Chapter 15

Emotional History and Legacies of War in Recent German Comics and Graphic Novels

Alexandra Lloyd

Comics and graphic novels provide a singular way to explore and portray historical events and narratives, particularly dark heritage and difficult history. Recently, several German-language graphic novels and comics have been published which explore the Third Reich and the Second World War from the perspective of those who experienced it first-hand: ordinary citizens, war children, Hitler Youth members, soldiers, and civilians. Such works, which include literary adaptations, memoirs and oral testimony, can be viewed as part of the recent turn towards 'felt' or 'emotional' history ['gefühlte Geschichte'] in German-language representations of the past—a shift towards an 'emotional' account of history, in contrast to documentary descriptions: one which offers a chance to encounter not only what happened, but *how it felt* to be there. This chapter examines the narratives of war and dictatorship in three recent works: Lina Hoven's *Love Looks Away* (*Liebe schaut weg*, 2007), Barbara Yelin's *Irmina* (2014) and the crowd-funded *Großväterland: Eye-Witnesses Tell about World War II* (*Großväterland: Zeitzeugen erzählen vom Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 2016). It considers the aesthetic strategies used to depict the past, particularly the adaptation of authentic documents such as diaries, photographs, and letters. Close readings of the primary texts are situated within a discussion of how such works form part of the highly contested legacy of that historical period within contemporary cultural memory.

Introduction

Over seventy years since it came to an end, the Second World War continues to cast a long shadow over Germany. The upheavals of the post-war period, the division of the country into two separate states, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Reunification in 1990, have all shaped the ways individuals and institutions negotiated, and continue to negotiate, the memory and highly contested legacy of that chapter of German history. In the last twenty years specifically, there has been a turn from a focus on collective responsibility for the atrocities committed under Nazism to a more pluralistic view, which encompasses a broader range of memory and experience (Fuchs and Cosgrove, 2006: 2). First and foremost, space has been made for accounts of German victimhood and suffering during World War II, including the effects of the Allied bombing campaign (particularly on children), the flight and expulsions from the eastern territories, and sexual violence against women during the Soviet advance (Taberner and

Berger, 2009: 1-15; Schmitz, 2007: 1-31). Such accounts have frequently been marketed and interpreted as breaking a representational taboo by voicing memories of German suffering publicly, apparently for the first time.

While significant critical attention has been paid to the representation of Germany's wartime experiences in a range of media and genres (including literary texts, feature films, documentaries, exhibitions, and historical texts), relatively little has been written about the role of graphic narratives in the construction of recent cultural memory.[1] Recently, several German-language graphic narratives have been published which explore German fascism and World War II from the perspective of those who experienced it first hand: war children, Hitler Youth members, soldiers and civilians. These include adaptations of literary texts,[2] as well as original works that engage a complex interweaving of imaginative approaches to the past with documentation from the period, taking the form of memoirs, oral testimony and narratives based on eye-witness accounts. The multimodal storytelling that such works enable opens up new ways to explore and portray complex historical events and experiences.

In this chapter, I examine three recent German-language comics and graphic novels that engage with the Second World War and its legacy in Germany: Line Hoven's *Love Looks Away* (*Liebe schaut weg*, 2007), Barbara Yelin's *Irmina* (2014), and Markus Freise's and Christian Hardinghaus's *Großväterland: Eye-Witnesses Tell about World War II* (*Großväterland: Zeitzeugen erzählen vom Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 2016). All three works were inspired by the experiences of 'ordinary Germans' who lived through this period and explore—explicitly or implicitly—the legacy of war experiences both for individuals and the national collective. Here, I examine the aesthetic strategies employed by the authors, in particular the combination

[1] Lynn Marie Kutch's recent edited volume is a welcome contribution to the field (Kutch 2016).
[2] See, for example, Ulli Lust's *Voices in the Dark* (2017) (*Flughunde*, 2013), based on Marcel Beyer's 1996 novel (translated as *The Karnau Tapes*), and Isabel Kreitz's *The Invention of the Curried Sausage* (*Die Entdeckung der Currywurst*, 2005), based on Uwe Timm's 1993 novel.

of text and image and the use and adaptation of authentic documents such as diaries, photographs, and letters. I argue that such works enact a kind of emotional history, one that privileges the representation of feelings and encourages an empathetic approach to its content. This allows these texts to be read as part of a broader discourse within contemporary German memory culture. I begin with a definition of emotional history, after which I situate close readings of the primary texts within a discussion of how such works form part of the highly contested legacy of the period 1933-1945 within contemporary cultural memory.

