The Narrative of Trauma in Art spiegelman's *Maus*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores how Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986-1991) challenges the humanist concept of the unified self, proposing instead that the post-war self is fragmented and split. This fragmentation is particularly examined through the lens of Holocaust survivors in *Maus*, showcasing how extreme experiences during and after the Second World War cause the self to fracture and even disintegrate. The article argues that storytelling and narration serve as a crucial tool for the trauma survivors to navigate and reconcile the fractured aspects of their self. Through storytelling, the protagonist finds a means of survival, by finding a language to articulate his otherwise inexpressible and ineffable experiences and memories. It highlights the fragmentation of the human psyche as a direct consequence of Holocaust trauma and similar traumatic experiences, examining how narrative acts as a medium for the protagonist to deal with his traumas. The novel offers insights into the complexities of the new post-war self, the enduring scars of trauma and the potential of narrative in coping with trauma, providing a deeper understanding of the fragmented self in the context of Holocaust trauma.

KEYWORDS: post-war, trauma, Holocaust survivors, fragmented self, narration, *Maus.*

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War and the Holocaust play a pivotal role in challenging the notion of objective reality, marking a profound shift in the collective understanding of truth and existence. The unprecedented horrors and moral complexities that these events inducedlead to a deep questioning of previously held beliefs about humanity, ethics and the nature of reality itself. This period of history necessitatesa reexamination of such concepts. Primo Levi vividly describes the deplorable conditions of humanity within concentration camps, emphasizing the dehumanization experienced during this period. His accounts shed light on the extreme suffering and loss of dignity faced by individuals, highlighting how these environments stripped away the essence of what it means to be human:

> Then for the first time we become aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man.In a moment, with almost prophetic intuition, the reality was revealed to us: we had reached the bottom. It is not possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more. (Levi, 1987: 32)

As societies grapple with the aftermath of these tragedies, the certainty of an objective, universal reality becomes elusive, giving rise to a nuanced, fragmented view of the world that acknowledges the impact of individual and collective experiences on the perception of truth. This shift influences a broad spectrum of disciplines, encouraging a more introspective, skeptical approach to understanding our place in a fundamentally altered world.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust and within a society increasingly dominated by scientific rationalism, which seemed to constrain human free will, and a world bereft of genuine spirit, the post-war artistic expression gravitated towards themes of self-destruction. In a modern era lacking a redemptive beauty, only by dissolution of the self can an artistic experience rebirth, renewal and freedom. As Arya Aryan states "[t]his is evedint in a range of post-war art, made explicit in the paintings and sculptures of auto-destructive artist such as Gustav Metzger, who also coined the term and expressed the concept in 'Machine, Auto-Creative and Auto-Destructive Art' in 1962" (2020: 79). Moreover, Al Alvarez argues that all of 20th-century art has been devoted to appeasing this terrestrial "Savage God" who demands blood-sacrifice, drawing parallels with modern warfare's technological advancements to produce art that is increasingly extreme, violent, and ultimately self-destructive (1971: 188). Accordingly, post-war artists were experimenting with new ways to find some salvation in a world that felt too focused on machines,lacking real human spirit. This kind of art shows how artists were dealing with tough questions about life and trying to find new ways to express their hopes and fears during that time. Hence, through the process of self-destruction and constructing a new self, artists could find a way for freedom.

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In this context, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* undergoes analysis through the lens of postwar theories, which assert that the self is not unified but is instead deconstructed and reconstructed, especially in the wake of trauma. This novel illustrates how, facing existential threats, the protagonist deconstructs his authentic self and construct a new one as a means to cope with his trauma. This process reflects the broader postwar understanding of self as fluid and malleable, shaped significantly by traumatic experiences. *Maus* is a compelling narrative that explores the complexities of selfhood in the aftermath of profound upheaval, showcasing how individuals navigate the challenging terrain of reconstructing their selves in an effort to find solace and meaning in a changed world. Therefore, this article argues that the self is not a fixed entity, but is continuously deconstructed and reconstructed, particularly in response to trauma. Moreover, it argues that this reconstruction of the self is notably facilitated through narration; the act of storytelling becomes a vital survival mechanism through which the traumatized individual copes with and processes their trauma, highlighting the significance of narrative as a means of survival for individuals seeking to make sense of their altered realities. Through the protagonist' journey of self-reconstruction, the novel offers a deep exploration of how narrative serves as a bridge to understanding and dealing with the scars of trauma, underscoring the malleable nature of selfhood in the aftermath of profound disturbance.

Post-war Theories and the Fragmented Self

The post-war period in literary theory witnessed a departure from essentialist views of the self, embracing more fluid and contingent understandings, marked by influential intellectual movements such as post-structuralism. The humanist concept of the self underwent significant transformations in literary theory as post-structuralist thinkers questioned the stability of language and meaning, arguing that the self is not a fixed, essential entity, but rather a construct shaped by language and discourse. Moreover, the anti-psychiatry movement in the 1960s further destabilized the idea of a coherent unified self by highlighting the inherent fragmentation and multiplicity of the psyche. This movement shifted the focus from a singular, stable and autonomous self to an understanding of the self as a complex interplay of various entities due to the fragmented or split psyche. Therefore, post-war literary works began to classic, humanist concept of the self and psyche, challenging linear narratives and conventional characterizations. In postmodern fiction,the "conviction of unity irrespective of the work's disintegration ischallenged by violating the work's supposed unity through leaving contradictions unresolved" (Aryan, 2022: 31).

