
Autobiography speech, a re-creator element to comics

Bernard Martoni Mansur Corrêa da Costa ¹

Abstract: This paper proposes to relate autobiographical text to comics, in particular the graphic novel format. Traditionally comic books were usually related to humorous themes and a minor form of art, mainly because of a limited graphical technique due to the low quality of the printing process and this media origins which is associated with American newspaper and European caricature, in both cases they do come from a non-traditional form of art or literature. During the history, comics development faces many changes concerning both thematic and artistic. In 1978, the cartoonist Will Eisner release the book *A Contract with God: and Other Tenement Stories*, considered for many as the first graphic novel and an important point in comics development in format and thematic sense. In 1975, Phillipe Lejeune presents the book *The Autobiographical pact*, in which he exposes his criteria to define a text as autobiographical. The proximity of those books' release denotes an important aspect in this period, which provided a changing in many narrative medias, this autobiography element shows itself as a relevant aspect to understand comic's production, particularly between 70's and 80's. In this sense, the present paper aims to identify the autobiography presence in comics and to show how it is affected by them. The presence of autobiography in comics shows themselves as a new possibility to explore this young media. It favored new possibilities in the medium, allowing a more personal and mature approach, a significant changing from super heroes thematic. To analyze this aspect, this work will focus on two important graphic novels: *The Dreamer*, by Will Eisner, and *Maus: a survivor's tale*, by Art Spiegelman.

Keywords: comics, comic strip, graphic novel, autobiographical speech, *Maus*

How satisfying is to leave a mark on a blank surface.

Craig Thompson

¹ Master's degree (in course) in Literature Studies at Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Instituto Federal Sudeste de Minas, Campus Barbacena, MG; E-mail: bernard.martoni@gmail.com.

Comic: a concept

When speaking about comics (comic books, comic strip), it is necessary to clearly understand their characteristics and how they operate. In a clear association with text and image, the reading is not limited to decoding words and semantic association, just as we cannot think that this is a mere glimpse through images that marks this reading experience. We need a better understand in what characterizes this media that grows every day. If in the past it was a very relevant contact with reading, today it influences much of the film production, electronic games, as well as accompanying various narrative forms, as adaptations or complementary narrative sources.

The conceptualization of something as present in our time as the comics can be more complicated than it seems. Perhaps because we are dealing with media that is a result of an image association and text, their classification ends up subordinate to the appreciation of one, or another, aspect. We also find it difficult due to the extensive unexplored artistic field for this media, which has not had yet two centuries of existence.

William Erwin “Will” Eisner², in addition to its extensive comics production, has a relevant theoretical study on the theme. In the preface of *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985)³, the author explains the comics reading process:

The comics have an overlap of word and image, and thus it is necessary that the reader carries out its visual and verbal interpretive skills. The art of regencies (eg, perspective, symmetry, stroke) and literature (eg, grammar, plot, syntax) overlap each other. Reading the comics is an act of aesthetic perception and intellectual effort (Eisner, 2010: 2)⁴.

² Known as Will Eisner, he is one of most important names in American comics. He has been a cartoonist for more than fifty years, became worldwide known for his character Spirit (1940), the publication of the graphic novel (graphic novel) *A contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (1978) as well as were his subsequent publications.

³ Book in which the author discusses primarily on the technical comics production, in a sort of guide that shows some techniques to achieve certain narrative flow.

⁴ As histórias em quadrinhos apresentam uma sobreposição de palavra e imagem, e, assim, é preciso que o leitor exerça as suas habilidades interpretativas visuais e verbais. As regências da arte (por exemplo, perspectiva, simetria, pincelada) e da literatura (por

In this quote, Eisner highlights the mixed nature inherent to comics, considering the parts that make up the comics, a fusion of techniques for reading the object as a whole. Still concerned with highlighting the "grammar of comics," Eisner notes that as:

In its simplest expression, the comic employs a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols. When they are used over and over again to express similar ideas, it becomes a language - a literary form, if you prefer. And in this disciplined application creates the "grammar" of sequential art. (Eisner, 2010: 2)⁵.

In the book *Graphic Narratives*⁶ (1996), W. Eisner takes care to define some concepts. On the very term that entitles the book, he considers any narration that uses images to convey ideas:

This paper aims to consider and examine the unique aesthetics of sequential art as a vehicle for creative expression, a distinct discipline, an artistic and literary form that deals with the disposal of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea (Eisner, 2010: IX)⁷.

