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## Decoding *Mimesis* of Trauma in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper studies the principles of mimesis in Art Spiegelman's graphic novel, *Maus* which showcases trauma and dehumanization of the Jews during the Holocaust period in Nazi concentration camps. Art Spiegelman's choice of using art to iconize, index, and symbolize the aspect of trauma allows for an understanding of semiotics of Mimetic principles of Theodore Adorno. The very idea that art actually "transfigures" and augments truth instead of merely trying to be an exact representation allows Spiegelman to create a powerful visual narrative to showcase trauma and dehumanization, and suggests that Adorno goes beyond Plato's perception of mimesis. Adorno also approximates Du champ's perspective that Art, when relieved of the burden of providing sensorial pleasure can become independent of aesthetics. Adorno's idea of 'speechlessness' being equally powerful a means of communication as is the 'speech or the word'; and, that even a static frame of characters become a movie in the consciousness of a reader (reader-"space"), alters the idea of mimesis itself. A visual narrative thus becomes a means of accessing the reader-"space" in a Bathes-ean context. Further to the context, Spiegelman's visual narrative allows an opportunity to examine the process of assimilation (*Angleichung*) of meaning.

### 1. Introduction

#### **Maus: Miming Trauma in a Visual Narrative**

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is a graphic novel that represents the Holocaust in a survivor's tale through the interview between Art Spiegelman and his father, Vladek. The novel is autobiographical and employs extended representation techniques of presenting the Jews as Mice, the Germans as Cats, the Americans

as Dogs, the Poles as Pigs, the French as Frogs, etc. The technique of representation in *Maus* may shake a hand with that of Orwell's *Animal Farm* to an extent, but Spiegelman recreates a static movie using visual narrative wherein the reader sees the lives of Vladek and Artie in a concrete-fictional "space" with dimensions that are historical, social, political, psychological, and ideological. One sees that Orwell's *Animal Farm* demonstrates how malefic an ideology becomes, while *Maus* showcases the trauma resultant of such a malefic ideology. The plot of *Maus* presents "spaces" of conflict—using a heavy graphic weight of black and white graphic tone—through mimetic representation of *trauma*. Artie's narration displays a demonstration of how "space" is not just defined by dimensions and temporality; instead it can be a social, cultural, psychological construct, and that trauma occupies these "spaces". "Space" could be a mere entity with no extensions at all (for example psychological space). Additionally, Spiegelman's narration also displays Barthes's idea of reader himself being the "space" to receive and record communication from a text (Barthes, 1990) in this case *trauma* of the Jews experienced through the Nazi regime. The plot employs a complex visual narrative of manipulating fictional space-time continuum in two parts and details violence and *trauma* of the protagonist Vladek. The visuals employed constantly reinforce the victim-status of Jews being marked for annihilation. The text employs visuals depicting gas chambers in concentration camps; gruesome scenes of bodies—some half dead—bring burnt, atrocities, in Vladek's tone which also carries the scars of *trauma* of having lost his son Richieu and his wife Anja. The narration laterally also portrays intermittent moments of conflict between Vladek and Artie. From the narratorial point, each visual / frame captures a "space" of conflict representing trauma, which a reader not only reads but also continues to see as a witness. While narration in a conventional novel achieves mimesis and representation through linguistic codes – which are linear – a visual narrative displays a capacity for narration by creating simultaneity using art as against linearity of linguistic codes. In such a mimesis and representation, a reader gets to read and "see" the action instead of reading its narration.

Words and pictures are the main components of a graphic novel/comic. Words and pictures exist in a relationship in the concreteness of the page of a graphic novel to create individual spaces: cultural, social, psychological or relational. Words and pictures work collaboratively and also blend to communicate *meaning*. Furthermore, similar to a conventional novel having functional and content words, graphic novel also comprises functional components and content components. Components which indicate the aspect of space-time in graphic novels would be a functional component. Graphic novel also allows us to reflect on the relation between a word and a picture. Ontologically, a word printed or written on a page is also a picture and like a picture a word is a visual entity. Similarly a picture would also mean singularly across cultures and can be a universal.