Roland Barthes'highly influential essay "The Death of the Author"(1967) marks a pivotal moment in literary theory and is often considered a foundational text for post-structuralist thought and deconstruction of the humanist concept of the self. The essay challenges traditional notions of authorship and the interpretation of texts, centering on the theme of subjectivity, especially that of the author.It critically examines humanist and Romantic concept of the self and authorship. These conventional perspectives emphasized the significance of the individuality of the author, praising qualities like autonomy. Put differently, the essay effectively declares the end of the humanist self, as an ultimate source of meaning, which was fundamental to metaphysical foundation of the Western philosophy. Nevertheless, anthropocentric worldview would now be threatened by the rise of post-structuralism. In his essay, Barthes begins with a quote from Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine* and asks, "Who is speaking thus?" He responds by stating that it is impossible to determine the speaker, proposingthat "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (2008: 146). As he elaborates, "writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (2008: 146-47). Accordingly, he underscores the idea that writing transcends the individual identity of the author, creating a space where the very notion of the self is dissolved. Thus, his polemic contrasts humanist ideology that the individual's autonomy and unity are paramount and the human being is at the core, where the mind is responsible for imparting meaning to, and defining, a world that consequently revolves around the mind itself; or as our understanding and knowledge are considered to be "the product of experience (empiricism)" (Besley, 2002: 5). What Barthes targets in his critique of the prevailing notion of authorship is, implicitly, the Romantic idea of the author as a figure with "god-like" authority. Barthes argues against the traditional view of the author as the ultimate source of meaning in a text, or as he puts it "the 'message' of the Author-God" (2008: 149). He criticizes the tendency to treat the author as a "god-like" figure, whose intentions is a paramount in interpreting his work.

Hence, what Barthes implicitly criticizes is the Romantic expressive theory of authorship. This Romantic perspective, which sees authorship as the indescribable essence of "mind", is subsequently substituted by the concept of language, as he states:

> Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred. (Barthes, 2008: 149)

Subsequently, the statement shakes humanist view regarding language as "the inevitable medium and mediator of all human experience"(Waswo, 1987: 218). Besides, the traditional notion of the authorship, that the author represents the history behind their text "book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into before and after. The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it" (Barthes, 2008: 148). In other words, in the anthropocentric mimetic concept of authorship, the author is perceived as a transcendent ego that underlies the work, akin to how God is behind His creation, but still transcends the work and remains unseen within it. By contrast, Barthes argues that the "author is a modern figure, a product of our

society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of Reformation" (2008: 147) and "the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing" (ibid:148). Barthes cites Mallarmé as a writer who anticipated the shift from the humanist perspective of the author (or modern man) to the post-structuralist concept of language's fluidity. As Barthes notes,"it is language which speaks not the author" (ibid: 147) referring to the departure from the humanist or modern conception of man. This implies that man is no longer regarded as capable of directly conveying personal experiences simply through his control and the medium of language and words.

Moreover, Derrida challenges the very notion of structuralism and the foundational belief of Western philosophy in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," (1966). The essay is "the inaugural essay for deconstruction theory" (Bressler, 2011: 107); thus, along with Barthes', it played a pivotal role in shaping the critical debate around the death of the author. As Nicholas Royle remarks about Derrida, "more than any other contemporary writer or thinker, Jacques Derrida has defined our time" (2003: 8). Derrida set out to dismantle and challenge the longstanding beliefs about the precedence of thought before language, especially the assumptions of Western metaphysic. Thus, he questions the basis of philosophical thought that relies on the notion of a centre, an original cause or genesis; as Western metaphysics has created several terms that act as focal points, such as, "consciousness, man, God" (Selden et al., 2005: 164), to name a few.

Nonetheless, instead of eliminating the center, Derrida suggests relocating and repositioning it. What he suggests is the dismantling of the established and unchanging bases from which human knowledge and thought originate. Hence, Derrida critiques Western thinking for repeatedly replacing one central concept with another, described as "substitutions of centre for centre" (2008: 90).Western philosophy and science have traditionally operated on a structural basis, relying on the ideas of structure and structurality, along with their associated notions of center, order, stability and finality. Derrida points out that"the concept of structure and even the word 'structure' itself are as old as . . . Western science and Western philosophy" (ibid: 89-90). He further emphasizes that "the entire history of the concept of structure . . . must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center" (2008: 90). In other words, what Derrida calls "a transcendental signified, an external point of reference upon which one may build a concept or philosophy" (Bressler, 2011: 109). Hence, with the emergence of structuralism, there was another shift to language as the primary signified. As Fry puts it, in the post-war period "the world is no longer anthropocentric, it's linguistic"(2012: 133).

Structuralism seeks to understand the fundamental patterns of human behavior and thought through scientific methods and a metalanguage,that is, an objective explanatory language. As Graham Allen describes, "Saussur . . . imagined a science of semiology which would be capable of reading all cultural sign systems. Such a method, or general science, relies ultimately on the idea of the sign and its ability to centre (order and scientifically stabilize) such a method" (2003: 70). However, post-structuralists like Derrida have shown that such language is inevitably subjectto *différance*, casting doubt on structuralism's claims to knowledge. As Aryan notes, Derrida "is aware that a new centre is now language but that language has always already delayed its signification. The meaning of a sign cannot be grasped" (2020:26). Derrida exposes and challenges the limitations and shortcomings of such all-encompassing and systematic approaches. Instead of being the creator of language/discourse, one is always enmeshed within it. This shift, or what Derrida refers to "the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought" (2008: 91), represents a significant change:

> Was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse – provided that we agree on this word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (2008: 91)

Therefore, there is no transcendental signified, no meaning that exists outside of the game (play) of languaget, but is instead a part of this system of differences and deferrals. As a result, with no transcendental signified, "an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (Derrida 2008: 91). Similarly, the author who was previously as a transcendental signifiedand a site for the synthesis of Dialectics, where contradictions were resolved, is now lacks a presence outside the system of *différance*. He and the text are unable to have a definitive meaning.Instead, meaning is perpetually postponed in a sequence.

