Original Research Article
Accepted: 12 December 2022
https://doi.org/10.20901/pm.59.4.06

Transgenerational Trauma in Comic Books: The Cases of *Heimat* and *Sunday's Child*

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Summary

Transgenerational trauma refers to the situation where children are traumatized by the experiences of their (grand)parents. It is a unique combination of individual, familial, and collective (cultural) traumatic processes. The intertwining of these processes poses a particular representational challenge, one that could be overcome by the comics medium. It was proposed by various authors that the visual language of comics is particularly useful for portraying traumatic experiences, such as the fragmentation of time, trauma's belatedness and the haunting presence of the past. In this article I analyse two graphic novels, *Heimat: A German Family Album* by Nora Krug and *Sunday's Child* by Serena Katt, both of which explore the transgenerational perpetrator trauma, and the roles the authors' families had during the Second World War. I show how the authors use representational and aesthetic choices that help them convey the process of fact-searching as well as emotional engagement and imagination that is characteristic for transgenerational trauma.

Keywords: Comics, Graphic Novel, Trauma, Transgenerational Trauma, Perpetrator Trauma

Introduction

Trauma is usually defined as an individual's psychological response to overwhelming events, such as wars, natural disasters, various acts of violence, or deep societal change.[1] Despite this seemingly simple definition, the concept has a rich intellectual history, both impacting and being impacted by various disciplines that include psychoanalysis, memory studies, literary theory, holocaust studies, and art (Ball, 2021). While these interactions have enriched our understanding of trauma as well

[1] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose insights and comments helped me to improve the first version of this article.

as broadened these disciplines, they have also "rendered the specific qualities of trauma all the more scattered and shattered, fluid and fragmented, the subject of extensive and sometimes controversial debate" (Davies, 2020, p. 1). One such debate concerns the representability of traumatic events. The "first wave" of literary trauma theory that erupted during the 1990s posited that trauma is essentially an unrepresentable event (Caruth, 1996). The combination of Freud's work on memory and trauma and poststructuralism brought about the idea that "trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language" (Balaev, 2014, p. 1). However, there have been several challenges to the supposed unrepresentability of trauma. For example, the pluralistic trauma theory focuses on the cultural, social, and political aspects of trauma representation and its socio-cultural variability. While the traumatic event affects the individual's identity and can be limited in its representability, this is not seen as being a universal response, which in turn leaves the possibility of direct knowledge of the event and its representation (Balaev, 2018). Similarly, scholars working on cultural trauma point specifically to the socially mediated attribution and representation of events as being key in establishing the experience as traumatic for the collective (Alexander *et al*., 2004; Alexander, 2012).

Another challenge to the unrepresentability came from works on trauma and art, or more specifically trauma and comics[2]. For example, Hillary Chute (2016, p. 3) talks about how the visuo-spatial specificity of the medium of comics allows it to "risk representation", and challenge the classic idea of "unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility" of trauma. Harriet Earle (2017, p. 43) points out that comics can overcome the crisis of representation by producing affect that "mimics (some part of) the feelings and experience of trauma".[3] Indeed, various trauma topics have been portrayed in comics – from the Holocaust in *Maus* (Spiegelman, 2009), PTSD and the Vietnam War in *Tapestries* (Moore *et al*., 1987), Yugoslav wars in *Vojna* (Duplančić, 2021), to war-torn communities in *Palestine* (Sacco, 2020), *Safe Area Goražde* (Sacco, 2019), and *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (Ghosh, 2013), individual and familial trauma in *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Bechdel, 2007), etc. In this article I aim to analyse two graphic novels dealing with a specific kind of traumatic experience – transgenerational perpetrator trauma. Both *Heimat: A German Family Album* (2018) by Nora Krug and *Sunday's Child* (2019) by Serena Katt tackle this topic at the intersection of individual, familial, and collective

[2] I follow Scott McCloud (1993) and Hillary Chute (2010) and use the plural term *comics* when talking about the specificities of comics as an art form and its relation to trauma. In my usage of the term *graphic novel* I follow Romero-Jodar (2017) who points out the graphic novels' focus on character change, transformation, and the passing of time to a greater degree than the "traditional" comic book.

[3] For a discussion on the focus of affect in trauma studies, see Ball (2021).

trauma and narratives; both authors explore the past and try to understand their own lineage/identity revolving around their family's positions during conflicts. The rest of the article is structured as follows. In the first part, I present theoretical accounts of trauma with a specific focus on transgenerational trauma. The second part is devoted to the discussion on the medium of comics and its relation to trauma, in which I present how this medium's specificities and its unique combination of both drawn and written material make it particularly suitable to convey the language of trauma. The last part of the article contains the analyses of *Heimat* and *Sunday's Child.*

Transgenerational Trauma – Intersection of Individual, Familial, and Collective Processes

> *It is bad enough to see images of children victimized today; that the same images may shape the lives of generations to come, sometimes unconsciously, often by design, is even harder to comprehend, and accept.*
>
> Yael Danieli (1998, p. xv)

A specific case of traumatic experience is transgenerational trauma, the situation where children, and even grandchildren, of individuals that were traumatized begin to experience various post-traumatic symptoms or troubles in everyday functioning (Danieli, 1998; Pearrow and Cosgrove, 2009; Grand and Salberg, 2021). Most studies of transgenerational trauma have focused on victims' offspring and have been inspired by second-generation Holocaust survivors (Danieli, 1998; Grand and Salberg, 2017; Salberg and Grand, 2017; for exceptions, see McGlothlin, 2006; Schwab, 2010). They show that the identity-formation processes of children are completely warped by the traumatic experiences of their parents; children are overinvolved in their parents' suffering and neglect their own self-development (see Prager, 2003; Alford, 2017).[4] To have a deeper understanding of transgenerational trauma, we need to investigate the ways individuals react to traumatic events, the ways that familial processes are included in those reactions, and how all these processes are embedded in collective social, political, and cultural practices.

While Freud's work on the impact of extreme events on memory can be thought of as a starting point of modern trauma theory (Balaev, 2018), it was not until his work was combined with a post-structuralist approach to literary criticism in the 90s that trauma studies were consolidated as a separate field. This "classic" approach to trauma sees the traumatic event as being unrepresentable, and traumatic responses to it as belated and imminent. For example, Caruth (1996, p. 4) understands traumatic events as ones that are "experienced too soon" and which cannot be consciously known. Paradoxically, the extreme nature of the event at the same time "demands

[4] For a different perspective of strong resilience in non-clinical samples of second-generation Holocaust victims, see Liner (2017).

