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## “VISUALISING POWER: POLITICAL SPECTACLE AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN *LIE*: A TRADITIONAL TALE OF MODERN INDIA”

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### Abstract

This article analyses *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* as a significant graphic political satire, in which humour is a political voice. The article challenges the focus on content in approaches to satire that often overlook its formal qualities, examining how this text uses disjunctive sequencing, caricature, visual excess and miniature to expose the theatrical dimensions of political power in contemporary India. Through its mix of satire, spectacle and graphic explosion, the novel constructs a hyperreal political world in which corruption, caste and mediatised politics are depoliticised and normalised through repetition and spectacle. Particular attention is given to how formal disjunction and hybrid representation disrupt the historical chronology of events in the comics page. The essay suggests that Bhatia's novel presents a critique of social and political power through satire but also a revision of graphic narration as a form of critique that complicates political certitudes. By situating *Lie* at the intersection of comics studies, postmodern political critique and South Asian art, the essay draws on recent work on the uses of comics for political dissent through formal innovations and satire.

**Keywords:** Caste; Comics studies; Graphic satire; Hyperreality; Political spectacle; Visual culture

### 1. Introduction

Visual narratives play a crucial role in understanding the intersections of visual form, politics, history and resistance. Comics studies has moved from comics being considered only as popular culture to being seen as complex narrative forms that produce their own theoretical and political knowledge over the last 20 years (Chute 2016; Gardner 2012; Beaty 2012). This has shifted

the focus of research towards the importance of visual rhetoric, composition and multimodal narration in the function of comics. Recent studies have also focused on the way in which graphic narratives have engaged with concepts of memory, violence and politics in creative ways (Chute 2016; Dony 2019). In this expanding area of research, scholars have also increasingly turned to comics from the Global South, in which graphic narratives

are seen as engaging with colonialism, nationalism and social justice (Mehta and Mukherji 2015; Davies and Rifkind 2020). In the case of South Asia, for example, scholars have examined comics' engagement with caste, identity and memory, often showcasing how comics can explore different social hierarchies through their visuality (Nayar 2008; Sreenivas 2010; Jain 2016). This work has encouraged a deepening of comics studies that moves beyond Euro-American paradigms and places graphic narratives within the field of visual culture and political representation studies.

Amongst this work, Gautam Bhatia's *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* has been under-examined as a formally complex work that uses comics form to stage political critique. Existing research has centred on its satirical view of corruption, politics and absurdity, typically privileging the text as allegory or political critique. While these interpretations emphasise the text's themes, they often neglect the way critique in *Lie* is enacted through the material and formal aspects of comics - fragmentation, density, overflow.

Recently, there has been a growing recognition in comics studies that we should not regard the form of graphic stories as passive but as a tool for analysis. Hillary Chute proposes that comics can represent contradiction and the past through formal strategies such as fragmentation and repetition that disrupt narrative continuity (Chute 2016). Similarly, Thierry Groensteen's analysis of the comics page as a relational space where meaning is created through non-sequential and ubiquitous connections (Groensteen 2007). These analyses suggest that disjunction, excess and spatial composition are not only formal characteristics but also fundamental to the politics of comics.

This article builds on such approaches to explain how *Lie*'s use of strategies of fragmentariness, caricatural excess, temporal instability and imagery inspired by miniature books creates what can be called a politics of formal disjunction. Satire does not just feature as the topic but is also embodied in a graphic narrative. The comic not only represents political instability but also physically embodies it.

The critique is also informed by critical approaches to spectacle and media politics. Guy Debord's critique of spectacle as a central element of contemporary social relations (Debord 1994: 12) and Jean Baudrillard's ideas of simulation and hyperreality (Baudrillard 1994: 1-2) provide a conceptual framework for reading *Lie*'s depiction of power as performative and unstable. In this graphic novel, corruption and government are less

institutionalised than recurrent visual performances that are enabled by spectacle and symbolism. So, power is represented as performative.

The novel is also a critique of the visual. Bhatia's enactment of miniature painting idioms in a modern comics idiom results in a hybrid idiom that transcends the temporal divide. As scholars of visual culture argue, images both represent and participate in regime-making in regimes of visibility and authority (Mitchell 2005; Mirzoeff 2015). The miniature-inspired density and ornamentation in *Lie* are not merely aesthetic but critical as they ironise historical power and demonstrate the performative nature of politics. This article takes a close formalist approach supported by theoretical insights from comics studies, visual culture and political theory. It does not theorise the text but aims to demonstrate how the text's innovations call for theorisation. This is important to situating the work in relation to recent developments in comics studies, where there has been an increasing appreciation of the significance of form.