Poststructuralist thinkers questioned essentialist views of the self and power structures, asserting that social and historical forces play a crucial role in shaping individual experiences. This theoretical framework resonated with the anti-psychiatry movement's contention that mental illnesses are not necessarily inherent biological entities, but are socially constructed phenomena. Hence, post-structuralism provided theoretical underpinnings that bolstered the anti-psychiatry movement's efforts to dismantle rigid psychiatric frameworks and promote a more holistic and socially informed approach to mental health. In this light, one of the prominent elements within the radical Counterculture of the 1960s was a phenomenon identified by David Cooper, a psychiatrist himself, as "anti-psychiatry," as discussed in his work *Psychiatry and Anti-psychiatry* (1967). This movement served as a sustained critique against the conventional paradigms of treatment and medication endorsed by orthodox psychiatry. Thus ,as Arya Aryan describes it,"[t]he coercive implementation of harsh and barely clinically evidenced treatments including lobotomy, electroconvulsive therapy, insulin shock and enforced hospitalization were all called into question as authoritarian, oppressive,

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controlling and excluding" (2020: 94). Notable figures associated with this movement included psychiatrists such as David Cooper, Thomas Szasz, R. D. Laing and Michel Foucault. Together, they were"looking for an alternative to what was called 'mental illness'"(ibid). Hence, they offered a compelling and influential condemnation of the medicalization of madness, the concept of mental illness and the autocratic and oppressive nature of psychiatric institutions.

In *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (1960), R. D. Laing, a central figure in the anti-psychiatry movement,questions the psychiatric establishment's approach to mental illness, particularly schizophrenia. He suggests that what is often diagnosed as mental illness could be a reaction to the contradictions and pressures in society and family dynamics. Laing explores how the self can become divided in an attempt to cope with these external pressures. His work implies that the subject is not a singular, coherent entity, but can be fragmented and shaped by interpersonal relationships and societal expectations. Thus, Laing characterizes the schizoid individual as someone whose personality and individuality is fragmented, both in relation to the external world and within themselves, conceived as a central inner core. Such an individual perceives themselves not as a unified whole "but rather as 'split' in various ways" (1969: 17), such as a mind loosely connected to a body or having multiple selves. This internal psychological division results in what Laing terms as the person's "existential splits" (ibid: 19).

Laing's main argument revolves around challenging the assumption of a genuine, autonomous self with a fundamental identity, distinct from the performative or deceptive selves formed to navigate a hostile external environment. He underscores the crucial division between inner, authentic selves and external personas or masks. According to Laing, this internal split plays a pivotal role in the development of schizophrenia, where individuals experience depersonalization and continually construct false selves to shield the authentic inner self from harm or annihilation. This process arises from a deep-seated anxiety caused by "ontological insecurity," signifying the "absence of the assurances derived from an existential position" (1969: 39). In Laing's view, the creation of different personalities or false selves becomes a survival or a self-defence mechanism in response to the perceived threats and radical unsafety of the world. Put differently, for Laing the subject is not a self-evident reality but a construct influenced by external forces.

Transmission of Trauma, Postmemory and Survivor's Guilt

Maus is among the first graphic novels to address the Holocaust. It tells the story of Spiegelman's father, Vladek, a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor. The narrative interweaves Vladek's harrowing experiences during World War II with the present-day relationship between Artie and his father. The novel juxtaposes the historical events of the Holocaust with the personal struggles of Spiegelman in the present, exploring themes of trauma, memory and the difficulties of understanding the experiences of the previous generation. *Maus I* specifically focuses on Vladek's experiences before and during the war, setting the stage for the events that are further elaborated in *Maus II*. The novel critically shows how the impact of trauma can transcend generations. Thus, Artie is depicted as grappling with the trauma of his parents, despite not having experienced it firsthand. Herein, Art's struggle to understand and illustrate his father's experiences is a key part of the narrative, showing the difficulty in fully grasping the impact of such profound trauma. As Michael Staub puts it:

Maus does not necessarily introduce historical materials unfamiliar to scholars or students of the Nazi genocide, nor does it add substantially to existing descriptions of the conditions concentration camp inmates experienced. What it does do is present a story of this "central trauma of the Twentieth Century"(Spiegelman qtd. in Dreifus 36). (1995: 33)

Therefore, In *Maus*, Spiegelman not only tells the story of his father's experiences during the Holocaust, but also displays the enormous difficulties of second-generation Holocaust survivors in finding a way to come to terms with their parent's trauma. Therefore, it explores Artie's relationship with his parents and the impact of their trauma on his own life. Throughout the novel, Spiegelman is open about his struggles with mental health issues, particularly as they relate to his experiences as a child of Holocaust survivors and the pressures of his artistic work. Correspondingly, the novel includes a poignant section titled "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," which vividly illustrates Artie's struggles with mental illness. As at the age of twenty, he suffers from a mental breakdown and is hospitalized at a psychiatric facility. This part of the novel stands out as a deeply personal narrative, diverging from the primary storyline to focus on Spiegelman's mental health journey.

Writings on the Holocaust by authors belonging to the post-Holocaust generation or second generation bring to the forefront an important issue about how trauma is passed down through generations. Amy Hungerford succinctly captures this dilemma by asking "[h]ow can the children of survivors be survivors themselves?" (2003: 92). Spiegelman's novel, a narrative response to this question, discloses that even generations not directly exposed to trauma can inherit their ancestors' traumatic experiences, primarily through familial dynamics. Spiegelman, who did not directly experience the Holocaust, learns about the tragic events through taped interviews with his father, Vladek. These interviews serve as a means for Vladek to express his repressed trauma, particularly the loss of most of his family members.

