(Re)Building, (Re)Creating and (Re)Imagining: Postmemory Representations of Family Through the Eyes of Rafael Goldchain and Art Spiegelman

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Abstract: Survivors of a trauma must deal with the life-long effects that result from their experiences. Depression, fear and a sense of isolation from society are only a few of the associated long-term effects of trauma. These traumatic repercussions are often passed down to their immediate family. These second and third generations must then live under the shadow of a trauma to which they were temporally displaced, but must cope with nonetheless. This paper deals with the concept of postmemory as it affects second generation Shoah, or Holocaust, survivors Art Spiegelman and Rafael Goldchain. Through an analysis of Spiegelman's *Maus* and Goldchain's *I Am My Family*, we can see not only how both artists work through their experience of postmemory via creative means, but how their use of the Verfremdungseffekt, a theory developed by Bertolt Brecht as a means of creating emotional distance, allows their pictorial representations of the Shoah to become bearable to a modern audience.

Keywords: postmemory; Verfremdungseffekt; Rafael Goldchain; Art Spiegelman; Shoah; visual arts; Bertolt Brecht

Introduction

Victims of trauma often seek an outlet through which they can relieve, albeit temporarily, their sufferings. They need a way to cope with the pain before it utterly consumes them. There are a plethora of avenues available to navigate through these experiences and facilitate healing: writing, painting, music, or simply talking about one's experience to those with an available ear. Whether the memories of these events are communicated through a conversation between survivor and relative, or through seemingly random references or allusions to the traumatic event, it is perhaps unavoidable that these traumas are passed down from the victims to their relatives. Trauma, according to Caruth (1991, p. 181), is "an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events" in

which the after-effects are often delayed and reoccurring." This reoccurrence of trauma may also be transferred to the families of the survivor. In terms of postmemory of the Shoah, which is commonly referred to as the Holocaust, this delayed response may come generations after, manifesting itself through a temporal ripple effect. Though it is a temporally displaced trauma, its repercussions can still be strongly traumatic for the second and third generations. This link to past trauma results in the experience of postmemory, a theoretical concept which describes the attempts of the second and third generation to deal with a past to which they are temporally displaced, but bound to by ancestral ties to experience its consequences (Hirsch, 1997).

Rafael Goldchain's *I Am My Family* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus I & II* are works that address the difficult concept of postmemory. Both ancestrally Jewish, the artists must deal with the reverberations of the Shoah as echoes of their lost families that haunt them from the void of memory. Both Spiegelman and Goldchain have embarked on the Sisyphean task of recreating a past that once was. Despite efforts to create an accurate representation of the past, no facsimile can be created that accurately describes the experience of Shoah survivors. The artists' inability to create an accurate representation is what defines the concept of postmemory, the appropriation of a memory which is simultaneously both foreign to them, yet inherently belongs to them. The works of these artists provide an example of how postmemory affects the lives of those who were born in the post-Shoah era, where the memories of the Shoah are inherited by the next generation.

This paper applies two theoretical concepts in its analysis of Rafael Goldchain's series of portraits, *I Am My Family,* and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel series, *Maus*. The first theory being applied to their work is the concept of postmemory. Relying on Marianne Hirsch's definition of the term, this paper explores how postmemory affects the lives of the second and third generation. A detailed description of the term is followed by an in-depth analysis of how it applies to each artist's work. In the subsequent section, Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is analyzed and applied to postmemory narratives. This theory is utilized in order to demonstrate how both Goldchain and Spiegelman produce works that lessen empathy, yet do not prevent it entirely. The slight decrease in emotion felt by the audience or reader of these works allows for a clearer understanding of the material presented.

The artists Rafael Goldchain and Art Spiegelman are both second generation European Jews. Rafael Goldchain is a professional photographer whose body of work, *I Am My Family*, consists of "self-portraits" captured in just under a decade-long process, spanning from 1999 to 2007 (Alterman, 2008). These "self-portraits" are recreations of old family photographs, both real and fictionalized, with Goldchain himself as the "model." Goldchain believes that his post-memory body of work, made to fill the missing gaps of his personal history, "[creates] the allusion of wholeness" which "highlights the losses and holes in remembered history" (Silverstein, 2009, p. 38). Art Spiegelman, a well-known graphic artist, produced his seminal work, *Maus*, after attempting to produce a three page comic of the same title in 1972 (Spiegelman, 2011). This comic, an overview of his family's history, is described by Spiegelman as being the manifestation of "those free-floating shards of anecdote [he'd] picked up" from his parents throughout his lifetime (p. 22). These anecdotes lacked a much-needed context, igniting within Spiegelman a drive to continue drawing from his family's experience during the Shoah (Spiegelman, 2011).