Emotional History in Contemporary Germany

Authenticity has been a signature of post-Reunification literature and visual culture that engages with Germany's twentieth-century history. Films' marketing strategies frequently emphasise the origins of the plot in real-life events, and several documentary series claim to have uncovered hitherto unknown stories about events and experiences.[3] Literature has seen a boom in family stories ('Familienromane'), which explore what Anne Fuchs has termed the 'agitated legacy' of families' involvement in Nazism and their private memories of war and dictatorship (2008: 1). The inclusion of documentary evidence, particularly photographs, has also been a common feature of recent writing, exemplified by the works of W.G. Sebald. Such material, whether thematised within the plot, used metaphorically, or reproduced within the pages of the text itself, paradoxically both confirms the authenticity of the works' content, while also raising questions about historical 'truth' and the possibilities of writing authoritatively about the past. At the same time, this attraction to 'authenticity' is not simply about the inclusion of documentary or technical details, but rather part of a larger search for emotional authenticity as well. The testimony of 'what it was like' has gained currency, marking a shift towards affective representations that promise the reader the (unrealisable)

[3] See in particular Guido Knopp's documentary films (Kansteiner, 2006: 154-183).

opportunity to experience *how it felt* to be there. Thus, on the one hand, documentary evidence has been used to legitimise, and in many cases, market, accounts of the past, while on the other, a text's documentary status has been eschewed in favour of narratives offering a kind of affective truth.

This cultural shift must be situated within a broader turn toward a more empathetic approach to the war generation in Germany. This approach has been provoked by the increasing historical distance from the period 1933-1945, the imminent disappearance of the last eye-witnesses of the war, and the conditions of Reunification and its effect on the national self-image and memory culture. It is also the consequence of a generational shift in which children are no longer accusing their parents, but grandparents are answering their grandchildren's questions. To describe the kinds of memories and approaches to the past that have come to dominate German culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the sociologist Harald Welzer employs the term 'gefühlte Geschichte', which translates as 'felt' or 'emotional' history. As Welzer explains, '[p]rivate memories are dominated by the experience of bombing, hunger, participation in the war, stories of victimhood and the struggle to maintain one's integrity. These memories are vital and concrete, they appeal to the emotions' (2004; my translation). Or as the critic Helmut Schmitz writes, emotional history emerges from a 'shift both in historiographical and popular discourse from a history of "hard" facts to "story", human interest and emotionalisation' (2007: 5).

Welzer led a ground-breaking study of intergenerational communication in Germany, interviewing individuals and groups from around forty families. Analysing over 2500 stories, the study concluded that the third post-war generation (the grandchildren of the war generation) tended to downplay or even whitewash their grandparents' participation in Nazism, despite their obvious awareness of the historical facts of what occurred under Hitler's rule. Welzer observes that while 'most members of the children's and grandchildren's generations express

no doubt at all that Nazism was a criminal system and the Holocaust an unparalleled crime', this version of the past, which dominates education and official memory culture, 'breaks down when questioning the role played by one's own grandparents during the period' (2005: 8). The study thus highlighted a discrepancy between 'official' or 'national' narratives of the past, and private, familial ones. This discrepancy arises as individuals negotiate what Welzer and others term 'Lexikon' (official narratives, learnt at school, with an emphasis on responsibility) and 'Album' (more emotionally charged, familial accounts and memories) (Welzer et al., 2002: 10).

Part of the criticism levelled at the 'German wartime suffering' discourse and other more empathetic approaches to the war generation is that they risk creating competition between victim narratives, thereby displacing the memory of Holocaust suffering. Furthermore, to approach Germany's dark past through the lens of emotional history arguably risks inculcating audience responses which are overly sentimentalised and empathetic, potentially even preventing the kind of critical engagement required to ensure that such histories do not repeat themselves. The potential of visual culture for empathy and identification has been well proven, and graphic narratives, in particular, have been shown to provide an opportunity for readers to encounter alterity. As Jennifer Phillips writes, '[g]raphic novels can greatly increase the process of empathy by highlighting the visual sense and drawing the reader further into the experience of the "Other"' (2017: 162). Similarly, Janine Utell suggests that 'we are perhaps more likely to feel empathy for a character in a graphic novel or a film because the image of the human face is so powerful' (2015: 157). Thus, comics provide a particularly compelling form in which to explore and enact emotional history, not least because of the imaginative engagement they facilitate (Polak 2017: 11-12). Yet at the same time, they can encourage a more critical engagement because of the nature of the reading experience, since the reader must necessarily make connections between text and image. As

Mila Bongco has argued, readers require 'the ability to decipher and "read" a new language of combined written and illustrated codes' (2013: 49). Comics therefore have significant potential in providing an important vehicle for engagement with the past within the wider context of cultural memory.

