

Graphic Representations of the Holocaust, between the 1.5 and the 2nd Generation: On

Helga Weissova's *Helga's Diary* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*

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Abstract: The importance and distinctiveness of the Holocaust as a 20th century genocide make its appearance currently reoccur in studies related to trauma, memory, intergenerational transmission, and postmemory. This article analyzes two works whose authors come from two distinct generations and from two very different cultural spaces. Helga Weiss, a Holocaust survivor from The Czech Republic, is a first-hand witness and a child during World War II, while Art Spiegelman, the renowned American cartoonist, tells and illustrates his father's survival story through a graphic novel, as a member of the 2nd generation.

This paper explores representations of the Holocaust in graphic form that display certain particularities belonging to their respective generation. For instance, Czech artist Helga Weiss's representation is based on her direct participation in the Nazi war ghettos and camps, while American cartoonist Art Spiegelman's work is based on reconstruction through profound research and imagination. At the same time, they both rely in different measures on visual representation: *Helga's Diary's* text is intertwined with the drawings she worked on during her stay in Theresienstadt Czech camp, while for *Maus* Art Spiegelman uses the medium of comics to represent Vladek Spiegelman's story as he is recalling it.

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In order to define the specifics of the 1.5 and the 2nd generations, I am indebted to Susan Rubin Suleiman's work on the 1.5 generation, particularly since the term "child survivor" represents quite a recent area of research in Holocaust studies, and to Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory. When exploring Weiss's work as a product of the 1.5 generation, I analyze aspects such as premature aging, early morality, their specific understanding of violence and historical events, and their effort to maintain a form of normality. In the case of the 2nd generation, I examine *Maus* from a postmemorial perspective, while I also look into its autobiographical aspect that deals with the author's own struggle to come to terms with the absence of a parent and with the inner conflict generated by questioning the adequacy of representing the Holocaust in a comic strip.

If definitions of the second generation can use as an anchor Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which applies to those who were born after World War II but bore the sense of Holocaust trauma via representations, in order to define survivors of the 1.5 generation, Susan Rubin Suleiman employed , the term "premature," as those who were children during the Holocaust were "too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have been there" (Suleiman, "The 1.5 Generation" 277). According to Suleiman, those who experienced Nazi persecution as children had not yet formed, by that moment, "a stable identity associated with adulthood" ("The 1.5 Generation" 277). That is why confronting the Holocaust was for them a different type of experience. Nevertheless, it can still be argued that the 1.5 generation is undertheorized in comparison to the second generation (Suleiman, *Crises of Memory* 179). The term "child survivor" started being widely used around the early 1980s and has received more attention over the past two decades (Suleiman, *Crises of Memory* 180). To look at the autobiographical works of child survivors often implies observing two things: for once, it is the account of what it felt like to be a child or adolescent and, secondly, it reflects what it means

to try to look retrospectively at that experience. As Suleiman suggests, these two aspects are undeniably in a significant dialogue with each other, since they bear “family resemblances” in tone, genre and emotional or narrative content (Suleiman, *Crises of Memory* 184).

Using the term “second generation” for the children of survivors qualifies the relationship in terms of continuity and therefore implies the transmission of trauma. The idea of continuity and transmission of trauma is emphasized by Elie Wiesel, who defines the second generation as those “who were born after their parents’ ‘reconciliation’ with life and perhaps also with God” (Wiesel qtd. in Berger vii). Wiesel proposes a similarity between the children of survivors and the biblical children of Job, suggesting the same urge to compensate in a way for their parents’ loss. He argues that, in the same way as Job, survivors of the Holocaust had lost everything. Similar to the children of Job, children of survivors “will never detach themselves from the tragedy that gave birth to them” (Wiesel qtd. in Berger viii). Moreover, Wiesel underscores the “specific and personal relationship” that children of survivors have to the Holocaust, but he also implies a clear distinction between the first- and second-generation witnesses. According to him, the survivors “had problems with knowledge,” while their children “have to face problems of the imagination” (Wiesel qtd. in Berger 18). The conflict between knowledge and imagination thus defines the relationship between the generations.