So the goal of this article is to demonstrate how *Lie* engages with power both through satire and through comics' formal processes. It does so in thinking about how sequencing and fragmentation create a graphic politics of satire; how hyperreality and spectacle shape representations of power; how carnival excess disrupts political power; and how miniatures operate as a graphic strategy. It does so by bringing together comics studies, political theory, and South Asian visual culture in order to engage with the emerging field of research into the mediation of dissent through the formal experimentations of graphic narratives.

## **2. Comics Form, Fragmentation and Political Satire – Revised Audit**

Satire and its formal techniques create political critique in *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India*. Recent research indicates that graphic narratives communicate through sequencing, spatial organisation, composition and image-text relations (Groensteen, 2007; Chute, 2016; Gardner, 2012). *Lie*'s discontinuous sequencing and jumbled compositions represent a politically turbulent world. This makes it difficult for narratives to be stable, as comics are necessarily discontinuous - they require the reader to fill in the gaps. In *Lie*, this discontinuity is a political reflection of disjointed authority and governance, which is visually evident.

Comics disrupt political meaning as a narrative, due to their discontinuity (readers must fill in the

gaps). In *Lie*, the discontinuity is a political tool, depicting fragmented governance and authority. Groensteen's relational model of comics emphasises the connections between and through panels. The political significance of *Lie* is often through accumulation, rather than linear progression, and with recurring tropes of power and corruption, these are not isolated events, but recurring social structures. The page, therefore, becomes a site of power dispersed and visually accentuated.

This approach works alongside Chute's thesis that comics communicate historical and political contradiction through fragmentation and visual discontinuity, rather than narratives (Chute 2016). In *Lie*, discontinuity uncovers the falsity of political authority, as the reader is forced to read abrupt transitions, amplifying its political effect. The comic makes instability a reading experience. Caricature is used not to represent political subjects and power but to distort them, revealing the performative nature of authority. Here, Hatfield's observations on the interplay between image and text, realism and abstraction are instructive (Hatfield 2005). Bhatia's graphic satire demonstrates that power is dependent on performance, posturing and repetition.

The power of the text, thus, is not just in its subject but in its representational method. The contorted figure, the packed composition, the outlandish gesture, and the sudden composition all work towards undoing power. Power is rendered absurd not just through the use of verbal irony but also visual distortion. This is especially significant because comics can condense visual critique: a single distorted body may better figure the absurdity of power than extended narration.

Recent scholarship on political comics and graphic dissent helps to add to this understanding. Dony suggests graphic satire can challenge power by making the visual traditions that make political power appear natural or legitimate unfamiliar (Dony 2019). *Lie* does just that. The excess of its visuals prevents institutions, rulers and social orders from looking natural. Rather, they appear constructed, precarious and reliant on symbolic repetition. Research on South Asian graphic narratives demonstrates that comics engage with nationalist, caste and other forms of identity, historical representation and social violence through nuanced graphic and spatial strategies rather than representational realism. The Indian graphic novel, Pramod K. Nayar shows, employs layout, sequencing, and visual-textual interactions to challenge dominant national narratives (Nayar 2016). Hillary Chute shows that graphic narratives

that engage with trauma and political violence employ fragmentation, repetition and visual density to represent non-linear histories (Chute 2016). In South Asia, these tactics are essential for negotiating collective memories and multiple identities.

According to Bart Beaty, the critical potential of comics comes not only from their content but also from their capacity to alter seeing and reading (Beaty 2012). *Lie* is important for its critique, which is not just political; it also draws attention to the architecture of comics - fragmentation, density, repetition, caricature, and the abundance of visual material - to expose the precarious nature of power, making form a vital component of political action. In this way, the politics of satire are coterminous with form in *Lie*. Fragmentation destabilises narrative; repetition exposes corruption; caricature defames political power; and density turns the page into a battleground of political contention. The comic does not just depict political chaos; it brings the reader chaos. Thus, *Lie* makes comics form political.

### 3. (a) Political Spectacle and Hyperreality

While fragmentation in the comic *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* suggests a formal politics of instability, the graphic narrative also critiques politics by staging political power as spectacle. In the comic, rather than sovereignty, power is staged, ritualised, symbolised and exaggerated. This aligns with Guy Debord's characterisation of the spectacle as a place of "social relations between people [that] are mediated by images" (Debord 1994, 12). In *Lie*, this is not an imagined, but a visual relation. This is most obvious in the comic's many public scenes of power. Political actors are regularly depicted in stylised poses and scenes: they are surrounded by courtiers, encased within symmetrical framing and involved in ritualistic poses reminiscent of being seen rather than acting. Here, representation, symbolism and clothing dominate politics. Thus, power is staged as spectacle. The privileging of representation in the imagery conforms to Debord's notion that spectacle is a representation of reality; in *Lie*, representations are not just a product of power but its producer.