Hilary Chute suggests that the comics form is particularly suited to the recovery and presentation of documentary evidence (2016: 2), and indeed a recurrent trope in recent German graphic narratives has been their engagement with autobiographical sources, and their representation of material and visual cultures through the inclusion of items such as photographs and other examples of documentary evidence within their pages. Here, we find the kind of dynamic play between the documentary and the imaginative that has been the foundation of recent theories of memory, particularly that of individuals without first-hand experience of past events. Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'post-memory' (1997) and Alison Landsberg's notion of 'prosthetic memory' (2004) both respond to the possibilities for intergenerational memory and emphasise the importance of imaginative and creative approaches to historical events and individuals (see Hirsch, 1997: 22). Increasingly, history is viewed as tangible and accessible. As Hirsch writes, 'photographic images that survive massive devastation […] enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past, but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic "take"' (2008: 115). Such representations use the technologies of technical verisimilitude but also go beyond them: they seek to recuperate something of what has been lost. The graphic narratives discussed below practise precisely this framework in the form of comics.

Family Stories: Line Hoven's *Love Looks Away* (2007)

Published in 2007, *Love Looks Away* is the first full-length publication by the German graphic artist Line Hoven (b.1977), originally submitted as part of her diploma at the Hamburg

University of Applied Sciences. It won the prestigious ICOM award in 2008 for best independent comic and was nominated for the Max and Moritz Prize. The text is constructed as a familial narrative, depicting three generations of the Hoven family. The story begins with the author's maternal grandparents who live in the US, and her paternal grandparents who live in Bonn. It traces her parents' meeting in Germany in the late 1960s, their marriage, and unsuccessful move to the US. The text thus focuses on individual experiences but sets these against the backdrop of pre- and post-war politics and international relations. Hoven's parents—Charlotte and Reinhard—encounter hostility when they decide to marry: her mother's American parents harbour lingering anti-German sentiments from the 1940s, and these prove hard to shake off. Hoven's parents relocate to America, but her father struggles to master English sufficiently to work as a doctor. The text ends as the young Hoven and her parents move (back) to Germany to live in the paternal family home. The Third Reich and Second World War appear only obliquely, but the text shows the war impacting individuals far beyond first-hand experiences of the conflict. The far-reaching effects of Germany history are never absent, and the text rejects any kind of easy or idealistic post-war reconciliation.

In her compelling analysis of *Love Looks Away*, Bernadette Raedler interprets the title page, which depicts a room in a family home, as an 'invitation to participate in the plot' (2016: 186). The reader is positioned outside the house yet invited to look in: photographs of the family are shown hanging on the wall, the curtains half open, a light illuminating the room. This architecture functions metaphorically, inviting the reader to step into the family home, and adopt a position of empathy and understanding. The main text begins with an episode from the childhood of Hoven's paternal grandfather, Erich, in Bonn. The pre-adolescent boy with a beaming smile is shown in his Hitler Youth uniform, marching contentedly through the streets with flags waving and drums beating. He is in the process of building a radio, and on its successful completion a full-page spread reveals the effects of the music Erich hears: he is

entranced as a wave of musical notes and dynamic markers burst forth from the set and engulf him. However, a much smaller frame on the following page reveals the source of the music, a BBC broadcast, accompanied by the announcement: 'That was Overture No. 7 by the Jewish composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy…' (2007: 17). Here the earlier frame of Erich smiling in his Hitler Youth uniform is repeated, though this time, as Erich looks in the mirror, his smile has changed to a frown. Deeply troubled by his own feelings, he chooses to tell his friends that the radio is broken—behind them we see a shop front that has been defaced with a Star of David and the word 'Jud' ('Jew').

Hoven created *Love Looks Away* using the scraperboard method, which involves scratching out white lines and surface areas on black card (see Fig.15.1). This meticulous work adds to the overall feel of the text as a material item, preserved and handed down over the years. Chute argues that the comic as a 'drawn form' involves a 'sensual practice', and in this way 'express[es] history' (2016: 4). This is particularly evident in the case of the scraperboard technique: rather than adding ink to blank paper, the artist removes a surface material to produce images. This in itself acts as a powerful metaphor for the uncovering of buried histories and the recovery of traumatic memories.

Insert Fig.15.1: The scraperboard method in *Love Looks Away* (© 2007 Line Hoven—Reprodukt, 18).