urgent representation" and "shatters all potential frames of comprehension and reference" (Guerin and Hallas, 2007, p. 3). This means that trauma is not located in the event, but in "the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Thus, trauma leads to the fragmentation of the psyche and prevents the narration and integration of the event, thereby also creating a temporal rupture in the mind. From the unconsciousness, through flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitive action, it continues to damage the individual. While early trauma studies scholars pointed out the connections between individual and collective experiences, in the sense that "a cultural group's traumatic experience in the historical past can be part of the psychic landscape of the contemporary individual who belongs to the same cultural group" (Balaev, 2018, p. 365), later studies approached this relationship in a more nuanced way. Pluralistic models of trauma, for example, point out the social, historical, cultural, and political particularities of each traumatic event. From this point of view, trauma's effects are conceptualized as an "interplay of external and internal forces as well as individual character traits and cultural factors" (*ibid*., p. 367). This means that trauma does not have to be unrepresentable or belated and that the act of recollection is impacted by cultural practices that can produce various types of knowledge and meaning of the past.[5] Still, while pluralistic models expand the possibilities of trauma representation, they do not touch upon the collective processes that occur after an extreme event impacts a collective. For that we can turn to the cultural trauma theory, which is a socio-constructivist account of trauma. At its centre is the active collective meaning-making process focused on the past. The main claim of this theory is that "events are not inherently traumatic...Trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (Alexander *et al*., 2004, p. 8). This means that events, such as wars or natural disasters, are not *a priori* traumatic, but are portrayed as such through social meaning-making processes. A cultural trauma is set to occur when "members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (*ibid*., p. 1). Thus, compared to individual responses to extreme events, for collectivities, it is the "symbolic construction and framing, of creating stories and characters" that is key to both establishing that event as traumatic and incorporating it into a new collective narrative (Alexander, 2012, p. 3). That process Alexander (2012) calls the trauma process; it is guided by carrier groups (e.g., political elites, intellectuals, marginalized groups) that aim to persuade the rest of the collective of their representation of the event. To do so, carrier groups must offer

[5] For an overview of more critical approaches to trauma studies, such as postcolonial or feminist, see Traverso and Broderick (2010) and Ball (2021).

an understanding of events – what happened, to whom did it happen (who were the victims), who were the perpetrators, and who are the victims related to the rest of the collective (Alexander, 2012). Cultural trauma is useful for understanding the creation, transmission, and collective adoption of traumatic narratives within a community and how they tie in with group identity. However, it lacks clear assumptions on and understandings of the dynamics between collective and familial historical narratives (which can be in line, but also can widely differ) as well as on the traumatic symptoms and preoccupations that have been found in the second (and even third) generation of trauma victims. For this, we must turn to theories that consider transgenerational familial trauma processes.

Familial Processes

I focus on three approaches to transgenerational familial trauma – Gabriele Schwab's (2010) work on transgenerational perpetrator trauma, Tihamer Bako and Katalin Zana's (2018; 2020) work on the transgenerational atmosphere, and Marianne Hirsch's (1997; 2008) work on postmemory. While these works have different assumptions regarding the exact nature of the transgenerational transmission of trauma, they are connected by the idea that an individual's psyche can be heavily impacted by the trauma of others, mainly her/his familial ancestors. Furthermore, they all point to the importance of affect in both transmission and dealing with inherited traumas of past generations.

Schwab's (2010) work relies heavily on the psychoanalytical work by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994). They assume that when faced with unspeakable and unbearable extreme experiences, individuals are not able to acknowledge and mourn the losses that they experienced – "the words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed – everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss" (*ibid*., p. 130). Thus, it is not only that traumatized individuals are not able to introject the traumatic event into their psyche, but the event also pulls with it the expected affective responses. The silence that ensues is from a psychoanalytic point of view adaptive, but it is never complete, only covered up by empty speech, coldly distancing information, or defensive storytelling (Schwab, 2010, pp. 47, 54). At the same time, if the silence persists for too long or it is too encompassing, an internal psychic splitting ensues. That which is silenced, unintegrated and unassimilated, haunts the individual like a ghost from the psychic crypt (Abraham and Torok, 1994). However, the lack of mourning and ensued crypt-building can influence other people, particularly children of the traumatized individual. The silence of the parent (and his/her crypt) goes on to haunt the children unconsciously in the form of phantoms, which are the "gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (*ibid*., p. 171). Thus, the children inherit the

"psychic substance of the previous generation and display symptoms that do not emerge from their own individual experience" (Schwab, 2010, p. 49). They are prone to erect their own psychic wall, i.e., their own crypt, within which they store their parents' phantoms. Schwab (2010) furthers Abraham and Torok's work in two ways. First, she focuses to a greater extent on the collective and cultural aspects of the crypt-phantom dynamic of transgenerational trauma. Stating that "in violent histories, the personal is inseparable from the collective and the political" (*ibid*., p. 78), she points out that the collective traumatic experiences can be kept within a collective crypt, which returns to haunt succeeding generations in the form of a collective phantom. Second, Schwab (2010) calls for a dialogical account of trauma, stressing the need to open (collective) crypts of both the next generation of victims and the next generation of perpetrators. They both need to mourn the psychic loss of the previous generation. Of course, there is substantial difference between the transmission of trauma for victims and perpetrators – the perpetrator's crypt is usually filled with guilt, shame, and self-hatred, which in turn results in the children's lack of a positive foundation for developing their (collective) identity.

Similarly to Schwab, Bako and Zana (2018; 2020) show that trauma is transmitted relationally, i.e., in direct relational patterns between parents and their children, and mostly in a non-verbal way. The latter comes from the transgenerational atmosphere, "an extended intrasubjective state or field of experience" of traumatized individuals (Bako and Zana, 2020, p. 16). The atmosphere is the result of traumatized parents not having a safe milieu to narrativize, share their experiences, and more generally contain their undigested traumatic feelings. Thus, they turn their inward psychological state outward, and share their traumatic experiences in a pathological, unsymbolized way; for example, through feelings of deep anxiety (Bako and Zana, 2020). In that sense, the atmosphere can be seen as a "form of remembering and of sharing the experience when there is no verbal remembering, and there are no memories, at least on the symbolized level" (*ibid*., p. 34). Sometimes it is precisely the silence that constitutes this kind of atmosphere. The children are drawn, or more precisely brought up, in the transgenerational atmosphere and instead of becoming witnesses to their parents' trauma, they become participants. They develop a *we*-self, an inflexible support for the parents' self, which prevents them from developing a personal, core self – "the child has no chance of perceiving the world but through the expanded, distorted, intrasubjective community sharing the experience... the parent and the child keep each other in the atmosphere, in the identity given by the *we*-self" (*ibid*., p. 42). In their work, Bako and Zana (*ibid*., p. 10) also point out that social processing of trauma is crucial for preventing transgenerational transmission of trauma, both for individuals and the whole society. Echoing the assumptions of cultural trauma theory, they argue for the need for an intersubjective environment around

trauma, which includes empathic and reflective relationship among members of the collective, by which trauma can be shared and even narrated.

For Marianne Hirsch's work on transgenerational trauma, the family is the key space within which "nonverbal and cognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly... often in forms of symptoms" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 112). Within this space children can inherit the individual and/or collective trauma of their parents. Their connection to the previous generation's experiences is so deep that the memories of the previous generation become a form of their memories. This "*consequence* of traumatic recall but at a generational remove" Hirsch (*ibid*.) calls postmemory. Postmemory is distinct from memory because it occurs at a generational distance, and it is distinct from history due to its intimate, personal, and deeply affective connection to the content in question (Hirsch, 1997). Importantly, postmemory implies an "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 107), and Hirsch sees photographs as the best way to mediate the past. The inspiration for her work on postmemory came from Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* in which Spiegelman uses three reproduced photographs which, according to Hirsch (1997), constitute both memory (of Spiegelman's father), and postmemory (of Spiegelman). *Maus* was not only an immense source of theoretical development within trauma studies (an overview in Davies, 2020), but also served as the foundation for various theoretical discussions regarding the connections between trauma and comics as an art form.