Spiegelman, as a secondary witness, absorbs the Holocaust history and reinterprets it, transforming Vladek's narrative into a graphic novel. This process aligns with what Marianne Hirsch describes as postmemory, as "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (1997: 22). The term postmemory, while initially seeming to

indicate a period after memory, is actually useful in differentiating firsthand experiential memory from the vicarious memory passed to subsequent generations. Hirsch explains that postmemory is typical of those "who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (ibid). In other words, "[p]ostmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that . . . transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, 2008: 103). The concept of postmemory is particularly relevant in Holocaust studies due to its impact on survivors' children who internalize events they did not directly experience. Postmemory in this context involves a deep identification with the original trauma victims. Hence, *Maus* goes beyond merely recounting a Holocaust survivor's story. Instead, it delves into how the narrative of the survivor has profoundly shaped another individual's personal history. As James Young states, "[i]n Spiegelman's own words '*Maus* is not what happened in the past, but rather what the son understands of the father's story'"(1998: 760). Thus, *Maus* opens with a short comic where the narrator, Artie, is depicted as a child at "Rego Park, N.Y. c.1958" (Spiegelma, 1986: 5). He stumbles while skating and his friends leave him.He seeks comfort from his father, who questions the sincerity of Artie's friendships by saying "if you lock them together in a room with no food for a week... THEN you could see what it is, FRIENDS!" (ibid: 6). Young points out that "the historical facts of the Holocaust . . . include the fact of their eventual transmission. This is why the "'autobiographical history of the survivor's tale' necessarily begins, then, not in the father's experiences but in Artie's own" (1998: 678). This passage highlights the notion that the trauma's legacy, particularly for the offspring of Holocaust survivors, often starts in their own childhood experiences, rather than those of their parents.

Marianne Hirsch argues that the children or the second generation of Holocaust survivors, "remember" events through the stories, images and behaviors passed down by the first-generation survivors (2008: 106). In Spiegelman's case, the photograph of Richieu (Fig 1), a brother he never met and who perished in the

(Fig 1)

Holocaust, becomes a central symbol of this inherited trauma. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is akin to a form of haunting.As she explicates,"[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (1995: 4-5). Thus, the haunting presence of Richieu through this photograph embodies the concept of postmemory in that Artie is perpetually confronted with a past he did not live, however feels deeply connected to. Artie refers to Richieu as "my ghost brother" (Spiegelman, 1991: 15), a spectral figure who continuously haunts him. Art grapples with being the child who survived, the one who lives in the shadow of a brother he never knew, yet feels intimately connected to due to their parents' grief and the pervasive legacy of the Holocaust. Sicher notes, "Richieu is the absent presence in the home that makes Art feel guilty and inferior" (2005: 148). This dynamic is symbolized in the photograph of Richieu that holds a prominent place in the Spiegelman household, a constant reminder to Artie of what and whom he could never be. Artie confesses his feelings while talking to his wife Françoise, by stating that "[t]hey didn't need photos of me in their room … I was alive! . . . The photo never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble … It was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete" (Spiegelman, 1991: 15). Artie is acutely aware that he remains overshadowed by Richieu. This phenomenon of being haunted by a deceased sibling is not uncommon. In *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, Gabriele Schwab reveals her experience, by stating that "[i]t was during my psychoanalytic training analysis that I was finally able to confront what I had vaguely known all along: so much of my life was shaped by an older brother who died as an infant during World War II, before I was born" (2010: 119). Schwab acknowledges a guilt that stems from living a life that her late infant brother never had. In psychoanalytic terms, children who experience this are known as "*replacement children*" (Schwab, 2010: 120), a category to which Art also belongs. This feeling of being an outsider in his own family is exacerbated by the fact that his parents hang Richieu's photo in their bedroom, but not of Artie, cementing his role as an imperfect substitute. This struggle peaks ironically at the end of the second volume, where his ailing, confused father

mistakenly addresses him as Richieu, saying, "Let's stop, please, your tape recorder… I'm tired from talking, Richieu, and it's enough stories for now" (Spiegelman, 1991: 136). Schwab notes that this silent rivalry with "a dead sibling is a classical syndrome of replacement children" and is a way trauma is passed down to future generations (2010: 121). In this regard, this inherited trauma is a pervasive force, shaping Art's perception of himself and his art. It is as if he is constantly competing with a memory, an ever-present ghost, leading to feelings of inadequacy and guilt.

As the novel unfolds, Artie's inheritance of trauma is notably deepened by the suicide of his mother, Anja Spiegelman, a pivotal event that profoundly impacted his life. Anja, a Holocaust survivor herself, struggles with her traumatic past throughout her life, and her suicide left an indelible mark on her son. Spiegelman's feelings of guilt intensify as he confronts the trauma of his past. He recognizes his failure to live up to his parents' expectations, which has made him a disappointment to them. Artie becomes increasingly aware of his lack of understanding and empathy toward his mother. This realization becomes particularly poignant when he recalls their last interaction before her suicide. His mother asked, "Artie…you…still…love…me…don't you?" (Spiegelman, 1986:103). Art's response, which he now sees as insensitive, continues to cause him pain: "I turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord: 'Sure, ma!'" (ibid). This moment underscores his regret over not being more emotionally available to his mother during her time of need. This added an extra dimension to the already complex feelings he had about being the child of Holocaust survivors. Art's personal suffering is directly linked to the Holocaust in a scene depicting him as if he were a death camp inmate (Fig 2), with the image being dominated by the sight of his mother's corpse in a coffin, complete with a swastika and a mass of victims depicted below.