Another relevant term is the "sequential art", this would be a series of images arranged in sequence. Finally he takes the reader to the definition of comics, "printed arrangement of art and balloons in sequence, particularly as it is done in comic books" (Eisner, 2013 (b): 10). Although has not got very clear the difference between the two terms used by Eisner, the cartoonist highlights the use of speech bubble associated with the image, which shows a concern with the importance of the word in the construction of comics.

exemplo, gramática, enredo, sintaxe) superpõem-se mutuamente. A leitura da história em quadrinhos é um ato de percepção estético e de esforço intelectual. (Eisner, 2010: 2)

⁵ Em sua expressão mais simples, os quadrinhos empregam uma série de imagens repetitivas e símbolos reconhecíveis. Quando são usados vezes e mais vezes para expressar idéias semelhantes, tornam-se uma linguagem – uma forma literária, se se preferir. E é essa aplicação disciplinada que cria a "gramática" da arte sequencial. (Eisner, 2010: 2)

⁶ *Narrativas Gráficas*

⁷ Este trabalho tem o intuito de considerar e examinar a singular estética da arte sequencial como veículo de expressão criativa, uma disciplina distinta, uma forma artística e literária que lida com a disposição de figuras ou imagens e palavras para narrar uma história ou dramatizar uma ideia. (Eisner, 2010: IX).

In *Understanding Comics* (1993)⁸, Scott McCloud⁹ presents an important definition of comic's medium. The author separates the form of comic from its content, as well dissociating the production from its content. It shows a concern to analyze comics as narrative construction with their own language.

To get to his concept of comics, McCloud starts from the definition used by Eisner, in which the image is placed one after the other following the cartoonist's wishes. However, McCloud ends up being more specific in his definition:

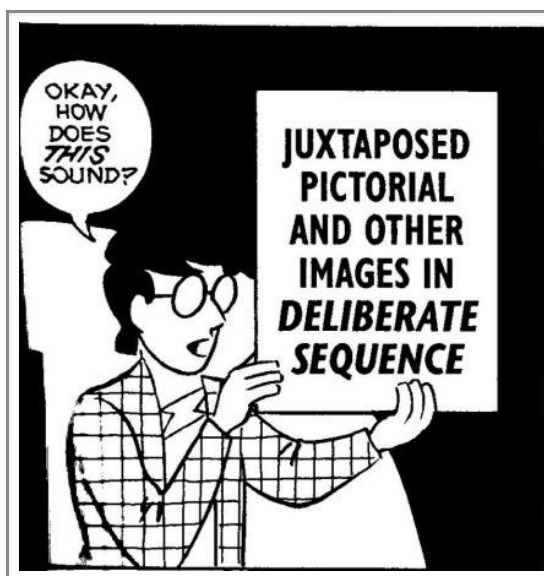


Figure 1: Scott McCloud. Source: *Understanding Comics* p. 9, 2005.

After reflecting on his definition, McCloud emphasizes the importance of the images placed in a sequence proposed by the cartoonist. It is noticeable the status he gives to image in comparison to the role of word, enhancing the image related to the text, since nothing is said about words in his definition. Although the author points out, at another time, on the word and image interaction, and their different combinations, he does so as narrative possibilities and not as a

⁸ The book's fame isn't only for his analysis about comics narrative, but for his comic format. The author is also the cartoonish protagonist who talks directly to the reader while using the graphics possibilities of comics to illustrate what he is been talking.

⁹ Scott McCloud is an important theoretical of the comics. Producer of the series of *ZOT* science fiction in the mid-80s, a pioneer in web comics production, creator of the concept of 24-hour comic.

condition *sine qua non* to the comics existence. Another important aspect on McCloud's theory is the need for a space between the comic strip panels (frame, box), what he calls gutter. It is on this space that the reader can assume what happens in the narrative, it is what moves the narrative in reading time. The absence of this space means the presence of only one frame. Thus it occurred the comics exclusion consisted by a single image.