Rather than chronicling the lives of their families through the sole medium of words, both artists use a more visual approach, utilizing visual means in an attempt to retell the stories of their disconnected family ties. The visual portrayal of their postmemory narratives is significant, as photographs and visual imagery "function differently than the written documents on which historians traditionally rely" (Farmer, 2010, p. 115). These visual renderings provide their audiences with an understanding of the history of the Shoah. Through glimpses of the past, the overwhelming grief that may be elicited through a fully-written description of the event is not appropriated by the audience.

The viewers of Goldchain's portraits and readers of Spiegelman's graphic novels are able to view these works with an analytical eye, engaging in a discourse that differs from other Shoah narratives. Spiegelman and Goldchain thus "break through the framework" of traditional Shoah narratives (Hirsch, 1997, p. 29). Their bodies of work stand in contrast to other Shoah narratives, as they choose to depict the Shoah visually; additionally, their visual depictions are not photos contemporaneous to the Shoah, but modern-day interpretations of the past. According to Hirsch, "Breaking through the framework is a form of dissonance: visual and verbal images are used to describe an incongruity necessary to any writing or teaching about the [Shoah]" (p. 31). The dissonance these two bodies of work produce is seen in the

conflict arising between their chosen forms of expression and that of traditional Shoah narratives, their altered representation of their family, and the postmemory essence of their works.

While both Goldchain and Spiegelman attempt to accurately portray the past, only a verisimilitude will ever be possible; those whose lives were taken by the Shoah will never be returned to us, no matter how hard we attempt to recreate them: "our past is literally a foreign country we can never hope to visit" (p. 244). Through the use of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, Spiegelman and Goldchain represent their families' narratives in a way that is simultaneously tolerable, as the audience can tolerate the grief they feel while observing these images, and yet unbearable, as their works still elicit a strong emotional response in their viewers.

Trauma (Re)Lived: Postmemory in Relation to the Shoah

Postmemory, and its various interpretations and portrayals, generates multiple questions in both the minds of the creator and those who read or observe their creations. In order to understand how Rafael Goldchain's *I Am My Family* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* are the products of postmemory, it is important to understand the nuances of how postmemory operates. Hirsch (2008), a seminal author on postmemory, notes,

> Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to
> powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births
> but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem
> to constitute memories in their own right. (p. 103)

The term postmemory is a word inundated with meaning. Marianne Hirsch breaks the term into its two core constituents: "post" and "memory," with greater focus on the prefix (Alphen, 2006). Hirsch notes the prefix of "post" is not an implication of the second or third generation's inability to form memories of the Shoah. Its use instead implies a generational detachment from these memories (Hirsch, 1997). Those who form post-memories are unable to recall for themselves an exact memory of the actual events, and instead rely on the information of others combined with their own imagination. Art Spiegelman substantiates this explanation in the description of his creation of Maus, stating: "I'm literally giving a form to my father's words and narrative . . . and that form for me has to do with panel size, panel rhythms, and visual structures of the page" (Chute, 2011, p. 200). It is his father's memory to which he is giving a voice, but it is through *his* chosen medium of expression. Through using his own personal

means of expression, Spiegelman is portraying his detachment from the memory, as well as his attachment to it. He is detached from the memory, as he did not directly experience the event, yet through his conversations with his father, both he and his father have relived the event.

Postmemory and memory are interconnected and cannot be fundamentally distinguished from one another. This is due to the mediation of memory itself. Because both memory and postmemory are mediated forms of a reality, one relative difference is used to differentiate the two. The differentiating factor is time: memory is a direct link to the past (Alphen, 2006). Those who experience the phenomenon of postmemory, however, are temporally displaced from the memory itself, as they were born years after the event. Hirsch also posits that postmemory's connection to the past "is not actually mediated by recall," as is memory, "but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (2008, p. 107). The creative aspect of postmemory is the reason why artistic representations of postmemory are an ideal outlet for second and third generation survivors.