## 2. Representing the Maimed: Mimesis and Narration of Trauma

Mimetic principles play a significant role when it comes to portraying reality. In an attempt to cater to the principles of realism, Art Spiegelman employs art. From the point of view of mimesis, art in graphic novels goes beyond the aspect of aesthetics- it imitates or mimes only to the extent of becoming “signs” of the objective correlative (Sinha, A. 2000). However, beyond this art becomes part of a ‘space’ acquiring layers of *meaning* and contours that are figurative, iconic and symbolic. Given this, art ceases to be an objective correlative of the artist’s mood or a (pictorial) representation of his/her psychological debris; instead, it becomes a purer tool of communication that quintessentially functions through mimesis to bring in an aspect of truth which ultimately is the objective of understanding. Mimesis thus in the quest of articulating reality is not about replicating content, but instead is a form of expression and it articulates expression only, and is not to be looked for in the intentions of the artist. In the light of this theory, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* keeps to the principles of mimesis to the extent it employs art as a quintessential expression of trauma. Truth becomes all the more refined in the context of the idea that mimesis is all about expressing the truth – in this case, that of trauma – without needing to worry about it being identical to the psychological debris of the author or the narrator. This does not mean that the credibility of the traumatic experience is compromised. Spiegelman’s mimesis of the Holocaust employs the pathway of the visual metaphors by using cats to represent Germans, Rats to represent Jews, Pigs to represent Poles, Dogs to represent the Americans etc. The truth of the Holocaust becomes the most objectively articulated expression. Both narrators in the graphic novel – Vladek and Artie (Spiegelman himself) - while fighting personal demons are able to artistically mime the reality of the Holocaust by freeing themselves from the burden of subjectivity of representation and repression of language and grammar. Thus use of language in a graphic novel and in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* is both communicative and mimetic (showcases reality). Taking this to the next level, Adorno suggests that “True language of Art is Speechless” (Adorno as cited in Sinha, 2000), and that language of art is self-contained and mute. If language is a method (of communication or construction of *meaning*), art does not speak out as a method, but instead retains a speechless self-hood understood through a ‘gaze’ of being-in-itself.

Art Spiegelman’s use of trauma art in his *Maus* takes the “speechlessness” of artistic expression to the next level through continual construction of spaces that mime trauma experienced in the Holocaust. Needless to say, the symbolism of representation and the visible speechless aspect of dehumanization expressed through cats shooting, mice scurrying, and pigs being looked down upon in a metaphorical animal society allows Spiegelman’s art to acquire a lethal ‘gaze’- that etches its message indelibly in the consciousness of reader-“space”. Looking at *Maus* through the discursive screens of Adorno’s conceptual framework of mimesis allows us to examine the construction of spaces of conflict and the representation of trauma employing different paradigms.

Holocaust has been mimed in movies like *The Schindler's List*, *Fateless* etc. catering to masses and popular culture. However, these movies also in the process attempt to substitute 'real history' with a 'fictional one' given that the focus is the mimetic moments of trauma—focusing on expression of trauma only—and not actually keeping to 'authentic memory' of victims. These movies then become a good example of how constructing a "space" of reality using art actually employs creativity rather than manifesting into a documentary the Holocaust. Given the inherent nature and ability of art of bypassing filters of rationality and carrying truth hidden in abstraction and metaphors/symbolism, Art Spiegelman draws on the form of the graphic novel/comic as a mass cultural genre and also transforms it into a meta-narrative of irony, breach of space-time continuum that manipulates sequencing of action and their causes: the plot of *Maus* fulcrums itself on "post-memory" based on Art Spiegelman interviewing his father, Vladek who is a Holocaust survivor. The plot not only portrays Vladek's flashbacks but also the interviews and conflicts between Vladek and Art Spiegelman. However Vladek's retelling is constantly interrupted by every day events of the present time. In narrating the story of his father bleeding history, Spiegelman continually ruptures the fictional time space thereby creating a distance between the temporality of his interactions and that of the memories of his father. The tale of Vladek's past is visually framed by Spiegelman in the manner of a movie projected by Vladek himself. In figure 2 and 3, a reader is able to connect with several dimensions of meaning simultaneously: a) recognizing that Vladek has begun to project his memories akin to projecting a movie on a screen b) the cycle is similar to a projector c) the movie "The Sheikh" can be perceived as Vladek begins a churning of psychological debris of memories d) the movie also uses mice as icons, etc.