The comic is divided into five sections. The first four all begin with a page that is blank except for a facsimile of an item from the family's past in their centre: a Hitler Youth identity card (Hoven 2007: 7), an ice-skating ticket (23), an invoice for a washing machine (45), and an airline ticket (65). Each of these sections closes with pages made to resemble a family photograph album. This encourages the reader to approach the text in a linear, chronological

fashion, but also to flip back and forth through the book (or 'album') as, given the scarcity of written text, the narrative on occasion requires readers to make connections between individuals and events in retrospect. This, too, affords the text a 'found' quality, as though it had been discovered in an attic and the pages turned back and forth to piece together a forgotten past. Yet the transition between the fourth and final sections breaks this pattern. The fourth section ends simply with a blank page, and the final section *begins*, rather than *ends*, with the wedding photograph of Hoven's parents (89). This functions to collapse the events of the past into the present, forcing the reader to acknowledge a break in the pattern as the story shifts from family history to the story of the author's own life.

The text itself can be read as an enactment of postmemory in its engagement with the past 'through imaginative investment and creation' (Hirsch, 1997: 22). Dialogue is sparse, appearing only occasionally in both English and German—including the grammatically incorrect German of Hoven's mother—to reflect the origins of the author's family. Thus, narrative progress relies primarily on the images, which in turn place the German experience of dictatorship and war within an international and intergenerational context. The inclusion of documents and family photographs in amongst the drawings throughout the comic dramatises formally, on the page, the tension between private memories and official, public documentation. For example, a double-page spread at the end of the first section features part of the family photo album (20-21). We see an image of Erich Hoven and of his wife, Irmgard, on the first anniversary of their marriage, along with pictures of their children and a flower, apparently pressed between the pages of the album. However, one photograph is missing, its absence indicated by four mounting squares where the image ought to be. Significantly, underneath this missing photograph we read the caption: 'Erich & Irmgard at Hitler Youth summer camp' (Hoven 2013, 20). The absence of this photograph raises a series of questions: why is the photograph missing? Has it been deliberately removed to erase an unpleasant

memory of the past? Has it simply been removed and mislaid? The absent photograph becomes symbolic of the difficulties inherent in researching family history and the inadequacy of documentary evidence to give a complete picture of the past. At the same time, it heightens the appearance of authenticity created by the work and encourages the reader to engage in a postmemorial practice: what is absent must be retrospectively reimagined. The photograph is referenced later within the diegesis, as Charlotte, visiting Reinhard's family home for the first time, asks about another photograph, hanging on the wall, of Reinhard's father in his Wehrmacht uniform. Reinhard's response to her questions about how his parents met encapsulates the silence of the war generation, and the frequently cited lack of intergenerational communication: 'Oh, I don't really know the whole story... I think it was in the Hitler Youth, at a summer camp or something… They don't talk it, really. It was so long ago' (2013: 75). The visual representation of Erich in uniform resembles the earlier photograph included in the recreation of the family photograph album (20-21), drawing attention once again to the silence that conceals this chapter of the family's past.

As the contents of a familial archive, these drawn objects act as reminders of 'the one-time bodily presence of an individual', acting not only as documentary evidence, but facilitating 'emotional engagement' (Mickwitz 2016: 62-63). It is important, though, to remember that these photographs and documents are not real items scanned and inserted into the pages of the manuscript; rather, they are imitated by Hoven using the scraperboard technique. The level of detail in the comic is startling and while they are not so strikingly authentic as to be able to be confused with real documents, they succeed in fostering a critical engagement with the 'truth' of the text and its depiction of history. After all, as Raedler points out, the only 'original' item in the text is the reprint of the scraperboard itself (Raedler 2016, 175).

The German title, *Liebe schaut weg* (*Love Looks Away*), has more than one possible meaning here. To have love 'look away' suggests a sense of shame, of turning away from the past because it is too painful. At the same time, we might read it as the promise of forgiveness. The verb used here, 'wegschauen', can also have the sense of 'to turn a blind eye to', suggesting that the familial bonds that bind us will enable us to look away from the crimes of the past and forgive. In this case, the book would seem to correspond to Welzer et al.'s findings that in contemporary memory there is a tension between official narratives and familial accounts. Yet of course the book itself is an exploration of the past, of the pain of loss and of the long-term impact of the Third Reich, particularly on family histories.

