

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN VISUAL LANGUAGE THE GRAPHIC NOVEL *CITY OF GLASS*

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Abstract

The paper explores the use and impact of conceptual metaphors in the graphic novel *City of Glass* published by Paul Auster as a free-standing story in 1985. Two years later Auster turned it into the first part of *The New York Trilogy*, which has since become one of the most iconic works of postmodern fiction. Artists Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli have adapted Auster's novella into a graphic novel and their version figures on the list of the best comic books in the 20th century. The aim of this paper is to examine how the two artists' use of conceptual metaphors has elicited the visual dimension of Auster's novel, conveyed its philosophical ideas and enriched its emotional effect.

Keywords: conceptual metaphors, visual dimension, graphic novel, comics.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the visual manifestations of conceptual metaphors in the graphic novel *City of Glass*. As aptly noted by Forceville and Renckens (2013), among others, one of the paradoxes of CMT has long been its exclusive study of verbal language, which undermines its basic claim that metaphors are not merely properties of language but of thought (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p. 5). In the present paper I attempt to redress this tendency by exploring the use and impact of conceptual metaphors in the visual language of a graphic novel – more specifically, the graphic adaptation of a verbal novel, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1987). I employ a double set of tools – that of literary analysis and that of linguistic research – to examine the structure, significance and impact of the visual rendition of the novel's conceptual metaphors. I compare Auster's verbal novel with Paul Karasik's and David Mazzucchelli's adaptation, to see how the graphic artists have succeeded in conveying Auster's highly abstract and philosophical concerns in a predominantly visual language.

2. The Analysis

I believe that the novelty of my study is twofold. As an Auster scholar, I am not aware of any research which has applied linguistic tools to his work; as a linguist,

I would hope to realign the scope of CMT research with the theory's basic claims. Let us now take a first look at the work which was elected as one of the best comics in the 20th century:

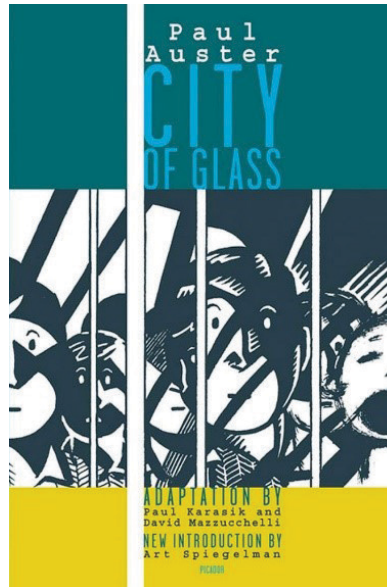


Figure 1: *City of Glass* (2004), front cover

The dramatic cover of Paul Auster's graphic novel unsettles us, attracts our attention and sets up a specific expectation. We expect to find a textual and visual adaptation of Auster's *City of Glass* - which was first published as a free-standing story in 1985, became the first part of *The New York Trilogy*, and has since become one of the most iconic works of contemporary, postmodern fiction. Adaptation is a potentially ambiguous term, both semantically and conceptually. Among its multiple denotations, "adaptation" may signify an artistic composition that was recast in a new form or medium, an alteration in the structure or function of an organism to make it better fitted for survival, or a modification in individual or social activity in adjustment to social surroundings.

What all these definitions have in common is a tacitly implied hierarchy and valorisation: they presume the existence of an original to which the recast work of art is indebted, or of biological or societal constraints to which the individual should conform in order to survive. The bias implied in the denotation of the word affects our perception. We see Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as superior to King Vidor's cinematic version, and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 as more moving and profound than the soundtrack of *Elvira Madigan*. This view is also media-dependent: most of us regard canonical literature and classical music as art forms superior to film, and regard literature in general as superior to comics or graphic

novels. This dismissive attitude indeed informed the initial reception of the graphic *City of Glass*. But in the present essay I would like to argue, along with critics like Martha Kuhlman, that Karasik's and Mazzucchelli's *City of Glass* is a masterful work of art, which not only elicits the visual dimension of Auster's narrative but also enriches it and intensifies its emotional effect. One of the principal strategies which achieve this artistic feat is the graphic artists' reliance on conceptual metaphors.