In *Maus*, postmemory is not exclusively seen through the narrative itself, but through the use of Spiegelman's minimalist approach to his drawings. The sketch-like quality is suggestive of an inability to 'come to grips' with the Shoah, and by utilizing this technique, he exhibits "the impossibility of his situation" (Brown, 1993, p. 139). In *Maus II*, Spiegelman explicitly states that "[t]here's so much I'll never be able to understand or visualize. I mean, reality is too complex for comics. . . so much has to be left out or distorted" (1986, p. 16). The distortion lies in the fact that Spiegelman will never know the true reality of the Shoah, he will only ever have a glimpse of his father's experiences during the Shoah. For Goldchain, the catalyst for his postmemory work was not a desire to chronicle the life of a family member affected by the Shoah; rather, his main inspiration to begin his journey into the past was the birth of his son. Goldchain uses the analogy of links in a chain to describe his reasons for creating his series of portraits, saying, "Becoming a father, I needed to feel like I was part of a long chain. I could not get the chain to come together, so I created the illusion of links" (Silverstein, 2009, p. 39). Through the loss of his family members in the Shoah, Goldchain lost these "links" to his familial past. In order to create a chain, he had to recreate ancestral links through his own postmemory creation. For Goldchain, this meant using his skills as a photographer and artist to reinterpret and re-imagine the past, creating "links" which were an amalgamation of fact and fiction.

The creative works of the second generation of trauma, such as fictional narratives, art and photography, come to fruition as an endeavour

to "represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma" (Hirsch, 2008, p.112).The pain and confusion is not only passed on to the children of Shoah survivors through stories and conversations, but also through fragmented narratives or seemingly irrelevant or random references to the Shoah in an unrelated conversation. Both Goldchain and Spiegelman have experienced this as part of their upbringing. In his "Artist's Statement" in *I Am My Family*, Goldchain states that his family "looked to the future and spoke of the past infrequently" (Goldchain, 2008, p.17). In *Maus,* Spiegelman portrays this experience through a panel in which he hurts himself in the park as a child and is abandoned by his friends, to which his father replies "If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week... then you could see what is, friends!" (1973, p. 6). This utterance from his father is naturally confusing to the child, as he has not been given the proper context or background information to thoroughly understand the meaning behind his father's words. It is this confusion that often prompts second generation writers to process their experience through narrative or creative means. Each representation, whether it is an elaborate painting or a sombre novel, is fashioned out of a sense of both duty to their parents' generation and an inherent confusion. Hirsch describes that the "loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world 'bleed' from one generation to the next," a concept used by Spiegelman in his creation of *Maus* (Hirsch, 2008, p. 122). This "bleeding" of history and trauma makes the title of Spiegelman's *Maus I*: *My Father Bleeds History* eerily appropriate, as Spiegelman's father is "bleeding" his historical trauma onto the next generation: his son Art.

(Re)Creating Familial Connections: An Artist's Portrayal of Postmemory

Rafael Goldchain and Art Spiegelman, like many second and third generation descendants of European Jews, are missing a large portion of their family history. The heritage of many persecuted families, stories and memories that most families cherish for generations, disappeared as a result of the Shoah. Jewish families that experienced the trauma of deportation and emigration are left with nothing but "photographic scraps supplemented with a mix of fact and legend" (Langford, 2008, p. 10). Rafael Goldchain, although in possession of various family photographs and albums, believes that there were a great deal more family photos before the war. He assumes

that these pictures went missing as a result of his family's dispersal, deportations and systematic murder during the war years (Langford, 2008). Similarly, Spiegelman is left with only one box of family photographs that his father managed to save from destruction (Spiegelman,1986). However, during the writing of *Maus*, Spiegelman did have the added benefit of his father's narrative. Goldchain had no firsthand accounts of surviving relatives upon which to depend, as, unlike Spiegelman, his parents did not survive the horrors of the concentration camps. To discover his family's experience of the Shoah, more research was necessary. Goldchain incorporated letters, interviews, conversations and anecdotes from his relatives into his research, but garnered his main source of information from old, remaining family photographs (Alterman, 2008). As written evidence was scarce, he had to rely heavily on photographs, for which background information could not be found. This lack of information influenced his final project, allowing him to blend imagination with reality. His use of letters and anecdotes in his research allowed him to often add stories to his recreated images. In a lecture given at Ryerson University as part of the Kodak Lecture Series, Goldchain (2009) states,

> Many of the relatives, people I am presenting are completely
> invented, imagined and drawn from archival sources. The names
> that I have attached to these are drawn from either my real family
> album or from genealogical databases.

According to Goldchain, Walter Benjamin's definition of history is the most accurate way to describe his search for a historical past: "He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging" (Goldchain, 2009). Goldchain used the internet as his metaphorical shovel, searching through vast genealogical databases. The databases informed him of possible familial relations. He searched through the various misspellings of his family names, the spelling changing upon factors of time and place, and used the relatives he discovered as reference points for his self-portraits (Goldchain, 2009). He also received archival photos from living relatives. These archival photos allowed him to recreate his relatives more accurately, as he had tangible evidence of their existence. The photographs often acted as the basis for his recreation of a portrait; although, in some cases, small details were changed. In these instances, archival photos were the "facts" on which he based his portraits.

