxtaposition, we must understand the emotions between the panels, moving from one to the next. Our brains must understand the process, the link, and the development between these pictures. This mental process is easier with some

panel-to panel transitions than others. For example, a moment-to moment transition requires little understanding of closure by the reader, the same with action-to action. It is with the subject-to subject, and scene-to scene that the reader's participation becomes very important. *Maus* uses a combination of these transitions to mark the difficulty of temporality and memory.



For example, in the panel above (Spiegelman, *Maus* 218) we find Vladek telling us about Dr. Mengele and his examination of the prisoners. As McGlothlin points out, in the first three panels Vladek is narrating in the present tense, but the illustrations suddenly change to the past narrative (177). Seemingly, we have simply seen a scene-to scene transition. However, looking at Vladek's bodily movement this proves to be a morph between an action-to-action and a scene-to scene transition. As Vladek starts off turning in present tense and ends the turn in the past tense, we see how the past is included in the present. While the gutters between the panels distinctly mark the difference between then and now, the two temporal levels share the same action. In the present tense, Artie is noting down his father's actions, in the past tense a camp guard is noting down Vladek's actions. These two panels juxtaposed tell us much more than simply what used to happen in the camp. It tells us that the experiences Vladek had in the past are still with him and that wherever he goes, the past travels with him.

Therefore, as Will Eisner argued, a panel can be both a containment of an action and a segment of an action. There is a clear gutter between panel three and four and the text is tightly packed into the fourth panel representing the past. However, the two last frames obviously display actions that are not separated. Spiegelman here exemplifies how two

temporal layers can be drawn as a natural fulfillment of each other. Overlapping in action, they demonstrate Vladek's inevitable connection to the past. As he relives his camp memory, we realize his inability to live in the present without being reminded of the past.

There are two more ways which comics can effectively use time. The first method is to use bleeding pages. Bleeding pages means the lack of a border surrounding a panel and can produce "a sense of timelessness" (McCloud 102). This is again very efficiently used in *Maus*, as timelessness is of the essence when dealing with trauma. One of the most striking bleeding pictures in *Maus* is on page 159. Here, Spiegelman portrays Vladek's first meeting with Auschwitz. The panel is huge, covering the entire page as it merges into and creates the background. It has no borders and like the many victims of the Holocaust, this page bleeds into Vladek's, Artie's, and our memory as one horrifying memory. It creates a sense of timelessness as it melts into the background and foreground at once, making the trauma seem infinite.

3.1.1 Time in *Maus*

Just as *Maus* has three narrative layers, inner, middle, and outer, it has three temporal layers. Firstly, the narrative's present is the conversations between father and son in the years 1978-79. The main past is Vladek's narration from Poland to the liberation of Auschwitz between 1930s and 1945. The super-present (McGlothlin 186) is the meta-comments made by Artie as he refers to the readers. In addition to this, we find two important flashbacks. The first one is on the first pages of *Maus*, with Artie and Vladek back in Rego Park in 1958. The second one is Spiegelman's earlier comic "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" from 1968. The importance here is that juxtaposing different platforms of time gives us the opportunity to understand the link between past, present, and future. By being introduced to a field of different time lines, overlapping and juxtaposing each other, we can see how the past taps into the future. This allows us to understand how a horrifying memory like the Holocaust has a way of never ending or belonging to the past, but rather continues to destroy and smash into both the present and future.

The visible juxtaposing of pasts and presents makes it possible to revisit the past, rather than simply having a chronological narrative or cutting straight to flashbacks. Verbal narratives can only demonstrate one focalizer at a time, just as it can only narrate one tense at a time. While film has the possibility of including different temporal layers through voice-over, it never lets the audience dwell on several moments simultaneously, simply because it deals in time. *Maus* introduces us to a spectrum of temporalities on one page, allowing the reader to sit back and view a landscape of different times at once. This makes *Maus* reflect the complexity of memory. The possibility of layering and intertwining time provides a good impression of how past and present continuously tap into each other, moulding and shaping how we view both. The braiding of time makes *Maus* evade “any attempt on the part of the reader to keep these two chronological levels distinct from one another” (McGlothlin 179). By avoiding time as clear fragmented units, Spiegelman introduces us to a realistic view of the power and influence between the present and the past.



The scene above (*Maus* 107) exemplifies Spiegelman’s use of the visual to show us how memory provides a journey from the present to the past. Artie and Vladek walk from the panel of the present, to the panel of the past. In the second frame they are no longer in the present, but they are not really in the past either. They are drawn slightly outside the frame, in the breach of present and past, seemingly gliding from one temporal layer to the other. This works to demonstrate how Vladek takes Artie into his world, his past, by narrating his story. By letting the last frame be open, without defining borders around Vladek and Artie, they are not completely locked in the past, only visiting, through Vladek’s memory.