Auster's fiction was already highly acclaimed in the 1990s, when the American cartoonist Art Spiegelman proposed adapting Auster's philosophical and metafictional novella into a graphic novel. This was a daunting challenge, as Spiegelman himself acknowledged. What visual language can do justice to a basically non-visual work, and convey a complex web of words and abstract ideas? Graphic artists Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli proved up to the task and in 1994 created a superb graphic adaptation, whose workings can be explained in terms of cognitive linguistics.

One of the most influential tenets of cognitive linguistics emerged from the theory of conceptual metaphor, formulated in the early eighties by Lakoff and Johnson. They described the essence of metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" and contended that metaphors are not merely properties of language but of thought (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p. 5). They argued that the human mind tends to conceptualise abstract domains in tangible terms, and this propensity results in metaphor formation. Metaphors are created when the structure of one domain – the source, usually more concrete – is mapped onto the structure of another domain – the target, usually more abstract. This idea was initially a theoretical model, deriving from linguistic intuition, but subsequent research has revealed its physiological basis: the mapping between conceptual domains appears to correspond to neural mappings in the brain system (Lakoff, 2009). Metaphor formation is thus both a theoretical hypothesis and a physiological reality.

A pervasive example which supports the conceptual theory is the metaphor of life as a journey. Life is seen as a journey, in most cultures, because of the perceived correspondences between the two domains: our lifespan corresponds to the duration of a journey, life's goal may be seen as the journey's destination, stages in life are locations along the journey etc. The title of Robert Frost's famous poem, "The Road Not Taken", has become a commonplace of regret, since that is the way we think of the life choices we have not made.

Lakoff and Johnson rooted their theory in the notions of embodiment and image schemata. As defined by Mark Johnson in his seminal *The Body in the Mind*, "image schemata", alternately labelled "embodied schemata", are highly skeletal structures that organize our mental representations and that derive from our bodily experience of the world. Our bodily experience shapes our mental structures which in turn shape our metaphorical thought. Thus the physical dimensions of our body shape the image-schema of CONTAINER. According to Johnson's apt formulation, we experience our bodies as containers into which we put certain things and out of which other things emerge (Johnson, 1987, p. 21). And if the

way our bodies are shaped gives rise to the image-schema of CONTAINER, the way our bodies move gives rise to another embodied schema. We walk forward, from point A to point B, and follow a specific trajectory. This physical imperative is reflected in the mental image of the path, or the PATH schema.

As noted by Charles Forceville, among others, the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image is one of the most fundamental schemata governing conceptualisation (Forceville, 2007). It structures the concept of journey, (involving a starting point, trajectory and destination), it shapes our understanding of what constitutes a purposeful life (initial problems, actions, solution) and of what is a story (it has a beginning, a middle, and an end). SOURCE-PATH-GOAL is an “embodied” schema, and embodied schemata are the quintessential material for structuring abstract concepts via metaphors.

The cognitive and physiological shift in metaphor research has had a crucial implication: metaphor exists in all modes of communication. It is not confined to verbal language alone. Thus the focus of research shifted to the study of multimodal metaphors, metaphors whose target and source are rendered in two different modes, such as written language or images (Forceville, 2009, p. 4). In investigating this type of metaphor we must take into account not only the medium-specific signifiers - words or pictures - but also stylistic properties, such as spatial configuration, size or colour. These considerations ultimately apply to the multimodal genre par excellence – comics, or the graphic novel.

This brings us full circle to Karasik’s and Mazzucchelli’s ambitious project of adapting Paul Auster’s novella into a graphic novel. A graphic novel, Art Spiegelman playfully suggests in his introduction to *City of Glass*, is simply a more respectable term for a comic book. But his own ground-breaking *Maus*, a graphic testimony of the Holocaust, belies his modest contention and demonstrates the complexity of a narrative genre which intertwines words and pictures but is not comic in tone. *City of Glass*, which can be found on the list of the best comic books in the 20th century, belongs to the same genre. And if we wish to assess its profundity and emotional impact, we must first explore the verbal novella that inspired it.

Auster’s verbal novella, which is usually classified under the label of “metaphysical detective fiction”, is structured around a quasi-detective quest. Daniel Quinn, a writer of detective stories, unexpectedly receives a mistaken phone call in the dead of night. The caller is asking Quinn to follow his father, Peter Stillman, who has just been released from jail. Stillman was imprisoned for having performed a cruel experiment on his son, and the son – the mysterious caller on the other end of the line – now fears that his father will come back to kill him.