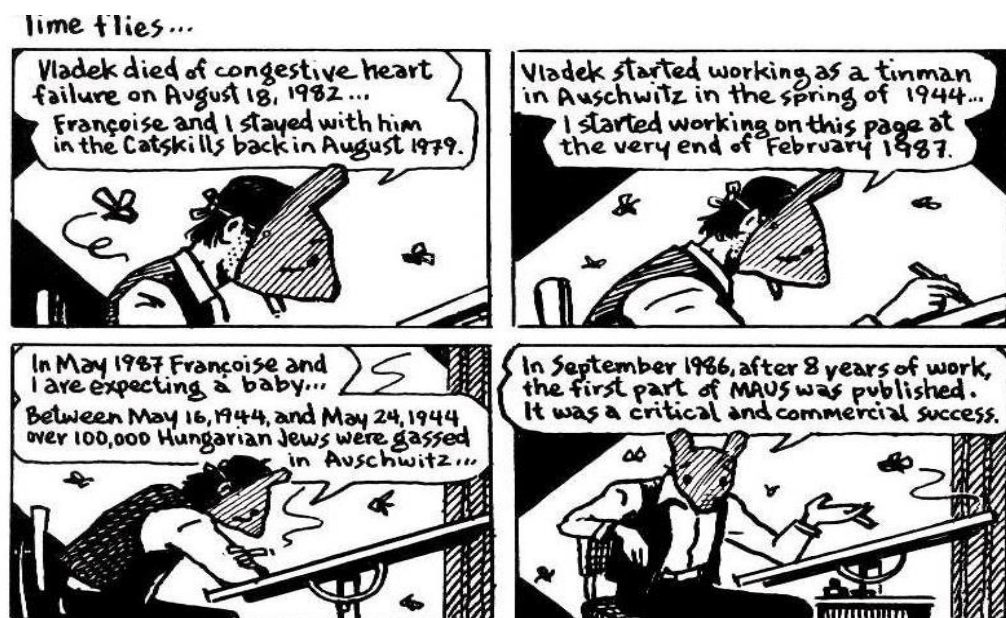
Figure 1. Spiegelman Book 1, p.11. 2003. Vladek's narration begins. His cycle is symbolic a projector.

This warping and wefting of past and the present however also establishes continually how Vladek continues to remain trapped in the past. In this particular frame, Vladek's arms and the handle of the bicycle are in the foreground with sleeves rolled up revealing the Auschwitz number tattooed onto his left arm:



**Figure 2. Spiegelman Book 1, p. 12. 2003. The narrative zooms in on the number tattooed on Vladek's hand with Artie in the background**

Vladek's behaviour indicates severally that he may not have escaped his traumatic past though he escaped the Holocaust. Upon looking into the semiosis of trauma, one may find it difficult to identify the referent or the external object signifying it. All semiotic codes may present the physicality of violence and assume that the trauma has been 'assimilated' by the reader. Since the psychological debris of trauma or traumatic experiences seldom have a particular order in the victim's consciousness, the same disorderliness gets mimed by Spiegelman's graphic narrative depicting his interviews with Vladek, and the process of his constructing the book in the years 1978 to 1991 during which Vladek dies (Fig. 4). So, in the second part, the 'Vladek' that we see comes from the memory of Artie – a post memory - recreating a visual narration of Vladek's narration.