A related example can be found on page 47. To the left in the frame, we find Vladek's past as a soldier. To the right, we find Vladek in the present narrating his past. In the middle, Artie is situated, stretching across the room. Artie's legs, his foundation, are planted in his father's past, while his upper body is in the present. This image shows us how Artie is thoroughly planted in between his father's past and their present. The melting and colliding of temporal levels seen in *Maus*, are often done in this manner. It is noticeable, but also quick to get used to and forget. This works as an analogy on how the present and past are morphed together, influencing each other more than we care to notice. Vladek and Artie both give way to the past, but Artie is not looking directly at the past, at his feet, but rather through Vladek and his interpretation of the past. No clear gutter can be found, but the half-drawn frame symbolizes a change of temporality. However, Artie is drawn as the physical connector between the frames, like he is our connector between present and past.

Maus is able to visualize the complexity of time and memory. After all, all we read is written in the past, but it insists on being understood as past, present, and super-present. The inclusion of different temporal levels reflects the different narratives. Just as the middle narrative defined the past, we can see how the inner and middle, present and past, reflect each other. As opposed to a verbal novel, the graphic medium, and *Maus* specifically, refuses to use a linear categorization of time. It throws us back and forth chronologically, always making the reader aware of the circumstances in which it is told. The reader is not only faced with the layering of time in and between frames, but we are visually met with a page filled with different sequences of time. It depicts memory as a result of then and now, making time not only a matter of visual portrayal, but also a mental overlapping. It therefore becomes a comment on the intricate temporal layers of the mind.

However, just as we tend to go back and change history, history also changes us. The past is the prologue to the present and tends to interrupt us whether we are aware of it or not. Like Dominick Lacapra argues: "the past not only interacts with, but erupts into, the present, and at times the present seems to be only a function of, or a diaphanous screen for, the past" (155). This becomes not only an issue for Vladek, but also for Artie. As Vladek is damaged by his past, so is Artie, by both his father's present life, as well as his past life. By juxtaposing time, between panels, in panels, and across pages, Spiegelman provides a view into the complexity of memory and trauma. He does not hide behind the idea that some issues are too difficult to convey, but can through "inventive mixtures of verbal and visual performance"

(Chute, "Comics as Literature" 459) illustrate the unspeakable. By not relying on one narrator, one temporal time, or one focalizer, Spiegelman uses the medium to emphasize how there is no such thing as a clear break between the past and the present. By depicting both Artie and Vladek's relationship with the past, he makes it obvious how the past inflicts pain on the present, as well as on the future. This can be seen by analyzing both Artie and Vladek's relationship with the past.

3.2 Deep memory

With different techniques, Spiegelman demonstrates the weight of carrying around the Holocaust memory. He does this by including both Vladek's present and Artie's in the light of past circumstances. This underlines how the past is only a prologue to the present and therefore never really dies. First, I will look at how the past and present are intertwined for Vladek.



In the example above (Spiegelman, *Maus* 239) the panel absorbs both present and past, braiding them to visualize how Vladek's past has caught up with him. As Vladek, Artie and Françoise drive home, Vladek is telling the story of how Anja's friends were hanged in Sosnowiec. As he tells the story, the four girls are visualized on the left part of the picture. Their hanging bodies wear camp uniforms, in stark contrast to the modern car on its way home from the grocery store. Spiegelman here braids two temporalities to show us Vladek's reality of having to daily deal with the horrors of the past. The panel shows us the past creeping into and hovering over the present life of Vladek. The frame is twice the size of the rest of the frames on the double page, exemplifying Bal's argument that the time (or space) given to an event signifies its importance. It is also thoughtfully placed, where the frames prior to it are in the present narrative, and the frames after it are in the past narrative. The size of the panel therefore illustrates a change from present to past that is not abrupt. but we are

instead eased into it. Matching this technique in film would not give the same results. The comics medium lets us sit back and stop motion and time and only focus on one picture, while film flashes 24 pictures in a second. We are presented with a larger frame than the ones before, and we are urged to stop and look for details. The merging, or braiding, of temporal layers in one frame becomes an analogue for Vladek's traumatized mind. He does not live in the present, he is not simply stuck in the past, but in the middle way between what *was* and what *is*. Just as the frame presents an eerie atmosphere, it represents Vladek's mental atmosphere.

In addition to visualizing temporal layers, Spiegelman also demonstrated, verbally, how the past dominates the present. Even though Vladek and Anja were among the lucky ones making it out of prison camp alive, their fight for survival was not over. Spiegelman includes information of Anja's suicide in the time after, as well as Vladek's struggle to not only survive, but continue surviving. Incidents like Vladek shouting out "Everywhere I Look I'm seeing Anja" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 263), are present to emphasize the continuum of death surrounding Vladek, and his intervals of surviving and dying. It is almost like Vladek has three deaths; one during the brutality of experiencing Auschwitz, one during Anja's death, and finally, his bodily death.

