



<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz>

ResearchSpace@Auckland

Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback>

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the [Library Thesis Consent Form](#) and [Deposit Licence](#).

Note : Masters Theses

The digital copy of a masters thesis is as submitted for examination and contains no corrections. The print copy, usually available in the University Library, may contain corrections made by hand, which have been requested by the supervisor.

Paul Auster's Writing Machine: A Thing to Write With

Evija Trofimova

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

The University of Auckland
2012

Abstract

Borrowing from the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, this thesis explores the intratextuality and self-referentiality of contemporary American author Paul Auster's work, with a focus on his films and collaborative projects, which so far have suffered critical neglect. In Auster's self- and cross-referential body of work (the so-called "intratext"), where each text is always "a part of" and yet "a multiplicity" of other related texts, and where, in Auster's own words, "everything is connected to everything else," looking for singular, fixed meanings would be a futile task. Instead, one can explore the plethora of shifting meanings by reading his texts rhizomatically and by following or "tracing" the associations, values and functions of the elements that work to assemble each text and its constituent parts (a story, a character, a plot situation, a diegetic space). This study does this by following, in terms of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, the meanings and work of several recurrent "things" in Auster's texts, such as cigarettes, typewriters and doppelgängers, which together assemble the emblematic writer-figure (the chain-smoking, typewriting New York writer), an image also associated with the empirical author himself. Functioning as prosthetic writing tools, they also construct what this study calls Auster's "writing machine." Taking the work of Paul Auster as an illustrative case, this is, in a broader sense, a thesis about assembling texts and textual networks, the writing machines that produce them, and the ways that such machines invest them with meaning.

Acknowledgements

It is a great pleasure for me to thank the many people who made this study possible.

A heartfelt thank you to my primary supervisor, Dr Stephen Turner, for all the time, attention and the almost blind confidence he placed in me from the moment he agreed to supervise my thesis. He gave me encouragement, advice and good company, and a truly inspirational example of scholarship. I know I would have been lost without him.

I also want to thank my secondary supervisor, Dr Jan Cronin, for her always constructive feedback on my work. My gratitude also goes to Dr Lee Wallace for making me feel welcome both at the Auckland University and in the beautiful country of New Zealand in the first months of my doctoral study.

I am most sincerely grateful to the person who inspired this project, Paul Auster himself, for the interest and challenge that his work presents to me, for his kindness and generosity with his time, and for that afternoon that we spent together in Brooklyn's Park Slope, sharing stories and cigars.

I am thankful to Anne Garner, librarian at the New York Public Library's Berg Collection, for her help in sourcing and preparing the Paul Auster papers for my visit, and for sharing with me a great story about Auster. I am also thankful to Jesús Ángel González for helping me on my detective quest.

This study would not have been possible without the financial and academic support of the New Zealand International Doctoral Research Scholarship (NZIDRS) granted by the New Zealand Government and of the Auckland University's English Department and the Faculty of Arts. I am very grateful for all the support I have received. Thank you to everyone at the English Department who gave me encouragement, academic stimulus and invaluable guidance (a special thank you to Dr Alex Calder for providing a very useful lead). A kind thank you also goes to Helen Peterson, the Faculty of Arts' Financial Operations Manager, who helped turn numbers and ideas into actual research projects, such as a trip to New York.

I want to thank Dr Paul Vincent, aka Doctor Edit, for his professional proofreading services. I would also like to thank Alena Kavka for her amazing sketches of Paul Auster's "writing machine" which supplement this thesis.

A special thank you to Janet McAllister and Michael Onslow-Osborne for all those thesis-related conversations we had and for their invaluable feedback on my work.

Most of all, I want to thank my parents, my family, and my friends for their encouragement, understanding, patience and love throughout the many years of study. None of this would have been possible without their kindness and support.