The panel format emphasises this. Rather than proceeding in terms of cause and effect, sequences alternate scenes of governance that seem incidental and unrelated but have similar visual traits. For instance, scenes of bureaucratic processes, public announcements and meetings are frequently repeated in terms of setting: high stages, tiered formations, exaggerated gestures. The repetition

becomes a pattern where representation is repetition. Repetition can show power as performed. Thierry Groensteen's concept of relationality can be applied to this process. He suggests that comics are significant as a result of the relations on the page, as well as their relation to each other (Groensteen 2007, 146-147). In *Lie*, the recurrence of figures of rulers, administrative meetings, and ritualistic arrangements forms a network of relations that emphasises repetition as power. Power is not in one instance, but in several parallel instances. Thus, spectacle is a constant.

This is also reinforced by the hyperbole of the bodies of political leaders. Political leaders are depicted with immense facial characteristics, rigid body poses and exaggerated gestures to emphasise their performative nature. Their bodies are not just anatomical, but also stylised. This kind of stylistic exaggeration demonstrates a disjunction between form and content. Power is not an identity, but rather a performance. This is where Hillary Chute's repetition analysis comes in. Chute proposes that repetition in graphic narratives can reveal inconsistencies in representational systems by revealing patterns (Chute 2016, 98-102). In *Lie*, the repetition of images of authority figures posed in the same way, of rituals that are enacted in different places, and of symbols that are repeated throughout panels, does not present us with something stable. Instead, they show political power is contrived. The more poses of authority, the more conspicuous they are. It is this hyperbole-reality combination that gives the play satirical force. Political scenes are satirical: gestures are overblown, protocols are unnecessarily complicated, and proceedings are irrelevant to life. But the scenes also depict political processes. This is key. The humour doesn't generate absurdity; it amplifies it. *Lie* exaggerates the spectacle and its use in politics.

Christophe Dony's theory of graphic satire can help explain this. He proposes that comics can challenge authority by "defamiliarising the visual tropes of naturalised authority" (Dony 2019, 224-225). *Lie* does this through over-representation. We see authority so often, so often that we can no longer not see it as a performance. Representation becomes theatre. Another aspect of the spectacle is its carefreeness. The spectacle isn't necessarily effective. Events don't have an effect; words have no impact. This distance highlights the importance of the spectacle over the substance of government. The comic suggests that power exists, not through action, but through representation. This is also emphasised by the complexity of the imagery. These densely populated compositions of people,

symbols and ornaments are the backdrop to an overabundance of spectacle. The reader's attention is directed not to one but many centres. This is the same as the excess of images in spectacle politics. Power is not hidden: it is overabundant.

*Lie*'s formal techniques create a politics of the visible in which power is represented. Spectacle is power, sustained by repetition, caricature and representation. The comic not only depicts spectacle, but it enacts it. It also hints at the vulnerability of this spectacle. The excess, repetition and staging of spectacle in the comic turn spectacle into a performance. Thus, spectacle in *Lie* is both content and form. Through panel composition, repetition, caricature and narrative rupture, the comic transforms power into spectacle. Power is not so much to be as to do; it is a performance.

### 3. (b) Political Spectacle and Hyperreality

If spectacle in *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* operates through repetition and visual performance, the narrative deepens this critique by moving into the domain of hyperreality, where representation ceases to refer to reality and instead begins to produce it. This shift can be understood through Jean Baudrillard's formulation of simulation, particularly in the opening section of *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he argues that contemporary culture is characterised by the "generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1994, 1-2). In *Lie*, this condition becomes visible in the representation of bureaucratic authority and political discourse. Administrative procedures, public declarations, and institutional performances are repeatedly staged, yet they appear detached from any meaningful referent. Actions are performed, but their consequences are unclear or absent. Authority persists not through effective governance but through continuous symbolic circulation. This aligns with Baudrillard's argument that in a hyperreal system, signs no longer represent reality but generate their own self-referential order.