Comic definition often finds problems of this nature. In the middle 70's in the United States, David Kunzle's¹⁰ works proposed more flexible parameters than Eisner and McCloud, but which also had problems to encompass all comics possibilities. In his book, *A Novela Gráfica*¹¹, Santiago Garcia¹² point out Kunzle criteria to identify a comic in any country and at any period:

The comic book definition given by Kunzle is based on four conditions that serve to define a HQ "at any period at any country: 1) There should be a separate image sequence ; 2) There must be an image preponderance on the text ; 3) The environment in which the comic appears and for which it is originally intended to be read, must be reproductive , or in printed form , a means of mass communication ; 4) The sequence should tell a story that is both moral and topical. (Kunzle *apud* García, 2012: 43)¹³.

Garcia highlights the Kunzle's thoughts concerned to the need for a separate image sequence and the association with comic strip to a printed form of mass communication. For him the comic existence is exclusively connected to

¹⁰ He began the tradition of comics studies in the United States with the *History of the Comic Volume I: The Early Comic Strip*, followed by work *The History of the Comic Strip. The nineteenth Century*.

¹¹ This book that traces what he calls historical essay that presents the history of comics since its first manifestations not yet known as comics in the first half of the nineteenth century until more recent publications.

¹² Born in Madrid, Santiago García is graduated in journalism, from the Universidad Complutense, and art's history, from the Autonomous University of Madrid. He writes about comics for over 20 years. Before the book *The graphic novel*, he has released three other books under the pseudonym of Trajan Bermúdez.

¹³ A definição dada por Kunzle se baseia em quatro condições que servem para definir HQ "de qualquer período, em qualquer país": 1) Deve haver uma sequência de imagens separadas; 2) Deve haver uma preponderância da imagem sobre o texto; 3) O meio em que as histórias em quadrinhos aparece e para o qual está originalmente destinada tem que ser reprodutivo, ou seja, em forma impressa, um meio de comunicação massas; 4) A sequência deve contar uma história que seja tanto moral quanto tópica. (Kunzle *apud* García, 2012: 43)

a mass communication medium and linked to the press. Like Scott McCloud, Kunzle excludes the comics consisted by a single image. Eisner analyzes the comic considering its application in magazines and comic strips, where it is universally employed (Eisner, 2010: IX).

Santiago García points out that the definitions in general end up deleting some comics that we recognize as such. It ends up less helpful than we expected them to be. When comics are associated to the print medium, it is seen more as a social object and defined more by their utility than by any formal criteria (García, 2012: 43).

In his didactic organization, McCloud talks about the importance of what the definition does not say instead of what it is actually said. Following this thought, the author points out that comic books are a narrative medium that has as main characteristic a large range of subjects to be dealt. (McCloud, 2005: p. 22). We are interested in this feature by the possibilities it offers to comics, particularly autobiography, which is responsible for many current comic productions (McCloud 2000: 40).

The emerging of a new format

In their development, the comics were changing throughout their history. Both in their European origin, linked to Rodolphe Töpffer and his first graphic silliness¹⁴ (1827), and in their American history associated with New Yorkers newspapers in the late nineteenth century, the comics emerge as a form of entertainment, in a more pejorative sense of the word, and for a long period it has continued to be. They had not been seen as a serious form of art or narrative medium until middle 80's.

Still stirring up the terrible blow of the Comic Code¹⁵ and the fight against the invasion of TVs to households, the comics found in the underground

¹⁴ Santiago points out that Töpffer himself gave unserious nicknames to his comic production. Another name used by him was "garatuñas" (García, 2012: 29).

¹⁵ The Comic Code was a movement that regulated - and limited - comics production in the mid-50. Those limitations were mainly allusions to violence, horror, terror and any form of affront to social and family values of that time.

environment, in comix¹⁶, the path to their survival and development. Starting from the idea of a more authorial comic and free from any editorial constraint, the comix obtained great achievements for the environment, including greater artistic freedom, (the comic starts working alone or in spontaneous collaborations), break with periodic comics serialization (commonly sale fortnightly or monthly), showing it as a closed and completed story.

In his book, Santiago García details how the underground movement possesses a huge importance to comic development in all senses, not only in thematic matter but mainly in comic book sales stance and author's autonomy, approaches that later extended to the comic books in general.

With the comix decline in the 80's, a new format, with new propositions, emerges to occupy this space: the alternative comic. This format comes up with an emphasis on a stronger artistic proposal and marked by an interest to make comics with more serious themes and establish the artist's autonomy.