The digging metaphor also applies to Spiegelman, as "*Maus* is . . . the story of the effort of recovering and recording historical reality as personal memory" (Thormann, 2002, p. 127). Though Spiegelman uses only one main source, his father Vladek, he still must "dig" to bring forth

information about his family's past. We are witnesses to this digging in certain panels in *Maus*, which show Vladek speaking into a recording device while Art's narrative persona "asks him questions, follows up on details, [and] demands more minute descriptions" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 26). Spiegelman describes the interview process with his father as one in which he repeatedly, almost obsessively, visits his father, interviewing him "over and over again to get more detail, texture and other facets" (2011, p. 23). A part of narrative digging is invariably hitting a rock, or a barrier, which one must break through or remove in order to continue. Spiegelman acknowledges these hardships, describing the barriers in his interviews with Vladek as being Vladek's memory or inability to articulate his experiences (Spiegelman, 2011). Sometimes, Vladek's emotions overcame him, prompting an immediate stop to the interview. However, this habitual digging is what provided Spiegelman with the ability to create a postmemory work of such depth. Through the intensity of his interviews, Spiegelman was able to create a comprehensive and detailed body of work, something he would have been unable to do had he not pushed his father for more information.

Goldchain's and Spiegelman's family roots were prematurely severed; the branches of their family trees were lost in time. In order to restore the tree to its original state, Goldchain reconstructed his lost relatives in a series of family portraits. In some instances, he had photographic proof of their existence. In other instances, the portrayal of his relatives was based solely on his own imagination, with nothing but a name for reference. The Shoah haunted his work, lingering like a shadow in the background. In the words of Elie Wiesel (n.d.), Rafael Goldchain attempts to recreate the images of "those whose shadow will fall on [his] forever and ever." Spiegelman was also haunted by a lingering shadow, that of his mother's. Due to his mother's suicide, Spiegelman was unable to record his mother's story (Hirsch, 1997). His creation of *Maus*, the telling of his family's story is an attempt by Spiegelman to lift the shadow of his mother from his troubled conscience. It was due to the Shoah that many of Goldchain's family photographs were destroyed or lost, as well as much of the information regarding his basic family genealogy (Bigge, 2008). He not only lost family members in the Shoah, he lost the undeniable proof that they ever existed. In some cases, the photographs he produced were based on real images of his family which he managed to find in his research (Bigge, 2008). Other "self-portraits" were purely his attempt to recreate a lost ancestor. Goldchain states that his body of work, *I Am My Family*, is about "[h]ow

we transform the past when we bring it into the present and how we construct ourselves in relation to our familial past" (Goldchain, 2008, p. 20). In an earlier incarnation of *I Am My Family*, an exhibition titled "*Familial Ground*," Goldchain showcased a number of his "family portraits," expressing the catalyst behind them as being a duty to his son to pass on cultural, historical, and familial inheritance (Goldchain, 2007).

Goldchain's work is a true amalgamation of real and imagined fragments of history; an attempt to make whole that which cannot ever become complete. Goldchain believes that his journey to represent the past is not only his duty to his son, but to his family. To intimate his responsibility, he likens himself to Hamlet. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the son is bound by his filial relationship to discover the truth behind his father's murder, and to avenge his death. Similarly, it is Goldchain's familial duty to uncover and "reshape [his] family's past" (Goldchain, 2009). While unable to avenge their deaths, Goldchain feels responsible for portraying at least a partial retelling of their story. Spiegelman likewise shares an unbreakable familial bond akin to that of Hamlet. The suicide of his mother Anja is the catalyst for Spiegelman's creation of *Maus*. Anja's ghost "haunts the story. . . a ghostly presence shaping familial interaction" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 34). *Maus* is the narrative of the presence of Anja's absence. Her perspective of Spiegelman's family history was lost with her death; *Maus* is an "attempt by father and son to provide [this] missing perspective" (p. 34).

The representational aspect of Goldchain's photographs meant some photos required greater "reconstruction" than others. Goldchain often recreated photos of his female relatives, real and imagined. In certain cases, he composed a completely invented back-story for his "self-portrait," such as the photo of Doña Reizl Goldszjan Rozenfeld (Bigge, 2008). Goldchain portrays her as a "middle-aged, stylish woman suffering from chronic, mild depression" and further explains, "there is one in every family" (Bigge, 2008). Losing information regarding his family's background means he must resort to inventing a pseudo-family history, and, in this case, resort to certain stereotypes about family structure. Every portrait is given a name, and often a life history (Langford, 2008). The relatives who were artificially created by Goldchain, those for whom proof of existence could not be located, were not only (re)created in photo form, but given a personal history by Goldchain, such as Doña's narrative mentioned above. In some cases, knowledge of the relative was all Goldchain possessed; no photos or written information could be traced to them. In his lecture at Ryerson, Goldchain recounts the story behind his self-portrait of Mojszes Precelman.