'Can You Forgive?': Barbara Yelin's *Irmina* (2014)

As with *Love Looks Away*, *Irmina* was inspired by the author's family history. Following the death of her grandmother, Barbara Yelin (b.1977) found a box of diaries and letters among her things and was inspired to produce a graphic novel based on her grandmother's story. The result is not a biography in any simplistic sense, though it does have a more conventionally novelistic narrative structure and linear progression than Hoven's work. It is composed of three parts, set in London, Berlin, and Barbados respectively, and begins in 1934 as the protagonist travels to London to train as a secretary. She meets and falls in love with Howard Green, one of the few Afro-Caribbean students at Oxford in the 1930s. The book explores Irmina's journey from a spirited young woman who takes every opportunity to challenge discrimination, to her later capitulation to the ideology and values of the Third Reich within Nazi Germany.

The graphic narrative pivots on the sharp contrast between these first two sections. It documents how Irmina's daily life under Nazism, her marriage to an SS officer, the birth of her child, and her experience as a civilian in wartime Berlin reshape her ideological position. After leaving Oxford, Irmina and Howard lose contact, and it is only in the early 1980s—

documented in the third section of the graphic novel—that they are reunited. Howard is now the Governor General of Barbados and this final section takes place in 1983, when Irmina is invited to Barbados and is reunited with Howard. Yet, as with Hoven's text, there is neither a straightforward scene of reconciliation nor a narrative resolution. Irmina is forced to come to terms with the turn her life has taken, and the comic documents an intense and moving study of conviction, conscience, and personal responsibility.

Again, Yelin reproduces memory objects throughout the comic, including items such as Irmina's wedding photograph, letters, and newspaper cuttings, though these are more obviously 'drawn' than in *Love Looks Away* and appear within the frames, and so within the diegesis. In this way they are more obviously framed within the world of the story, like close-ups in a film, rather than resembling real objects caught in the pages of an album. If the recreation of documents and photographs in Hoven's text suggests its documentary status, Yelin's more overtly fictional work has a historical framing with an assertion that 'the historical background to this story has been carefully researched' (2016: 5), informing readers that a historian was consulted—this historian, Dr Alexander Korb, then provides an afterword to the text. Here, an imaginative approach to lived experience is apparently confirmed as authentic by scrupulous attention to historical evidence. In this way, the text offers an opportunity for emotional engagement with the indoctrination processes of Nazism through its imaginative response to personal history, and a historically responsible account of life under Hitler and during World War II.

Irmina also follows *Love Looks Away* by taking an overtly international view both of the war and the post-war period. The historian Bill Niven has observed that sometimes those who research Germany's history are susceptible to 'imagining that it is the only country which has such a past to face' (Niven 2012, 180). *Irmina* circumvents this problem by placing the rise of Nazism within a broader context of British colonialism, racism and elitism. This does not

serve to relativize the crimes of Nazism, but to invite reflection on a bigger picture of the past. In addition, while Hoven's text is written in both English and German, the dialogue in the original publication of *Irmina* remains solely in German, even in the scenes set in the UK and in Barbados.[4] The effect is to align the reader more thoroughly with Irmina's perspective, rather than creating a movement and tension between the two. Yet as I shall now show, she remains a character who is not so easily empathised with.

The second part of *Irmina* shows in vivid detail the protagonist's experience of war: bombing raids, food shortages and her escape from Berlin with her child, the death of her husband at the front, and the arrival of the Allies. While the text seeks to portray the violence and horrors of war, it also recounts the sense of monotony, drudgery and uncertainty that dominated wartime life. The graphic narrative emphasises this through its structure, in particular through repeated frames overshadowed by air-raid sirens, poverty, and sheer exhaustion. This section is composed primarily of muted blues, browns and greys, punctuated only by the striking and vibrant reds of Nazi flags. Yelin accentuates specific moments of fear or suffering by using double-page spreads, and the sounds of persecution and war appear as pictorial texts. Indeed, most striking about the depiction of civilians' experience of warfare here is the noise of it. For example, Irmina is awoken during *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass) by the repeated 'Wrrrrrr' of cars and 'smash' of shop windows being broken (177-181). Later, as the Americans advance, the 'Wrrrrrrrr' of their planes dominates a double-page spread of frames in which Irmina and her son are depicted on the ground below (220-221). In this way, the *experience* of war, what it felt like and what it sounded like, is foregrounded, imagined and imaged by Yelin in the mode of emotional history.

---

[4] The 2016 English translation of *Irmina* includes no German text. In *Love Looks Away*, the text is also entirely in English, though two different typefaces are used to indicate when either German or English was being used in the original-language publication.