Another supporter of the idea of continuity, Alan Berger presents the second generation’s connection with the Holocaust as a “personal relationship” and an “inheritance.” Inheriting the Holocaust is the special situation in which the second generation finds itself. Even more, with this inheritance follows the responsibility of “providing a voice for their survivor parents” (Berger 3). According to Nina Fischer, who analyzes the memory work of children of Holocaust survivors, this voice shaped in literary form by the second generation is the only way of engaging with the

remnants of a family's past. Even more, through memory work, children of survivors attempt to recover a "sense of origin through memory" (Fischer 3) and to define their place in the chain of generations, building therefore their own sense of identity and continuity. Berger also comments on the determination of the second generation to "inform the world," a dedication similar to that of survivors. Furthermore, due to the "heightened sensitivity to suffering," he argues that many children of survivors enter helping professions, such as medicine, psychiatry, psychology, social work, and teaching (Berger 16).

Morality and Premature Aging for the 1.5 Generation

Defining the features of the 1.5 generation can sometimes be a difficult task, since it has to explore the moral universe of a child placed inside the concentrationary universe. Scholarly studies reveal a concern related to "the child's moral center" (Motola), which can suffer serious shifts as the child engages in "lies and deception in order to survive." As Gabriel Motola suggests, the children's memory is "morally-charged in a different way from either their mothers or their fathers." Growing up against the background of the Holocaust can trigger in a child the idea that this universe and everything related to it represents normality, and therefore the definition of what would be moral in such conditions is very fragile.

When dealing with issues of morality related to the 1.5 generation, the situation is open to interpretation and leans towards setting the children category aside. In his works, Primo Levi describes the "moral and ethical ambiguity" experienced by the prisoners of Auschwitz but he doesn't blame those who chose life, by suggesting a "suspension of moral judgment" in the midst of adversity (Levi qtd. in Motola). When it comes to child victims, their morality is either in the process of being formed when the war starts, as in the case of Norman Manea, or they already have

a set of traditional moral values, such as Anne Frank. In the case of those still too young to have a defined set of moral values, Motola suggests that what they were exposed to appeared as normal, which in turn distorted their moral compass (10).

A form of trauma that was inherent to the members of the 1.5 generation was their premature aging. For instance, Weiss's age through the years of trauma acts as a sort of variable, from when she misrepresents her age when she arrives in Auschwitz in order to be considered old enough to work and therefore to remain with her mother. In the third chapter, that depicts their arrival in Auschwitz, Weiss describes her inner conflict as they are waiting for the selection that would decide their fate: "Maybe they'll ask me how old I am. Should I tell the truth? Fifteen; no, that's too little – they'd send me left and separate me from Mom. I'd better say I'm older, maybe eighteen. Do I look it? Sure, maybe they'll believe me" (*Helga's Diary*). As it turns out later, Weiss has to bear more struggles due to her fabricated age, and subsequently endure more labor and less food than children of her age: "Once in my life I lied and all I've had from it are disadvantages. Of course it could also have turned out that, if I'd told the truth, they'd have split up me and Mom" (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*).

There is a sense of maturity in the way she grasps the dehumanizing effects of the war on those who "were once people," leaving behind "phantoms, bodies, skeletons without souls" (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). The lucidity of her remarks illustrates a way in which premature aging affects the 1.5 generation. She associates Mauthausen, the last concentration camp that they are sent to, with a final stop that prompts her to look upon her life retrospectively and to regret not being able to materialize the plans that she had made for her future life. Through her words transpires the desire to have experienced more of life than she managed to: "I never knew how

much I loved this world. How much of it have I experienced? Fifteen years; of those, three and a half in the camp” (Weiss, *Helga’s Diary*).