In this context arise three titles that will define the comics path, the magazines *Raw*, *Weirdo* and *Love and Rockets*, considered, respectively: the brain, the gut and the heart of the alternative comics (García, 2012: 196). The first had a major concern with the paths to be occupied by comics, a concern that is evident with the artistic approach that was adopted in *Raw*. In *Weirdo* magazine, survivor Robert Crumb¹⁷ sought to recognize the comics origins, a kind of redemption of lost values over time. *Love and Rocket* was the first comic book authorial generation of new alternative comics, strengthening the creative freedom of authors who were also the editors.

In less than a decade, the definition "alternative" was no longer justified since it became the new method to create strip comic. The new format met the main concerns of previous generations: artistic freedom and especially the elevation of the comics status. The name that designates the format may

¹⁶ Comix is the name given to comic strip produced by the underground movement, in a more authorial approach.

¹⁷ Robert Crumb is an important name on American underground movement; he is the creator of *Fritz the cat*.

vary, we can find the terms visual novel, graphic album, comic novel or novel in picture. Some artists advocate the use of other terms such as Daniel Clowes in his comic-strip novel *Ice haven* (2005); *My brain is hanging upside down* (2008), named by the author, David Heatley, as graphic memoir; Greg Thompson in illustrated comic *Blankets* (2009); the novels *Picture It's a good life, if you do not weaken* (1996) and *George Sprott* (2009) by Seth. But the name that became popular was the expression “graphic novel” used by Will Eisner.

After a period of twenty years away from production comics, Will Eisner had had contact with the underground artists of the time. Motivated by the ethics and aesthetics of the movement and following the European tradition of the 70's, in which the text and the image were worked in one direction admittedly personal, Eisner launches in 1978 an composite album of four independent stories: *A contract with God: and other tenement stories*. In the book's preface, the author presents as the first three tales are related to his childhood: the street singers and the building caretaker, present figures in the neighborhood where he lived. We realized an autobiographical relationship, if only for the use of childhood environment and some other elements. But there is a more personal relationship with the tale that entitles the book. The first story deals with man's relationship with God, due to his daughter's early death, the protagonist decides to take revenge against God. According to Eisner in the preface:

The creation of the story was an exercise of personal agony. My only daughter, Alice, died from leukemia eight years before the original publication of this book. My pain was brutal. My heart still bled. Indeed, I couldn't even think in discuss my loss by that time. I transform Frimme Hersh's (story's protagonist) daughter in an “adopted child”. But his affliction was mine. (Eisner, 2007: 10)¹⁸

¹⁸ A criação dessa história foi um exercício de agonia pessoal. Minha única filha, Alice, tinha morrido de leucemia oito anos antes da publicação original deste livro. Minha dor ainda era brutal. Meu coração ainda sangrava. De fato, eu nem mesmo conseguia pensar em discutir a perda naquela época. Eu transformei a filha de Frimme Hersh numa criança adotada. Mas sua aflição era minha. (Eisner, 2007: 10).



Figure 2: Frimme Hersh accusing God to broke their contract. Source: Will Eisner, *A contract with God and other tenement stories* p. 27, 1996.

Eisner seeks to provide a very different comic material from aesthetics and super heroes theme. In order to raise the comics importance and an attempt to assign them a literary status, which was his project for a long time, the author undertook to publish his work not in a comic book publisher, but literature. By that time, this strategy did not work, as the publisher closed at the launch time, making *A contract with God* forgotten for some time (García, 2012: 215). Aiming to enhance his work, both artistic as thematic, the term “graphic novel” was put on the cover, at least as a warning about the work “seriousness”, a concern in writing for a more adult audience. In his graphic novels production, Eisner demonstrates his concern to deal with more personal themes, in a poetic approach; stories that should not get lost in time, this aspect can be seen in the preface to *A contract with God*:

I have the need of an old sailor to share my experience collection and observations. If you want, you can call me a graphic witness, recording life, death, suffering and the endless struggle to triumph... or at least survive. (Eisner, 2004: 7)¹⁹

The autobiography was first used in work *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972), by Justin Green. Its use was a major influence on the Will Eisner's production and other cartoonists'. Presenting itself as the "main artery of the current graphic novel" (García, 2012: 216), the autobiography, called by Santiago García as the "anti genre" is the resource used by comics for the production of a more personal and intimate narrative. The graphic novel appropriates the writing itself to a more mature production, an escape from a merely visual entertainment appeal and focused on action.