Although the call was not addressed to him but to a detective called Paul Auster, Quinn accepts the assignment and starts following Stillman. He learns that the old man is a deranged linguist, who had locked his son in a dark room, in order to find which language the baby would speak when deprived of all human contact. Stillman sought to discover the ideal language of the Garden of Eden, in which the word and the thing perfectly coincided. He continues his pursuit

after his release from jail, wanders aimlessly to and fro, collects broken objects and gives them names which he believes would fit their new essence. Quinn follows Stillman doggedly through the labyrinthine streets of New York, but learns nothing, and at the end realizes, in despair, that “there [is] no way to know. Not this, not anything” (*Trilogy*, p. 56). Stillman eventually vanishes; Quinn’s employers, young Peter Stillman and his wife, inexplicably disappear; Quinn locks himself in their empty apartment, stops eating and is determined to fade away as well. A narrator who suddenly appears at the end of the novel proclaims that he knows nothing about Quinn’s fate.

As we can see from this sketchy and incomplete plot summary, Auster simultaneously constructs and deconstructs the detective story paradigm. He constructs a story of an investigation and a potential, dangerous crime, but the danger may never have existed, the assumed criminal and the detective both fade out and the investigation comes to a dead end. There is no mystery, no solution and no possible closure. Auster thus thwarts our customary expectations of the genre; he also thwarts our expectation of a fast-moving narrative and uses the formula of the detective story to explore major philosophical and artistic concerns, such as the nature of truth, the possibility of knowledge or the scope and limitations of language.

How can this narrative and philosophical complexity be conveyed by the medium of the graphic novel? Karasik’s and Mazzucchelli’s principal strategy is the use of multimodal metaphors. This is the main strategy which accounts for their artistic success: complex narratives and abstract ideas can be adapted from a verbal into a predominantly visual language because both forms of communication are rooted in the metaphoric system of the brain, which is usually universal. This reliance on universal cognitive metaphors can be seen in the very beginning of the graphic novel, which I would like to compare to the analogous paragraph in Auster’s verbal novella. This is how the verbal novella begins:

It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not. Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that was much later. In the beginning there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger’s mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell. (The New York Trilogy, p. 3)

A novel’s opening paragraph has a crucial function. It attracts the reader’s interest, sets the mood, it may foreshadow the narrative development and suggest the author’s main thematic concerns. Auster’s main concerns as implied in the first paragraph of his quasi-detective novel are highly abstract: chance as the principle governing human life – it was a wrong number; the nature of identity – the caller was asking for someone that Quinn was not; the interplay of chance and fate – it is not clear if everything was accidental or predetermined; and the

function and meaningfulness of storytelling: the question is the story itself. How does a graphic novel render these abstract, philosophical themes? Let us look at what Karasik and Mazzucchelli have done:

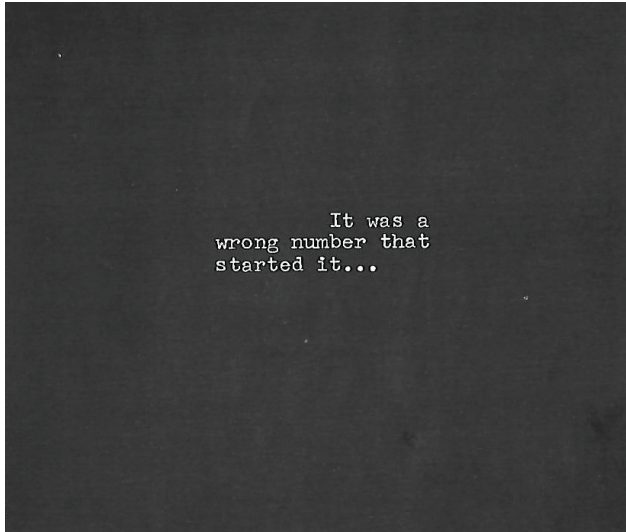


Figure 2: *City of Glass*, page 1

The two graphic artists deploy the opening paragraph on two pages. The first page presents just the very first sentence, which effectively highlights its thematic importance. The white letters stand out against the stark blackness of the entire page. This is a reversal of verbal works' conventional colour scheme, in which letters appear in black print on a white page. The colour reversal is a simple and brilliant strategy which, by being exceptional, is also noticeable. It functions on several levels. On the most obvious, narrative level, the black color evokes the temporal setting of the first scene – the deep dead of night. Here the relationship between the concept of darkness and the concept of night is metonymic rather than metaphorical. As aptly distinguished by Littlemore, metaphor usually involves some sort of comparison between unrelated entities, whereas in metonymy the relationship between a term and its referent is usually much closer. The most common metonymic relationship is that of one part of a category standing for a whole. This is the type of relationship between darkness and night, darkness being a salient property of a category – night – which stands for the entire category (Littlemore, pp. 1, 22). But beyond this relatively obvious association, grounded in metonymy, the stark blackness of the page affects us on an intellectual and emotional level by subliminally evoking our entrenched conceptual metaphors.

One of the most culturally entrenched metaphors is that of darkness as a symbol of evil. The mental correlation between evil and blackness can be traced back to the Bible, with its association of the Devil with darkness and God with light, and it exists across cultures and times. The Greeks pictured Hades, the underworld

realm of death, as a place of eternal darkness; Joseph Conrad epitomized the evil of colonialism in his iconic *Heart of Darkness*; guidelines for realizing our most murderous fantasies can today be found on the dark web. In this transcultural and translinguistic metaphor, GOODNESS IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS; if we narrow it down, GOODNESS IS WHITE and EVIL IS BLACK.

This metaphoric association is extensively analysed by Forceville and Renckens, who examine the correlation between GOOD and LIGHT and BAD and DARK in feature films. The two scholars initially distinguish between creative and conceptual metaphors. A creative metaphor is one “in which there is a novel, *ad hoc* reconceptualization of a target domain achieved by linking it with an unexpected source domain”. An apt example of this artistic strategy would be a scene in Polanski’s *Knife in the Water*, which visually suggests that SEXUAL ACT IS FLAPPING SAIL (Forceville and Renckens, p. 2). Here the linking of the two metaphoric domains results from Polanski’s subjective creative insight; it is a correlation both appropriate and unexpected and is not rooted in our collective unconscious. In contrast, a conceptual metaphor does appeal to our collective unconscious, in that it activates an embodied image schema. “It is image schemas,” conclude Forceville and Renckens, “that provide the source domain for conceptual metaphors which, unlike creative metaphors, are recruited more or less subconsciously” (*ibid.*). Furthermore, conceptual metaphors are grounded not only in our body but also in our life experience: we have a better chance to protect ourselves when we have access to light, but in the dark we cannot see very well and are thus vulnerable to danger and harm.

It is therefore only natural that the label *noir*, the French word for dark, was affixed to a genre dealing with evil and its manifestation, crime. *Noir* fiction is also the (apparent) generic affiliation of *City of Glass*, to which we are alerted by the metaphoric impact of blackness invoked by the first page of the graphic novel. In this culturally pervasive metaphor, which has a physiological and experiential basis, blackness is the source domain. The multi-layered target domain, in the case of *noir* fiction, is described in Paul Duncan’s monograph which defines the genre:

Noir is all those things we fear in the back of our minds, the parts of ourselves we want to block out because they make us feel uneasy. Noir doesn't always have pat solutions and attractive people, doesn't spoonfeed pat solutions into drooling mouths. Noir drags you screaming and kicking through all sorts of hell before reaching some sort of satisfactory ending. It's not something that many people can take.

[...] Noir is often associated with the crime, detective and thriller genres because they give ample opportunity for you to gaze into the minds of bad, dark people on the edge of society. [...] These people are actually you. They live and express your secret desires, weaknesses and motives. It is safer for the character to live for you than for you to admit your dark side to yourself. The crime, mystery, thriller and detective clichés are a code to protect you, a wall you build to stop yourself from being hurt. (Duncan, p. 7)

The history of the term, as it refers to literature, can be traced back to the *Série Noire* published in France in the 1940s, focusing on translations of American hard-boiled novels, by writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. In 1946 French critic Nino Frank coined the term “film noir” to describe

atmospheric crime films, which were often cinematic adaptations of hard-boiled novels. Indeed, the graphic *City of Glass*, first published in 1994, initiated a series of adaptations into comics of noir books. The series was eventually dubbed “Neon Lit”, a pun referring both to literature and to the neon light characterizing the darkly lit urban streets of noir films. This is also the label which figured on the cover of the graphic novel’s first edition.