In Terezín, the idea of extermination camps had not circulated before. As Weiss states, people were not aware that places like Auschwitz really existed. Facing reality when they were sent on a transport to the East was brutal: “We arrived and saw smoking chimneys—we thought it was a factory” (Weiss, “My diary of a Nazi death camp childhood”). Her reaction in the diary when their transport arrives at Auschwitz shows an honest shock: “I can see people, but what are they wearing? It looks like pajamas, and they’ve all got the same ones. My God, those are prisoners’ clothes! Where have they taken us?! This is a concentration camp!” (Weiss, *Helga’s Diary*). What her tone suggests is that a sense of prolonged disbelief about the harsh realities of the camps seems to represent another specific trait of the 1.5 generation during the war.

Postmemory and the 2nd Generation

According to Marianne Hirsch, herself the daughter of survivors, the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first is reflected through postmemory, a particular form of memory which is mediated and, as Hirsch argues, that “consists not of events but of representations” (“Surviving Images” 8) and is usually accompanied by a compulsive and traumatic form of repetition which “connects the second generation to the first, producing rather than screening the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly” (“Surviving Images” 8). In some cases of children of survivors, these narratives that they grow up with are “so powerful, so monumental,” that they become memories in their own right. The “postmemorial generation” uses the well-known images of the Holocaust as a “useful vehicle of working through a traumatic past” and, when Hirsch refers to images she specifically means photography as a “privileged medium of

postmemory” (“Surviving Images” 9). Hirsch argues that it is a special feature of the subsequent generations to witness and work through the trauma that has been transmitted through the narratives, actions, and symptoms of the previous generation. For some of those belonging to the second generation, iconic images of the Holocaust become part of their own consciousness and, furthermore, they can only imagine their parents by means of integrating them inside those images.

Being the child of a survivor can also imply “surviving” a parent who lived through the Holocaust, as is the case of Art Spiegelman and his relationship with his own father, Vladek. Owing to their Holocaust experience, those who lived had, in some way, “flawed parenting skills” (Berger 2) which made their children feel responsible of “parenting their parents (Berger 3).” This process also implied providing a voice for their parents and a “compulsive need” to learn about the Holocaust (Berger 3). Their suffering is also rooted in the fact that the daughters and sons of the survivors are frequently “replacement” children, after their siblings had been murdered in the Holocaust.

In the case of the second generation, their worldview and identity can be easily affected, as Berger argues, by the postwar home atmosphere that surrounds them. Their response and testimony can vary according to the type of “survivor household” in which they were raised. According to clinical psychologist Yael Danieli, there are four major types of survivor families: “victim families; fighter families; numb families; and families of those who made it” (Danieli qtd. in Berger 14). In case of the victim and numb families, the children may be exposed less to the details of their parents’ Holocaust experience, whereas children who belong to fighter families can have access to far more detailed accounts of what happened. Nevertheless, the stories of the children themselves are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, as Hirsch argues. As

Maus shows, having a parent who survived the Holocaust can inspire guilt and a sense of underachievement to the child.

Visual Representation in *Helga's Diary*

During their almost three years internment in Terezín, Weiss recorded the camp conditions both in a visual manner, through drawings and paintings, and in written form, in her journal entries. The last entry in her journal while in Terezín dates from the 3rd of October 1944, the day when Weiss and her mother found out that they would be sent on a transport to an imprecise location in the East, an “Osttransport.” The events that transpired after being deported from Terezín to Auschwitz, Freiberg and Mauthausen were added to the journal retrospectively, after Weiss’s return to Prague at the end of the war, in 1945-46. Her journal ends with the entry of 29th of May 1945, the day Weiss and her mother returned from Mauthausen back home.