In an article found on *Haaretz.com*, children of survivors described their parents. They claimed that their parents seemed unable to settle because they viewed the world as filled with unexpected events. Their parent's reaction to this was to continually be "prepared for the unknown" (Even). Spiegelman mirrors this world view in Vladek. His need for control is striking, as if sorting his pills (page 28), and nails (page 100) will help him sort out his life. On page 118, Vladek picks up a telephone wire from the ground, arguing that "it's good for tying things". Artie has problems understanding it, answering "you ALWAYS pick up trash! Cant you just BUY wire?". Vladek replies "Why always you want to buy when you can find?... I'll give you some wire. You'll see how useful it is". Vladek's survival from Auschwitz is partly due to his way of seeing the potential in utilizing and saving things others might not. He survives typhus because he saves his bread and uses it to get help, he saves his lunch box given by the American army because it might later be useful. Whether it is saving a useless telephone wire, or getting "six dollars worth of new groceries for only one dollar" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 250), Vladek still views the world as a dangerous place where you always have to be on your guard. When Vladek tells Artie about the bunker they survived in, he

wants to draw the bunker for Artie, because “such things it’s good to know exactly how was it-just in case” (Spiegelman, *Maus* 112). The need for caution and moderation are skills Vladek learned the hard way, and now, forty years after, he is still unable to let go of the past and settle down as a free man.

Vladek’s lack of progress is made even more visible by Spiegelman’s visual depiction of time. In several parts of the middle narrative, Vladek is seen narrating while exercising on his indoor bike. As Vladek steps onto his bike (page 15), he recounts his youth and how he once “looked just like Rudolph Valentino”, with the past, presumably a poster of Valentino, in the background. As Vladek pedals away on his cycle, he pedals through the past, telling his survivor’s tale to his son. Revisiting the past is both a mentally and physically demanding task for Vladek, resulting in loss of breath and physical exhaustion. Finally, on page 93, he asks for a break. On this page, he is drawn in the right bottom of the page, making it look as though he has peddled through the past, but ending up nowhere and fatigued. Without any frames or borders, it looks like Vladek is a part of the background, the background for the past. Quite ironically, since what Spiegelman is emphasizing is how the past is the background for Vladek’s present weakness. The wheels spun, like his memory, but Vladek never moved.



The panel above (Spiegelman, *Maus* 14) illustrates an interesting containment of action. This frame demands what McCloud calls *closure*. It is the “phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (McCloud 63). This is an action necessary both in and between frames. It is necessary in the frame above, because it is picking the parts apart and then viewing them as whole, that will convey the importance. The verbal narrative alone is not nearly as interesting as what the visual narrative tells us. The frame shows Vladek cycling, with Artie in the background. However, it is the placement of Artie, the sizing, and the details that allows us to draw a more important conclusion. Visually, Vladek’s body dominates the picture, working as an analogue to how he has been a dominating factor in

Artie's life. In the top corner we see his number tattoo from Auschwitz. Just as Vladek is mentally scarred by his past, he is also physically scarred, a constant reminder every time he looks at his arm. Right beneath the tattoo, we find Artie. He is encircled and in a way trapped by his father's body of memories. This conclusion can only be drawn by first looking at the parts and then seeing them as a whole. Again, the comics medium allows for a moment to linger, the details to speak for themselves, which is harder to do with other graphical narratives, like film. This frame leads us onto Artie's role in relation to the Holocaust. As mentioned, the Holocaust hovers over them both, emphasized by Spiegelman's layering of meaning in the panel above. Vladek, closest to us, is also closest to the memory of the Holocaust. Artie, in the shadow of his father, is furthest from us and further away from the memories than his father. This panel can be read as an analogy for what Marianne Hirsch coins—post-memory; the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their generation (*Family Frames* 22).

3.3 Postmemory

While Vladek is representing deep memory, Artie's life is presented in parallel. The inclusion of Artie's story makes this novel something more than "simply" a traditional Holocaust narrative. By including Artie's perspective *Maus* becomes self-reflexive because it meta-comments on its own representation, as well as the "limits of representation" (Staub 35). According to James E. Young, *Maus* suggests itself as a model for "what I would like to call 'received history'—a narrative hybrid that interweaves both events of the Holocaust and the ways they are passed down to us" (Young 669). As Young argues, the generation after the Holocaust cannot remember the exact occurrence of the Holocaust, simply because they did not experience it. However, this does not mean that they are not influenced or shaped by the Holocaust. Their parents become a filter for their impression of the trauma. Even Spiegelman himself highlights this in *MetaMaus* and this was one of the reasons why he felt he had to travel to Auschwitz and see what was left.

Harvey Pekar does not accept Artie's voice in the story. He is negative to this parallel narrator because, he claims, it does not convey the story of survival, but rather "the obsession of the artistic temperament" (qtd. in Hatfield 141). Certainly, Artie's comments are at times concerned with the artistic side of the story, especially when discussing the animal metaphor, but throughout the story Artie's comments reveal another story of survival, as well as the

problems of understanding and presenting the unimaginable. Artie's interventions reveal far more than an eager artist; as Spiegelman says in his own words "*Maus* is not what happened in the past, but rather what the son understands of the father's story" (qtd. in Young 670). Artie's interventions demonstrate a problematic relationship between father and son, present and past, authenticity and authority. I will argue that Pekar has not understood the actual long term consequences and repercussions of the Holocaust and how Spiegelman ingeniously braids this into the story.