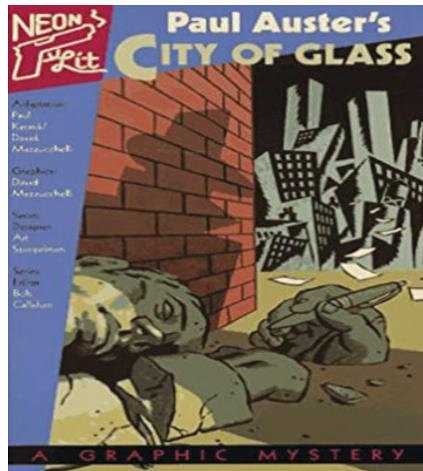


Figure 3: *City of Glass* (1994), front cover

If darkness is associated with evil, it is also associated with ignorance. Duncan analyses *noir* elements in terms that evoke Freud’s notion of the id – those aspects of the self which we do not acknowledge, which we ignore. The association of darkness with faulty knowledge is the metaphorical antonym of its inverse: understanding, or knowing, is seeing. Such conceptual association of sight with comprehension has an experiential basis, as we gain our knowledge of the world mainly by looking around. Here we have a consistent metaphorical mapping from the properties of the source domain - seeing - to the properties of the target domain - knowing. The eyes are likened to the mind, the seen object is compared to the object of knowledge, and the person who sees is similar to the person who knows and understands (Grady, 1998). Thus, ever since Plato’s allegory of the cave, and possibly even much earlier, being in the dark metaphorically conveys the state of ignorance. In Plato’s fable, the miserable exemplars of humanity who are chained to the walls of the dark cave mistake the shadows that they see for reality. Only the one daring prisoner who manages to escape understands the essence of life – the existence of eternal forms – when his eyes open to the sunlight. In the same vein, we refer to the Middle Ages as the Dark Ages. In the 21st century the black hijab imposed on Taliban women symbolically conveys the fact that they are barred from access to knowledge and education.

In this context, I believe there is no further need to establish the metaphorical correspondence between seeing and understanding. But why is this important

in the context of Auster's novel? The answer is related to the novel's genre and main theme. *City of Glass* seemingly follows the conventions of the detective story, and the detective story, contends Brian McHale, is the epistemological genre par excellence (McHale, p. 9). It does not dwell on the nature of the world, the ontological status of perceived reality. Its interest lies in the human endeavour to apprehend reality, to gain understanding. In traditional detective fiction the detective is the representative of inquisitive intellect: he successfully solves the crime mystery, which is only apparent. But in the postmodern, metaphysical detective story the detective's epistemological endeavours are doomed to failure. "There [is] no way to know, not this, not anything," reflects Quinn. This is Auster's stark message, which is forcefully conveyed by the multimodal metaphor of the black page.

Let us now look at the second page of the graphic adaptation, which is a further visual representation of the opening paragraph:



Figure 4: *City of Glass*, page 2

Here Karasik and Mazzucchelli reproduce Auster's text almost verbatim, but the subliminal appeal to our inherently metaphorical perception enriches the novel's emotional effect. The second page of the graphic adaptation is marked by a nine-panel grid, and each three-panel row visually conveys one of Auster's

central concerns. The first row represents the mistaken call in the dead of night. The blackness of the panels, as already mentioned, suggests the temporal setting of night. At the same time, it metaphorically suggests the novella's narrative line and the trajectory of the detective investigation, which will end up in ignorance. The ignorance motif is reinforced by the figure of the dial, whose white oval shape against the black background evokes the shape of zero. And zero is the conceptual metonymy for nothingness. Zero is a symbolic sign, and within the scope of sign and reference, SIGNS STAND FOR THE CONCEPTS THEY EXPRESS (Littlemore, p. 22). Although it is a mathematically mistaken notion - the symbol 0 has an important function in the numerical system - the correspondence between zero and nothingness is due to the fact that in arithmetic the zero symbol is one which has no effect when added or subtracted to anything (Barrow, p. 3.) We talk about zero balance, zero tolerance or zero population growth, and in all these expressions zero metaphorically conveys nullity, non-existence. The oval shape of the dial suggests that Quinn's detective quest will end up in nothingness.