In 1961, a shortened version of the diary was included in the book *Deníky dětí (Children's Diaries)*, published by Naše Vojsko and later in 1965 in the book *Terezín*, published by the Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands. In 1998, the drawings and paintings that Weiss had made during her time in Terezín were published in the book *Draw What You See*, but the full version of the diary appeared much later, in 2013. Weiss confessed that the post-war atmosphere was not an appropriate time to reiterate what had happened and that the survival and return to Prague of the Jews that had been deported to Terezín was something unexpected for the Czechs (Weiss qtd. in Bermel). The published version of the book is the postwar version, that Weiss edited stylistically or by excising parts of the text that she deemed unnecessary. For this article, I am using the first American edition of the book (2013), translated from Czech by Neil Bermel and with an introduction by Francine Prose.

Although while being transported to concentration camps like Auschwitz, Freiberg and Mauthausen writing was not possible, Weiss did not abandon the idea of keeping a diary, whilst her real, physical diary had been hidden inside a brick wall in Terezín. Instead, she recorded everything that happened after she and her mother, Irena, the only ones left of her family, moved on and returned to Prague, keeping the present tense, even though it was written afterwards. As Weiss herself puts it, “It’s written in the present tense because I was still caught up in the experience” (Weiss, “My diary of a Nazi death camp childhood”).

According to the author, keeping a diary was an activity that many of the other occupants of Terezín engaged in. Her case was not unique: she revealed that even those who hadn’t particularly enjoyed the activity before started doing it: “everybody needed to express something, to say or to keep himself a human being” (Weiss, *Helga’s Diary*). When this form of expression emerges from a concentrationary universe, it can be interpreted as a collective effort of the victims to memorialize the event in their writing. Nevertheless, the act of writing itself during the Holocaust years was an unusual and even dangerous activity. When she discusses the origins of her diary, Helga confesses that what led her to start writing were the events happening in Terezín, which “were such that I started to write them down; I thought it would be important for them to be recorded” (Weiss, “Interview with Helga Weiss”). Moreover, she views the purpose of the diary as a “coming to terms” with the situation (“Interview with Helga Weiss”). Weiss later acknowledges that she had quite a good understanding of contemporary political events considering that she was just a child at that time, before their deportation to Terezín in 1941: “Of course, I always followed the political situation. My father was quite active in politics, so people we knew used to meet at our house and debates went on—and I listened to all of it” (“Interview with Helga Weiss”). For a child of her age, she had a particularly advanced awareness of the historical events.

Weiss's writing and drawings also speak for the thriving cultural life that developed inside the Terezín ghetto. Despite its horrors, or even determined by them, many occupants engaged in a form of artistic activity, whether it meant keeping diaries, playing instruments that they had smuggled inside or drawing. As Weiss states when interviewed, "the culture was the only thing left to us," while also attributing all their creative pursuits to their attempt of "staying human beings." In this respect, in her diary Weiss mentions how "Literary recitals, concerts, plays and lectures were held in the dormitories, lofts, and courtyards. They were a source of hope and strength, and people, including children, took a great interest in them" (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). All the cultural manifestations that the inmates pursued can be considered within the framework of "spiritual resistance," a widespread notion that refers to the "social and cultural initiatives" that took place as an active form of redemption (Gilbert 447). Although spiritual resistance is often associated with music and *Helga's Diary* renders a few festive moments that involved singing, it also includes religious activities, diary writing, and education (Gilbert 447).

Weiss minutely described the artistic events that the prisoners organized, such as a show that they had prepared for Christmas Eve, as a particular event, creating a fairytale-like image in order to express their shared longing for home: "For a while we forgot completely... We're free, far beyond the ramparts and gates of the ghetto that hide so much suffering and woe... and in the glow of the candles burning they see that beautiful, unforgettable image come alive before them... Home" (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). The preparations for and celebration of Christmas appear as a signpost in her diary, all along the years spent in Terezín. As Weiss describes the preparations that Czech Jews were making for the transports, she recalls the distinct and pleasant sensation of passing by a Jewish home, as "people are baking crackers, biscuits, Christmas cake" (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). The Christmas cake is later mentioned three more times and it always implies a

comforting presence during the days of waiting at the Trade Fair Palace in Prague or after their arrival in Terezín.