The narrative attempts to show how the experience of war impacts upon Irmina's own sense of morality, something for which she feels profound shame in the years following the war. In 1930s Oxford, she staunchly defends Howard against racism, but over the course of the second part of the text in 1930s and 1940s Berlin, this anti-racist stance is gradually worn away by Nazi propaganda—she eventually accepts this propaganda unquestioningly, telling her son 'The Jews are our misfortune!' (2016: 203). Like many post-Reunification works about the Nazi past, *Irmina* invites readers to engage with the process of indoctrination, to try to understand how it was possible, and ultimately to empathise with—rather than dismiss outright—those who failed to question the system. In part three, after the war, Irmina's silence stems from her shame. When Howard's granddaughter refers to '[t]hose terrible Nazis!', three successive frames show Irmina unable to voice any response, as she withdraws into herself, head bowed with shame (263). The pain of confronting her own past in the third section is portrayed as a deeply personal and fraught journey, one that is never fully resolved. When she attempts to apologise to Howard, whom she clearly feels she has betrayed vicariously, she is again unable to give voice to her emotions, as indicated by the incomplete question, 'Can you for-' ('Can you forgive?') followed by another frame in which her speech balloon contains only an ellipsis (Yelin 2016, 266).

Part of the criticism levelled at the discourse of German wartime suffering is that it risks displacing memory of Holocaust suffering through the introduction of potentially competing narratives of victimhood. In *Irmina*, Yelin depicts a young woman who, despite her initial convictions, comes to acquiesce to Nazism because of fear and the daily hardships of war. The graphic narrative invites the reader to consider the suffering Irmina endures, but also to reflect critically on the protagonist's actions. Her image is complicated in a way that makes straightforward empathy impossible and, through the depiction of her relationship with Howard Green in the opening part, the text holds Irmina to a higher moral standard than it might

otherwise have done. In this way, Yelin offers a nuanced portrayal of Nazi indoctrination and the painful legacy of having conformed uncritically to the system.

Grandfatherland: War Stories

While Hoven's and Yelin's projects explore the past from a familial perspective, *Großväterland: Eye-Witnesses Tell about World War II*, an anthology of short comics documenting the experiences of some of the last living German eye-witnesses of the war, takes a more wide-ranging approach. It also focuses primarily on the experiences of war, rather than taking in the broader post-war perspective of Hoven's and Yelin's texts. The book is the result of a collaborative project between Markus Freise (b.1971), a freelance designer and illustrator, and Christian Hardinghaus (b.1978), an historian and author specialising in the period of the Third Reich. The creators actively sought eye-witness accounts with the intention of introducing memories, which had hitherto been kept in the family sphere, into a public arena. Freise highlights in his foreword what has become an entrenched narrative about the silence of the war generation, asserting that the book is an 'attempt to break the silence in which our grandparents all too often had to spend the rest of their lives' (2017: 8). The project thus aims to tell 'stories *from* WWII' rather than 'the history *of* WWII' (Freise, n.d.), and was initially crowdfunded before the creators signed a publishing deal with Panini. The authors were careful in anticipating criticisms that the work might be revisionist or encourage extremist views of the past, pledging to donate a percentage of the funding costs to organisations that fight right-wing extremism. They also highlighted Hardinghaus's role as an historian in their promotional material, thus emphasising the historical accuracy of the work.

The comic's visual style contrasts starkly with that of *Love Looks Away* and *Irmina*. It has a more vibrant use of colour and acute angles, and its material quality is less noticeable since the images are drawn by hand and shaded digitally, unlike the use of scraperboard in

Love Looks Away or coloured pencils in *Irmina*. The graphic style is influenced by Jacques Tardi, Emmanuel Guibert, and Art Spiegelman, and the authors have consciously positioned the volume within the 'tradition of the historic and documentary comic' (Freise, n.d.a). Yet it still retains a familial perspective—Hardinghaus's own grandfather is featured as one of the eye-witnesses, and this is also registered in its (admittedly gendered) title, 'Großväterland' ('Grandfatherland'). The text reads as a collection of oral testimonies, its series of eye-witness accounts included without an overarching guiding narrative, though it does follow a broadly chronological narrative of the war. Each individual account is followed by a double-page spread outlining the historical context, including photographs and quotations from official documents. In this way, the eye-witnesses' stories are privileged, even as their authenticity is then confirmed by situating them within a larger historical setting. By allowing the eye-witnesses to 'tell their stories themselves' the authors pursue emotional authenticity, asserting, for example, that '[i]n the implementation for the graphic novel we […] strived—to the extent possible—to pass on as much as possible of the original way of speaking and the genuine emotions' (Freise, 2017: 8).