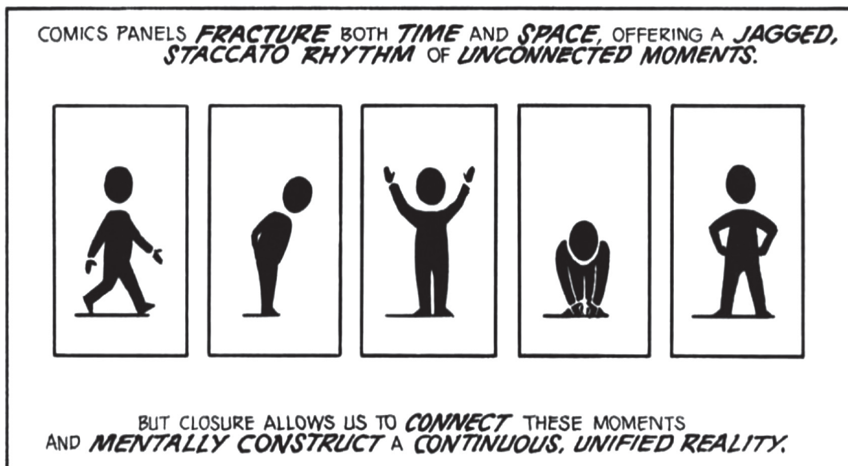
Comics and Trauma

Regardless of our approach to trauma, art has been identified as a way of understanding and communicating traumatic experiences and affects. In that sense, art can be thought of as "a kind of visual language of trauma and of the experiences of conflict and loss" (Bennett, 2005, p. 2). For individuals and societies to heal or work through traumas, Bako and Zana (2020) stress the importance of witnessing the trauma by others. This puts trauma in an intersubjective relation and makes it a manageable experience and a potentially transformable one. This process can be achieved through a work of art. Importantly, witnessing through art does not mean establishing the truth of the traumatic experience. As Atkinson (2017, p. 16) points out, the truth is "not only the thing you must not say, but also *the thing you cannot say*". It can, however, be expressed creatively, and importantly for transgenerational trauma, it can enable both expression and engagement of traumatic affect (*ibid*.). Most of the studies on the relationship between art and trauma usually focus on the written word, film, and visual or performance arts. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been several major theoretical developments exploring the usage of comics in relation to trauma. As opposed to the classic approach to trauma that deems it unrepresentable, authors like Hillary Chute and Harriet Earle

argue that trauma merely creates a representation crisis, and comics can, taking the risk of representation, nonetheless "represent trauma productively and ethically" (Chute, 2010, p. 3). Perhaps of all art forms, comics is the "most proper field for the development of trauma narratives" (Romero-Jodar, 2017, p. 22). In order to understand why there are such high regards for comics and its possibilities for trauma representation, we have to delve deeper into the specificities of the art form itself.

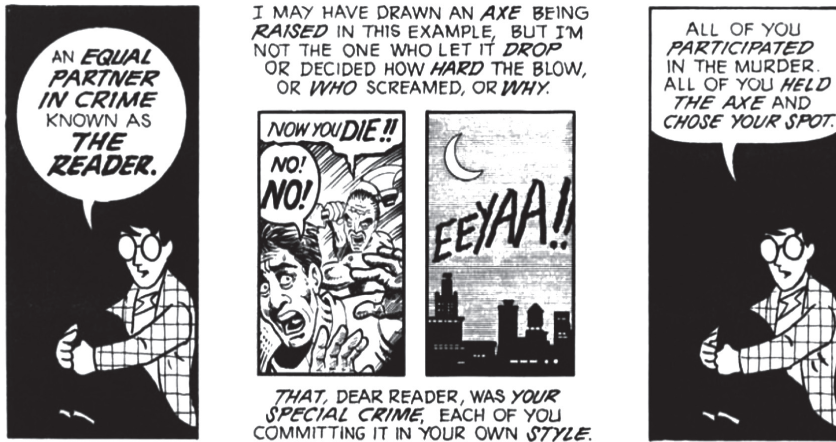
Comics can be defined as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, p. 20). These images are usually framed within panels, which usually depict single points in time. However, single panels are not perceived as a photograph, but "as a portion – which can be of various lengths – of the narrative, where something actually takes place and takes time" (Saraceni, 2003, p. 7). Taken together, panels on the page create a "sequential *continuum*", and the reader simultaneously experiences both individual panels and their combination into a grander narrative (Groensteen, 2007, p. 26). This is due to the key aspect of the comics architecture, the gutter, which is the empty space between panels. Since frames limit a "fragment of space-time" into a panel (*ibid*., p. 40), and the panels are set apart by the gutter, comics can be said to fracture both time and space simultaneously. For the reader, who is presented at the same time with the past, the present, and the future in space, time is no longer perceived as duration, but as a sequence (McCloud, 1993, p. 67; Hague, 2020, p. 181).

Picture 1. Time as sequence



Source: McCloud, 1993, p. 67.

Picture 2. Readers as active participants



Source: McCloud, 1993, p. 68.

The gutter is also said to invite closure and ease the reader's perception of the panels as a continuous reality, so much that McCloud (1993, p. 61) asserts that "comics is closure!". This means that readers of comics are, more than in any other art form, invited to actively fill the story. They are a "silent accomplice" in giving the narrative meaning and continuity (*ibid*., p. 68).

There are many other structural aspects of the comics medium that authors use to tell various stories, convey meanings, and elicit emotions. For example, since comics usually include text, the form of the text carrier (e.g., text balloons), can convey various emotions and characteristics, such as whispering, official documents, or sarcasm (Cohn, 2013, p. 36). Another aspect is the point of view which is used by authors to define the characters' positions in the story and the reader's relation to the characters, which in turn can contribute to the reader's identification with them (Saraceni, 2003).

How are these aspects of the visual language of comics important for trauma? First, trauma fragments time, preventing the traumatized individual the integration of the experience into a single cohesive narrative. Comics panels are pieces of fragmented time, but due to their spatial relationship and the closing power of the gutter they push the reader toward integration and formation of a single narrative. In that sense, comics use the "same mode of cognition essential for reassembling what trauma has disjointed" (Leone, 2018, p. 245). Second, since comics portray time as space, they can create the actual "presence of the past" in the present, which is what

happens with traumatic (social) haunting (Chute, 2011, p. 109; McNicol, 2020). Third, comics usually include a combination of text and drawings, which allows them to combine textual accounts of traumatic experiences with visual depictions. While textual form is "deemed more honest" and "the most authentic" autobiographic account of traumatic events (Guerin and Hallas, 2007, p. 7), drawings can elicit various emotions in the reader; even complex ones that are related to trauma, such as blockages, isolation, and post-traumatic stress (Orban, 2020). Fourth, comics authors can use point of view to increase the reader's identification and simultaneously elicit their empathy with the character (and/or author), and the reader can more easily become a second-hand witness to traumatic experiences. However, identification has major ethical implications, e.g., when readers are asked to identify with the perpetrator. For Polak (2017, p. 20), the gutter here again plays a significant role, because in addition to closure, "it represents the shift from one point of view to another", thereby prompting the reader to ethically relate not only to the characters, but also to the author. With the shift from panel to panel, the reader thus questions the representational choices of the author, "particularly how we narrate and receive history and how we affectively engage with historical atrocity" (*ibid*., p. 1). Finally, since comics, and particularly graphic novels, can contain deeply personal experiences and perspectives (Pines, 2013), this makes them especially useful for exploring instances of postmemory, within which authors can combine individual experiences and a wider socio-political context.