The graphic structure of the comic reinforces this logic. Visual motifs associated with power—ceremonial arrangements, official postures, hierarchical compositions—recur across panels with minimal transformation. This repetition produces a saturation effect in which authority becomes overrepresented. Rather than stabilising meaning, such excess destabilises it. Power appears not as singular or grounded but as an endlessly reproduced image. The comic thus mirrors the hyperreal condition in which meaning emerges through repetition rather than reference. This effect

can be further understood through Hillary Chute's analysis of repetition in graphic narrative. Chute argues that recurrence in comics can expose structural contradictions by making visible the patterns through which representation operates (Chute 2016, 98–104). In *Lie*, repeated images of authority do not confirm legitimacy; they reveal its dependence on performance. Corruption, bureaucracy, and hierarchy appear as recurring visual structures rather than hidden processes. The reader encounters domination as a pattern.

The satirical force of the text lies in its oscillation between exaggeration and recognisability. Scenes of political life are rendered with excessive detail and absurd intensity, yet they remain legible as reflections of real conditions. This tension produces what may be described as hyperreal satire. The comic does not distance itself from reality; instead, it reveals that reality itself may already operate through exaggerated and self-referential forms. Satire becomes diagnostic rather than purely critical.

Christophe Dony's work provides a crucial framework for understanding this mechanism. He argues that graphic satire can destabilise authority by disrupting the visual regimes through which power appears natural (Dony 2019, 224–230). In *Lie*, this disruption occurs through overexposure. Authority is rendered excessively visible—so visible that its constructed nature becomes undeniable. The repetition of spectacle leads not to acceptance but to estrangement. Another significant dimension of this hyperreal condition is the hollowing out of authority. Power appears omnipresent in its signs but fragile in its legitimacy. Political figures and institutions are constantly represented, yet their actions lack coherence and consequence. This produces a paradox central to the novel's critique: authority persists despite its emptiness. It is sustained not by substance but by repetition.

The relationship between spectacle and hierarchy further intensifies this critique. Social and political hierarchies are frequently depicted through structured visual arrangements—ordered compositions, symbolic positioning of figures, and ritualised gestures. However, these arrangements do not stabilise authority. Their repetition exposes their constructed nature. Hierarchy appears not as a natural order but as a staged configuration. The comic's visual density contributes to this effect. Overcrowded panels filled with symbolic detail create a sense of saturation in which representation becomes excessive. This excess mirrors the logic of hyperreality described by Baudrillard, where signs proliferate beyond referential limits. Meaning

becomes unstable because it is overproduced. Thus, *Lie* moves from spectacle to hyperreality, from performance to simulation. Through repetition, visual saturation, and satirical exaggeration, the graphic narrative constructs a political world in which reality itself appears mediated and unstable. Authority survives not through coherence or legitimacy but through the continuous reproduction of its own image.

#### 4. (a) Carnavalesque Power and Satirical Excess

While *Spectacle in Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* makes a case for the mediated nature of authority, the text extends the critique to carnival. In this instance, satire does not simply function through irony and verbal mimicry; it comes through the grotesque exaggeration, bodily deformity, comedic subversion and symbolic denigration of power. Power is not just analysed; it is lampooned. This transformation from spectacle to carnival is important because it is not only about uncovering the theatricality of power but also about weakening its symbolic power. This analysis retains Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival. In *Rabelais and His World*, carnival is linked to the suspension of officialdom, its seriousness, distance and solemnity. Its power is found in laughter, the subversion of official power and its degradation into the physical and comic (Bakhtin 1984, 10–21). In *Lie*, carnival is evident in the visual reduction of political power to theatrical, bodily and ridiculous forms. Authorities, officials and institutional personae are not depicted as solidified bodies of sovereignty; they are hyperbolic, unstable and theatrical bodies. This bodily grotesquerie has political implications. Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body focuses on excess, openness, instability and corporeality; it subverts closed, high and transcendent figures of authority by embodying them (Bakhtin 1984, 303–367). Bhatia's cartoons achieve a similar effect. The political authorities in *Lie* are represented through visual distortion and caricature, so power is defamiliarised. Authority is realised as pose, attire, faciality, gesture and body swell. The comic body undermines the image of power.

This is where comics form comes in. In *Lie*, caricature is not a cosmetic effect but a political strategy. Hatfield's scholarship on the form of comics is relevant here, as he suggests that comics make meaning through tensions between sequence and surface, image and text, realism and abstraction (Hatfield 2005). Bhatia plays with these tensions. Fat bodies, busy panels and shifting rhythms of image and text become a means of critique. The reader doesn't just perceive power as

absurd; the reader sees the absurdity of power. The carnival is not just directed at individual politicians, but also at their institutions. Bureaucratic processes, ritual structures and official ritual are taken to the level of parody. Signifiers of order become signifiers of absurdity. This is significant because the satire not only condemns institutions for failing, but it also implies irrationality is already resident in the systems that claim to be reasonable. The comic exposes the tension between official pretensions and actual chaos.