In the opening scenes of *Maus*, page 5-6, we find a young Artie back in Rego Park. This preface functions as an example of how a post-war childhood "is not protected from the history it has inherited." (Hirsch, *Postmemory* 30). Artie is crying as he approaches his father in the hope of getting comforted. Vladek sees that his son is crying, but before he asks him why he is crying, he demands that he should "hold this a minute while I saw". Not until the second frame does he ask Artie why he cries, and even then the question is followed up by the command "hold better on the wood". Already we notice a parent not too concerned with his child, too busy sawing to give Artie the consolation he needs. As Artie explains why he cries "my friends skated away w-without me", Vladek stops sawing. However, Vladek does not stop the sawing to condemn Artie's friend's behaviour, but rather to react to Artie's use of the word *friends*. "Friends? Your friends?...If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week... THEN you could see what it is, FRIENDS!...". Vladek's reaction is understandable. It is not that he does not wish to comfort his son, but rather that he is incapable of giving Artie what he needs. His actions are not meant to be harsh, but they reflect Vladek's view on reality. His experiences with war have become integrated in Vladek and changed his view on reality. In this example, perspective and time are used to properly depict the distance between father and son. As Artie holds the wood in the final panel, his father leans over him and we can see how his physical stature grows while Artie is diminished to a small creature in his father's shadow. Both Vladek and his speech bubble grow in size, dominating the scene, leaving us with the impression of how Artie's everyday life must be lived in the shadow of his father. Vladek's experiences in the past have made him unable to be the affectionate father Artie needs. Both the verbal narrative and the visual depiction demonstrate the uneven power balance between father and son. Artie not only learns that friends can let him down, but "also that his pains are unimportant and that he is insignificant in relation to Vladek and his story" (Bosmajian 11). It serves to show how the past has ruined the chance for a healthy father-son relationship in the present.

In her book, *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch coins the term post memory. She argues that the prefix *post* does not imply that we are no longer dealing with memory, but rather that postmemory is:

distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 22)

In other words, postmemory is different from deep memory as it does not have direct contact with the source, but is “delayed, indirect, secondary” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 13). While Artie does his best to try to figure out his father’s story, there is an “inevitable distance and lack of understanding” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 13). Hirsch’s points are very valid, as it is impossible to properly comprehend horrors that have not been experienced. However, this memory cleft goes both ways. Just as Artie can never properly understand Vladek, Vladek, as we saw in the prologue, can never properly understand his son. This is also obvious in their different reasons for keeping in contact as time moves on. While Vladek wishes to have his son near him and keep in contact talking casually on prices and Mala, Artie has another motivation for their communication. For Artie to be able to live his life, he must understand his past. The way to understand his past is to “confront the Holocaust and the ways in which it affected Vladek and Anja” (Witek 98). At times, this wish becomes so strong that it becomes uncomfortable to observe, as Artie’s need for explanation becomes almost explosive, screaming to his father: “TELL ME ABOUT AUSCHWITZ!” (Spiegelman, *Maus* 207). The memory of the Holocaust becomes a difficult subject for both father and son as it is both what holds them together and what tears them apart.

3.3.1 The guilt of postmemory

The opening page of the chapter “Auschwitz (time flies)” has been commented on by most *Maus* critics (Ewert, Chute, Hirsch, Young). While the first four pictures are small and relatively easy to decipher, the lowest frame is filled to the brim with metaphors and symbols. The frame below (Spiegelman, *Maus* 201) is much larger than the rest, covering half of the page. As indicated already, Bal argued that the amount of time given to an event is proportional to the importance of the event. Also, McCloud argued that in comics, space equals time. In other words, for us to notice an important event or sequence in *Maus*, we must look for large and repetitive frames. This makes the entire page incredibly important. Not

only does the image above cover half the page, but the four images leading up to it are part of the same sequence. With this narrative technique, Spiegelman asks the reader to stop, look, and decipher what we see. In other words, Spiegelman asks the reader to take the time to reach what McCloud named *closure*. The reader has to make sense of the different components in the picture, to be able to comprehend the whole.



The frame shows Artie inside at his drawing desk, contemplating the reception of the first part of *Maus*. Below his feet we find a massive pile of dead mice, with flies hovering around them. This panel fulfills Paul Klee's argument that "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it Makes the visible" (qtd. in McCloud 123). The panel melts together the past at his feet, the present in his being, and the future in his words. The past is both the dead mice on the floor and the watchtower outside his window. The present is Artie communicating directly to the reader and the future is his comments on the offers to turn the book into a TV-special or movie. The importance of this page is that Artie says he feels depressed while being surrounded by both death and success. Outside his window we can spot a watchtower which reminds us of the ones who died in the concentration camps. As it is right outside his window, it looks like he is watched by the past and must guard his step. Drawn above the pile of cadavers, Spiegelman lifts Artie up from the masses making a gap between the past and the present, while also visualizing how Artie has built his career **upon** (the tale of) other's suffering. Ironically, the chapter is called "time flies", when the panel and the book itself exemplifies how time does not fly, since after deep memory comes post memory.