Asking Questions About Perpetrators – *Heimat* and *Sunday's Child*

In this section I will analyse two graphic novels that deal with transgenerational perpetrator trauma[6] – *Heimat: A German Family Album* (2018) by Nora Krug, and *Sunday's Child* (2019) by Serena Katt. Nora Krug, a German-American author, was born in 1977 in Karlsruhe, Germany, and moved to New York to study Visual Arts, where she is currently an associate professor at the Parsons School of Design. While she has published several graphic editions of literary works, *Heimat* is her most

[6] A sidenote is important here. Dealing with the trauma of perpetrators entails several risks, e.g., the risk of equivalence of the perpetrator and the victim, downplaying the atrocities, revisionism, increasing empathy toward the perpetrator, even portraying the perpetrators as victims etc. However, I would argue that these graphic novels are important to study. If we take the position that dealing with the past is an attempt to take responsibility for atrocities, acknowledge the victims, and work toward an integrated collective psyche and better relations among collectives of former perpetrators and victims, then perpetrators, especially children of perpetrators, who had no role in the violence of their ancestors, must also be considered. From this point of view, these novels can be seen as making a move from collective guilt to collective responsibility, always keeping in mind the delicacy of such actions and differences between official and private narratives (for a similar discussion on societal responsibility, see Subotić, 2011).

successful book so far. It won multiple awards and was translated and published in over 15 countries.[7] Less information is publicly available about Serena Katt, who is a German-English illustrator and artist, and a senior lecturer at the University for the Creative Arts in Farnham.[8] *Sunday's Child* is Katt's debut graphic novel, and it received several positive reviews. Both graphic novels explore the author's family role in the Second World War; combine individual, familial, and collective narratives; use archival data and family photographs. Both authors are third post-war generation (born in the 1970s and later) and spent most of their lives outside of Germany. Both graphic novels can be viewed as instances of postmemory, but with an additional generational shift that impacts the authors' questions and approach to the past. Aleida Assmann (2006, p. 193) states that while the second post-war generation in Germany was conflicting and focused on condemning of their parents' role in the Second World War, the third generation is "now much more concerned with seeking its place in a continuous family history, however troubled and ruptured that continuity might be... [however], the desire to reconstruct family histories does not have to mean reinvesting in genealogy and restoring the family's honour. Most of this writing is still driven by a desire to come to terms with guilt and haunting legacies" (see also Assmann, 2010). Schwab (2010, p. 35) also analyses the post-war German generation, which were stuck "between knowing and not knowing, belonging and not wanting to belong that marked [their] psychic life". It is an interesting situation in which the crypt itself was not silenced in the factual way (Germany had politics of acknowledgment, Nuremberg trials, official politics of reparation etc.), but "these acts did not include a psychosocial politics that addressed the responsibility, complicity, guilt, shame, and psychosocial deformation of the culture at large. Ultimately, the official politics did not break through the politics of silencing, denial, and disavowal. The latter politics became a haunting legacy for postwar children, a legacy that marked the formation of psychic space and the affective politics that shaped public discourse and private lives with unacknowledged if not unconscious feelings of guilt and shame." For children to break away from the trauma requires them to first address their parents' unfinished business, after which they can acquire agency that would allow them to deal with the past by themselves. Without it, they stay fixated on the parents' trauma, which in turn affects their identity – they form a negative identity, both not knowing how to be German and hating that they are German. This is in line with Bako and Zana's (2018) note about the difficulty of breaking away from the transgenerational atmosphere. Firstly, because it is an adaptive response of the trauma participants, but secondly, because for children the transgenerational atmosphere is the only way to build at least some kind of closeness and intimacy with their parents.

[7] https://nora-krug.com/belonging-heimat

[8] https://serenakatt.co.uk/ABOUT-1

Heimat: A German Family Album

In *Heimat*, Nora Krug explores her individual, familial, and collective identity that was warped by the German collective guilt and silence that ensued after the atrocities of the Second World War. Krug grew up in West Germany during the 1980s where she learned facts about the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, but "never learned about what happened in our own hometown" (Krug, 2018, first chapter). Krug explains that she and her whole generation struggled with "the meaning of HEIMAT" (*ibid*.), which is the German word for homeland or hometown. The reason is that Krug learned about German atrocities from WWII, which led to her developing feelings of guilt, both for the act of Holocaust as well as for being German. The guilt and shame are visible in Krug's experience while travelling abroad – she is bombarded by stereotypes about German culture and Nazism. As can be seen in Picture 3 (on the next page), Krug portrays different parts of the world as being connected with a speech bubble that transcends time and space. The speech bubble has the words "Heil Hitler", a synonym for Nazism. Everyone else in the drawing, regardless of their nationality, is portrayed uniformly, in bland colours that blend them with the background, pointing to a global narrative regarding Germany and Germans. Meanwhile, Krug portrays herself in fuller colour, connecting herself both to the speech bubble, which is accentuated by bright colours, and to the collective shame toward Nazism.

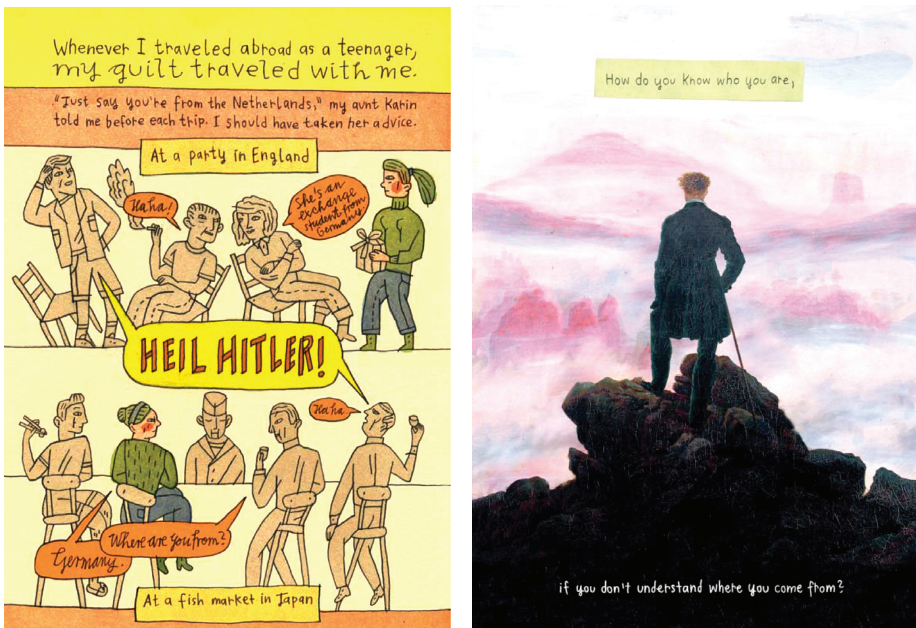
This struggle with collective trauma that defined her collective identity spilled over to the struggle about her own familial and personal identity, and Krug (*ibid*.) asks: "How do you know who you are, if you don't understand where you come from?" This question is written over the redrawing of the *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, a painting by German painter Caspar David Friedrich completed in 1818. The painting itself is a synonym of romanticism, an era that glorified nature and especially the past. The wanderer is standing on top of a mountain looking forward into the fog from which several other mountain tops and rocks emerge. It can be said that he is contemplating his own place in the vastness of nature around him.[9] Krug separates the question in two parts (Picture 3), implying the generally unknown vastness from the picture is her identity, the story of who she is. As with the mountain tops that emerge, she too has only a vague sense of her identity, information regarding Germany's atrocities, but the issue of her familial role is unknown, covered by the fog of intergenerational silence. It is her ancestors' collective psychic crypt. *Wanderer* seems to be important for Krug because an homage to it stands as the cover of the book. The difference is that in the cover Krug is portrayed as the wanderer looking over what seems to be her hometown in Germany. The fog is lifted, and it is there that Krug would find who she really is. The usage of the *Ruckenfigur*, the back-figure, of