However, the autobiography, when used in the comics language, has some peculiarities with regard to their versions in prose and poetry. Santiago García mentions about these different ways it manifests itself, it is possible the use of "literary lookalike" and a even more complex visual code like in *Just another day*, (1986) by Daniel Clowes. In this particularly case, the cartoonist chose to represent himself with a different, and fictitious, face in each frame, showing a very complex code to understand that the character is actually Clowes (Garcia, 2012: 218).

Another interesting point when thinking about autobiographical writing is the first-person speech construction. In autobiography comics, the reader can see that first person which is technically a "problem". In the book *Alternative comics, an emerging literature* (2005), Charles Hatfield presents a particularity in comics when comes to first-person speech:

Seeing the protagonist or narrator, in the context of other characters and object evoked in the drawing, objectifies him or her. Thus the cartoonist projects and objectifies his or her inward sense of self, achieving at once a sense of intimacy and critical distance.

It is the graphic exploitation of this duality that distinguishes autobiography in comics from most autobiography in prose. Unlike

¹⁹ Tenho a necessidade de um velho marinheiro em compartilhar meu acervo de experiência e observação. Se quiser pode me chamar de uma testemunha gráfica registrando a vida, a morte, o sofrimento e a luta incessante para triunfar... ou, pelo menos sobreviver. (Eisner, 2004: 7)

first-person narration, which works inside out, describing events as experienced by the teller, cartoonist work *from outside in*, presenting events from as (imagined) position of objectivity, or at least distances. (Hatfield, 2005: 115)

When it is concerned to autobiography in literary texts and their characteristics, the French theorist Philippe Lejeune is an important name. In 1975, he presented his studies on autobiography in the book *The autobiographical pact*. In his work, he establishes criteria to a text be considered autobiographical or possess an autobiographical thematic.

The author highlights the importance of speaking in a retrospective way by personal experience in narrative form. According to Lejeune, the autobiography would be a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his/her own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particularly the personality history."²⁰ To meet this definition, he set up four categories, from which two are essentials for autobiography's existence: "3. Author Status: Publisher's identity (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator; 4. Narrator's position a) identity of the narrator and the main character" (Lejeune, 2008: 14:15)²¹. Lejeune's concern is to establish the same identity among author, narrator and protagonist.

We can see how comics use autobiographical language in a peculiar way when gazing upon the graphic novel *The dreamer* (1986), Will Eisner. In this book, Eisner tells his story in the beginning of the comic book industry in the 30's. However, the characters in the story (whether humans or comic's character created for the comics) have changed their names, the author uses "literary lookalikes" in his narrative. Even though Lejeune emphasizes the need of an evidence of identity among author, narrator and protagonist in Eisner's graphic novel, the reader is led to believe in Eisner's identity coincidence with the protagonist Billy. And in this dubiety, lies the autobiographical work content:

²⁰ Narrativa retrospectiva em prosa que uma pessoa real faz de sua própria existência, quando focaliza sua história individual, em particular a história de sua personalidade (LEJEUNE, 2008: 14)

²¹ 3. Situação do autor: identidade do autor (cujo nome remete a uma pessoa real) e do narrador. 4. Posição do narrador: a) identidade do narrador e do personagem principal; b) perspectiva retrospectiva da narrativa. (Lejeune, 2008: 14:15)

"(...) the reader may have reason to suspect, from the similarities he believes see that there is identity between author and character, but that the author chose to deny that identity, or at least does not affirm it."²² (Lejeune, 2008: 25). Besides, at the end of the story, in the book *Life in Picture*²³ there are notes about the real identities of every character in the story, including comic's super heroes that appear in the story. It can be seen as a way to establish the autobiography pact.

The self-representation can also be observed in the graphic novel *Maus: a survivor's tale* (1986) by Art Spiegelman. The final version of *Maus* was originally published in chapters from *Raw* magazine a vanguard type of comic book edited by his wife and co-edited by him in 1980. In 1986 it was released as a book: *Maus vol I: my father bleed history*, the second volume comes out in 1991: *Maus vol II: and here my troubles began*. One year later, *Maus* receive the Pulitzer award, an out of category award. There is even a first *Maus's* version published in 1972 in a magazine called *Funny animals*. It is consists by only three pages it has the same theme as the final version, but presents a few esthetic difference as a much more cartoonish draw styling and the character has fiction names rather than his father's and his own.