Stallybrass and White's analysis of transgression sheds light on this. Their work extends Bakhtin's insights into how cultural hierarchies are often premised on symbolic divisions of high and low, pure and impure, elevated and degrading (Stallybrass and White 1986). *Lie* repeatedly unsettles such divisions. The lofty speech of authority is reduced to farce; political dignity is reduced to bodily humour; public order is visually sullied by excess. This lowering is not accidental, but a structural assault. So the laughter is crucial. In *Lie*, laughter is no release from politics. It is a form of political desacralisation. The graphic narrative places power in the comic context, making it less inevitable. The King, the bureaucrat and the State are defenceless once they are laughed at. The carnivalesque laughter undermines the solemnity of power.

This point is supported by recent studies of graphic satire and protest. According to Dony, political comics can oppose power by estranging the imagery through which power seems legitimate (Dony 2019, 221-237). *Lie* achieves this estrangement through a grotesque exaggeration. Power is not just challenged; it is rendered uncanny. Its postures, practices and bodies are distorted, made too obvious. This technique also fits with Chute's claim that comics can represent political contradiction through fragmentation, repetition and visual repetition (Chute 2016). In *Lie*, humorous political bodies and scenarios repeat as tropes. Their recurrence stops satire from being a purely localised form of humour. Instead, ridicule becomes systemic. The text demonstrates the way domination maintains itself through repeated poses of seriousness, and it then converts these poses into ridicule.

A carnivalesque politics of graphic satire emerges. By exaggerating, distorting, inverting and ridiculing, *Lie* upsets the symbolic power of politics. The grotesque is not just ornamental to the satire; it is critical. Power seems vulnerable because the comic continually renders it theatrical, corporeal and absurd. Thus, this section argues

that *Lie* employs carnivalesque excess as a graphic strategy of resistance. If spectacle renders power as spectacle, then carnival renders spectacle as ridicule. In grotesque embodiment and satirical excess, the graphic narrative brings the solemn authority of the state "down to earth".

#### **4. (b) Carnavalesque Power and Satirical Excess.**

Although grotesque caricature in *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* deconstructs the symbolic power of political figures, the narrative goes further in this process to reveal how power is contingent on ritualised representation that is liable to collapse in on itself. The carnivalesque satire of the text does not simply make fun of the authority figures, but exposes the flimsy nature of authority. This is significant because it is a shift from a critique of representation to a critique of structure. The major source for this explanation is Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of carnival. Bakhtin's account of carnival in *Rabelais and His World* is the disruption of official culture through a suspension of hierarchy, subversion of authority and laughter at and through power (Bakhtin 1984, 10-21). Bakhtin's definition is consistent and thus safe. In *Lie* this occurs in scenes in which power figures are exaggerated, distorted and dramatised.

But the role of carnival excess in *Lie* is not just about the inverted but also the revealed. Power is seen to depend on repetition - rituals and ritual objects, and ritualised performances that have to be repeated to sustain power. The repetition of these rituals, when exaggerated, reveals their precariousness. The more formal, the more parody. This is the case with bureaucratic representation. Bureaucratic processes are portrayed as complex rituals dominated by excessively formalised rituals and gestures. These are more ritualistic acts than rational processes. This is consistent with Bakhtin's analysis of how carnival functions to undermine official authority and its seriousness by revealing its dependence on conventions (Bakhtin 1984, 122-127). In *Lie*, bureaucratic authority is considered comic because it is ritual.

The grotesque body is key to this. Bakhtin's grotesque is open, exaggerated and transformative, as opposed to the closed body of classical authority (Bakhtin 1984, 303-367). Every political figure in *Lie* is presented in a grotesque body with distorted faces, swollen bellies and hyperbolic gestures. These characters confirm the carnality of power by materialising it. Power is corporeally vulnerable. This is discussed by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, who argue that social stratification is premised on symbolic distinctions between the high and the low, order and disorder, purity and

excess (Stallybrass and White 1986). Carnival feasts also use inversions to undermine these distinctions by elevating the "low" to the "high". In *Lie*, this occurs when politics is dragged into the realm of the body in excess and humour. The sovereign is not high, he is low. The system is no longer normal; it is excessive.