[9] https://artincontext.org/wanderer-above-the-sea-of-fog-by-caspar-david-friedrich/

which *Wanderer* is one of the most famous examples, is used to increase the reader's identification with the author. This is particularly true for comics in which the back-figure creates the feeling that the character in question, here Krug, is not "her" for the reader, but "may be referred to as 'I'" (Saraceni, 2003, p. 78).

The exploration of Krug's past starts with in-depth studying of Germany's history and culture, but that does not bring her closer to understanding her *heimat.* She concludes that "perhaps the only way to find the HEIMAT that I've lost is to look back; to move beyond the abstract shame and ask those questions that are really difficult to ask – about my own hometown, about my father's and my mother's families. To make my way back to the towns where each of them is from. To return to my childhood, go back to the beginning, follow the breadcrumbs, and hope they'll lead the way home" (Krug, 2018, second chapter). Krug's shame is abstract since it is a feeling without actual experience. Still, it was strong enough to warp Krug's identity. This is an instance of transgenerational atmosphere of silence (Bako and Zana, 2020), and Krug is aware how that silence is a crypt surrounding the actual experiences of her family in the war; for her to transcend that shame and guilt, she must try to open the crypt (Schwab, 2010).

Picture 3. Collective and individual identity



Source: Krug, 2018, first chapter.

In the rest of the graphic novel, we follow Krug's fascinating research on both sides of her family's history. On her mother's side of the family, Krug struggles with her grandfather Willi's past, specifically his role in the Nazi regime. He died when Krug was 11 and she has personal memories of him. The familial narrative about Willi was that he was a driving instructor for the German army during the war. However, Krug is devoted to see whether that narrative is true. To do so, she takes on an enormous task – she studies family pictures, documents, letters, as well as municipal and national archives to piece together the story of her family's role during the war. This often reads as a thriller, one in which both Krug and the reader are confronted with conflicting accounts from page to page – Willi tried to help Jews, he supported the regime, he was a member of the Social Democratic party, he was a member of the Nazi party etc. Krug is often obsessing over the need to clearly establish the facts. For example, she meticulously analyses old maps of Karlsruhe to pinpoint Willi's office in relation to the synagogue that was burned down and to the main square where Jews were being beaten and rounded up (Picture 4); or she analyses archival photos for traces of her grandparents behind the mass of locals rounding up Jews.

Picture 4. Where were you, Willi?

Source: Krug, 2018, tenth chapter.

Krug's search for facts could clear her internal struggle of being "stuck between knowing and not knowing" (Schwab, 2010, p. 35) about her grandfather's role in the attacks on Jews. She is explicit about the role that establishing facts has for her – it is to find out if the information is "malignant or not" (Krug, 2018, tenth chapter). The need for "stronger proof" is there because she "never had the chance to ask" Willi about it (*ibid*.). Throughout the graphic novel, when Krug establishes a fact, it is represented by a photograph of the actual archival material, which fulfils the role of authentication of the narrative of her family's role in the war (Szep, 2020). Even more than that, Krug represents these documents as pieces of her grandfather, stating after finding an actual form which Willi filled that "finally, Willi is talking to me" (Krug, 2020, twelfth chapter). Thus, finding the archival materials is a way of breaking the intergenerational silence. However, to confront the transgenerational crypt, merely facing the facts and breaking the silence is not enough; there is a need for emotional engagement in the assessment of responsibility and in the potential change of relationship with one's (grand)parents (Schwab, 2010). There is plentiful emotional engagement and conveying of emotions to the reader in *Heimat.* For example, in Picture 4 we see Krug "asking" her grandfather about his whereabouts on the day that the local synagogue was burned down. Since there are no official documents about this, it means that Willi cannot answer back. Thus, Krug must imagine the possibilities, which she divides into four panels. In all panels Willi is breaking the fourth wall, looking at both Krug, as the person asking the questions, but also at the reader. In all but one panel, Willi's face does not convey emotions, and in those panels, Krug draws him away from the crowd and destruction. On the other hand, in the panel that imagines Willi at the town square amidst the destruction, Krug draws him with a slight smirk, while at the background we see a person in a Nazi uniform, an angry mob, and a hurt bearded man, supposedly a Jew. Willi's smirk during an act of mass violence in combination with his breaking of the fourth wall elicits fear for two reasons. First, because Krug fears imagining (and learning) that her grandfather committed atrocities. Second, at a more visceral level the reader is drawn into a situation with Willi as a participant of violence who does not exhibit anger or hate, but responds to violence with a smirk, almost a psychotic smirk, a trope usually used for portraying deeply villainous characters.

This type of imaginative process, that is particularly important for postmemory, is present throughout the graphic novel. It is represented via cartoony drawings, which serve three roles. They allow the reader to perceive them as possible realities and they reinforce the identification with both those portrayed in the drawing (McCloud, 1993), as well as with Krug as the narrator and source of these imagined realities (Pedri, 2015, p. 7). This process in turn impacts the reader's empathy with Krug's exploration of the past, as well as her ancestors' behaviour. Krug uses

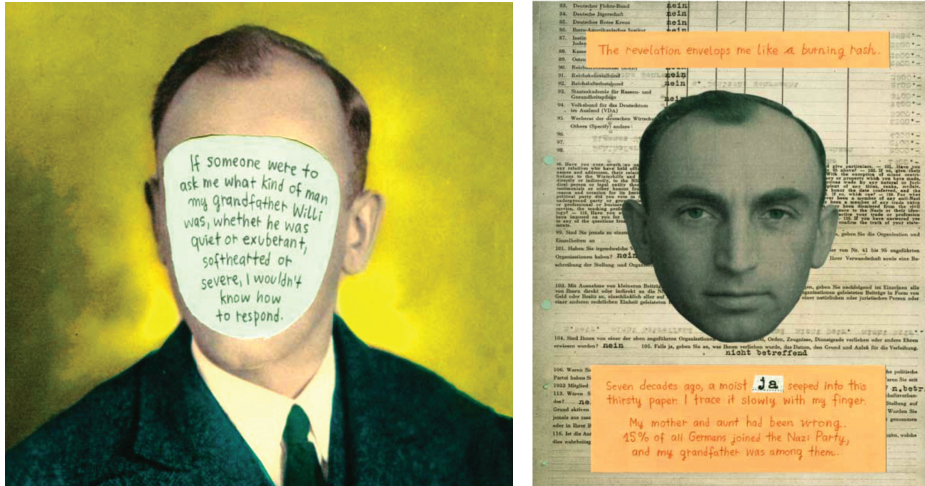
mostly photographs as mediations of the past within postmemory. They represent fixed points in time around which she can update her imaginative process, as well as disregard certain narrative paths. For example, in Picture 5, Krug's imagination and narrative of Willi's active role in the war ("lying in the muddy trench") is replaced by the positive story that her mother and aunt tell her about Willi, but even more by the photograph that she acquired. It shows Willi in military uniform in a car, and allows her to freeze time, imagining Willi forever in that situation, "while other men commit atrocities far, far away". At the same time, the photograph is here as a claim to the truth, grounding Krug's imaginative process in reality and guiding her subsequent imaginative explorations of Willi's life.