Additionally, the drawing features his mother's hand, marked with a prisoner number, clutching a razor. Art's exclamations "Hitler did it!,""Mommy!" and "bitch" (Spiegelman,1986: 103) indicate his efforts to project his guilt onto others as a way to ease his tormented psyche. Yet, this attempt at alleviation fails; instead, his guilt deepens when a family friend holds him accountable for the tragedy "[i]t's his fault the punk" (ibid). Art acknowledges that his detachment from his mother's pain is an aftermath of the initial acts of genocide. In this light, Hitler's actions continue to inflict harm across generations. Art's blaming shifts dramatically in the narrative to accusing his mother: "You murdered me, mommy, and you left me here to take the rap!!!" (ibid). Despite his outcry, the indifference of his fellow prisoners, who tell him to "Pipe down, Mac! Some of us are trying to sleep!" (ibid), highlights the isolation of his suffering.

(Fig 2)

Artie presents a vivid depiction of the complex trauma he inherits as a second-generation Holocaust survivor. His father Vladek's harrowing and repressed stories of survival, the haunting presence of his deceased brother Richieu symbolized through a photograph, and the devastating impact of his mother Anja's suicide, collectively contribute to Art's psychological struggles. These elements of his family's past create a tapestry of survivor's guilt and inherited trauma, deeply affecting his mental health. The link between Art's own trauma and the Holocaust becomes strikingly clear in his emotional exclamations, "Hitler did it!", further emphasize this connection. The reference to Hitler in his outburst connects his personal trauma with the larger historical trauma of the Holocaust, suggesting a continuum of suffering that links his family's past with his present.

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The Fragmented Language of Trauma

In *Maus*, Spiegelman intricately portrays as a character who grapples with mental illness, a condition significantly influenced by the inherited trauma from his parents' experiences during the Holocaust. This transmissible trauma not only manifests in various aspects of Art's life, affecting his sense of self, his relationships, and his overall mental well-being, but also it manifests through the language. The language used in the novel reflects of the psychological state of trauma survivors, embodying their fragmented psyche. Spiegelman's experiences, which suggest symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), profoundly permeate the narrative structure and language of his graphic novel, *Maus*. Cathy Caruth defines PTSD as "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena" (1996: 57-65). She further states that this is due to the event "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experience it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (1995: 4-5). This is evident in the way the narrative structure is marked by repetition, narrative gaps, and fragmented timelines, mirroring the disjointed and often interrupted thought processes, typical of those who have experienced trauma.

In the novel, the narrative deftly intertwines past and present, creating a dual storyline, one set in the late 1930s and early 1940s during wartime, and another in the late 1970s to early 1980s, focusing on the retelling of those times. It encompasses Vladek's life and experiences around and during World War II, alongside the story of Spiegelman's later interactions with his father as he gathers these accounts. This narrative structure, where the horrors of the Holocaust as experienced by his father Vladek are interlaced with Artie's present-day struggles, exemplifies a fragmented narrative style or contextuality. This narrative fragmentation serves as a representation of the disrupted and disjointed mental state of Spiegelman who has endured or inherited trauma. Hence, the two distinct narrative timelines mirror the traumatic structure. Correspondingly, Anne Whitehead argues that "[t]he effects of the inherent latency of trauma can be discerned in the broken or fragmented quality of testimonial[traumatic]narratives which demand new structures of reading or reception" (2004: 7). Thus, this difficulty of expression or latency leads to fragmented, disjointed, or non-linear storytelling in *Maus*, often disrupted or intersected by shifts between past and present. For instance when Vladek recounts his experience of being received a draft letter in August 1939, from the government calling him to join the Polish reserves at the outbreak of war, indicating the imminent German invasion of Poland, as he reaches a critical moment in his story, saying "and on September 1, 1939, the war came. I was on the front, one of the first to ... Ach!" (Spiegelman, 1986: 39) he accidentally knocks over two bottles of pills. "So. Twice I spilled my drugstore!" (ibid) he exclaims, attributing the mishap to his poor vision caused by a lost eye and cataracts. Vladek then diverts to a tale about his eye surgeries and careless doctors. That day, in that chapter, he doesn't complete his account of the Nazi invasion, instead remarking it's enough for now, he concludes "I'm tired and I must count my pills" (ibid: 40). By moving between different time periods within the conversation, the narrative highlights the complex interplay between past and present, emphasizing the nonlinearity of human experience and the layered nature of storytelling. *Maus* highlights the fragmented nature of language, reflecting the fractured lives of trauma survivors. This fragmentation serves as a metaphor for the disrupted self in the post-war era, challenging traditional linear narratives and suggesting that language alone cannot fully convey the depth of trauma.

Spiegelman's narrative structure, characterized by the recurrent revisiting of traumatic events, mirrors the intrusive thoughts and flashbacks commonly experienced by individuals with PTSD. In a scene from the second volume of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Vladek Spiegelman, a survivor of the Holocaust, shares with his son a harrowing account of the selection process at Auschwitz during a stroll in the Catskills. He explains how prisoners were subjected to selections, a chilling evaluation determining who was fit for labor and who was deemed too weak, the latter doomed for extermination in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Fig. 3). Vladek recounts, "In the whole camp was selektions," (Spiegelman, 1991: 58) revealing he faced Dr. Mengele twice. As he describes standing bare, ordered to "FACE LEFT!" by Mengele, the accompanying visuals starkly illustrate Vladek demonstrating this moment, with Artie observing and recording his father's words. This scene spans four panels, with Vladek not only verbally recounting his ordeal, but also physically reenacting the selection process. The narrative shifts from Vladek's demonstration back to the actual events at Auschwitz, showing the deep impact of these memories. This method captures the gravity of Vladek's experiences, blending past and present in a powerful narrative device that underscores the selection's brutality and its lasting effects on survivors. In this moment, Vladek transforms from the older storyteller revisiting his past to the vulnerable, skeletal figure he was during his imprisonment, directly experiencing the oppression and helplessness of the Holocaust. He makes another quarter turn, but this time, it's not Artie capturing the tale. Instead, Josef Mengele, depicted as a menacing figure, commands Vladek to "FACE LEFT!" while assessing his physical state, a scene vividly captured in the artwork. In the sequence where Vladek reenacts his experience, he is depicted turning on the right side of the panel, acting out his past for an onlooker positioned on the left. This observer, Mengele in the final frame, adopts a stance very similar to Artie's in earlier scenes, and like Mengele, who decides Vladek's immediate future with a gesture " to be sent to the 'good side' and not 'to the other side,'a destiny visually represented by a chimney [58]" (McGlothin, 2003: 179), Artie is engaged in documenting Vladek's recollection of the event. The illustration doesn't suggest equating Mengele, who was responsible for countless deaths, with Artie, who is merely listening to Vladek's ordeal, yet it draws a parallel between the act of