Repetition and accumulation in comics form help to carnivalise. The reiteration of grotesque forms of body and absurdity creates patterns that extrapolate the comedy in a moment to the institution itself. Hillary Chute's analysis of repetition in the graphic narrative is pertinent here, in her discussion of repetition's role in highlighting structure to expose contradiction (Chute 2016, 98-104). In *Lie*, repetition becomes estrangement; the repetition of the grotesque forms not only captivates but also renders the code of power. Similarly, Christophe Dony shows how graphic satire can destabilise power through the estrangement of the normalising visual codes of power (Dony 2019, 224-230). In *Lie*, estrangement is through excess. The figure of authority is depicted in excess so that it is unrecognisable. Its gestures are excessive, its symbols exaggerated, and its ceremonies superficial.

The second aspect of excess in the novel is that it is unresolved. Excess is left to stand rather than being restored to a moral norm, as in satire. Excess does not lead to a happy ending; it adds up. This is politically significant because it prevents closure. No continuity might resolve the symbolic order.

This is also in accord with Bakhtin's processual account of carnival. While carnival was certainly a temporary event, its critical potential - laughter, inversion, excess - could unsettle strict authority (Bakhtin 1984, 122-127). In *Lie*, this is realised through the comic itself. The comic's page is a site for the destabilisation of authority. So, carnival in *Lie* is not only satirical but also formal. In grotesque representation, ritual exaggeration and repetition, the comic stages authority. The more it tries to control through ritual repetition, the worse it gets.

### 5. (a) Miniature Aesthetics and Graphic Subversion

A recurrent feature of *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* is the reworking of miniature aesthetics for political commentary. The novel's imagery does not simply draw on Indian miniature painting for decorative embellishment; instead, its style converts the density, compression, redundancy and hierarchy of miniature painting into a graphic satire. In this way, traditional aesthetic forms are enabled to undermine rather than shore up authority. This is crucial because the

miniature-inspired visuality of *Lie* is formal. The dense surfaces, condensed spatial structures, and visual textures create a different kind of reading than narrative progression. Rather than inviting the reader to move from one panel to the next, the eye is invited to return. Meaning is a matter of accumulation: bodies, icons, gestures, and decorative structures accumulate visually. This makes the page a political place.

Here, Groensteen's theory of the relational nature of comics is helpful, as he explains that the meaning of comics is generated not just by the sequence of panels but also by the connections between elements across the page (Groensteen 2007, 146-147). In *Lie*, the density of a miniature reinforces this relationality. Political meaning is not just created within panels, but through the placement of bodies, symbols, decorative adornments, and recurring motifs. Power appears to be diffused through design. Visual density also complicates notions of order. Miniatures can connote at times refinement, hierarchy, ornament and composition. But in reality, they are exaggerated. Order becomes excess. Balance tips into rigidity; decorations become a visual weight; ritual becomes spectacle. This surplus is at the heart of the novel's satire because it makes aesthetic form a symptom of political disunity.

W. J. T. Mitchell's analysis of images can help explain this. In *What Do Pictures Want?* He suggests that images can't be viewed merely as passive bearers of meaning; they are active agents in culture and politics (Mitchell 2005, 28-56). This approach is helpful for *Lie* because Bhatia's pictures don't only represent political critique. They perform it. The miniature-influenced page turns into an active space that challenges power. The University of Chicago Press/Google Books archive allows us to verify Mitchell's book, its publishing details and chapters. The miniature-inflected visual idiom of the novel also complicates the relationship between the traditional and the modern. Instead of miniature forms as markers of cultural tradition, *Lie* juxtaposes them with scenes of contemporary political absurdity. This creates a productive anachronism: the "traditional" forms are not archived as cultural purity, but repurposed as satire. Tradition is used as a critical, not merely decorative, element.

Here, the South Asian graphic narrative backdrop is relevant. Pramod K. Nayar's *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History and Critique* defines the Indian graphic novel as a genre of history, memory, cultural identity and critiques of the nation. The book's record on the Routledge site confirms that its emphasis is on dissident histories and satire in

Indian graphic narratives. *Lie* is part of this genre but also contributes to it in its unique blending of political satire and miniature scenes. It offers a critique of power both thematically and visually.

This interpretation accords with that of Nicholas Mirzoeff on visual culture. *How to See the World* underscores that in contemporary visual culture, the production, circulation and political appropriation of images, such as "visual activism", plays a significant role. The publisher's blurb confirms Mirzoeff's interest in the politics of images. In *Lie*, the politics of seeing takes place on the page: the reader is trained to see authority as staged, contrived, and preformatted.