Kia ora

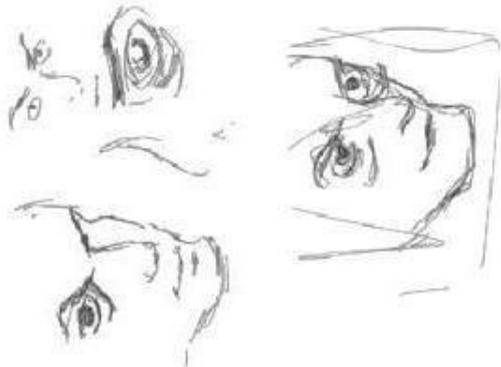
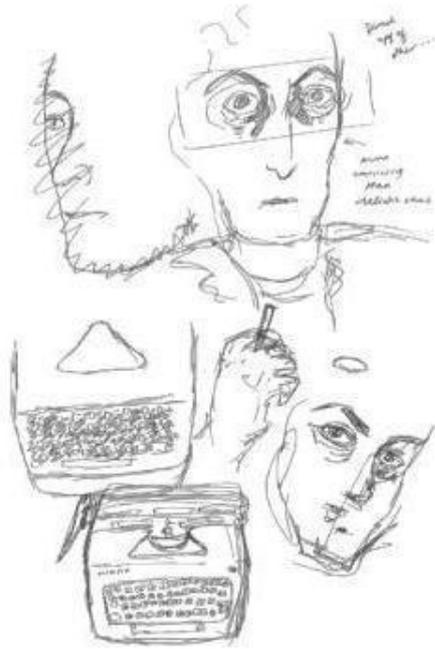
Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Chapter 1: Paul Auster's Rhizome	6
Uncontainable Assemblages	13
All Texts that are the Same Text.....	23
The Impossible Task of Locating Auster	31
"Thinging" Things	35
Intratext	39
Chapter 2: Smoke that Means the Entire World	51
The Writer's Prosthetic Cigarette	56
The Gathering of the Tobacco Shop	73
Smoke is the Story Itself	90
Chapter 3: The Story of the Typewriter	107
Typewriter Associations	109
The Typewriter-Assemblage.....	121
Rhizomatic Typewriting	127
The Machinic Muse	133
Chapter 4: Doubles and Disappearances	142
The Birth of the Double	149
The Double Functions of the Double.....	154
The Doppelgänger in the Other Sex.....	161
Double Game, and the Mingling of Texts	172
Gotham Handbook	181
Chapter 5: New York, Where All Quests Fail	188
Introducing New York	190
In Search of Auster's City.....	200
In Australia.....	202
Discovering Diagrams	215
Encountering the Writer.....	232
Inconclusion.....	237
Bibliography	244

List of Figures

Fig. 1	<i>Mise en abyme</i> . “The Player,” by Sam Messer, from <i>The Story of My Typewriter</i>	42
Fig. 2	Auster-assemblage. “Mr Coincidence,” from <i>The Story of My Typewriter</i>	107
Fig. 3	I am a writer. Two frames from <i>City of Glass: The Graphic Novel</i>	111
Fig. 4	Set of fine fingers at work. Stills from <i>The Inner Life of Martin Frost</i>	123
Fig. 5	Typewriter-assemblage. “As One,” from <i>The Story of My Typewriter</i>	124
Fig. 6	Doppelgänger. A frame from “The Day I Disappeared,” by Jacques de Loustal	147
Fig. 7	Noir chronotope. Frames from “The Day I Disappeared”	149
Fig. 8	Why are you not at work? A frame from “The Day I Disappeared”	157
Fig. 9	Borgesian forking situation. A frame from <i>City of Glass: The Graphic Novel</i>	159

All other illustrations by Alena Kavka.



1. Röhre
2. Smoke
3. Typewriter
4. Doppelgänger - a. u. d. c.
5. New York



Foreword

For Paul Auster a story can grow out of a tin of cigars, or the pages of a blank notebook. For me, this thesis grew out of a particular image of a writer, the chain-smoking typewriting New York writer so emblematic of Auster's life and work that it sums up my idea of both "Paul Auster" and his fictional surrogates. For me, Auster's work condenses into this single image, which painter Sam Messer so acutely explores and exploits in his portraits of the writer. This study, then, largely originated from contemplating the significance of what I believed to be Auster's nostalgic attachment to this particular image of a writer.