Picture 5. The limits of imagination

Source: Krug, 2018, fourth chapter.

After much research, Krug manages to establish a fact that goes against the familial narrative – Willi was a member of the Nazi party. The combination of facts and emotions that relates to this revelation is interestingly portrayed by Krug. Before she knew any facts regarding Willi's role in the war, Krug uses his photograph, but cuts out his face (Picture 6). In its place stand her words, explaining that if someone were to ask her what kind of a man her grandfather was, she would not know how to respond. The face, which is the clearest identifier of a person, is missing; and behind it is an empty space, filled with unknown information. The cut out is from an actual photograph, signifying her disconnection with the facts of Willi's life, but also with Willi himself.

Picture 6. Unknown and known Willi



Source: Krug, 2018, fourth and twelfth chapters.

Since Krug cannot open the crypt of Willi's past, but is aware of it, the crypt becomes all-encompassing, casting doubts about Willi's whole identity and characteristics. On the other hand, when she finds archival material that Willi was a member of the Nazi party, the crypt is finally opened, and the ghosts of Willi's past become known to her. The membership is portrayed by a simple "ja" (yes), which is a photograph of Willi's response from the post-war form to the question regarding his membership in the Nazi party. That fact is embedded between her words, thereby changing the whole familial narrative about Willi. She also connects that narrative to the German collective identity and trauma, with the total number of German citizens that were members of the Nazi party. The revelation is so strong that Krug uses a cut out photograph of Willi's face on this page. Thus, the membership in the party becomes the crucial identifier of her grandfather's identity, the thing that makes him known to her.

It is important to keep in mind that Krug's work is not just her personal negotiation of the traumatic past, as it involves her parents and aunts, who are second-generation Germans. By opening these questions, Krug is forcing them as well to look at the crypt, to break the silence, and take in the emotional toll that was either too hard to bear or was never there to begin with. The silence of the transgenerational atmosphere is visible in the quote by Krug's aunt, describing her relationship with Willi (her aunt's father) – "One of the things I've always struggled with is the

fact that I was never able to get emotionally close to him... Now I think his remoteness had to do with the fact that he probably experienced horrible things, and that he tried to deal with them by covering them up inside" (Krug, 2018, sixth chapter). This quote is written over six panels within which Willi's war path is drawn and imagined, both by Krug and, by extension, by her aunt as well. The panels thus represent the way Willi's war trauma was encapsulated in his psychic crypt and the way it was transgenerationally transmitted to two subsequent generations.

The transmission of the transgenerational atmosphere is even more present regarding the life of her uncle Franz-Karl, who died when he was 18 as a German soldier on the Italian front. For Krug, Franz-Karl was a "complete stranger", with whom she only associated "war and death", and since he had been a Hitler's soldier, she learned that she wasn't "supposed to feel sadness over his premature death" (*ibid*., third chapter). Here we see the lack of mourning, the unhealthy relation to one's loss, that makes it hard to work through trauma (Schwab, 2010). When Krug and her father visited her uncle's grave for the first time, it was only then that her uncle was transformed for her from "a shadow", a phantom from her family's past, to a human being. And it was then that Krug "longed to understand what it had felt like to be him. Was he proud to fight in the war? Was he afraid? What was the last thing he saw, the last thought he had?" These questions are the driving points of Krug's further investigation and imagination of Franz-Karl's life and are written next to a photograph of him at the war front, thereby marking the start of the exploration of her postmemory. The exploration delves deep into her uncle's life and death, but also opens the issues and traumas her father endured during his childhood. Her father was born in 1946 and can be seen as a replacement child, brought to the world with the impossible task of filling the idealized position of his deceased brother. Her father not only physically resembles his brother but is also named the same. Schwab (2010) says that replacement children are supposed to live someone else's life and thus they never can quite have their own; their psychic life is interwoven with the violence of WWII, and they usually cannot mourn. The replacement children are unconsciously pitted by their parents against their dead counterparts, in a fight that they are sure to lose, since the dead child is completely idealized by its parents (*ibid*., p. 122). This creates a psychic split, since replacement children cannot mourn the loss of their dead sibling and integrate that loss into a healthy psyche, while at the same time they are competing with that sibling for their parents' love. The split was made even deeper with the silent transgenerational atmosphere that characterized Krug's father's upbringing. There was "no shared family narrative... from father to son to grandson... and because there was no story, there also was no history" (Krug, 2018, fifth chapter). This psychic split is clear for Krug when she mentions that her father "talks about his childhood as if it had been lived by some-

one entirely unrelated to him" (*ibid*.). Visually, Krug represents this replacement child "syndrome" by juxtaposing two photos of her uncle and her father receiving First Communion. She is thus materializing the overlap in their identities and lives.

In the end, Krug is only partially successful in establishing facts, and she is aware she will never have a full picture of her family's history. However, she is successful in owning the past, as she mourned her familial losses with responsibility. Krug explored her postmemory, establishing various facts about her grandparents and uncle, and imaginatively approached the narratives of their lives. She was strongly emotionally involved in the process, and was finally given an individual, familial, and collective identity, a narrative of her past, with all its positive and negative sides. Krug concludes that "HEIMAT can only be found again in memory, that it is something that only begins to exist once you've lost it" (*ibid*., epilogue). She understands that she needed to break the familial psychic crypt, both by establishing facts and by mourning her familial loss. If we return to the starting pages, the dedication of the book reads "To my old family and my new family". In the ending pages we learn that Krug is pregnant, and thus her graphic novel can be read as a gift to her children, so that they do not have to inherit the familial phantoms that Krug inherited.[10]

The novel itself is artistically very interesting. It is a scrapbook, a combination of drawings, photographs, redrawn photographs, and words in the style that is reminiscent of a high-school journal. In that sense it feels like a coming-of-age journal. This corresponds to Krug's questioning the familial narratives, similarly as one does while growing up. As in a scrapbook, there are various aesthetic techniques present, pointing to numerous narratives, sources of information, and imagined possibilities of the past. It transmits to the reader the chaotic nature of this kind of exploration of the past, of trying to pinpoint the role and motivation that Krug's grandfather and uncle had regarding the Second World War. As in a journal, the reader can read Krug's intimate thoughts and struggles, and at the same time see the visual representations of her emotions or imaginative explorations. As the above-presented excerpts show, Krug very clearly depicts her emotions of shame, guilt, dread of finding incriminating information, and the silence that surrounded her family's traumatic experiences. The visual representations, in combination with an intimate insight into her thoughts, push the reader toward greater identification, understanding and empathy, both with Krug and her ancestors. It is interesting to note that Krug does not use gutters, one of the key features of the comics medium, and classic panel grids (4 to 9 panels, neatly organized) are only sporadically used. This makes the page layout instable, creating an incoherence for the reader, who must get acquainted with the new layout for every page, thereby making him more