witnessing the original traumatic event and its later narration, showing that recounting and experiencing trauma are intertwined, not separate, activities.

This connection is visually emphasized through Vladek's turning motion, which, from the second to the final panel, completes a three-quarter circle turn to the left. This series of panels, similar to frames in a film that create the illusion of motion when viewed in quick succession, suggests a continuous rotation, bridging a stark shift in scene while maintaining their individuality as separate images. The portrayal of Vladek's turn from the present recounting back to his past experiences visually narrates the merging of time periods, illustrating the complex link between past and present. This blend is not portrayed as the past intruding into the present narration, however shows the present moment of recounting casting its shadow onto the past events depicted in the comic's images. MacGlothlin states "the past story that is narrated bears the visual traces of the act of storytelling. The present, both visually and metaphorically, thus 'turns' into the past (ibid). Therefore, the act of narrating the past visibly carries forward into the present, metaphorically turning the present back into the past, highlights the repetitive appearance of traumatic events that hunts the survivors and raptures presence.

(Fig 3)

Hillary Chute recognizes comics as a hybrid art. In her view, "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" (2008: 459). Thus, the use of panels and gutters—the spaces between panels—serves as a powerful visual metaphor for the fragmented and fractured psyches of trauma survivors Artie frequently halts Vladek's recounting with questions about his mother, Anja, specifically asking, "Tell me about mom. Were you in touch with her in Auschwitz" (Spiegelman, 1991: 51), thereby repeatedly bringing her into the conversation. This recurring mention of Anja not only gradually reveals more about her, but also emphasizes her absence. Through these inquiries, Spiegelman connects further with these varied histories, engaging in a conversation with a past that remembers those who are no longer present. On the same page (Fig 4), in discussing the division of Auschwitz into two sections, Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II Birkenau, where Vladek and Anja were separately located, Spiegelman incorporates a bird's-eye view map of the camps. This map, reminiscent of real schematic diagrams and aerial photos, differs in its execution as a cartoon, adding a unique, personal touch to the depiction of historical facts. The layout of the conversation between Artie and Vladek, represented in distinct, isolated panels juxtaposed against the map, suggests that Artie perceives the story as disjointed. These standalone panels, framing the camp's layout without fully enclosing it, hint at the incompleteness of Vladek's accounts involving Anja, further fragmenting Artie's understanding of his family history by raising more questions.The layout's non-linear, open nature, particularly with frames potentially continuing the narrative in the bottom right corner, reflects the ongoing, dynamic process of retelling. Yet, the frames that mention Anja act as visual and thematic anchors, allowing for her perspective to subtly influence the narrative. This setup acknowledges the countless missing narratives and serves as a reminder of the many untold stories. As Costello claims "[t]he horizontal and vertical frames at the bottom right corner could both be logical continuation of the frame above, textually and visually, indicating the movement and instability inherent in this retelling" (2006: 35). The dialogue created on this page is thus not just between Artie and Vladek, however extends to include voices from the past and future, maintaining an open dialogue that resists closure and forgetting, thereby creating a space for multiple perspectives and a continuous exploration of self and history. Through this intricate interplay of panels and gutters, Spiegelman captures the essence of a fragmented, post-traumatic consciousness, offering profound insights into the enduring effects of trauma on individuals and their families.

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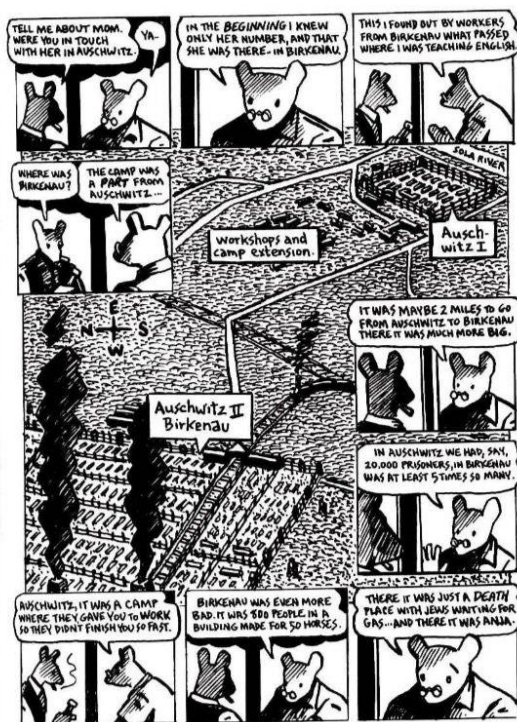
(Fig 4)

Accordingly, *Maus* employs intertextuality and visual art to communicate meanings that words alone cannot capture, making extensive use of repetition and visual gaps through panels and gutters to emphasize the narrative's themes. The novel's structure and content mirror the difficulties in representing trauma, particularly for those like Spiegelman, who experience it secondhand.