But it all started much earlier. As a reader my interest in Auster's work was also marked by fascination with this image, which I associated with proper, "real" writing, and with the specific nostalgia-infused things, objects and spaces required to assemble this archetypal idea: an old, rattling, manual typewriter, cigarettes and cigars, spiral notebooks and fountain pens, and the writer's solitude at his desk in a studio somewhere in New York where his solipsistic mind generates captivating stories that gradually fill the bare room. Back then, I never thought to question the value, functions and meaning of each of the elements in this peculiar "collaboration" between the writer and his writing tools that ultimately makes writing possible and creates our idea of "a writer." Back then, I could not see that the things we use to tell stories also tell stories.

Auster's earlier texts in particular often portray an isolated character writing about the process of writing and reflecting on the writing self, or writing about someone else's writing, or someone else as a writer, and although I never thought about myself in those terms, I nevertheless could not help but identify with this character and his existential and literary quests. I remember wanting to be a writer, too, and to find myself in the sort of universe that this writer inhabited.

In his introduction to *The Writer's Desk*, a collection of black-and-white photographs depicting acclaimed writers at their desks amidst the tools of their trade, other paraphernalia and their idiosyncratic habits of writing, John Updike states that, "[h]ere,

the intimacy of the literary act is caught in *flagrante delicto*: at these desks characters are spawned, plots are spun, imaginative distances are spanned.”¹ One sees there typewriters, computers, notebooks, pens, pencils and ashtrays on these desks, the different tools described by the writers as having their own different values, algorithms, rhythms and functions that are all set to work during the writing process. Yet, Auster’s “writing machine” – the construct of the chain-smoking, typewriting New York writer figure – beats them all. This is because, as this thesis will show, this writer-figure construct is not only the source of an Auster text, but also the tool that writes it, and, likewise, its own end-result, as new texts are always generated by the same writer-assemblage.

* * *

My study proposes a new way of looking at the work of Auster, who is mainly known as a novelist. It does so firstly by reading his texts through “things” – by looking at the ways objects and other non-human actors participate in the creative as well as interpretative processes, functioning as prosthetic writing tools and sites of production and storage of a multiplicity of meanings. When one takes a closer look at an author’s work through “things,” one finds that each thing opens up an entire discourse of its cultural history that contains layers and layers of narratives that all add to its shifting signification. For methodological purposes, I have given this cultural context the name “extratext” to distinguish it from my interest in Auster’s body of work, which I call the “intratext”. Things, I discovered, tend to be ambiguous semantic multiplicities and bundles of sometimes contradictory associations, so that, in the end, it is quite difficult to say what a thing means, what it functions as, or what exactly its effects are. And if a single thing can be semantically uncontainable, how much more so the story in which it acts.

Secondly, my study suggests that Auster’s texts, instead of being viewed and interpreted as separate hermeneutical entities, should be seen in the context of a larger interconnected and self-referential structure in which they are entwined and which I call the “rhizomatic intratext,” to echo Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the rhizome. While I read “horizontally” across Auster’s oeuvre, tracing associations and connections between his texts, I stop to pay particular attention to his most marginalized texts – films and other collaborative

¹ John Updike, “Introduction,” in Jill Krementz, *The Writer’s Desk* (New York: Random House, 1996), viii.

projects that so far have suffered critical neglect. What I also realized in the process is that this thesis not only presents “the curious case” of Paul Auster, the writer, and his rhizomatic writing machine, but it also opens up a discussion on the infinity of a text, the uncontainability of an oeuvre, and the ambiguous borderlines that for writers and readers separate fact from fiction, and various genres and media.

* * *

As I started work on this thesis, I thought it would be possible to maintain a required scholarly distance from the subject of my research while I carried out and presented an academic and objective study of the structure and mechanisms of production of one writer’s body of work. Yet this research led me to realize that when tracing associations in a rhizomatic formation – where the fictional is suffused with the real and vice versa, so that it is impossible to tell the two apart (the whole world is contained in the “book,” and the book leaks out into the world) – personal involvement on the scholar’s part is impossible to avoid.

Accordingly I found myself smoking while exploring the “metaphorical potencies” of the cigar and cigarette smoke, the meaning of the process of smoking for the writer and its agency in the creation of a story. And, while smoking, I was thinking about the ambiguous, shifting relationship between the author, his critic and the reader in producing meanings for texts, and I kept asking myself whether one could be a critic without being a reader, and how did one read when one became a reader? What was the source of all those associations that I had with things I was reading about? Could a non-smoking reader ever understand why a cigarette meant no less than “the entire world” to Jean-Paul Sartre? Or, that a cigarette was, in fact, no less than another writing tool, like the writer’s typewriter, the pen, the notebook, and the book, among other things?