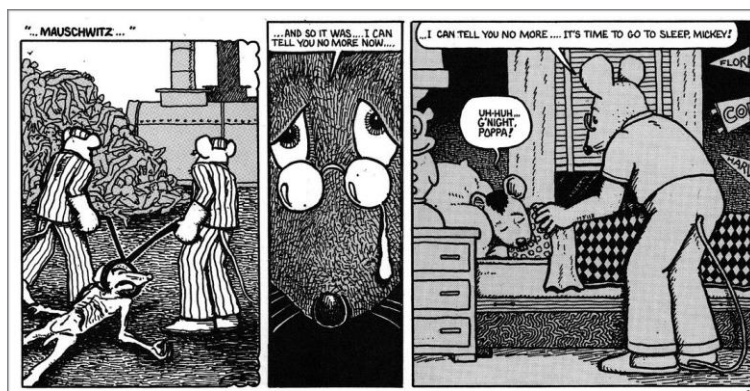


Figure 3: Art Spiegelman. Source: *Maus* p. 3, 2011 (a).

The graphic novel is about the experiences lived by Vladek Spiegelman, the author's father, in camp of Auschwitz camp. The narrative is constructed in

²² (...) o leitor pode ter razões de suspeitar, a partir das semelhanças que acredita ver que haja identidade entre autor e *personagem*, mas que o autor escolheu negar essa identidade ou, pelo menos, não afirmá-la. (Lejeune, 2008: 25)

²³ *Life in Picture* is an album with some autobiographic stories from Eisner work. At the end of *The dreamer*, some pages identifies the character from that story.

two stages that alternate throughout the text: the diegetic present, when Art Spiegelman interviews his father, an old and disturbed man, to get information about his experiences for comic production itself. Another moment is the past, in which Vladek's memories are graphically represented.

In *Maus*, we have an interesting case of self-representation, in which the author chooses not to be represented, as all other character in the story, as a human being, but as anthropomorphized animals. Every social, ethnic or religious group is represented by a different animal: Jews as mice, German as cats, Polish as pigs, Americans as dogs and French as frogs²⁴. Although there are many different types of animals throughout the story, it is important to emphasize that Jews and Germans are the most presented people in Maus's narrative.

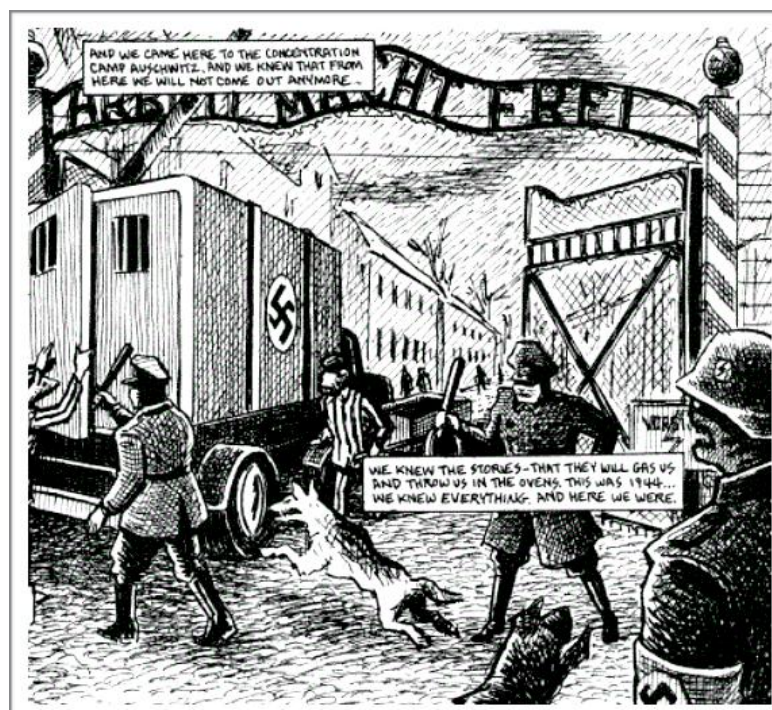


Figure 4: One of the most used representation on *Maus*: cats as German. Source: Art Spiegelman, *Maus: a survivor's tale* p. 159, 2011 (b).