The novel also displays hierarchy as spectacle through miniature aesthetics. Characters are frequently arranged within geometric forms that evoke hierarchical rank, ritual and symbolism. But these designs are often disrupted through caricature, crowding and excess. Hierarchy is exposed, but it is also destabilised. The page makes hierarchy visible by hyper-organising it. This order that appears to increase power, in fact, exposes its melodramatic nature. This approach also plays off the legacy of miniature painting as a courtly and elite genre. Museum catalogues frequently attribute Indian miniature paintings to courtly settings, manuscript traditions, court workshops, and highly decorative painting techniques on paper with opaque watercolour using valuable materials. *Lie* employs this memory, but does not offer a faithful representation of it. Rather, it renders the court aesthetic of order, decoration and rank satirical. This yields a visual style in which the traditional becomes a site of visual subversion.

So, miniature aesthetics are not incidental in *Lie*. They are integral to the novel's politics. Bhatia turns inherited visual forms to critical purposes by means of density, repetition, ornament and hierarchy. Tradition is not represented; it is transformed. The miniature page becomes the site for the display, excess and subversion of authority.

### **5. (b) Miniature Aesthetics and Graphic Subversion**

While the miniature aesthetic of *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* serves as a form of graphic excess and satire, the narrative takes this a step further by using hybridity to destabilise histories of authority. The graphic text does not simply place traditional and modern visual forms side by side; it overlays them to create a visual field in which traditional and modern forms are blurred. This temporal disjunction is key to the politics of its form.

One element of this tactic is the disjunction of linear time. The use of miniature-style imagery, a trope typically associated with courtly imagery, and its juxtaposition with scenes of contemporary political absurdity create temporal complexities in which historical modes of visual power and contemporary satire coexist. This is critical, revealing contradictions, not nostalgia. Hillary Chute's work on fragmentation in graphic novels notes that comics use juxtaposition to express historical contradictions, and in *Lie*, this includes the juxtaposition of style. The use of miniature styles in contemporary political settings introduces a visual disjuncture, revealing history as an intricately constructed presence rather than as a stable continuum.

The political implications of this approach are that it undermines historical authority. Legitimacy often rests on the claim of continuity, but with satirical miniature aesthetics, *Lie* breaks this continuity. The visual imagery of hierarchy and order is indeed inverted, no longer reinforcing authority but challenging it. According to W. J. T. Mitchell, images play a role in constructing cultural and political realities. In *Lie*, the miniature imagery does not just represent authority, it re-presents it; images become battlegrounds. The novel hyperemphasises ornamental qualities such as symmetry and balance to the point of a breaking point, where balance becomes excess, and arrangement becomes a show, and, by extension, authority. This is an overuse of the traditional, rather than a dismissal of it.

In this context, Thierry Groensteen's notion of the comics page as a relational field is useful (Groensteen 2007, 146-147). *Lie*'s meaning is produced by tensions in its visual structure. Hierarchical compositions are continually challenged by crowding, caricature and repetition. These undermine the stability of the hierarchy. The page offers an area where power is created and subverted. This technique also aligns with conversations about visual culture. Nicholas Mirzoeff stresses the importance of visibility in the organisation and contestation of power in contemporary society (Mirzoeff 2015). In *Lie*, the politics of visibility is designed. The reader is not just presented with authority; the reader is taught how to see it. The picture becomes a teacher.

The other key component of this graphic subversion is hierarchy. Figures are frequently organised in compositional arrangements that allude to ritual. But these compositions are continually subverted by excess, an excess of figures, decoration and repetition. Hierarchy is evident because there is too much. Its constructed

nature is overstated. This approach is consistent with the critical approaches to Indian graphic narrative. Pramod K. Nayar suggests that Indian graphic novels often deal with history and nation through visual techniques that call into question official narratives (Nayar 2016). *Lie* expands this to an engagement with aesthetic form as critique. It does not simply compare alternative histories but undermines the visual strategies that legitimise history.

The result of these tactics is a new articulation of tradition. Miniature aesthetics are not abandoned; they are reimagined. Their legitimacy is not rejected; it is problematised. Through parody, excess and bricolage, *Lie* makes of the visual legacy a site of resistance. Thus, miniature imagery in the novel is a kind of graphic subversion that is temporal, visual and ideological. By breaking with past continuity, subverting order and hierarchy, the comic makes tradition a site of critique. It is a space where authority is not only depicted but also destabilised.

#### 6. (a) Comics, Dissent and the Politics of Form

This research illustrates *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* is politically subversive and creates dissent through its formal elements. Fractures, spectacle and density are part of a critique of the page. This undermines comics as a communicative language; in accordance with Scott McCloud's dictum, the gutter - or space between panels - enables meaning through discontinuity. However, *Lie* confounds this process, for transitions are often left unresolved, creating gaps that confound continuity. This suggests authority is positioned as unstable and difficult to discern when reading. This is shown in Thierry Groensteen's system. Groensteen emphasises the importance of the page as a system of relations, not sequence (Groensteen 2007, 146-147). In *Lie*, this is complemented by repetition, density and dispersed motifs. The politics appears on the page as inter-panel. Power appears to be dispersed, decentralised and unstable because it is not located on the page.