In its specific focus on war, and principally on the war experiences of combatants, *Großväterland* depicts the physical violence of warfare. Freise in fact altered some of his depictions of this physical violence during the creative process and in response to feedback. For example, as he explains on the project's website, in Rolf's story, the original drawing of a British bomber pilot who has been shot down was extremely graphic in its depiction of the soldier's mutilated face. Freise decided to redraw this image to tone down the brutality. This stemmed in part from a concern that graphic violence would alienate readers and limit its readership. But it also showed an effort to reflect more authentically the stories he had been told by eye-witnesses: 'None of our witnesses told us about injuries and mutilations. They spoke about grief, suffering and despair' (Freise, 2015). Thus, extreme violence in the comic

tends to be shown in a semi-abstract style using orange hues and rough outlines without filling in specific details (see, for example, Freise and Hardinghaus, 2016: 13, 23, 24). Another striking example of this is when Otto, who survives by acting as an interpreter for the German Army in Poland, is reunited with his mother, who believed he had been killed. The emotional force of this reunion is heightened by the absence of detail in the drawing: we see only an outline of their bodies embracing, the comic hinting at the unrepresentability of trauma, while also suggesting a moment of intimacy.

Insert Fig.15.2: An illustrated photograph album in *Großväterland* (Freise and Hardinghaus, 2016: 40).

Großväterland's perspective is a retrospective one, portraying moments from the past without fully situating them in a contemporary context. Nevertheless, as in both *Love Looks Away* and *Irmina*, we find a drawn photograph album. Resting on a lace tablecloth, the presence of a wrinkled hand and captions remind the reader of the continued existence of eye-witnesses in Germany today and the far-reaching legacy of their war experiences (Freise and Hardinghaus 2016: 40). Again, the drawing of photographs contained within an album suggests authenticity by igniting a felt connection to the past, even as their drawn form encourages an imaginative engagement with the history on the page.

Conclusion

Hoven, Yelin, Freise and Hardinghaus were all born in the 1970s and, as such, approach the past from the perspective of those born after the Third Reich and Second World War who, as journalist and author Volker Hage has argued, cannot narrate the events of that time, but who can 'report on the consequences of those events which continue to catch up with them' (1998;

my translation). The stories they tell are part of what has been viewed by many as a belated legacy, accounts which are only now being given because of a confluence of circumstances, including national Reunification, the impending disappearance of the last eye-witnesses to Nazism, and a broader shift in historical understanding. In this context, there has been a demand for affective histories that, because of their formal features, comics are uniquely well placed to facilitate. Furthermore, they can present the past 'from below', focusing on individuals and private or familial experiences via a form that, as Lynn Kutch argues, has been part of a 'delayed process of German cultural acknowledgment' (Kutch 2016: 1).[5]

The combination of text and image in comics exposes the reader to the sensory aspects of war—sights, sounds, smells, feelings—in a particularly striking way. To make meaning from graphic narratives, the reader must be actively and critically engaged. In the examples I discuss above, the combination of drawn images and pictorial texts depicting sound helps to create a more immersive and emotional picture of the past. At the same time, the use of authentic documents—diaries, photographs, letters—as inspiration for, and inclusion in, graphic narratives, raises questions about the generic status of the graphic novel and its representation of history. Arguably, when the ephemera of the past are *drawn*, they take on new meaning. More than providing a stamp of veracity, they create a further space in which an imaginative encounter with the past might be enacted, while retaining a link to historical facts. This offers a space for readers with no experience of the Third Reich to try to understand what it was like through the mode of affective history. As Kate Polak has persuasively argued in her analysis of what she terms historio-metagraphics, the constructedness or 'createdness' (2017: 14) of graphic narratives 'makes the reader aware of the gulf between his own experience and

---

[5] It was only in 2011 that the first comics publication by a major publishing house in Germany (Suhrkamp) appeared: Nicolas Mahler's graphic novel adaptation of Thomas Bernhard's *Alte Meister*.

that which is depicted' and this in turn 'cues the reader into an engagement more ethically nuanced than he might have had otherwise' (2017, 14).

The risk in this kind of approach is that it inculcates a response to history that prevents critical engagement; yet in an analysis of contemporary films about the Nazi period, Axel Bangert has argued that 'intimacy and immersion are not necessarily an escape from the political choices and ethical dilemmas of the past. Instead, they can also serve as a point of contact with them' (2014: 169). With this important observation in mind, the comics discussed here might be understood as efforts to encourage the reader to consider their own response to the situation and context of wartime Germany precisely through the imaginative work they demand from readers. None of these texts confines the events they depict to history: the effects of the past are made clear. By virtue of their combination of text and image, and the critical reading process such a form requires, these works offer an encounter with the past that is able to bring otherwise forgotten stories into the public domain. The critically aware framing process of which the comics form is capable allows them to do so responsibly, as they make a productive rather than reductive contribution to the pluralisation of memory in Germany today.