Goldchain's great-grandmother was married twice, and very few photos remained of either husband. Looking through the old family photos, it was unclear which husband was Goldchain's great-grandfather. Through careful comparison of his own face in a mirror with that of the face in the photograph, Goldchain made an executive decision that the man in the photograph was indeed his great-grandfather. This was determined by Goldchain through what he calls "invincible genetics": he could raise the same eyebrow as the man in the photo, and in an identical fashion; therefore, he must be related to him (Goldchain, 2009). From that instant, Goldchain decided to adopt this man as his own flesh and blood, despite his tenuous link to the Goldchain family tree.

This reconstruction of familial identities is also seen in *Maus*. While Spiegelman had a seemingly compulsive need for accuracy in the recreation of his family's narrative, he transformed this desire into a representational animal fable (Hirsch, 1997). Unlike Goldchain, Spiegelman knew for certain his familial connection, or lack thereof, to each character he depicted. However, by representing them as animals, he, as the human author, is not related to them, figuratively speaking. Only the narrative persona of Artie is connected to the "animals" he portrays. This perplexing jumble of relatedness highlights how Spiegelman's work is also a reconstruction and resurrection of familial history, as is Goldchain's *I Am My Family*.

The use of the subtitle *From Mauschwitz to the Catskills and Beyond* in *Maus II* highlights the very essence of Spiegelman's postmemory narrative, namely, that the Shoah affected every aspect of his father's life long after it was over, and that this in turn affected the way that Spiegelman was brought up (Spiegelman, 1986). The subtitle imparts to the reader that every facet of Vladek's life was eternally linked to his traumatic experience during the Shoah; traces of his trauma in Auschwitz remained with him, inextricable as a shadow. This inability of Vladek to separate himself from his experiences had an understandable effect on his son. Hirsch suggests that *Maus* "represents [Spiegelman's] attempt both to get deeper into his postmemory and to find a way out" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 32). Through *Maus*, Spiegelman endeavoured to navigate his inherited memory, fusing "past and present, destruction and survival, primary and secondary trauma" (p. 32). In relation to Eva Hoffman's characterization of postmemory as a "fairytale," Spiegelman chooses to subtitle his first volume "A Survivors Tale," highlighting the narrative aspect of his graphic novel. As his name suggests,

Spiegelman, translated from German as 'mirror man,' is a mirror through which his father's story, and that of his own, is reflected.

(Re)Routing Empathy: The *Verfremdungseffekt*

The artificiality of Goldchain's "self-portraits" and Spiegelman's graphic novels are often apparent to the viewer. This blatant artificiality can be interpreted as an intentional yet subtle use of the *Verfremdungseffekt*. The *Verfremdungseffekt*, otherwise known as the *alienation effect*, is defined by the use of blatant artificiality as a means of decreasing the emotional attachment of an audience to the characters in a play (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). The imitational essence of Goldchain's and Spiegelman's works emphasizes that these representations are not carbon-copies of their relatives, but loosely-based interpretations of a lost memory. The *Verfremdungseffekt* was originally developed by German playwright Bertolt Brecht for use in his theatre productions. While Brecht uses this concept to avoid an emotional connection of an audience to his plays, it can be argued that Goldchain's photographs and Spiegelman's graphic novels elicit almost a reversal of this reaction, engaging the audience emotionally, but with blatant artificiality creating distance. The photographs and drawings do not necessarily alienate the audience; however, they do not likely elicit in the viewer or reader the same degree of emotion as a memoir or photos contemporaneous with the Shoah would elicit either. Through the artificiality of Speigelman's and Goldchain's works, viewers become alienated from the natural emotions they would expect to arise from viewing such depictions of the Shoah. Steer (1968), in his explanation of epic theatre, describes the purpose of the *Verfremdungseffekt* as to "[present] a situation in a striking and unaccustomed light . . . to draw the audience's critical attention to the social forces which determine human destiny" (p. 639). By reducing empathy, Spiegelman and Goldchain are able to focus their audience's attention on the atrocities of the Nazis and the collective and perpetual damage it caused.