The fact that, although being Jewish, they celebrated Christmas along Hanukkah shows that, prior to the war, they were assimilated in the main Catholic culture. It was not uncommon for Jews and their families to celebrate Christian festivals. During the first winter spent in Terezín, the celebration of Christmas in one of the rooms of the barracks is associated with the feeling of being back home and with a sense of freedom (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). One year after their arrival at Terezín, Weiss depicted in her journal their decision to celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas, since some of the girls that she mentioned came from mixed families (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). Weiss described how the preparations for the festive meal had to start two weeks before the event itself. Their third Hanukkah celebration was also preceded by many preparations that involved meticulous cleaning, preparing a cake from scraps and gifts. Weiss's written description is associated with the drawing *Hanukkah in the Loft*, an etching that suggested the great number of participants, the lighting of the menorah and how the *Heimleiter*, a Czech gendarme, , who was part of Jewish self-governing apparatus of Terezín, prayed in the original spirit of the Hanukkah.

In the first part of Weiss's journal, as the author describes the domestic atmosphere of her household and how they cope with the growing restrictions of the Nazi regime, there is nothing to indicate that they as a family are observant Jews. However, a strong sense of identification with Jewishness develops within her community of Jewish friends after they are compelled to sew and wear on their coats a bright yellow Star of David with the word *JUDE* on it, that make them easily recognizable on the streets, and more vulnerable (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). Soon enough, Weiss describes how they became accustomed to the star and, besides, how wearing it became an active form of protest and contestation of the German authority: "Let the Germans see that we're not

bothered. We deliberately put on cheerful faces and make ourselves laugh. Deliberately, to make them angry” (Weiss, *Helga’s Diary*).

In her journal Weiss recalls how one of the first drawings that she made in Terezín, of two children building a snowman, became the last childish drawing that she would ever make after arriving in the camp (Weiss, *Helga’s Diary*). “Draw what you see” – these crucial words spoken by her father became an impulse for her to document their new life in Terezín. Indeed, her following drawings depict bleak scenes, such as lines for food, a washroom scene, children ill with tuberculosis or bread transported in a funeral cart. As such, they become a precious record of the troubles encountered by Jews in Terezín as they were occurring.

From about one hundred drawings made in Terezín, only some of them are present in her published journal. Fifteen drawings are inserted among the entries, while sixteen others are added at the end of the diary. The drawings that are included in the diary proper complement what she speaks about in the entries in which they appear and add act as evidence to support Weiss’s words. The first illustration, *List of Possessions*, although created two years after the event itself, depicts the preparations her parents were making before the deportation, so Weiss painted it while already being in Terezín for two years. The following drawings all consist of key moments of their internment, from the *Arrival in Terezín*, showing people of old age and families with children carrying their luggage as they were entering the camp, to the last sketch, *Counting Legs*, that describes how the counting of the prisoners took place in Auschwitz while also portraying the Jews as a mass of bony legs hanging from their bunks.

In some of her illustrations, Weiss shows a great level of attention to detail, as in *The Dormitory in the Barracks*, that displays all the things necessary for living: from mattresses to shoes, pots, clothes hung to dry and baby bottles, as though she was indexing all the items around

her. Two other drawings depict episodes of cultural life taking place in Terezín in spite of the terrible living conditions, such as *Opera in the Loft* or *Hanukkah in the Loft*, which both show the cramped loft space of the building filled with emotion. There are drawings which depict more dramatic moments and have a sketchy quality: *Summons to Join a Transport* is a bleak representation of a guard handing a piece of paper to a prisoner, during the night, confirming that he would be sent on a transport. Another sketchy and powerful drawing is *The Departure of a Transport*, illustrating how the Ghetto guards were separating those who were leaving from their families, who were trying to reach them. Attention is also paid to the preparations that were made for the visit of the Red Cross Committee, in drawings such as *Cutting Down Bunks* or *The Arrival of the International Red Cross Committee*, that render the turmoil created by the cleaning and brightening up of the town in order to make everything appear in order.