²⁴ Throughout history others animals appear, however their ethnic, social or religious origin are unclear.



Figure 5: One of Most used representation on Maus: mice as Jews. Source: Art Spiegelman, *Maus: a survivor's tale* p.189, 2011 (b).

By representing Jews as mice, Spiegelman presents a version of these people not as human beings, but from the Nazi army's perspective in which Jews represent a type of plague that must be systematically controlled and eliminated. He attributes to this social group, as to himself, the entire pejorative semantic load the animal "mouse" has. Not by any coincident, Germans are represented by cats, emphasizing the predator relation between Nazi army and Jewish people. The repulse meaning of mouse is so strong that even those represented by rats bother with their presence, they feel fear, repulse and disgust by the animal, in this case the animal as we know.



Figure 6: Art Spiegelman. Source: *Maus: a survivor's tale* p. 149, 2011 (b).

A reader, however unaware, would not take more than a few pages, perhaps frames, to realize that the story is about Vladek Spiegelman's experiences during the Jewish Holocaust (Shoah) and the parent-son relationship. It is a life story in which the author's identity is evidenced by a code established in the comic itself. The representation of himself as a mouse does not break the autobiographical theme, but, on the contrary, goes along with an intention to represent him, constructed from selections and choices.

Final considerations

The autobiography use has had a great importance in the development of comic books and graphic novel themselves, its use can be observed in several cases. The Eisnerian graphic novels, centered in the American minorities' dramas of the nineteenth century, popularized the production of a more intimate and personal material, and also a more poetic writing. Quite similarly, Art Spiegelman in *Maus* opened a door to the possibilities of a committed narrative with something more than telling a good story. It redefines not only the ways of the comics language, but mostly its function as textual vehicle. It is not intended to search in any way to define the creator or the largest motivator of this kind of writing or approach on comic strip, but highlight how the

autobiography provided a change in the way comics had been thought before middle 70's.

As well as the inclusion of the autobiographical genre within the literary studies promotes a discussion about the limits of what is literary, similar question hit the comic medium. The selection made by the memory is an important consideration concerned to autobiography. In Spiegelman's graphic novel all facts came from Vladek's report, who is definitely a tormented character because of his traumatic experience during concentration camps, making it even less reliable. In *Maus's* case, the transposition from the oral reports to another media does not occur by the survivor itself, the person who goes through all suffer from the *lager*, but it is done by his son, who picks the facts and then organize those facts as his narrative objective. Like in *testimonio*²⁵ narrative, someone is required to translate those reports that come from orality (SELLIGMANN-SILVA, 2005). Art Spiegelman is that one who gives voice to his father's history. In his latest theoretic book *Metamaus*, precisely in the DVD that came in it, Art Spiegelman mention how his father's reports are hard to organize, they are not linear or precise, the fact that memory itself is not chronologically organized and the years added from Vladek's experience to his report make the whole process much more complex. To format Vladek's report in a narrative form, Art Spiegelman had to choose: "I had to make a decision early on: Would I try to deal with the telling he is told or would I try to tell what he is telling?" (SPIEGELMAN, 2012. DVD, Making Maus/ Interviewing Vladek). When comes to a text production from a oral report is more than just a mediatic transposition, from speaking words to, in this case, the word integration and image that makes comics. It is a translation process in which, in the same way it happens to memory, a selection and organization must be made to translate those reports into a narrative.

The selection made by the memory and the gaps in it, intentionally or not, is an important element in autobiographical writing. This selection is a form of self-representation that marks the autobiography written, not as a reproduction of reality but a representation of a person's experience.

²⁵ *Testimonio* is the testimonial literature concern Latin America

This discussion is further magnified when thinking in a graphic representation that the author does about himself and the graphic likeness in it. When he is represented, not just by words, but also through a graphic representation (usually produced by the cartoonist) an important selection is made of what has been telling to the reader about that author-character. This self-representation is as important as the facts selection, when it comes to autobiography in comic strip. Choosing an artistic style, deleted or highlighted physical details, reveals the author's intentions, these choices are important elements in self-representation as in narrative construction. Spiegelman deliberately chose to represent all characters in his story as animals. In this form of representation there is a whole allegoric resource that adds more possibilities and values to the book. In this dialogue with the tradition of funny animals in comics, we can see how *Maus* uses anthropomorphic animals not in a child or funny approach, traditionally used in comic strip, but as a tool to represent those facts, giving more meaning to his story.