**Figure 3. Spiegelman Book 2, p. 40. 2003. Artie's novel as a "post-memory"**



While it is easy to recognise the role of the art in creating a complex narration, one might easily observe that its aesthetics mimetically approximates trauma that is both historical and personal. Art Spiegelman's life stands in a mimetic approximation with the traumatic past of his parents even before he begins interviewing his father. This mimetic approximation has its moments of irrationality and lack of clear articulation due to mimetic dimensions that lie beyond semiotic code employing words. These dimensions are then articulated in silences, speechlessness, gestures and compulsive habits or fixations—all of which have been created in “spaces” that can only be perceived and assimilated in a certain wholeness wherein the signifier and the signified of a semiotic code function like the sides of a Mobius strip.

In his *Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno*, Huyssen suggests that “mimesis in its physiological, somatic dimension is *Angleichung*—an *assimilation*” (Huyssen 2000). In such *assimilation*, a reader is in a continuous process of constructing meaning and the process is never complete. “It rather requires us to think identity and non-identity together as non-identical similitude and in unresolvable tension with each other” (Huyssen 2000). In this context, one sees a conflicted consciousness of Artie as a narrator and the design of his narrations through “post-memory”. *Maus* thus becomes a mimetic approximation not of memories of Artie's parents, but of Artie's consciousness as a “post-memory”, which becomes the “space-of-conflict” interacting with *reader-“space”*. Artie positing himself as a character and the narrator in the graphic novel is different from Artie [in the novel and beyond it] who pens the “post-memories”. Readers thus perceive Vladek's trauma and Artie's voice together in a state of tension through the speechlessness of the graphic narrative. If *Angleichung* (Huyssen 2000) is nothing but assimilation, then *Maus* also exposes how Vladek's memories also have gaps suggesting that the mimesis of the survivor's tale would also be fractured. The scene wherein Artie calls Vladek a murderer is significant because Vladek reveals that he destroyed Anja's diaries detailing her experiences of being in being in Auschwitz. While Artie extracts the narration from the survivor, Vladek, through series of interviews, the mimetic processes may never completely be able to come to a completion because in order to do so it would be necessary for Vladek to recall his traumatic experience from the deepest and darkest recesses of his consciousness, and replay the trauma—something that the human mind or consciousness is programmed to forget. The totality of recalling might not be possible forcing the reader to assume that the interviews will also continue to be endless. Vladek continues to “assimilate” the psychological debris of Vladek's pain and attempts to give them a mimetic representation. Narration in *Maus* thus shows a mimetic approximation of the tension within it between closeness and distance, affinity and indifference. As a narrator, Artie recognizes the factors shaping his father's world views in his struggle for survival. He sees how Vladek's profile has been shaped by trauma and struggle for survival. In recalling his memories, the current location of USA also provides a sense of safety to Vladek—a physical distance away from the ghettos and concentrations camps.

While examining the mimetic approximation in *Maus*, linguistic and pictorial punning of “Maus”, “Mauschwitz” and “Catskills” attract attention. It would be reductive to label ‘naturalization’ to the use of Cats and Mice in predator/prey relations to depict the story of Germans and Jews. A graphic novel need not be history but is the mimesis of relation inaccurate? Is Spiegelman’s strategy of producing Nazi image of Jews as a lowly rat/mouse problematic and *demeaning* of Jews? If mimesis is based on similitude, then such a mimicry of predator- prey relationship foregrounds powerful symbolism and allegories of everything that the relationship can be extended to: trauma, pain, hate, anti-Semitism, racism etc. The similitude thus draws coordinates from mimesis-metaphor axis to portray trauma or conflict in panel-space.