This approach is opposed to the more typical Shoah narratives and memoirs that focus on the plight of one single individual. While a single story may be representative of a collective history, stories which focus on one person's experience tend to have the effect of increasing empathy. The author spends time developing a rapport between his character and the readers. Once this rapport is developed, we become emotionally attached to them. This emotional attachment may not only hinder our understanding of the story, but it may produce emotions that are not genuine within the reader: the feelings are over-exaggerated, or the emotions are felt because

they *should* be, not because they truly are. Kluger, a concentration camp survivor and author of *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, acknowledges the emotions that many people feel when they visit a concentration camp, stating:

> A visitor who feels moved . . . will be proud of these stirrings of humanity. And so the visitor monitors his reactions, examines his emotions, admires his own sensibility, or in other words, turns sentimental. (2001, p. 66)

Kluger is critical of this inward sentimentality, as it places emphasis on the observer instead of on what is being observed. This line of thought can also be applied to Shoah narratives, as the reader is aware of the reactions and emotions that they *should* feel while reading; therefore, the reader closely monitors their emotions, sometimes to the point of over-empathizing. The use of the *Verfremdungseffekt* can stop this process from happening and allow greater understanding of the material presented, while also eliciting more authentic emotions in the reader. The focus is placed on what is being observed, as opposed to the reader turning inwards and to gauge and monitor their own emotions and reactions.

Bertolt Brecht states in *Schriften zum Theater* (Volume 3), that the techniques through which the *Verfremdungseffekt* is produced are diametrically opposed to acting techniques, which produce empathy in an audience (Brecht, 1963). However, it may be argued that the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or alienation effect, can be used in such a way that it still allows for empathy through audience involvement. The alienation effect "propels the spectator from a merely passive . . . attitude into one of genuine participation" (Politzer, 1962, p. 101). Goldchain's collection of portraiture does just this; we do not just view them, we observe them, analyze them and above all, we discuss them. We are not passive observers who look at art for the sake of looking; we are active observers participating in constructing meaning, viewing the portraits not only on a superficial level, but on an analytical one, as well. We are able to view the portraits as simply photographs, but we are also able to analyze the subject matter and the intent behind them.

In *How Epic Is Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theater?*, Politzer suggests that one of the best ways in which Brecht expresses the alienation effect is through his characters, which are alienated from themselves and from the other relevant characters (1962). Goldchain's portrait of Doña Reizl Goldszajn Rozenfeld is the quintessential manifestation of this concept of alienation. The combination of impersonating another human being with

that of crossing the established social gender boundaries alienates and confuses the audience, as we are unsure in what social category we should place the subject. At first glance, we see a woman in her mid-forties, a forlorn and melancholic look spread across her face (Goldchain, 2008). If one were ignorant of the context in which this picture was taken, one would presumably believe this photograph was of a woman with subtly masculine features. However, because we are given the context, we are thoroughly aware that this is a man. Goldchain, in reference to the double nature of his portraits, has stated:

> I deliberately . . . leave details undone and show the process work in order to keep the viewer aware and close to the process of production . . . keeping the viewer oscillating between the illusion and reality of my performance. (Goldchain, 2009)

Viewing this portrait, we become alienated from our empathy; this particular representation simultaneously invites, yet discourages empathy. The viewer is aware that s(he) is alive; however, the viewer also is aware that this image is the reconstructed manifestation of a once existing deceased relative (Goldchain, 2008). In the words of Goldchain, we as the observer are kept in a permanent state of oscillation between "illusion and reality" (Goldchain, 2009). Goldchain's image of Doña is a clear example of the *Verfremdungseffekt* at use in his work, as it exhibits the "artful and artistic act of self-alienation" that Brecht so admired about Chinese theatre, on which the *Verfremdungseffekt* is based (Bai, 1998, p. 422). Goldchain alienates himself in this portrait, as well as his audience. In the act of cross-dressing, he becomes alienated from his gender and has to take on a new persona, one which is totally unfamiliar to him. While he must adopt a new persona for each photograph he takes, regardless of the gender being depicted, photographs in which he is dressed as a woman provide extra challenges. This is because he must not only contend with a new identity construct, but a new gender construct as well.

Each photo is a painful reminder of Goldchain's vanished family. What makes this reminder bearable is the understanding by the viewer that these photos are recreations. While the imagined subject of the photo is deceased, the real subject is very much alive. The viewer is simultaneously disconnected from yet connected to the photographs in question. In his portraiture, Goldchain utilizes black and white photography, as well as stylized portraiture reminiscent of the 19th Century (Langford, 2008). His refusal to use colour photography gives his images a purposeful historical depth, furthering their displacement in time. This therapeutic *Verfremdungseffekt* helps to create an emotional disconnect by the viewer.

Through the photograph's apparent temporal distance, the viewer can be consoled in their grief by the passage of time. We are aware that the people who are being represented are in reality just anachronistic portrayals of people who died long ago.