Finally, the last panel in the first row suggests the motif of mistaken identity. This motif is evoked by the suggestion of a finger turning a dial: in our minds a fingerprint is a conceptual shorthand for identity. Our fingerprints are unique and constant from birth to death; these are also the two qualities which we attribute to the notion of the self. Such conceptual contiguity results in the metonymy FINGERPRINT FOR A PERSON: the fingerprint, one part of our body, represents our whole physical identity. On the other hand, we may regard this as an example of metaphor in which the source - the imprint of our fingertips - is concrete, the target - the concept of identity - is abstract, and the (perceived) similarities - uniqueness and permanence - are mapped from the source to the target. The visual version of this metaphor is aptly presented on Pinterest, a popular site of stock images:



Figure 5: *Fingerprint being shredded, Metaphor for identity protection*
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/749497562969329589/>

We have seen how the first page and the first row of panels on the second page already convey the central themes and aspects of *City of Glass*. Abstract notions such as the impossibility of knowledge, the fluidity of identity or the apparent affiliation with the *noir* genre are conveyed by evoking our conceptual metaphors through the multimodality of word and image. In the second row of three panels we have a richer multimodality, consisting of (representative) sound, picture and text. The RRING is the conventional representation of sound in comics, the size of the letters suggesting the telephone's harsh loudness. This visual convention of the comic genre is also inherently metaphorical, as it converts an auditory sensation – loudness – into a visual sensation – magnitude. It supports Lakoff's contention that metaphors give meaning to form, and MORE OF FORM IS MORE OF CONTENT (Lakoff, 2003, p. 127). The shrill sound of a telephone ringing in the silence of the night is conveyed by the oversized capital letters of RRING, the repetition of the first two letters constituting a visual onomatopoeia.

But the complexity of these three panels is still more multi-layered. They brilliantly address another central concern of Auster's novel – the scope and limitations of verbal language. All three protagonists of *City of Glass* professionally work with language. Quinn is a detective story writer, as is the fictional Paul Auster whose identity he assumes; the elder Peter Stillman is a linguist. Throughout the story the characters, and their author, discuss the possibilities and constraints of language and the unbridgeable gap between signifier and signified. This theme is brilliantly conveyed by a suggested play between reality and representation in the central panel. We first see a picture of a telephone and “hear” it ring. This suggests that the telephone is a real object in the world of the novel. But then we see that the telephone is not a real object in a room but only a picture on the cover of a telephone directory. Finally we see a telephone on top of a telephone directory on which a picture of a telephone is drawn. What is real here and what is representation? We are reminded of Magritte's famous painting, “The Treachery of Images”



Figure 6: René Magritte, “The Treachery of Images”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Treachery_of_Images

Ceci n'est pas une pipe – this is not a pipe – because it is a representation of a pipe. The telephone in Auster's graphic novel is a representation of a representation which ultimately does not refer to any reality. This evokes Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum – a simulation, or representation that does not refer to anything external to itself. In the postmodern era, suggests Baudrillard, reality itself has begun to imitate the model, which now precedes and imitates the real world. The three-panel image of the telephone, in the sequence designed by Mazzucchelli and Karasik, visually conveys this idea. Furthermore, the coupling of the sentence "...nothing was real except chance" to the three-section grid of the telephone suggests that chance underpins even the relationship between the visual signifier and the signified. Words do not represent reality; neither do pictures. Auster's novella is self-reflexive, a work of verbal language questioning the scope and fidelity of verbal language. Karasik and Mazzucchelli apply the same self-reflexive strategy to visual language.

Finally, we come to the last row of three panels which together form a picture of a path and of a traveller on the path, and we return to the conceptual significance of the journey metaphor. The juxtaposition of the mistaken telephone call and the image of the black path which the traveller is bound to follow brilliantly conveys one of Auster's central themes: the interplay of chance and fate. This theme is conveyed by a multimodal representation, both verbal and visual. The notion of chance is verbally and visually suggested in the three-panel telephone sequence. The notion of fate is visually suggested by the image of a black path unfolding across three panels. We understand the idea behind it and experience it emotionally because, as Lakoff and Johnson have so insightfully pointed out, the metaphor of life as a journey is etched in our collective consciousness. The accompanying text, taken almost verbatim from Auster's *City of Glass*, asks "whether it might have turned out differently or was predetermined", a question that juxtaposes chance and fate. But Auster then qualifies: "the question is the story itself". And we are reminded of Lakoff's observation that life, with its beginning, middle and end, is alternately conceived of as a journey or as a story.