Spiegelman highlights his deliberate use of the animal imagery/representation to mimic the anxiety of the Holocaust. A Cat-Mouse relationship can never be normal and the outcome is obvious: there is a speechless terror that the mouse experiences every time, and the cat has decided that the mouse deserves to be exterminated as it is filthy and inferior. In his *Metamaus* Spiegelman actually calls Hitler as a collaborator: “And all of a sudden, I was off and running with a metaphor, with my collaborator, Adolf Hitler.” (Spiegelman 2011); and chooses to feature Hitler-quote on the copyright page of *Maus I*: “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not humans” (Fig. 3); and, thus preparing the reader for mimesis of how anti-Semitic sentiment would be handled in the text by presenting the dehumanization of Jews. Instead of literal representation of a vermin, the mimesis invests in anthropomorphized victimized animals drawn with human bodies in human clothing with features of a mouse. In *Metamaus* Spiegelman says: “At times I feel enslaved by my metaphors... cats chasing mice and dogs chasing cats is a food chain... Pigs are outside this food chain... victims and victimizers... didn’t create holocaust but it happened on their farms” (Spiegelman 2011).

“The Jews are undoubtedly a race,  
but they are not human.”  
Adolf Hitler

**Figure 4. Spiegelman Book 1, p. 3.2003. From the copyright page of the novel**

Thus the metaphor of ‘maus’ which mimes the trauma of the Holocaust becomes name for being vulnerable, continual suffering, and victimization. Spiegelman draws a world which cannot claim total authenticity despite using content based on reality of the Holocaust. Thus despite employing such an intense metaphor of cats and mice, Spiegelman stays clear of the danger of using Holocaust memory as screen memory for political purposes. Instead his narrative and pictorial narrative become a strategy of mimetic approximation projecting spaces of conflicts - literally, metaphorically, and mimetically.

### 3. Visual Narrative: Mimesis, and Semiotics of Art

According to social semiotic theories (Halliday 19, as cited in Jimenez and Meyer), texts can be any instance of communication that convey *meaning*. Michele Anstey and Geoff Bull identify five semiotic systems: (a) linguistic, (b), visual, (c) auditory, (d) gestural, and (e) spatial (as cited in Jimenez and Meyer, 2016). So if each of these systems communicates *meaning*, it must be recognized that such a *meaning* is possible only in a “space” that is social or cultural or historical or ideological or personal or psychological, or that of conflict, etc. Thus semiosis would then need to further encompass the role of “space” in which “signs” bind with *meaning* and become a semiotic resource producing communication. A quantum of *meaning* delivered through linguistic codes printed on paper or uttered (spoken) or depicted as images manipulate “space” in different ways thus affecting the aspect of the assimilation of *meaning*.

A graphic novel essentially uses images or visuals along with language and physical space on a page to communicate *meaning*. It employs the linguistic, visual and spatial semiotic systems. The linguistic semiotic system includes letters, words, vocabulary, and so forth, and aligns with traditional print texts. The visual system includes images while the spatial system includes layout, use of proximity, direction, and position (Michele Anstey & Geoff Bull, 2006, as cited in Jimenez and Meyer, 2016). In the process, graphic novel readers must examine not only the colour, font, panel layout, point of view, line, printed text, and gutter space (Pantaleo as cited in Jimenez and Meyer, 2016) but also investigate on how these semiotic resources help construct the “space” of *meaning* construction. The reader must use skills and strategies that go beyond print-based comprehension strategies. As a multimodal text, comics must be analyzed in new, interactive ways (Serafini as cited in Jimenez and Meyer, 2016).

Considering the semiosis of graphic narratives, it becomes essential to examine the nature of Art, and through it the concept of mimesis because in a graphic novel, each “space” type is given a visual ‘presence’ or a visual ‘absence’. The ‘presence’ gets established through technique of visually foregrounding the point-of-gaze in a given panel; and, the ‘absence’ has been created by ‘background-ing’ everything that is significant but as an undercurrent and as a subtext. The Holocaust thus becomes a visual ‘absence’ in the first part of *Maus* and a visual ‘presence’ through the second part.