Works Cited

Bangert, Axel. 2014. *The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film: Viewing Experiences of Intimacy and Immersion*. Rochester, NY: Camden House.

Bongco, Mila. 2013. *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*. New York: Routledge.

Chute. Hilary. 2016. *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Freise, Markus, and Hardinghaus, Christian. 2016. *Großväterland: Zeitzeugen erzählen vom Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Stuttgart: Panini.

——2017. *Großväterland: Eye-Witnesses Tell about World War II*. [ebook] Vierauge Books.

Freise, Markus. 2016. 'Vorworte'. In *Großväterland: Zeitzeugen erzählen vom Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Freise, Markus and Hardinghaus, Christian, ed. Stuttgart: Panini, p.8.

——n.d. 'For Beginners'. Web. http://www.grossvaeterland.com/for-beginners/. Accessed 21 January 2019.

——n.d.a. 'Frequently Asked Questions'. Web. http://www.grossvaeterland.com/frequently-asked-questions/. Accessed 21 January 2019.

——2015. 'The Violence of War'. 11 September. Web. http://www.grossvaeterland.com/category/making-of/. Accessed 21 January 2019.

Fuchs, Anne. 2008. *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuchs, Anne, and Cosgrove, Mary. 2006. 'Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and the Management of the Past'. In Fuchs, Anne, Cosgrove, Mary, and Gröte, George, eds. *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, pp.1-25.

Hage, Volker. 1998. 'Auf der Suche nach Arnold'. *Der Spiegel*, 23 March. http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-7852006.html. Accessed 21 January 2019.

Hirsch, Marianne. 1997. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

——2008. 'The Generation of Postmemory'. *Poetics Today* 29: 103-128.

Hoven, Line. 2007. *Liebe schaut weg*. Berlin: Reprodukt.

——2013. *Love Looks Away*. London: Blank Slate Books.

Kansteiner, Wulf. 2006. *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics After Auschwitz*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Kutch, Lynn Marie. 2016. 'Introduction'. In Kutch, Lynn Marie, ed. *Novel Perspectives on German-Language Comics Studies: History, Pedagogy, Theory*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1-18.

Landsberg, Alison. 2004. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mickwitz, Nina. 2016. *Documentary Comics: Graphic Truth-Telling in a Skeptical Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Niven, Bill. 2012. 'German Victimhood Discourse in Comparative Perspective.' In Langenbacher, Eric, Niven, Bill, and Wittlinger, Ruth, eds. *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp.180-195.

Phillips, Jennifer. 2017. 'Revising the Rhetoric of "Boat People" through the Interactive Graphic Adaptation of Nam Le's "The Boat".' In Burger, Alissa, ed. *Teaching Graphic Novels in the English Classroom: Pedagogical Possibilities of Multimodal Literacy Engagement*. New York, NY and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.149-167.

Polak, Kate. 2017. *Ethics in the Gutter: Empathy and Historical Fiction in Comics* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press).

Raedler, Bernadette. 2016. ‘Tensions Acrobatics in Comic Art: Line Hoven’s *Liebe schaut weg*’. In Kutch, Lynn Marie, ed. *Novel Perspectives on German-Language Comics Studies: History, Pedagogy, Theory*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp.171-189.

Schmitz, Helmut. 2007. ‘Introduction: The Return of Wartime Suffering in Contemporary German Memory Culture, Literature and Film’. In Schmitz, Helmut, ed. *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp.1-31.

Taberner, Stuart, and Berger, Karina. 2009. ‘Introduction’. In Taberner, Stuart, and Berger, Karina, eds. *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, pp.1-15.

Utell, Janine. 2015. *Engagement with Narrative*. London: Routledge.

Welzer, Harald. 2004. ‘Im Gedächtniswohnzimmer: Warum sind Bücher über die eigene Familiengeschichte so erfolgreich? Ein Zeit-Gespräch mit dem Sozialpsychologen Harald Welzer über das private Erinnern’. *Die Zeit*, 25 March. https://www.zeit.de/2004/14/st-welzer. Accessed 21 January 2019.

——2005. ‘Grandpa Wasn’t a Nazi: The Holocaust in German Family Remembrance’. *International Perspectives* 54: 1-30.

Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine, and Tschuggnall, Karoline. 2002. *‘Opa war kein Nazi’: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.

Yelin, Barbara. 2014. *Irmina*. Berlin: Reprodukt.

——2016. *Irmina*. London: SelfMadeHero.