The possibilities that the autobiography led to comics allowed an important evolution of the medium. The comic is replaced by new aesthetic ambitions - graphical and textual, resulting in a comics specialization, an increase to narrative possibilities as the medium itself.

In a dialogue with autobiography, the comics limits were rethought in comic books and what would fill the pages of that reading still considered "childish" and marginalized. A new form of telling a story has been proposed: far more intimate and lyrical. The men's dramas, unveiled to readers, came to occupy the pages of this media. Enabling the emergence of works like: *A contract with God, and other tenement stories* (1978); *The Dreamer* (1986), *Dropsie avenue - the neighborhood* (1995), *To the heart of the Storm* (1991) all by Will Eisner; *Maus, a survivor's tale* (1986), *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2000); *Blankets* (Thompson, 2003).

As well as the autobiographical speech on literature does not seek the reality reproduction, but a selecting exercise promoted by memory itself,

autobiographical comics draw on personal experiences and selections of which the author is the subject:

When I started working on this book²⁶, I intended to provide a narrowly focused fictional experience in this climate, but at the end, the story took direction from a thinly disguised biography. Here a selective memory, fact and fiction blend, resulting in a special reality (EISNER, 2013 (c): 105)²⁷.

We are not talking about a comic elite, an evolution that ignores the importance or relevance of the previous comics, not a format that occupies a level above their predecessors, but a new type of reading, another option, that, in addition to valuing the narrative possibilities of the comic books, reinsures the longevity of it. A way to establish comics as a legitimate form of art, a form that, like the other expressions, changed throughout history, and still does, becoming a picture of its time, reflecting thought and needs of the moment in which it operates.

Reference

- Eisner, W. (1996). **A contract with God and other tenement stories**. New York: DC Comics.
- Eisner, W. (2013) (a). Ao coração da tempestade. In: __. **Vida em Quadrinhos**. São Paulo: Criativo.
- Eisner, W. (2004). **Avenida Dropsie: A Vizinhança**. São Paulo: Devir.
- Eisner, W. (2013) (b). **Narrativas gráficas**. – 3^a. ed. -- São Paulo: Devir.
- Eisner, W. (2013) (c). O sonhador. In: __. **Vida em Quadrinhos**. São Paulo: Criativo.
- Eisner, W. (2010). **Quadrinhos e arte seqüencial: princípios e práticas do Lendário Cartunista**. – 4^a. ed. -- São Paulo: Editora WMF Martins Fontes.
- García, S. (2012). **A novela gráfica**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Hatfield, C. (2005). **Alternative comics: An emerging literature**. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Lejeune, P. (2008). **O pacto autobiográfico: de Rousseau à Internet**. Belo Horizonte: UFMG.

²⁶ The reference is to the graphic novel *To the heart of the storm* (1991).

²⁷ Quando comecei a trabalhar neste livro pretendia apresentar uma experiência fictícia estreitamente focada nesse clima, mas no fim das contas, a história tomou rumos de uma biografia levemente disfarçada. Aqui uma memória seletiva, fato e ficção se misturam, resultando em uma realidade especial. (EISNER, 2013 (c):105)

-
- McCloud, S.(2005). **Desvendando os quadrinhos**. São Paulo: M. Books do Brasil Editora Ltda.
- McCloud, S.(2000). **Reinventando os quadrinhos**. São Paulo: M. Books do Brasil Editora Ltda.
- Seligmann-Silva, M. (2005). **Testemunho e a política da memória: o tempo depois das catástrofes**. Proj. História, São Paulo, n. 30, p. 71-98.
- Spiegelman, A. (2011) (a). Maus. In: ___.**Breakdowns**: a portrait of the artist as a young %@&*!. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Spiegelman, A. (2011) (b). **Maus**: a survivor's tale, 25th anniversary edition. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Spiegelman, A. (2011) (c). **Metamaus**. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Spiegelman, A.(2011) (d). **The complete maus files**. New York. I DVD.