The guilt and agony of being a survivor's child is a continuous theme in Spiegelman's work. Sometimes, like the example above, there is an obvious reference to Vladek's past. This is also very apparent in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" which will be dealt with later on. However, other times, the reader must search for clues not only *in* frames, but also between, through the gutters, to produce meaning.



The frames to the left (Spiegelman, *Maus* 234) are an example of the subtlety of the comics medium. As Artie and Françoise sit outside Vladek's home, they comment on how quiet it is and that "it's almost impossible to believe Auschwitz ever happened". However, in the midst of

their relaxed evening, something disturbs the silence. The annoying flies keep buzzing around them, pulling Artie out of his relaxed state. Here, Spiegelman again uses juxtaposition to produce a deeper message than what can be understood from text or image alone. The image shows us that Art sprays the flies, which then die as a result. The text tells us that he is annoyed with the bugs because they "are eating me alive". Between what we see and what we read, a hidden message of survivor's guilt and anxiety is hidden. According to McCloud "no other art form gives so much to its audience while asking so much from them as well" (92). This example testifies to that argument. The flies, which we saw earlier above the dead mice, represent the older generation. As Artie sprays the flies, they die. This becomes an analogue for the tragic gassing of prisoners during the Holocaust. The third frame therefore not only tells us how Artie feels eaten alive by the flies, but that he feels devoured by his father and his generation of victims. This one frame plays on the hybrid of text and image to shows us how Artie feels threatened and perhaps even irritated by his father's story and background. It shows us that he cannot simply escape from it and that it will continue to creep up on him until he learns to deal with it. Just as Artie cannot simply wave the flies away, the generation of postmemory cannot turn away from history.

The frames above make use of the graphic novel's specificity of juxtaposing text and image. It also makes use of its chain narrative, forcing us to look for closure. In addition, it proves that graphic novels not only produce meaning linearly, but that "every panel exists... in relation with each of the others" (Groensteen 146). It is the back and forth reading that reveals the depth of the four frames and makes it become an analogue for time in general. *Maus* portrays time as anything but chronological, reminding us of how thoroughly tied together our impression of the present and past are.

3.3.2 Postmemory as epigenetics

Through both *The Generation of Postmemory* and *Family Frames*, Hirsch argues that postmemory is imprinted so deeply in the survivor's children, that they seem to become memories on their own. She argues that even though the major trauma happened in their parent's generation, the after effects continue well into the next generation. She claims that this is the result of an "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (*Postmemory* 5). Postmemory, therefore, is not simply to live *after* memory, but rather that old memories become new memories, with new obstacles. However, Hirsch, Young, Chute, and many other critics tend to only focus on the environmental aspect of memory.

During the last few years, theories have been tested and evolved to explain the effect trauma transmission can have on future generations. Not being a counterpoint to psychoanalysis, but rather to complement it, epigenetics research shows how trauma can cause genetic changes that can explain the repercussions of memory. A group of researchers at the University of Zurich examined how mice (ironically) reacted to early stress and how this effected the next generation. They discovered that the mice that were exposed to stress developed depression-like behaviour, as well as their offspring (Franklin et al.). This part of the research supports Hirsch's argument that parents can inflict their stress and anxiety onto to their children. However, the research had an even more alarming conclusion; not only were the offspring inflicted by their parent's stress, but also the mice who were taken away from the stressed environment showed higher tendencies to PTSD than the reference group (Franklin et al.). In other words, epigenetics indicate that post-memory is not only the result of psychological influence from parents, but it changes the body, it changes the genes. This further strengthens what Spiegelman is demonstrating; the past is never really the past. It lives on in, and through, the body.

3.4 “Prisoner on the Hell Planet: a case story”

Perhaps the most interesting example of the past’s ability to penetrate the present and the graphic novel’s unique way of layering time, can be seen in “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” (PotHP). Originally, PotHP was printed in the underground comic book *Short order Comix 1* (Chute, “The Shadow of a Past Time” 207). However, it abruptly appears in *Maus* about half way through the novel. I use the expression abruptly because of three reasons. Firstly, the style of drawing is far from what the rest of *Maus* is, making us feel, as though we are reading a completely new and different type of story. Secondly, we are suddenly introduced to Artie’s inner feelings of guilt and sorrow, which are mostly reserved for part two of *Maus*. Thirdly, the story’s explosive sorrow and anger is in itself so dark that it almost overshadows the horribleness of Vladek’s descriptions.

On the page prior to PotHP, a calendar is repeated in five out of eight panels. This highlights how PotHP cuts away from the linear time (Chute, “The Shadow of a Past Time” 207). However, this is not the only thing that separates it from the rest of the story. PotHP becomes both an included and separate part of *Maus*. It is included because it is in *Maus*, but it is also separated from *Maus* because it was not written for *Maus*, but rather serves as the reminder of Spiegelman as a real life author and not only a comic avatar. PotHP is a four page comic on the chilling circumstances of Artie’s mother’s suicide in their family home in Queens, in 1968. It explains how she committed suicide and the guilt Artie feels towards this.