Among the drawings added at the end of the diary, there are many that depict various situations involving children. They either render them under the protection and in close contact with a parent that holds them or helps them wash, or engaged in activities typical for their age, such as going to study groups (in the drawing titled *Children Go to Lessons*) or taking part in the Christmas festivity or other cultural events, as depicted in *Concert in Dormitory*. As these illustrations suggest, there is a sense of community when it comes to children. Weiss's own attitude towards life, the affection for her friends and the close relationship with her parents can be perceived in the way she illustrated children. When in 1943 children from Poland (who were being sent to Auschwitz) arrive in Terezín in a deplorable condition, she recognizes a more brutal form of suffering, unknown to her at that time, that she depicts in her journal.

There are four idyllic illustrations included at the end of her diary that depart from the reality of the camp conditions. The first one is the *Snowman* illustration, from 1941. Three more

optimist drawings follow in 1943: *For Her Fourteenth Birthday* represents a present for Weiss's friend, Francka, marking the evolution of their friendship from the maternity in which they were both born in 1929 to an imaginary adult age in 1957 when they would be walking along with their infants. The image looks embellished, colorful and festive, representing another mark of Weiss's endurance and resilience through the fact that she was able to picture a positive outcome and the end of the war. The third idyllic drawing, *Birthday Wish I*, is a depiction of two children carrying a huge birthday cake to Terezín, but also a commentary on the fact that everything in the camp, including bread, was transported in old hearses. It is followed by *Birthday Wish II*, a portrait of a young girl, fully equipped with all she needed to leave Terezín and head back to Prague, expressing Weiss's own desire to do so.

The Nazis rarely appear in Weiss's drawings. One such drawing is *Counting Legs*, which illustrates two German wardens seen from the back, in the process of counting the prisoners sitting on their bunk beds, and it emphasizes both the banderoles they are wearing as block wardens, as well as their unusual garments, consisting of a "satin bathrobe and a nightshirt" (Weiss, *Helga's Diary*). Another appearance of a German officer is the one leading the sickly-looking Polish children through Terezín in *The Transport of Polish Children*, represented as a strict-looking man in a Nazi uniform leading a convoy of children.

The uniqueness of her drawings emerges from the way they depict small, apparently unimportant details. There is no useless stylization or exaggeration. Just like her writing, they are truthful and straightforward. Weiss's affinity for visual expression through drawing precedes the beginning of the war. When the time comes for her and her family to leave to Terezín, she packs along the necessary things: diary, crayons, watercolors and a sketch pad (Weiss, *Helga's Diary* at that stage probably being unaware of what she would document the following years. Among her

first drawings there is one that served like an embellishment she adds on the envelope of a letter for her grandmother from the Trade Fair in Prague, the gathering place of the Czech Jews before being sent to Terezín. But the primary value of her drawings remains the documentary one. Just like her diary, the author wants her drawings to serve as a testimony for the times she lived and as “a cohesive whole” (Weiss, “Interview with Helga Weiss”). Moreover, Weiss invests all her artistic oeuvre with the idea that it would depict her life, confessing that “in it you can read everything about me” (“Interview with Helga Weiss”).