Spiegelman also implements the *Verfremdungseffekt* in his work, alienating his audience by tempering their emotions through his representations. In *Maus*, Spiegelman depicts "schematic mice and cat heads resting on human-looking bodies . . . who perceive themselves as human" (Hirsch, 1997, p.27). The alienation in his work lies in the viewer's attempt to reconcile the fiction with reality in order to determine the level of empathy they emote. In reference to his play *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, Brecht himself suggests that the alienation effect occasionally leaves room for empathy. Regarding a scene in which the character 'dumb Kattrin' performs a tragic act, Brecht states: "The spectators may identify themselves with dumb Kattrin in this scene; they may feel empathy with this human being . . . [but] the process of empathy will not be complete here" (Politzer, 1962, p. 111). When we observe Goldchain's portraits and Spiegelman's graphic novels we experience partial empathy. Knowing that Goldchain and Spiegelman did not personally experience their relatives' pain lessens the viewers' willingness to empathize. Alternatively, we are aware that the photographs represent someone who felt the trauma physically and temporally. This estrangement from the traditional empathy one experiences with Shoah narratives helps to make an unbearable representation bearable.

In *Maus I* and *II*, the alienation which we feel from the drawings is derived from the essence of graphic novels themselves: graphic novels are meant to be artificial and overly-exaggerated representations of fiction or reality, as "[T]he [comics] form dictates the sensationalizing and exaggeration of perceptions" (Thormann, 2002, p. 129). This exaggeration alienates the reader. We are accustomed to the use of sensational aspects in comic book narratives, such as Batman or Spiderman, but we are not used to these sensational aspects being applied to a Shoah narrative. Through pictures, the reader can visualize what cannot be truly depicted, but which needs to be presented regardless. The value of imagery has been recognized by other authors who choose to portray Shoah narratives in visual form, such as the graphic novel *The Search*, written in 2007 by Eric Heuvel, Ruud van der Rol, and Lies Schippers (Flory, 2011). This novel differs from *Maus* in terms of its representation of the Shoah and the historical context delineated in the novel; however, both novels aspire to the same goal: to

portray the atrocities of the Shoah to a modern audience. The "unreal" or "sensational" genre of graphic novels thus is a valuable tool with which one can portray "the seeming unreality of an experience beyond all reason" (Thormann, 2002).

The anthropomorphizing of humans into animals is another way in which Spiegelman creates a *Verfremdungseffekt*. While anthropomorphism can be seen as a way in which to *promote* empathy, I argue that it can also achieve the opposite effect. In Spiegelman's *Maus*, the characters are not often given facial expressions, and as such, their emotional reactions cannot be interpreted by the reader. Consequently, in Maus, we are less likely to deeply empathize with the characters. Spiegelman acknowledges the lack of facial attributes in Maus by explaining that he drew his characters as "mouse heads that are basically triangles without mouths: just a nose and eyes, very different from Mickey Mouse with his smiling have-a-nice-day face" (2011, p. 145). Spiegelman thus acknowledges the importance of faces in invoking emotional response or empathetic identification. His characters do not have mouths; therefore, they are incapable of smiling, frowning, etc., leading to our inability as readers to render emotional cues from their facial gestures. This inability hinders the reader's ability to empathize.

Another way in which Spiegelman creates a *Verfremdungseffekt* through his use of animal depictions derives from the common literary trope of using animals in folk narratives. By anthropomorphizing, the author evokes within the reader "culturally scripted responses to familiar schemas of sympathetic and antipathetic animals... reinforced by countless representations throughout culture" (Keen, 2011, p. 137). From the sheer repetition of these stories, we already know where to place the cat and mouse in the animal-kingdom-as-humanity metaphor. We are well aware that cats are the predators, and are thus the *persecutors*, of mice. In Spiegelman's use of mice as main characters, he uses this familiar schema to contradict the cultural normative role of mice as vermin, instead transforming them into sympathetic, persecuted creatures.

The use of dehumanization has often occurred during conflicts when depicting the enemy; the 'dehumanization' of humans into animals makes them seem less sympathetic. The Americans dehumanized the Japanese during World War II in order to prepare the citizens for the bombing of Hiroshima, the Hutus referred to the Tutsis as cockroaches, and most relevant to *Maus*, the Nazis referred to Jews as vermin (Spiegelman, Metamaus , 2011). This dehumanization was used as a tool by the persecutors in order to justify to their respective populations why genocide

was necessary. These groups purposefully reduced people's empathy towards the "other" by depicting them as animals. Spiegelman does not use this dehumanization process in such a manner. Spiegelman utilized mice for the cat-and-mouse metaphor as a way in which to portray the predator versus prey relationship between the Nazis and European Jewry. However, there remains an added side effect, perhaps an unintentional one, of the dehumanization of characters, leading to a decreased empathy in the readers. In Goldchain's work, the *Verfremdungseffekt* is constantly expressed, though less variation in alienation is utilized. As viewers of his work, we are hyper-aware of Goldchain's presence in each photograph.