[10] For a more critical reading, see Grujić and Schaum (2019).

involved in the reading and the narrative of the graphic novel. Even though authors like Earle (2017) and Chute (2010) point to the comics combination of panels and gutters as being key for representing the fragmented traumatic experiences, Szep (2020, p. 249) argues that the whole page layout also "relates to the expression of trauma". This means that the medium of comics relates to trauma beyond the "simple" combination of panels and gutters. In *Heimat*, the words, photographs, and drawings all intertwine, mirroring the combination of thoughts, facts, and emotions that are deeply connected in traumatic experiences, especially in transgenerational trauma. Borders are mostly used for photographs and archival materials, further accentuating their role as facts, as things existing beyond the graphic novel itself, around which Krug's emotions and thoughts are portrayed. This lack of a classic comics structure makes it more difficult for the reader to reach closure and form narratives,[11] which is also a defining feature of traumatic experiences and the fragmentation of the psyche that ensues after traumatic events.

Sunday's Child

Serena Katt's *Sunday's Child* (2019) is a graphic novel exploring the past of the author's late grandfather Gunther. It takes the form of a conversation between Katt and Gunther, and the introduction to the graphic novel is a letter written by Katt to her grandfather, telling her "Dearest Opa" how she found a photo album containing photos of his youth. Even though he gave her notes and a CV, it was not until after his death, with the photo album, that she "was introduced to a grandfather I had never known". She finds out that he spent most of his youth years in Nazi education camps, and Katt has many questions regarding his past, beyond the luck and success that he achieved as a "Sunday's child" (always lucky!) – "I'm beginning to question what's behind the façade... I want to know about... the violence, about the fear, about the shame" (Katt, 2019, introduction). The transgenerational atmosphere of silence was present in their relationship. Katt mentions how she tried many times to open Gunther's crypt, asking questions about the family's past, only to be confronted by the silence or empty speech, with Gunther's experiences being neatly replaced by a simple chronological narrative and "a brief description of life" (*ibid*.). As in many instances of postmemory, it was not until Katt found photographs of Gunther's childhood that she began to question Gunther's stories, but also to ask questions regarding his past emotions and motivations. Katt is aware that to answer these questions, she will have to make an imaginative investment, crate her "own version of history" by inventing and adding things, as well as add-

[11] Even though the use of page numbers is not a standard in comic books, the lack of them in *Heimat* can be seen as an additional way to portray the difficulty of following a clear linear narrative of traumatic experiences.

ing words and feelings that she thinks her grandfather felt. The introduction ends with Katt (*ibid*.; italic in original) addressing her grandfather – "Dearest Opa, here is your story. Told by both of us. In your words *and in mine*". This ending serves as a reminder of the co-creation of narratives and emotional states that is the defining feature of postmemory, but also as a pointer for the reader on how to distinguish between Gunther's and Katt's words in the graphic novel.

Gunther was born in Poland into a family with an aristocratic past. It is already at this point that Katt questions the familial narratives. She puts Gunther's statement about the familial aristocratic roots on the top of the page of a redrawn photograph of Gunther and his older sister Inge in front of a residential building in town. Additionally, she explicitly counteracts the narrative-telling Gunther – "But you don't live in a castle, you live here, in a the Polish workers' estate". His father was a soldier in the First World War, and after the war, Gunther's whole family moved to Germany, where Gunther started attending school in 1935. While Gunther's story regarding school is a positive one, focusing on the fun and enjoyment that he got out of school, Katt again questions it, casting doubt on her grandfather's lack of understanding and awareness of Jewish children missing from the school (Picture 7).

In 1938 Gunther is old enough to join Hitler Youth, a Nazi Party for young boys that had the goal of indoctrinating the boys with Nazi ideology and training them for warfare.[12] Gunther is immediately chosen as the leader of his group and spends a lot of time away from home at camps, where he learns about war, violence, and group identity. The third chapter, completely devoted to the experiences in Hitler Youth, lacks Gunther's words, mimicking the silence that surrounded this part of his life. It is filled with Katt's various imaginative routes, particularly about Gunther's emotional states, ranging from the sadness of missing home to happiness of belonging to a group and fear regarding the violence that was present. After the war starts, Gunther attends more military camps, looking forward to joining the battle, but is not drafted since he is still a minor. After he is finally called to the Russian front (while the rest of the soldiers are fleeing back home), he is sent back by an older soldier, claiming that Gunther is still a child. Back home, Gunther survives the allied bombing, and after the war leads a happy life, working in a bank and winning gold medals in gymnastics.

There are many questions that Katt poses to her grandfather, regarding the accuracy of the stories he told, the experiences he was silent about, and his emotional experiences. However, the most important one seems to be the question regarding his sincerity and internalization of the Nazi ideology – did Gunther continue to harbour Nazi sentiments after the war, until he died?

[12] https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/hitler-youth-2

Picture 7. But are there no children who disappear overnight?

Source: Katt, 2019, second chapter.

After reading Gunther's words that after the war "life really begins again", the reader turns the page only to be confronted with a drawing of a young Gunter in a Nazi Youth uniform, looking away from the reader and toward Hitler's portrait (Picture 8). Katt asks the question in small font in the upper-left corner of the page – "But does it, Opa?", doubting her grandfather's words on the complete break from the Nazi past after the war. Visually, the reader is facing Gunther's back, which increases the identification with him. At the same time, it increases the reader's identification with Katt, because the same as her, the reader cannot know how Gunther is feeling toward Nazi ideology – is he smiling, is he crying, is he scared, proud, confused etc. This mimics the issue of facing the past in post-war Germany; there was a collective facing with the historical facts, but they were "coldly" acknowledged, without appropriate emotional engagement and addressing of "the psychosocial deformation of the culture at large" (Schwab, 2010, p. 84). Katt is facing the facts, albeit after Gunther died, but she lacks insights into Gunther's emotional states and levels of involvement in the Nazi ideology. In that sense Katt's work offers no final narrative resolution, but instead offers emotional engagement. For example, even though she knows that Gunther attended military camps, and she read

Picture 8. But does it, Opa?

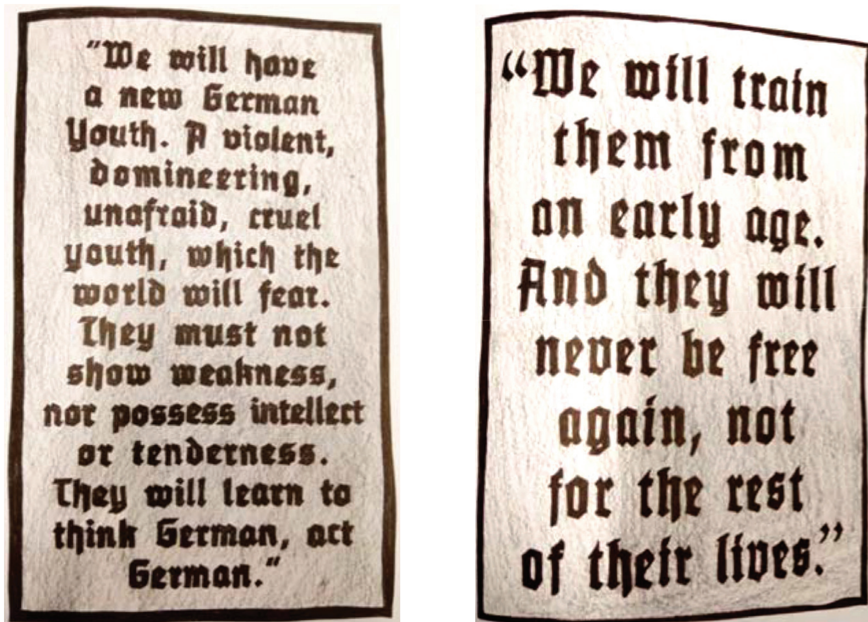
Source: Katt, 2019, sixth chapter.