Visual Representation in *Maus*

Through *Maus*, Spiegelman changed way that the medium of comics was perceived by the public. For many who had been in doubt, it proved that comics “could be a serious art form” (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 74). Spiegelman’s initial work of drawing his father’s story of survival in the camps was the three-page “Maus” or *The First Maus*, published in 1972, which includes stylistic decisions that he later adapted in *Maus*, while the story is based on the same retelling of his father’s war narratives. The appearance of the letters that spell MAUS is the same that he uses later in his two-volume work, letters that seem to be bleeding onto the page, over the image of male prisoners in front of barbed wire that stare at the viewer with huge eyes and long faces. This panel represents a remediation of a photograph taken by Margaret Bourke-White in 1945 of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald. An arrow pointing to one of the prisoners suggests it is “Poppa,” Spiegelman’s way of imagining his father there, by placing him almost randomly as one of the prisoners. This aspect can prove how, besides the direct transmission of his father’s past, his own process of reconstructing the past, as a member of the second generation, is mediated by public, well-known images that are then adopted in the family narrative.

Maus displays an intention to create a truthful representation of Vladek's words rather than a myth about the Holocaust. The author had to retrace the area his parents had been, to visit Poland and Germany and the sites of their lived traumatic episodes. The drawings of survivors, who had the clear intention to bear witness, were also a valuable resource. The tone that the author had in *Maus* was not directly related to the fact that the text was about the Holocaust (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 75), but mostly to his own struggle of dealing with his family's past.

In terms of aspect, there are many stylistic devices that give *Maus* the appearance of a diary or manuscript, such as the one-to-one ratio of the images or using the actual handwriting of the author and a straightforward manner of drawing that eliminated unnecessary detail, but that also echoed "the urgent look and practice of drawings of witness made in the Nazi camps" (Spiegelman qtd. in *Disaster Drawn* 177). For Spiegelman it was a mark of truthfulness to leave no room "for flourish and decoration" and to make sure that "the essentials in the drawing stay clear" (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 176), but the visual imagery is very much thought through. Panel sizes, for instance, have their own symbolic value: in the first volume, the largest image until the end is the one of his parents seeing the swastika for the first time, and it rhymes visually with the last page of the book a flashback to the gates of Auschwitz.

In order to understand why Spiegelman arrived at the visual choice of anthropomorphized animal masks that made "Nazis snarling cats, Jews forlorn mice, and Poles stupid pigs" (Doherty 70), a study into the visual stereotypes of the Third Reich can provide some answers. According to Doherty, the Nazi propaganda encouraged the anti-Semitic representation of Jews as "hook-nosed, beady-eyed *Untermenschen*, creatures whose ferret faces and rodent snouts marked them as human vermin" (74). Therefore, *Maus* can be considered a "graphic reaction to the aesthetics of Nazism" (Doherty 70). In fact, Spiegelman himself declared that *Maus* "was made in

collaboration with Hitler” to explain why he adopted the same visual stereotypes (Doherty 74). But his unique contribution derives from the fact that he took the Nazi visual imagery and reversed it by humanizing the rats, “investing them with personhood,” giving them back their dignity and integrity (Doherty 74). Each one has its own particular features that distinguishes him from the rest, they “affirm their own humanity” (Doherty 74) since, as it was mentioned earlier, they are anthropomorphized.

The animal mask choice could be an indicator of the fact that for the 2nd generation, the representation of the Holocaust is based to a great extent on the work of imagination. In Spiegelman’s case, the animal mask represented a choice that allowed him to approach otherwise unspeakable things in the logic of violence (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 127). Also, by using different animals for different ethnic and national identities, he created a scale of symbols with animals clearly representing victims, oppressors or outsiders of the food chain. Therefore, he was suggesting through this visual representation the power structures existing during the war, without figuratively depicting the Jews or the Nazis. Also, Spiegelman did not intend to create a representation of the Holocaust that would insist on the primacy of Jewish suffering over other forms of suffering and that would sentimentalize trauma (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 127).

The animal masks are considered by their creator as a mechanism of approaching otherwise unspeakable things, while they also express the process of dehumanization that was at the heart of the killing process during the Holocaust. They support Spiegelman’s idea of the essence of drawing rather than a realistic depiction of horrors. When discussing the imagery of Jews as vermin, Spiegelman claims that, before starting research on this topic, it was not clear to him that this imagery was built into the Nazi project itself (*MetaMaus* 113).