Moreover, we have here a metaphorical representation of temporality, which we grasp because we have been exposed to the language of comics. In the first picture, the one most to the left, we see only a black path. In the following panel we see a foot barely touching the ground. In the closing picture of this sequence, we see two feet firmly planted on the ground, pointing outward. This sequence visually conveys the metaphor TIME IS MOTION, and one of its two principal forms, TIME PASSING IS AN OBSERVER'S MOTION OVER A LANDSCAPE (Kövecses, p. 37). It is a primary metaphor, grounded in our experience: as we move through time, we perceive time as elapsing. The source frame here is motion along a path and the target is time. We conceptualize time in terms of space: present time is metaphorically visualized as the location of the observer, past time as the space in the back

of the observer, and future time as the space in front of him/her. The three-panel sequence designed by the novel's graphic artists strikingly illustrates this metaphoric construct.

City of Glass is a thin volume, both in its verbal and graphic format. In this paper I have explored only the first two pages of the graphic novel, which correspond to the verbal novella's first paragraph. I have tried to show the richness and complexity of the graphic artists' achievement and their intuitive (or deliberate) reliance on conceptual metaphors. I have discussed the meaning and impact of multimodality, in this case the combination of words and images, and I have discussed the meaning and impact of colour. The scope of this essay does not allow for a nuanced analysis of the whole narrative so I will focus only on its edges - the beginning and the end. And the end is marked by a breakdown of an element hitherto undiscussed – the grid.

A grid is a system for organizing layout. In the graphic *City of Glass*, the basic grid consists of nine panels. This formal schema recurs on most pages, both between and within panels, and constitutes a unifying formal principle. Thus, the window in Quinn's room consists of nine squares, as does the darkened window in the room in which Stillman has locked small Peter. Peter now lives in a different apartment and is apparently free, but his father's experiment has warped him for life and the door of his room consists of nine even squares.