The story breaks with the narrative flow of the Holocaust story as it puts focus on Artie’s feelings towards his mother, rather than focusing on Vladek’s emotions and experiences with the Holocaust. I would argue, that like the rest of *Maus*, it tells the story of Artie’s survival. The background is no longer white, but pitch black, as it represents a dark chapter in Artie’s life. Spiegelman himself calls the black border around the page a “funeral border” (qtd. in Chute, “The Shadow of a Past Time” 207). As the story does not have page numbers, it breaks with the rest of *Maus*, making it stand out as a *timeless event*. This is a fitting phrase to use, because Anja’s suicide is very much a timeless event for both Artie and Vladek. None of them have really dealt with the past and therefore the event cannot be placed in the past. As mentioned, Vladek still sees Anja everywhere, resorting to burning her diaries in the hope of erasing the past. The consequence of Vladek burning the diaries is that Artie cannot get the information he needs to move on. This makes Anja’s suicide a very apparent incident of the present’s inability to let go of the past.

The style in PotHP is a heavy German expressionist style, with harsh, nightmarish lines and great pits of darkness. In fact, it is so visually dark, as well as being heavily loaded emotionally, that it almost looks like an inverted version of the rest of *Maus*. Like Harvey Pekar criticized *Maus* for being too obsessed with Artie as an artist, Eric Berlatsky understands PotHP as simply being “self-involved” (130). Criticizing PotHP for being self-involved implies that Artie has no right to be self-involved. This comes off as rather strange, since Artie is heavily impacted by his mother’s suicide and this is an extremely important factor of the post-Holocaust life to include. The story explains an incredibly dark period in Artie’s life, showing not only how Artie feels guilty of his mother’s suicide, but also allowing us to see a broader aspect of the true long-term consequences of the Holocaust. It shows how Anja never survived the past and it shows us how Artie feels trapped by his parent’s past. It layers time visually and verbally, ultimately becoming a strong testament to how the present never lets go of the past. Instead of condemning PotHP for being self-involved, we should look at why Spiegelman has chosen this angle and what the significance of this is.

By drawing PotHP in an expressionistic style, Spiegelman moves away from the rest of *Maus*. We are no longer in the world of the animal metaphor, but with humans. McCloud’s concept of universalism is no longer present and we are overwhelmed by the feeling of reading someone else’s private thoughts. The drawings of human faces bring the story back to a personal level, reminding us that this is a real life tragedy and not just an incident in a fable book.

PotHP becomes a leap from Vladek’s cold, calculating way of narrating his past. The mice are drawn plain and understated, confirming Vladek’s simple and unemotional tone (Witek 100), while Artie’s part is overloaded with shock and angst. This again shows us that what you wish to tell in a story is dependent on how you tell it. Reading PotHP is like drawing a veil aside and seeing the damaged child Artie truly is, forever living in the shadows of his parents.

Of all the frames presented in PotHP, one uses the comics medium to the fullest. This frame seems to sum up the entire story and perhaps even *Maus* itself. The frame in question is found below (Spiegelman, *Maus* 105).

As earlier mentioned, Bal claimed that the time given to an event signifies its importance. Also, According to McCloud, space is time in comics. Following these arguments, the frame presented should be of no real importance. It is small and found among



nine other equally sized frames on the same page. However, this example shows how the comics medium has the possibility of disclosing large amounts of information in very short sequences. The frame is, after all, a containment of action (Eisner 26). It compresses action and information into a tiny box, truly displaying how a picture is worth a thousand words.

The frame is accompanied by the text “...But, for the most part, I was left alone with my thoughts...” (Spiegelman, *Maus* 105). The illustrations therefore try to visualize Artie’s thoughts. It presents, with text and drawings, Artie’s way of rationalizing and summing up reasons for his mother’s suicide. At the bottom we find Artie and above him different potential causes for Anja’s suicide. This one, small frame represents a number of different tenses. Anja’s dead body represents the point of no return, the time of her death. The dead bodies beneath represent her trauma and the past time of the Holocaust. A young Artie and his mother represent his childhood. Finally, Artie is presented as supposedly the story’s present. However, the time portrayal is much more complex than this.

Artie might represent the present, but his striped pajamas strongly resemble the camp uniform worn by his father in Auschwitz. This makes Artie represent both present and past, finding himself in between times. In other words, a typical realization by a carrier of postmemory. Young Artie lying next to his mother, presumably reading a bedtime story, also wearing the striped pajamas, further emphasizes this. This displays how Artie is caught in between his present life and the life and experiences of his family. The prisoner uniform not only suggests that Artie has taken on his parents past, but also that he already as a child was carrying the burden of being a survivor’s son. Even as a small child next to his mother, where he is supposed to feel comforted and safe, he is already covered and almost decorated by the details of a past that is not his. He carries on the legacy of the Holocaust, keeping the memory of the Shoah alive. Now, just as the past has killed his mother, he too can sense the turbulence in his inner life.