The politics of such explosions are indicated by Hillary Chute's suggestion that comics can represent contradiction by generating forms that resist narrative simplification (Chute 2016, 98-104). *Lie* demonstrates this ability. Its form doesn't resolve the contradiction. The reader is continually exposed to the disjointedness, surplus and instability, which in turn undermines the unity of the political. This constitutes a broader view of dissent in comics. Dissent in *Lie* takes the form not only of countervailing content, but also of estrangement. The comic estranges the codes that institutionalise power.

According to Christophe Dony, graphic satire can undermine power by estranging its legitimating codes (Dony 2019, 224-230). In *Lie*, such estrangement is not only performed through caricature or exaggeration, but also through composition. So, *Lie*'s politics is a politics of formlessness. Discontinuity disturbs consistency; repetition reveals constriction; density overwhelms hierarchy. This makes comics a political form. That is, the text not only presents a political instability, but it also makes us unstable readers.

#### 6. (b) Comics, Dissent and the Politics of Form

While *Lie* shows that the form of comics can subvert political power through fragmentations and disjunctions, it suggests something bolder: that form is politics. The spectacle, carnival and miniature of the comic effect not only critique but also a re-vision. The comic is not simply about politics but performs politics. This enactment can be thought of as the extension of Scott McCloud's idea of closure. While McCloud emphasises the role of the reader in completing gaps (McCloud 1993, 66-69), *Lie* expands this notion by introducing unsynthesised gaps. The reader is unable to synthesise the narrative, and this is reflected in the unstable nature of the political structures. The act of interpretation becomes problematic.

This is supported by Thierry Groensteen's relational model. The dispersion of meaning on the page stops power from seeming coherent and unified (Groensteen 2007, 146-147). Rather, power is a collection of signs - repeated, exaggerated and inconsistent. The diffusion is political in that it prevents a unified power. The significance of this formal strategy is that it affects the visual mediation of social relations (Debord 1994, 12). If spectacle is about the organisation of perception, *Lie* is about the organisation of perception. The comic does not go beyond spectacle, but rather, within spectacle, it rearranges the images. Here it does its work.

This can be understood using Baudrillard's concept of simulation. If the political is generated by the circulation of signs without referents (Baudrillard 1994, 1-2), then the shifting of form in *Lie* is suggestive. The comic demonstrates that meaning is not fixed but arises from repetition and interpretation. In turn, it questions the signs themselves.

Finally, Chute's emphasis on contradiction as a part of the structure of comics underlines the importance of this point (Chute 2016, 98-104). In *Lie*, contradiction is maintained. This is politically significant as it prevents a re-establishment of power. The *Lie* leaves a reader in a position of uncertainty, in which power is arbitrary. As such, *Lie* reconsiders dissent not as resistance but as civil

disobedience. Through its fragmentation, relationality and excess, the comic makes its medium critical. The politics of the comic are not only representational, but representational as well.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, I propose we might think of *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* not just as political satire but as a visual disruption to the perception and construction of authority. It does this by emphasising satire as a formal tactic, and how the formal qualities of fragmentation, spectacle, carnival and miniature for authority provide a site of tension. This analysis shows that political critique is embodied in the materiality of comics. Disjunction and fragmentary sequences create a break from continuity, problematising authority; spectacle and hyperreality demonstrate authority as mediated spectacle; carnival and excess overturn hierarchy; and a miniature-inflected visual style creates a site of tension. These approaches enact the political contingency of authority, prompting the reader to perceive authority as flexible and constructed. This is important for the field of

comics in that it stresses form as a site for political reflection, rather than an aesthetic vehicle. In previous studies, scholars have considered graphic narratives that address issues such as history and identity, but *Lie* shows that resistance takes place through the formal disorientation and includes contradiction within its framework. It is also suspicious of the role of aesthetic hybridity because miniature traditions and contemporary satire upset linear histories and the visual field. In this case, tradition is neither preserved nor eradicated but re-evaluated to expose and destabilise political regimes. Power is ultimately reproduced through visual regimes in *Lie*. The graphic narrative intervenes formally (fragmentation and excess) to destabilise these regimes, showing that authority is a representation, and encourages us to see and analyse power differently. The benefit of *Lie* is that it illustrates that comics can be a critical practice, where politics are inherent to their aesthetics.

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