about the sadism and (sexual) violence that occurred within Hitler Youth, she does not know what happened to Gunther, or, even more importantly, what did Gunther do at the camps? This tension and dread is portrayed by a double-spread page that is completely black except for Katt's question to Gunther – "What happens in your dorm at night, Opa?" (Katt, 2019, fourth chapter). It portrays the dark of the room within which Gunther could be abused (or be an abuser), but it also portrays the lack of facts regarding this part of Gunther's life and the emotional tension that Katt is experiencing by exploring this issue. At the same time, *Sunday's Child* explores the issue of indoctrination, wherein the reader follows a young "regular" boy, slowly being drawn into the violent Nazi ideology.

The first and last drawing are written in Fraktur font, a version of the blackletter typeface, which was used as the official font of the Nazis until 1941 (Picture 9), further embedding Gunther's life story within German cultural trauma.[13] The drawings contain supposed quotes from Hitler, stating how the indoctrination of youth

[13] https://www.wired.com/2017/05/how-fonts-are-fueling-the-culture-wars/

Picture 9. They will never be free again



Source: Katt, 2019, first and sixth chapters.

must take place. The last page states – "We will train them from an early age. And they will never be free again, not for the rest of their lives" (*ibid*., sixth chapter). Katt assumes that her grandfather's life surely did not start anew after the war, but she is also ambivalent. It is up to the reader to conclude whether this means simply that her grandfather was "branded" for the rest of his life with guilt and shame, or that he was forever a member of Hitlerjugend?

The visual characteristics of the graphic novel also contribute to the empathy and identification with young people in Nazi Germany, particularly to their exposure to Nazi indoctrination. Even though Katt bases her work in photographs, there is not a single depiction of those in the novel. Instead, Katt redrew all photographs (Picture 10). This has a dual impact on the reader. First, the reader becomes aware of Katt's processing, both graphically, and emotionally, of the past and her grandfather's photos (Pedri, 2015). Thus, the reader knows that he is looking at something that, though grounded in reality, is transformed by Katt, which pushes the reader to reflect on her other representational choices. For example, the aesthetic of the graphic novel is rather childish, which is particularly accentuated for the members

Picture 10. Re-drawing the past

Source: Katt, 2019, first chapter.

of Hitler Youth, who seem as children dressed as adults. The reader is thus reminded of their young age and their (probable) naivety, as well as possible lack of agency in the indoctrination process. The second impact of redrawing the photographs is that the reader has a tough time distinguishing between the redrawings of actual photographs and Katt's imagination.

On a lot of drawings, the characters are breaking the fourth wall, looking at the reader, as if they were being photographed. Furthermore, both the redrawings of photographs and drawings have the same style, and as such the lines of reality and imagination are even more blurred, which pushes the reader to accept them all as parts of the same narrative, regardless of the lack of factual resolution.

Sunday's Child lacks gutters, but it also lacks panels. The whole graphic novel consists almost exclusively of double-spread pages, which are relatively large (zoomed in). The drawings thus "bleed out" of the pages, creating a sense of moments frozen in time (McCloud, 1993), as well as making those past moments spread over into the reader's world, as if the past was present in today's world (Szep, 2020), which is in concordance with the time-fragmenting and belatedness of traumatic ex-

periences. However, compared to the strong evocation of closure that comes from the gutter, the lack of panels and gutters pushes the reader toward closure between pages, which often depict scenes that are years apart. Again, this mimics the complexity of forming a single narrative in postmemory, trying to form a coherent story from various photographs. The colours are bland, mostly shades of grey, which elicits the temporal distance of the depicted events like in the old black and white photos. At the same time, it does not make anything or anyone stand out, making the characters in the book lacking individuality and making them (un)able to respond to the strong social and political shifts that are happening. The text itself is visually secondary to the drawing, located in the upper corner of the page. However, it offers context, and frames the visual depiction within Katt's exploration of her grandfather's past.

Conclusion

The medium of comics has been heralded as a way to overcome the representational crisis that is brought upon by traumatic events. It can mimic the fragmentation of time and belatedness of trauma, push the reader toward closure and integration of the experience into a cohesive narrative, elicit various affective responses, increase the identification and empathy toward characters and the authors, etc. (e.g. Chute, 2010; 2011; Earle, 2017; Polak, 2017; Orban, 2020). This vast array of usages of the visual language of comics makes it even more applicable to complex traumatic experience, such as transgenerational trauma, which is a specific case of trauma happening at the intersection of individual, familial, and collective processes and narratives. To represent this type of trauma, one usually needs to represent and incorporate factual data, archival materials, the process of questioning narratives and emotional states, imaginative creations of the past, and deep affective experiences. In this article I analysed two graphic novels dealing with transgenerational perpetrator trauma, Nora Krug's *Heimat: A German Family Album* and Serena Katt's *Sunday's Child*. Both graphic novels deal with the issues that the authors faced when exploring the question of the role of their families in Germany during the Second World War. The authors make heavy use of photographs, and the graphic novels can be seen as forms of postmemory, in which the authors explored someone else's memories with a generational distance while having a deep affective connection to that person (Hirsch, 1997).[14] Both authors use the comics medium to represent their ancestor's (collective) psychic crypt (Schwab, 2010) and the silence of the transgenerational atmosphere (Bako and Zana, 2018). Both graphic novels are trying to break the silence and the crypt not by merely facing the facts, asking tough

[14] However, Behrendt (2013) argues that one of the defining features of postmemory is the reliability of the information around which the next generation develops an emotional investment, which is not the case for the graphic novels analysed in this article.

questions, but through deep emotional engagement and imagination. To do so, the authors employ various techniques and aesthetics, going beyond the classic gutter and frame combination. For example, Krug's page layouts mimic the chaotic process of working out (and working through) familial narratives and she juxtaposes the depictions of photographs with her drawings, again mimicking the differences in the processes of establishing facts and emotional engagement. On the other hand, Katt uses the lack of panels and gutters to elicit the fracturing of time within traumatic experiences, as well as for making the past present today. Furthermore, Katt's usage of childish aesthetics and the back-figure pushes the reader toward greater identification with Katt's grandfather as well as toward empathetic understanding. At the same time, both authors are going against the "cumulative heroization" that is sometimes present in Germany's post-war generations (Welzer, 2010). In that situation individuals adopt the intergenerational transfer of past narratives, usually reformulated to fit the moral standards of today; these narratives persist even when confronted with condemning facts. *Heimat* and *Sunday's Child* show that the comics medium is indeed capable of exploring and representing complex traumatic experiences, as well as offering deeply emotional accounts of delving into narratives of perpetrators coming from one's own familial history.

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