A graphic novel essentially renders a three dimensional world into a two dimensional world. Thus upon evaluating the said *ontological dependence* of the image on the real, theorists run into the crisis of the issue dividing the mimetic aspect from the semiotic aspect: *how might one explain the fact* of a visual resemblance between the image and its object which is expected of a realistic picture? Mimetic theorists would associate the resemblance to ‘facts’ about the world, to ‘facts’ how one sees the world; almost as if the perceiving eye could as well be replaced with the lens of a camera. However the semiotic aspect would attribute the fact of visual resemblance to how the world is ‘taken’ by the perceiving eye instead of how it is ‘given’: the resemblance



between the image and the object may not be 'given' and it is how the viewer interprets the picture given. At a manifest level, one sees the crisis of representation (in art) in the tension between the 'mimetics' and 'semiotics' of a three dimensional world being portrayed in two dimensions on a page. This perspective would also suggest that the mimetic understanding of a text might have severe limitations if it ignores the aspect of "emergence" (Donovan) and *semiotics*. This however does not mean that the concurrency with the truth has been compromised. Instead the art-content in each of these novels gets transfigured through the minds of the author—Spiegelman- and the readers into a psychological or a spiritual space which is accessible only through human semiotics, employing symbolic forms and *human and semantic universals* (Brown 2004). Spiegelman chooses to draw an idea—an abstraction—in the form of mice/cats in *Maus*. In showing the mice as the victims (Jews), the author take *mimesis* to the level where the *emergence* i.e., trauma, and *semiotics* i.e., letting the readers take in and reconstruct the victims' agonies, are assimilated and that a historically real three-dimensional world has been represented quintessentially in two dimensions in on the pages of respective graphic novels. *Mimesis* can become integral to narration and augment itself by liberating itself from the clutches of maintaining concurrency with the real world at all times: it allows Spiegelman to draw the trauma as an *emergence* (Donovan) of a genocide or democide in *Maus* by essentially reducing animal icons to a blank screen for projecting human meaning (Bloomsbury).



**Figure 5. Spiegelman Book 1,p. 33. 2003. Dehumanization and Atrocity**

The panel in Figure 1 is about how the Nazis force the Jews to sell their business to a German. It depicts a looming swastika in the background, the familiar David's star in the midground and two soldiers with one of them displaying an arm-band (supposedly Nazi). The pictorial "signifiers" namely the Swastika and David's Star might not mean anything by themselves, but these have been iconised into the "signified" depicting conflict between the Nazis and the Jews. The visual presence is of the soldiers denying something to an intimidated character (possibly a lady -with a purse in hand). While one

reads the action with or without a voice-over explaining the action, the Swastika with its speechlessness becomes the constant undercurrent with which all characters continually negotiate with. Thus we see that a single panel effectively shows a certain manifest action. In the panel-space, Spiegelman mimes the speechless over-pervading authority of the swastika and a silenced victim. While reading this panel, a reader is not into a mode of appreciating the aesthetics of the art work employed, but is instead engrossed in reading the subtext and interpreting the visual symbols.

“Spaces” of conflict in *Maus* operates through the principles of mimesis. Seeing the visual and the absent, hearing the speechlessness and the spoken, deconstructing metaphorical representation and the concept, recognizing atrocity and trauma, positioning the victim and the perpetrator, they symbol and the referent—all get narrated through a definitive artistic portrayal in a set of sequenced panels in the respective graphic novels; yet, at the same time, the artistic representation of reality does not get to carry the burden of aesthetization—in keeping with Duchamp’s view that Art should be liberated from the burden of providing ‘retinal pleasure’ (“Marcel Duchamp”); and, in alignment of Adorno’s understanding of Mimesis that ‘speechlessness’ is the language of expression to articulate conflict which otherwise cannot be expressed in any given space using language. Trauma and violence, thus, get articulately expressed through mimetic approximation.