The fact that the Nazis are depicted as cats, enforcing the metaphor of cats and mice, was not meant to work as “an endorsement of Nazi ideology or as an implicit plea for sympathy,” but Spiegelman came to realize that this association could work as a symbol of oppression (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 118). The choice of pigs for the Poles caused a great deal of negative reactions for the Polish readers that Spiegelman connects to the problematic assimilation of their past and how “the tragic fate of Poles under the Nazis has led to a kind of competition of suffering” (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 124). This representation suggests an animal outside the cat-mouse food chain, who is there as a witness of a genocide that is taking place in their space. Their depiction as pigs could also refer to Hitler’s plan for the Slavic races, not to be exterminated like the Jews, but rather worked to death (Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* 121).

Gender and Sexuality

Another dimension that I consider important when discussing both these works is gender and how it contributed to survival during the Holocaust through the development of communities. Myrna Goldenberg argues that women “faced a double jeopardy” during the Holocaust: “first, they were targeted for death because they were Jews; second, they suffered, and those who survived often attribute their survival in large part to behaviors they learned, as women” (397). Motola also argues that “women seem not to be similarly affected by their incarceration.” All in all, we can remark a difference in the way men and women endured and remembered their suffering (Motola). This difference can be attributed, as Motola suggests, to the fact that women “were more nurturing,” being able to comfort each other, to organize in groups of mutual help, to share their food, to listen.

While in Auschwitz, Weiss observes the stable presence of the male gaze upon the female prisoners including herself, while they were allowed to take brief, cold showers. This was “the strict gaze of the youngest SS men” who enjoyed participating in those moments of nakedness and vulnerability, as Weiss later remarked, although she didn’t appear to be aware of the sexual implications of their participation (Weiss, *Helga’s Diary*).

According to Hirsch, who was also interested in discussing gender issues in *Maus*, the work was structured as a “transaction between men who were mourning the wife and mother” (*The Generation of Postmemory* 10). The absence of Anja’s voice is something very pronounced in *Maus*. Her voice can no longer be heard unless it is filtered by Vladek’s memory. With her diaries no longer existing, her memory of the Holocaust is lost. There are many occasions in which Art insists to get access to his mother’s diaries in *Maus I*, to reach a fuller understanding of the way in which she lived through the events, but Vladek keeps avoiding the moment to admit destroying them and the tension is constantly built up with Spiegelman’s insistences. The way in which Vladek had destroyed them was through burning, which might be a symbolical instance of portraying him as a perpetrator himself. It is therefore not surprising that Spiegelman calls his father a murderer in the ending panel of *Maus I*, clearly identifying his survivor father with an aggressor.

Conclusion

If Weiss’s primary concern was to reveal an authentic testimony of what she lived through, she did so by documenting her stories as they were unfolding. The retrospective interventions did not bring major changes and her representation remained as it was meant to be, a child’s

perspective. In the case of *Maus*, the authenticity resides in the faithful observation of what living and being parented by a survivor means. The trauma, in this case, is not only felt by Vladek, as a survivor, but also by his son. At the same time, the attitude towards survival in Weiss's journal reveals a general trait of the 1.5 generation, which is endurance and constant hope. On the other hand, *Maus* represents an effort made by a member of the second generation to put together in a coherent way several raw episodes of one of his parent's traumatic memory, in order both to preserve and understand them. The use of comics stems from Spiegelman's choice to create a narrative that is as much about the past as it is about the present, and how they intertwine. As memory works related to the Holocaust, they both convey expressions of trauma through the representation of the event. Filtered through their authors' own perspective and background, the two representations offer an insight on the specifics of two distinct generations, as well as an authentic testimony that can help shape our understanding of the Holocaust.

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