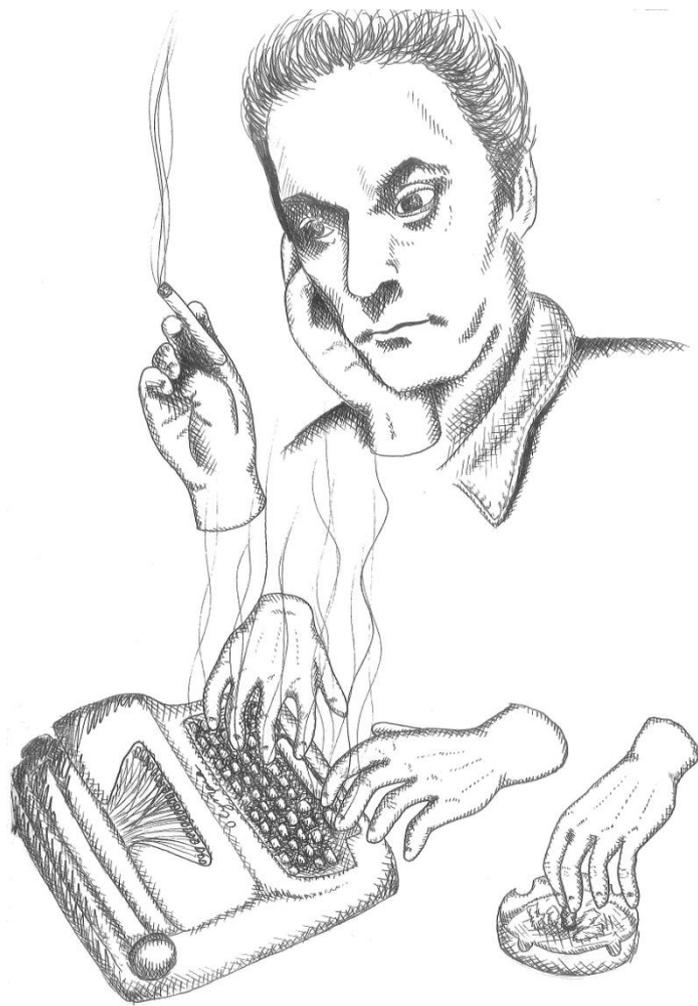
A “thing,” such as New York, where Auster’s writer-character is customarily situated and where he acts and writes, is not just a place or an event, but an experience that demands to be lived through. Tracing the associations of Auster’s facto-fictional New York meant reading his texts on location, yet as I followed the footsteps of his characters, and

gradually found myself inhabiting “Australasia,” new questions arose that problematized my interpretative quest. Was it Auster’s New York that I was reconstructing from his texts, or was I, perhaps, constructing something new? I felt my presence in New York was somehow changing it, in the same way that, it is hoped, this text might change one’s sense of Auster’s texts.

That is why a shift in perspective and tone of writing occurs towards the end of this study, when the thesis becomes a subjective first-person narrative. The nature of the rhizomatic reading method demands a performative act on the reader’s part; a thought needs to be produced rather than merely “read,” or else it falls into the trap of old, non-rhizomatic and descriptive thinking. The act of reading Auster’s texts rhizomatically turned me into a similar writer-figure who was required to smoke, to go to New York, and to double Auster and his characters, in order to trace the associations of these particular quasi-fictional things in his life and work. In the end, then, Auster’s writing machine can reveal something about writing in general, about writing as a set of associations, and about the kind of relationships that exist between authors and their texts, writing processes and technologies, and ultimately about our understanding and reading of all of the above.

In its attempt to describe Auster’s rhizome, this thesis has become rhizomatic itself. Like Auster’s writer-character assemblage or “the Auster-assemblage,” it is both a “writing machine” and the text being “written,” a tool and an end-product in one. There is, as Niall Lucy would put it, an “in-difference” between production and product: “In producing a rule for explaining an art object ... one also produces that object of art” and “in producing mythological assemblages ..., the assembled product ... is inseparable from the assembling production.”² And so the implications of this study on Auster’s intratext and his writing machine – the questions of what and how much is being reflected, recreated or created in the process – remain open, resisting simple explanations.