In this light it might be appropriate to summarize a little understanding of what “space” might mean. “Space” conventionally refers to something that has dimensions: something that exists and has extensions. It also gets referred to as an ‘area’ or an ‘expanse’ with the potential for being occupied. However, “Space” also gets defined as “emptiness”, and “nothingness”. The idea of what “space” might mean becomes complex when it comes to representing it especially in literature: it could mean “narrative space”, “psychological space”, “communal space”, “social space”, “personal space”, “symbolic space”, etc., and at the same time it could also refer to the physical space occupied on a page on which action is mimed especially with respect to graphic novels. In a graphic novel, concreteness of fictional *space* is constructed on the physical space of the page, and in the fictional space, a reader gets to perceive the visual “space” in which the narration occurs. This visual “space” is defined as the subjective space which develops around the subject’s own body in relation to the capacities of the various receptors (Thinès 1990). In the reading of this visual “space” the reader constructs his reading of the text—understanding the graphic perceptually and conceptually. Perceptual “space” is “the view of things at a particular time and from a fixed position. This is the stationary window view recorded by the camera... based on the observations that objects appear to the eye to shrink and parallel lines and planes to converge as they approach the horizon, or viewer’s eye level” whereas conceptual space “produces the overall effect that objects and their surroundings have been compressed within a shallow space behind the picture plane” (Owen 2019). Graphic novels thus use art to narrate and construct *space*: of conflict or otherwise. Narrating conflict and representing the same using only language

versus narrating conflict using art can be diverse reading experiences in terms of understanding the aspect of 'reality'.

In a comic book, signifiers can also be presented using colours and style. It is always possible that some of the visual narratives may not use colours at all while the other will use them. This choice of colour or otherwise then allows authors to code characters. This can be seen in characterization in visual narratives involving superheroes: "Superman is associated with red and blue, Batman with black, etc.) Why red for the villains' truck? Why a truck instead of any other car?" (Levine 2013). In Spiegelman's *Maus* one gets to see extended symbols. Jews are coded as mice and Germans are coded as cats while Poles are coded as pigs, etc. The coding involves use of black and white colour to prevent a reader from getting distracted by the art and instead remain focused on miming of atrocity and trauma.

Furthermore, in a visual narrative, the interfacing of symbolic, indexical, and iconic *meanings* of an image and that of the text create an altogether new *meaning* irrespective of what they signify individually. The interaction can be considered similar to that of H<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub> interfacing to form H<sub>2</sub>O which is neither combustible like H<sub>2</sub> nor supportive of combustion like O<sub>2</sub>. A visual narrative brings in further complexity to what might be considered the object or the signified or the signifier in a given panel. For example, a regular speech balloon and a twisted speech balloon could alter the connotation of the very same text spoken by a character. Scott McCloud categorizes several different types of text-image interactions: "word specific (words describing all you need to know while pictures illustrate aspects being described); picture specific (pictures providing all you need to know); duo-specific (words and pictures sending the same meaning); parallel (words and pictures following different paths without intersecting); montage (words and pictures combined pictorially); and interdependent combinations (words and pictures combine to create a meaning which they individually cannot create)" (Mccloud 2006). The complexities of semiosis in a visual narrative i.e. in a graphic novel is also due to fact that while the images remain static, they move physically in the reader's mind. This radically alters the semiosis of the text given: the visual narrative printed which has (static) images acquire mobility and motion in reader's mind i.e., in the psychological space thus making one question whether the text on hand versus the text being read are one and the same. In this case i.e., that of reading a visual narrative—the visual icons, index and symbolic "signs"—, the semiotic crisis is created by the "reader-space". Pierce makes reference to "icons", "index", and "symbols" while explaining "representations" that lead to creation of "interpretants" (Albert, 2006). By "icons", he refers to the aspect of "likeness" - photograph of a person is iconic of the person wherein the relation is established through correspondence. However the crisis here is about how much likeness might be appropriate to iconise a "sign". "*Index*" a mode in which the signifier is *not arbitrary* but is *directly connected* in some way (physically or causally) to the signified—this link can be observed or inferred: this could be a natural sign like "smoke" or "thunder; or signals like "phone ringing", etc. "Symbol" is a sign which would lose its character that renders it a