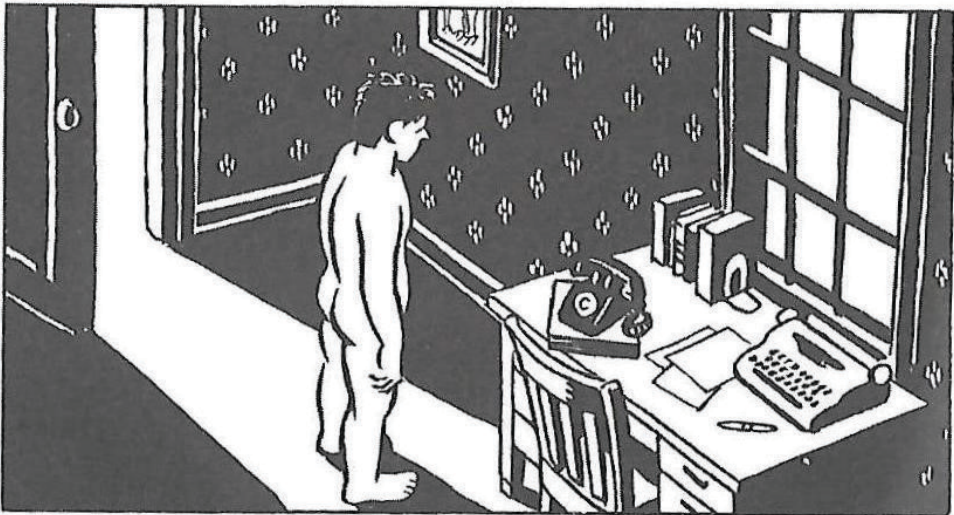


Figure 7: *City of Glass*, page 6: Quinn's room

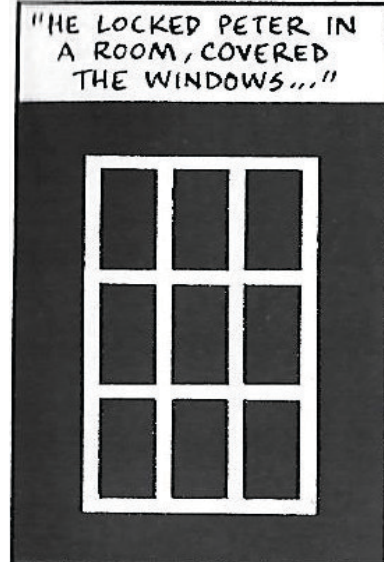
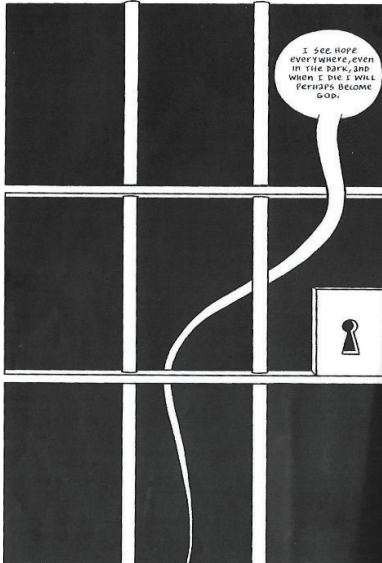


Figure 8. *City of Glass*, p. 22: Peter's door **Figure 9.** *City of Glass*, p. 27: Peter's window

A grid consisting of straight lines offers a multi-layered conceptual metaphor. A line is a two-dimensional object from one point to another. We can describe it as straight, or crooked and bent. The second set of adjectives is metaphorically conceived of as negative: a crooked person is immoral and “bent” was a pejorative term for homosexuals. The first adjective is metaphorically conceived of as positive: describing something as straight implies that it is clear, true and direct. The underlying metaphor is MORALITY IS A STRAIGHT PATH, which is a special case of the broader metaphor MORALITY IS STRAIGHTNESS (Lakoff, 1991, p. 185). Thus, a cheat is a person who deviates from the straight and narrow and a person who walks along a straight path is decidedly moral. And if we take a detour from academic discourse to popular culture, the lyrics of Johnny Cash's iconic song suggestively convey this conceptual metaphor:

*I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds
Because you are mine
I walk the line.*

In the context of Auster's novel, the symbolism of the straight lines on Peter's window and door is ironic. It may evoke the self-delusion of Peter Stillman senior, the deranged linguist who had convinced himself that he was conducting a scientific, and thus ethically justifiable, experiment. But the metaphorical impact of a grid is not confined to the symbolism of straight lines. A grid is a specific

arrangement of lines, which we mentally associate with prison bars. This association is substantiated in Paul Karasik's interview with Bill Kartalopoulos:

...Well, the grid got to serve double duty ... both as backbone and as a symbol unto itself. [...] As well as holding the story together ... ultimately it also allowed the story to fall apart. You know, because that tight nine-panel grid became a symbol for, among other things, Quinn's sort of rigid and unhappy state of mind and pent-up life, which over the course of the book really kind of unravels, to the point where the panels themselves unravel. ("Coffee with Paul Karasik", 2004)

In the graphic *City of Glass* the grid functions both as a structural principle and a symbol. Its symbolic significance is complex. On the one hand the grid evokes the image of prison bars, which metaphorically describe Quinn's self-repression and young Peter's confinement; the underlying metaphor here is the association of openness with freedom. We conceive of freedom of action as the lack of impediment to movement. This is an experiential metaphor, whose source inference points to the fact that lack of containment enables the mover to move in many directions and this – hence the target entailment – gives him/her the freedom to act. From this perspective the nine-panel grid of Peter's door is the image of his mental prison and the shape of the text bubble which swivels upward is the visual metaphor of his hope, as “up” is invariably associated with optimism.



Figure 10: *City of Glass*, page 130

But the visual metaphor of the grid is ambivalent, due to the ambivalence of its source domain – containment. The notions of containment and confinement share the exact image schema of CONTAINER. Containment confines our movement but it also holds us together and prevents us from unravelling and falling apart. These obviously metaphorical expressions are visually conveyed towards the end of the novel, the collapse of the grid offering a metaphorical equivalence of Quinn's psychic collapse.

3. Conclusions

The graphic novel *City of Glass* is presented as an adaptation of Auster's iconic verbal novella. We should not, however, be misled by its title. Karasik's and Mazzucchelli's version is a masterful work of art, which not only elicits the visual dimension of Auster's narrative but also enriches it and intensifies its emotional effect. This feat can be attributed to the graphic artists' reliance on the verbal, visual and stylistic properties of conceptual metaphors and their universal impact on our minds and hearts.

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