By layering different times and reasons for Anja's suicide; the menopausal depression, Hitler, the swastika, the memories of Auschwitz, Spiegelman creates an intense and chaotic frame representing Artie's tense and chaotic mind. If this were done through a bigger panel, or frame, we would have been given more time to analyze it, more space to take the elements apart. By squeezing it all into such a small frame, we are invited into Artie's chaotic and struggling mind. The frame is simply packed full and there is no more room for anything else, just like there is no more room in Artie's mind. Like our eyes tire from looking at the frame, Artie's mind is tired from reviewing his mother's life. This panel proves why the form of comics is efficient in miming the ways of the mind. The linearity of a verbal novel cannot match comics' way of framing a moment, framing a sensation. A verbal novel has the possibility of creating chaos by refusing chronology, but because of the option of framing moments and relying on both text and image, comics can create chaos without making us confused.

Early on, Artie says to Francoise "I can't even make sense out of my relationship with my father... how am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz? Out of the Holocaust?" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 174). Artie will never understand his mother's suicide, just as he will never understand the Holocaust. According to Anderson, the past "can only be known belatedly, reconstructing in the present what had previously been thought of the past" (58). This is what Artie is trying to do, understanding and reconstructing the memories so that in the end, it will make sense. Three times in the book, two of these in PotHP, Artie tells us how his mother "left no note", referring to the lack of a suicide letter. He is searching for an explanation for the past, some sort of answer that will make it possible for him to move on and into the present.

Narrating both *Maus* and PotHP is Spiegelman's way of making sense of the past, making order in the disorder, trying to provide some surface structure that can give meaning. However, this tragedy can never be meaningful. There is no explanatory note from Anja, because there is no explanation for this past. Despite PotHP physical size in *Maus*, it is an explosive emotional part that explains the tension within Artie, between Artie and his parents, and between the present and the past. The whole of PotHP becomes a strong example of how postmemory can be as haunting on the next generation as deep memory is on the generation of eye-witnesses.

3.5 Concluding thoughts

This chapter has focused on explaining why and how the graphic novel is suitable for narrating memory. While the second chapter focused on how the present influences the past, this chapter focused on how the past influences the present. By layering temporalities, just as he layered narration, Spiegelman portrays a larger specter of memory than a first-person verbal narrative can achieve. This chapter has demonstrated how Spiegelman uses the form of the comic medium to visualize the connection of the mind between present and past. By including both Artie and Vladek, he has achieved a narration not only depicting one side of the story, but two very different sides. As we know, Artie is not a survivor from the physical Holocaust, but he is a survivor in his own way. Both father and son have had to deal with the psychological consequences and aftermath of the Holocaust.

The graphic novel's way of creating its own view on time, provides the reader with a narrative that does not rush, but leaves time to dwell on moments. We are not presented with the past and then the future, but rather a stacking, morphing, and collision of temporalities. This is much more suitable to explain human memory. It is hard to decide which thoughts were formed in the present and which are the result of the past, because our mind merges and morphs our understanding of time, just like the form of comics allows. The last example I want to look at highlights this argument.

"I'm tired from talking, Richieu" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 296) Vladek says, no longer talking to Artie, but his dead brother. Time has not only turned Richieu into a ghost, but Vladek's mind can no longer separate then and now, forcing Artie to be nothing more than a living memorial candle of his brother. As Spiegelman places his signature beneath his family's tomb, he demonstrates both how he is "Buried by his parents' history" (Chute, "The Shadow of a Past Time" 20) and also showing his willingness to carry on the legacy of his parents. The ending frames again exemplify how "the past is never dead, it is not even the past". The last page is not numerated, reminding us how history never ends and how the memory of *Maus* and the Holocaust will live on through the next generation and that of *Maus*' readers.



- art spiegelman - 1978-1991

4 Conclusion

Chapter two demonstrates how the present can control the images of the past. This is seen by Artie and Vladek's different approach to what and how the past is to be remembered. Spiegelman achieves this by using the graphic novel's ability to layer focalizers and narratives. Chapter three argues that even though the present has the power to redefine the past, the past has the ultimate control by being a prologue to the present. Spiegelman emphasizes this by layering temporality, visualizing how both Artie and Vladek are marked by the past.

Both chapters demonstrate how memory is a highly subjective matter, and that past and present are in a gliding transition depending on each other. It is the inclusion of both Artie and Vladek that allows us to see this, because they both represent different perspectives on how the past is to be defined and how the past defines the present. Through Spiegelman's effective use of the comics form, he demonstrates that what you tell depends on *how* you tell it.

As any great piece of literature *Maus* is not only important as a beautiful work, but also mirrors challenges in our society. The power struggle in defining the past is therefore not a unique problem found in *Maus*, but is a massive issue in our everyday life, whether it is on a personal level, or a political or collective level. Just as Vladek tries to suppress and control past elements, such as Anja's voice, so do nations and societies by disregarding certain parts of the past. When President Gerald R. Ford was to deliver a speech on the Vietnam War, he demanded that Americans should "look forward" by "stop dwelling in the past" (McMahon 164), as this could potentially be dangerous (McMahon 164). The Vietnam War was a heavily debated topic in the U.S., causing great divides in the society, as well as between the nation and its leaders. Therefore, Ford saw it best to simply forget the past and look forward. Ford's quote is a display of power, as he tries to control his present popularity by erasing the faults of the past. A nation, its leaders, or a single individual might try to both change the past and repress it, but it can never be deleted.