“sign” if there were no one to interpret it: language, traffic lights, etc. would be symbolic. While icons communicate truth and reality due to resemblance, Index would communicate abstraction; and, symbols would very often become a matter of consensus wherein it means what it means because everyone agrees to mean it so as in case of language (Chandler, 2019) Similarly, in *Maus* the mice and the cat are icons and are pictorially represented so; the mice and the cat get indexed in the predator-prey relationship retaining the direct connection of the signifiers with the object they represent; the very same mice and cats symbolize the Jews and Germans (Nazis) as *symbols*.

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the older terms in literary criticism, *Mimesis* is defined as “imitation” or “representation” with the idea that the imitation endeavors to represent the original as much as possible. Thus, if *mimesis* is the relation between the original and the representation of it, then according to Plato in his Book X of Republic, the mimetic principle need not be applied solely to art. Furthermore, artistic representation is twice removed from reality: once from ideas, and second time from the form. Thus according to Plato, Art does not “represent”, but instead merely arouses emotion and passion. However, according to Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno: “Works of art do not imitate reality”, instead “they “they exemplify its transfiguration” (Adorno as cited in Donovan, 2019).

These perspectives essentially point to a question: is seeing a picture the same as seeing reality? If this is not the case, then to what extent does graphic narrative focus on ‘resemblance’ to establish reality; or, does graphic narrative employ art to create “representations” to portray the emergent aspect of an event or reality? And, is it possible for art to portray real *spaces* if what it does actually is to reduce a three dimensional world to a two dimensional one? Josephine explains that “a live mouse and a dead mouse may have an identical molecular make-up (their material parts), but those parts do not explain the essential difference between the two creatures. That essential difference—life—is an *emergence* property” (Kim as cited in Donovan, 2019). Art replicates or mimics nature’s *emergence*. Art thus enacts a *mimesis* not by recreating a mere resemblance, but instead as a recognition and recreation of a certain consciousness of reality.

Art Spiegelman in *Maus* respectively attempts relentlessly to not merely showcase atrocity, but also create a representation of the trauma in narrativising the annihilation of Jews in the Holocaust. The (trauma) art employs metaphors/icons (mice, cats, pigs, deer, etc.) with associated symbolic nuances. These metaphors then become the real thing and the authors make it real by attempting to draw the *emergence* aspect of the trauma in these novels. If the principle of reality is about resemblance, then graphic or pictorial representation cannot be approximated with resemblance as resemblance has to be symmetrically concurrent with the object whereas ‘representation’ can be symbolic or suggestive and at times minimalistic. David Blinder in his *In Defense of Pictorial Mimesis* suggests that there is a relation of ontological

dependence implicit in the notion of mimetic representation that holds between the pictorial image and the original mode. He quotes Ernst Gombrich stating that a picture could look like the world but the world would not look like the picture (Blinder 1986). This makes the argument that if mimetic representation is construed as a formal symmetric concurrent relation of the picture with the real, then perspective of the ontological dependence could be missed.

Art Spiegelman's visual narrative employs a complex relationship of mimetic and semiotic principles. The mimetic principles constantly engage with the semiotic principles functional in the narrative and create a flux that induces layers of meaning in a reader-"space". Keeping in sync with Adorno's principles of aesthetics, Spiegelman brings in the aspect of *emergence* to the theme of *trauma* portrayed through Vladek's narration of the Holocaust.

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