The *Verfremdungseffekt* shadows other aspects of Goldchain's and Spiegelman's lives. Not only does their work create an alienation effect upon their readership and viewers, but their ancestral history is in and of itself an alienating experience. Goldchain expresses this historical alienation, stating*, "I Am My Family* stages an attempt to return to a historical/mythical place of origin from which I am irretrievably exiled, and to create . . . 'an illusion of [familial continuity] over time and space.'" (2008, p. 18). Through the loss of family portraits and narratives, second and third generation Shoah survivors become estranged from their familial past, able to form only a tenuous link between past and present. They are alienated from society's traditions of passing down family anecdotes and stories. Their stories are cut short. Unlike other families, reminiscing about bygone days, their narrative is not sentimental, but morbid and saddening. It is this alienation which acts as catalyst for the creation of postmemory narratives.

Conclusion

Through graphic novels and photography, Art Spiegelman and Rafael Goldchain are able to process their postmemory experiences in a way that is not only beneficial to them as individuals, allowing them to cope with their family's past, but beneficial to their prospective audiences as well. The trauma of the Shoah, through which these two artists are unavoidably linked, finds a therapeutic outlet in their postmemory works.

Tragic in their very nature, these works are able to address the difficult subject of the Shoah without developing a "hyper-empathy" in the minds of the viewers. Shoah narratives often "impede the critical faculty" by means of emotion and empathy (Kluger, 2001). Before a reader opens the first page, they know what emotions they should feel, preparing themselves for the tragedy contained inside. The reader understands that the narrative

contains factual stories of someone who exists or existed in reality. Spiegelman's and Goldchain's works do not hinder our ability as readers to think critically, and in doing so, they alter our understanding of the Shoah narrative, allowing us to think more clearly and analytically. In *Metamaus*, Spiegelman offers his own opinion on the overly sentimental Shoah graphic novels that have been produced: "Some of these projects strike me as if they were trying to set my work right by smoothing down the rough edges, by making a more didactic, more sentimental, more slickly drawn [Shoah] comic book" (2011, p. 126). It can thus be argued that Spiegelman created his graphic novels *Maus I & II* with the intention of producing a product with which readers could empathize, but not become overly sentimental about in the process.

In Spiegelman's and Goldchain's works there is an emotional distance created through the use of the imagined, the blending of fact and fiction which forms the basis of both artists' works. This synthesis of reality and the imaginary helps to give a form to that which cannot be truly represented on paper: the lives of those who lived through the Shoah. Spiegelman has stated that it was "those animal masks which allowed me to approach otherwise unsayable things" (2011, p. 127). Both Spiegelman and Goldchain have used liberal amounts of fictional elements in their work. However, according to Spiegelman, any written work contains at least some element of fiction, whether it is placed in the fiction genre or not. Spiegelman believes that his book belongs firmly in the non-fiction category, as

> Reality is too complex to be threaded out into the narrow channels and confines of narrative and *Maus*, like all narrative work including memoir, biography, and history presented in narrative form, is streamlined and, at least on [one] level, a fiction. (2011, p. 150)

Spiegelman legitimates his use of fictional elements in his narrative by suggesting that any account that is written down is bound to add or remove parts of the events in question. Therefore, the imagined aspects in both Goldchain's and Spiegelman's work do not give their works less validity. Indeed, Spiegelman seems to argue that it is the commixture of realism and fiction contained in both *Maus* and *I Am My Family* that make these two bodies of work bearable for their audiences.

Goldchain's and Spiegelman's works are attempts to deal with the repercussions of an inherited trauma, where the fragments of memory can be collected, but never completely reassembled. While these fragments will never create a whole, both Spiegelman and Goldchain create works in

which their scattered pasts are retold, relived and recreated in a way which simultaneously portrays their own experiences and that of their ancestors. By creating a *Verfremdungseffekt* they are able to transmit the horrors of the Shoah to their readers and viewers in an accessible way--a way in which empathy is lessened but does not completely vanish. This decrease in empathy is beneficial, as it causes the reader or viewer to engage in a discourse in which their perception does not become clouded with emotion. Through lens and pen, Art Spiegelman and Rafael Goldchain open our eyes to the realm of postmemory and the lives of second and third generation Jewry.

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