Spiegelman's use of two narrators creates a tension between a representative for the deep and for the post memory, for the past and the present, for the emotional versus factual authenticity. However, Artie and Vladek's different roles do not guarantee a flawless, legitimate memory. It gives us a realistic and necessary view of the powers involved in

shaping a memory, as well as the spectrum of interpretations. Even though Artie is a strong agent for factual authenticity, he also has an agenda with the story. An example of this was seen when he portrayed his lost brother, Richieu, as a spoiled brat at the table, despite the fact that his father has made no such statement. *Maus* is a very truthful narrative on memory because it openly allows us to see the subjectivity of memory both experienced and dealt with. The discrepancy between father and son demonstrates how a past is neither remembered nor felt in the same manner, but rather that it triggers a spectrum of different interpretations. It shows how an individual, or a society, will always see the past in light of the present, while also demonstrating memory's connection to time. The further we move away, the harder it is to not be influenced by present conditions. Again, these conditions will not be the same for all involved, as everyone has different experience with the past making us interpret the present differently.

Maus is an important contribution to collective memory. It is central as a reminder of how we must never forget, and never let this happen again. It also is a vital contribution to how memory operates in general. James E. Young argues for another reason why works like *Maus* are significant. He fears that if not presented correctly, authentic and personal memories can be lost. According to Young, the only way to keep these memories is to mix the personally felt, with the common, historical (667). As I have previously argued, this is very much what *Maus* does. The inclusion of two narrators makes it possible to bridge a story between both the factual and the emotional. *Maus* therefore becomes the type of story Young is searching for.

The graphic novel medium not only allows it to challenge traditional expectations and representations of time, narration, and focalization, but the medium itself has the possibility of reaching a large readership. Most likely, this could include people that otherwise might have never picked up a Holocaust narrative. *Maus* demonstrates what Chute argues is the gift of the graphic novel, its possibility to write a history that combines “formal experimentation with an appeal to mass readership” (Chute, “Comics as Literature” 459).

Chute, Hirsch, Young, and Hatfield all praise *Maus* for its unique ability to communicate memory, but Alison Landsberg takes it even further. In her book, *Prosthetic Memory* (2004), Landsberg argues that mass media, like the graphic novel, not only conveys memory to the reader, but has the possibility of transferring memory. She argues that mass media has qualities that take such a deep hold of our emotions, that we move beyond

sympathy, beyond empathy, and actually internalize the memory represented. She coins this act as *prosthetic memory*. Prosthetic meaning that it is not naturally a part of a person, but it can function as an optional, artificial part of a person. She hopes that stories like *Maus* not only invite to empathy, but can give ground for “unexpected alliances across chasms of difference” (Landsberg 16). She claims that the mass media gives the audience the possibility to replace oneself in history, moving across borders of time, culture, and biology (Landsberg 2). She argues that strong narratives can provide a felt experience that actually breaks down the difference between lived and observed experience.

Landsberg’s idea is bold, but it can be defended. McCloud argues that viewer-identification is a specialty of cartooning (42), and *Maus*’ simplistic drawings are much closer to the universalized faces, than the realistic. A graphic novel also demands reader involvement to properly decipher the juxtaposing texts and images. However, the involvement from the reader is still far away from Landsberg’s idea. We engage in the narrative, we are moved, but we do not *become* the narrative. If this was the case, Landsberg’s idea would also be quite dangerous, as there would be an obvious danger for exploiting the audience’s felt, or transferred, memory. *Maus*’ importance to collective memory is not because of Landsberg’s idea of *prosthetic* memory, but rather that it works to involve the reader in the difficult process of both remembering, and creating memory. This is crucial, because the graphic novel can, as I have demonstrated, display the challenges with not only remembering, but also creating memory. *Maus* does not use its platform to display a story the reader can personally identify with, but it enlightens the reader of the problems connected to the narration *of* memory, and the issue of living *with* memory.

With its mixture of emotional and factual authenticity, with its focus on both the challenges of defining the past, and living with the past, *Maus* becomes an original work of memory. At a time where there is growing recognition that elements like *history* and *truth* are contestable (Staub 41-42), there is a need for a story like *Maus*. *Maus* visually and verbally displays the difficult relationship between present and past. It exemplifies how humans do not have a fixed idea of the past, but rather that it is always contestable, always subjective. While there can be no doubt of the existence of the Holocaust, Holocaust deniers are still working to deny its very existence. They are trying to rewrite the past, in the terms of the present. At the same time, new research on the Holocaust, started in 2000, had estimated to find around 7000 Nazi camps, but their finds have already reached 42,500 different camps and ghettos (Lichtblau).

The research displayed figures and details that go far beyond the cruelty that had already been documented. This testifies that even though we would like to believe that the past is dead, it most certainly is not. After President Ronald Reagan had visited a military cemetery for Nazi soldiers in Germany, he defended himself by saying “I don’t think we ought to focus on the past. I want to focus on the future. I want to put that history behind me” (qtd. in Staub 42). However, if *Maus* has taught us anything, it is that the past is never dead. It’s not even the past.

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