The Divided Self and Graphic Narrative

Art Spiegelman, in his creation of the graphic novel *Maus*, constructed an alter ego within the narrative. It is R.D. Laing's concept of creating a psychological fortress for self-protection. This concept is pivotal to understanding how Spiegelman navigates the challenge of communicating the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. This graphic novel becomes a tool for Spiegelman to manage and articulate these fragmented aspects of his experience and self. The narrative allows him to create a separate entity, a second self, which can safely contain and express the traumatic memories that are too overwhelming for his ''authentic self'' to confront directly. This separation is crucial for someone grappling with a schizophrenic-like experience, as it provides a structured framework to explore and integrate these disparate parts of the self. Laing delves into the phenomenon of self-division as a coping mechanism for external pressures. He emphasizes the significant divide between an inner, authentic self and external selves. Laing's perspective highlights the crucial role of this internal split in the development of schizophrenia, where individuals engage in depersonalization and consistently fabricate false selves to protect the genuine inner self from potential harm or annihilation. As he states " [i]f the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self" (1969: 42-43).This phenomenon stems from a profound anxiety called "ontological insecurity," indicating the "absence of the assurances derived from an existential position" (Laing,1969: 39). According to Laing, the formation of distinct personalities or false selves serves as a survival or self-defense mechanism, a response to the perceived threats and profound lack of safety in the world. As he puts it "the secondary verbal and conceptual task of reintegrating the various bits and pieces will parallel the despairing efforts of the schizophrenic to put his disintegrated self and world together again" (ibid: 20). In this sense, trauma which is inherently unrepresentable, poses an existential threat and cause ontological insecurities. As Dori Laub argues:

[trauma]survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed ''external evil,'' which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The ''not telling'' of the story serves as a perpetuation to its tyranny . . . The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor's doubts the reality of the actual events. The power of distortion in present-day life is demonstrated by the loss of a sense of human. (1992: 79)

Thus, trauma survivors face a critical need to articulate their experiences, as silence can have dire consequences that failing to verbalize and process traumatic events can lead to extreme outcomes, including total annihilation. As Aryan argues, "[s]torytelling has been a popular literary technique . . .to renavigate the paths of culture and identityformation" (Aryan, 2023: 385). Therefore, transforming traumatic memories into a narrative form, or using Pierre Janet's term "narrative memory" is essential and identity

forming. This challenge and process is evident in Art Spiegelman's work, mirroring an individual with divided self. In creating fictionalized version of himself and his traumatic hallucinations in *Maus*, Spiegelman effectively splits his own self as a protective mechanism against trauma. This separation allows him to address and process traumatic experiences without directly exposing his authentic self to their overwhelming nature.

Grappling with a profound sense of inadequacy in comparison to his father's survival of Auschwitz, Spiegelman finds himself caught in the shadow of an experience he deems incomparable. The magnitude of his father's resilience and endurance creates a daunting backdrop, making any personal achievement or endeavor appear insignificant in contrast. As Artie complains, "no matter what I accomplish, it doesn't seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz" (Spiegelman, 1991: 44). In response to this perceived powerlessness, Spiegelman embarkes on the creation of *Maus* as Barthes argues"writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (2008: 146). Thus, he deconstructs his real self by constructing a second self. Therefore, the graphic novel becomes a means for him to reclaim agency, feels autonomous and potent and assert a form of power over his narrative. As Aryan argues, "turning voices into characters and stories and entering a dialogue with them risks experiencing the self as fundamentally split, so losing more and more the sense of agency and authority as the self-conscious subject becomes an object of its own scrutiny" (Aryan, 2021:119). Similarly, through storytelling and visual representation of his traumas and his father's experiences, Spiegelman seeks not only to honor his father's survival, but also to establish his own agency and protect his own self in the face of trauma. As Artie puts it:

> He[Vladek] loved showing off how handy he was … and proving that anything I did was all wrong. He made me completely neurotic about fixing stuff… one reason I become an ARTIST was that he thought it was impractical-just a waste of time… it was an AREA where I wouldn't have to COMPETE with him. (Spiegelman, 1986: 97)

Accordingly, Artie, in narrating the story, asserts his sense of authorship and agency. Aryan defines agency as "a sense of controlling one's own thoughts, feelings and emotions" (2020: 123). This is evident in instances where he deliberately includes aspects despite objections. For example, when Vladek advises him not to mention a particular episode involving his ex-girlfriend Lucia as he states "but this what I just told you –about Lucia and so- I don't want you should write this in your nook" (Spiegelman, 1986: 23). However, Artie exercises his authorial control by incorporating that part into the narrative. The narrative does not strictly adhere to the defined roles of the authors. Notably, Vladek at times assumes the role of artist/narrator, evidenced when he draws diagrams to support his narrative, momentarily stepping into Artie's shoes. Although these diagrams in *Maus* are recreations by Spiegelman, inspired by his father's original drawings within the story, it is Vladek, not Artie, who is shown creating these images. While Vladek narrates his wartime experiences, Artie often takes control of the narrative direction. This dynamic is vividly illustrated when Artie, depicted as a man in a mouse mask, listens to a tape recording of their conversations, urging Vladek to focus on the story and provide more details about Auschwitz "please pop. The tape's on. Let's continue . . . let's get back to Auschwitz . . . ENOUGH! Tell me about Aushwitz!" (Spiegelman, 1991: 47). The narrative choices showcase Artie's intentional shaping of the story, emphasizing his autonomy and authorial presence in recounting the complex and sometimes contentious details of his family's history.

Artie does not merely write a story; instead, he deliberately selects the graphic medium. He is cognizant of the challenges in expressing the historical trauma of the Holocaust through words. He acknowledges that the stark reality of the events exceeds the capacity of imagination, this difficulty is further heightened by his own limited firsthand experience, as he states "Just thinking about my book…it's so presumptuous of me… I mean, I can't even make any sense out of my relationship with my father… How am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz?...of the Holocaust?" (Spiegelman, 1991: 14). The quote underscores the inherent difficulties of representing trauma, particularly as a second-generation Holocaust survivor. The unrepresentable nature of such profound suffering and loss challenges Spiegelman, as he grapples with the limitations of imagination and expression in conveying his father's experiences and his own inherited trauma. Facing these immense challenges, Spiegelman innovatively creates a 'second self' by creating *Maus*:

> I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. And trying to do it as a comic strip! I guess I bit off more than I can chew. Maybe I ought to forget the whole thing…There'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. (Spiegelman, 1991: 16)

Therefore, by creating a second self within the novel, as a narrative strategy allows him to navigate the complex terrain of memory, history, and subjectivity. This alter ego enables Spiegelman to explore and communicate his own trauma by distorting reality. Thus, Spiegelman through the graphic novel distorted reality of the brutality of Holocaust by using the technique of zoomorphism-the depiction of people as animals. As Whitehead claims" writers of trauma narrative push the realist project to its limits, not because they have given up on knowledge but in order to suggest that traumatic knowledge cannot be fully communicated or retrieved without distortion"(2004: 84). The portrayal of characters as animals Jews as mice, Germans as cats, serves as a form of dissociation, abstracting the real horror of the events. It allows Spiegelman to represent complex relationships, power dynamics and historical events without directly depicting individuals. This abstraction serves as a psychological defense mechanism, providing a degree of separation between the storyteller and the painful reality of the Holocaust. As Young

states,"[b]y using mice masks, the artist also asks us not to believe what we see. They are masks drawing attention to themselves as such, never inviting us to mistake memory of events for events themselves" (1998: 687). Therefore, Art Spiegelman underscores the essential role of fictionalization and the intentional distortion of reality in the process of transforming traumatic memory into narrative trauma. He recognizes these creative techniques as indispensable tools for making trauma communicable, allowing for a meaningful conveyance of the intense experiences without succumbing to the risk of complete self-annihilation. In acknowledging the necessity of these artistic liberties, Spiegelman emphasizes their crucial function in rendering traumatic narratives accessible, shaping them in a way that facilitates communication while providing a protective barrier against the overwhelming weight of the memories.
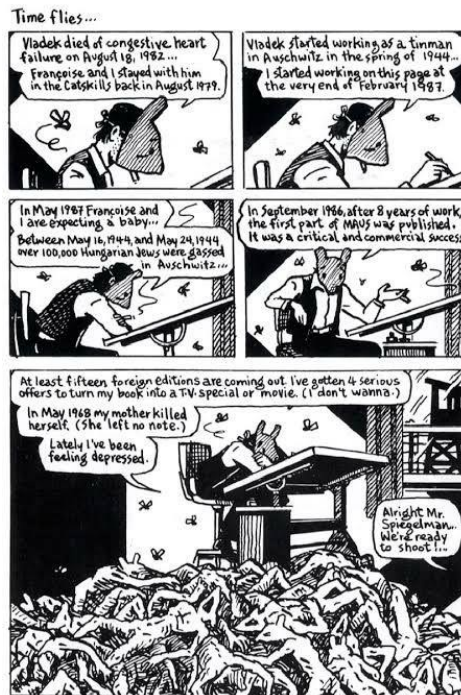
(Fig 5)

Fig.5 depicts juxtapositon of life with death. Art's achievements, which stem from the immense suffering and loss endured by many during the Holocaust, are contrasted with his mother Anja's inability to communicate and make sense of her own Holocaust trauma. This act of creation sets him apart from Anja, whose story remains largely untold, especially highlighted by her absence of a suicide note "she left no note" (Spiegelman, 1991: 41). The act of discarding Anja's diaries, symbolically erases her personal narrative and struggles (Fig. 6). Art's narrative success, therefore, stands in stark relief to the silence and loss represented by Anja's missing written legacy. Anja's silence becomes a symbolic representation of this failure, intensified by Vladek's act of burning her diary, preventing the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory. Hence, due to destroying his mother's memory, Art labels Vladek as "murderer" (Spiegelman, 1986: 159). Simultaneously, the pile of corpses under Artie's drawing desk in the second volume of *Maus* serves as a stark reminder that silence persists for those who did not survive or were silenced, such as Anja. In this regard, the process of creating the second self within *Maus* itself could be argued as a therapeutic endeavor for Spiegelman, and the act of writing and storytelling can become a means for him to process and articulate the deep-seated trauma that has been passed down to him. It allows him to confront and give shape to the otherwise intangible and overwhelming experiences of his family's past, providing a pathway for understanding and coping with the inherited trauma.

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(Fig 6)

CONCLUSİON

To conclude, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* emerges as a post-war novelthat provocatively challengesthe conventional humanist notion of a unified and autonomous self. Spiegelman's artistic narrative embodies fragmentation, mirroring the split psyche of individuals grappling with the aftermath of war. The textual and visual elements within *Maus* intricately weave a complex tapestry that defies traditional boundaries, challenging the transcendental signified. The self is not unified, however deconstructed and divided. This suggests that the traditional belief in man's ability to directly convey personal experiences through language and words is no longer upheld. In the absence of the humanist author, the literary work undergoes a transformation, aligning with Barthes' concept of "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (2000: 148). By breaking away from a conventional, objective portrayal of historical events, *Maus* engages in a subjective and introspective exploration of the self, emphasizing the complexities of memory, trauma, and the construction of personal narratives.

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