² Niall Lucy, “Concept Creation,” in *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 196.



Chapter 1: Paul Auster's Rhizome

Paul Auster has become one of the most distinguished figures in contemporary American literature. At the moment that these lines are being written, he has authored 17 novels (including one under a pseudonym), five collections of essays and three collections of poetry, has independently or collaboratively written and directed five films, and has been involved in around a dozen other miscellaneous collaborative projects with painters, photographers, conceptual artists, comic artists, radio listeners and jazz musicians. Auster, who has been praised for his talent as storyteller, is mainly recognized as a novelist, while his other projects remain marginalized and neglected by critics. This study is an attempt to fill an existing gap in Auster scholarship by studying his marginal projects – films and collaborations – while simultaneously asking questions about the place and role of these texts within Auster's body of work. Since this thesis aims to offer a more encompassing look at Auster's work, one must presuppose that there exists a certain assortment of texts whose authorship, regardless of their genre and media, or the number of people involved in production, can be at least partly ascribed to Auster, while keeping in mind that, as Michel Foucault reminds us, the idea of a complete oeuvre itself is an illusory one.¹ Indeed, as I will illustrate, Auster's oeuvre forms a network of mutually connected texts, which foregrounds the principle of interconnectivity and internal referencing, and which I have given the name "intratext."

At the same time, what I will call the seemingly idiosyncratic "Auster case" prompts more general questions about writers, writing and the technologies of writing. This study is equally interested in exploring and challenging accepted ideas about the singular origin, authorship and interpretation of a text; the boundaries and "containability" of a text, genre or medium; the borderline between fact and fiction; and the process of production of a text and its meanings. It proposes a new way of reading Auster's texts which acknowledges the "work" of objects in the process of generating the heterogeneity of textual associations and meanings. Taking Auster as an illustrative case, this is, in a broader sense, a thesis about assembling texts and textual networks, the "writing machines" that produce them, and the ways that such machines invest them with

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage, 1982).

meaning. This first chapter serves to introduce the reader to the theoretical framework I have constructed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome for viewing Auster's body of work, and Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory for addressing the agency of non-human things that emerges from Auster's writer-character assemblage. The chapter will also briefly consider current criticism on Auster and the split it evinces between views of Auster as a humanist and as a postmodernist writer.

As my point of entrance into Auster's work I have used the motif of the chain-smoking typewriting writer that is also the image associated with the empirical author himself. That writer, who lives and works in Brooklyn, and smokes little Dutch cigars, while contemplating chance and coincidence, and the nature and meaning of identity and language, and who drafts his stories in spiral notebooks and then types them up on a manual typewriter, manifests itself not only in Auster's novels but also in his films and various collaborative projects, and interviews published in popular media. That prompts the reader to question the differences between the real author and the implied author of Auster's work, Paul Auster the character (as in *City of Glass*), and Auster's many other fictional stand-ins. Auster's tendency to inscribe himself in his texts by obliterating the borders between fact and fiction has been labeled postmodern by many critics in the past (Markus Rheindorf, Dennis Barone, Aliko Varvogli, among others).² In Auster's pseudo-autobiographical text *The Invention of Solitude*, a character named "A." had "made the equation between his life and his work," so that he "was no longer able to distinguish between the two."³ The Auster reader, too, is confronted with a similar equation that erases the boundaries between fact and fiction, and problematizes the search for any fixed authorial intent: the life of Auster's writer-characters is like their work, and the life and work of Auster are like those of his characters, and vice versa. A more accurate way of describing Auster's oeuvre would then be to call it his "life-work."

The question then is the interpretative consequences of the reader's realization that numerous details and facts related to the characters, names, events, situations and entire

² See M. Rheindorf, "'Where Everything is Connected to Everything Else': Interior and Exterior Landscape in the Poetry, Essays, and Fiction of Paul Auster" (MA diss., University of Vienna, 2001); Dennis Barone, "Introduction: Paul Auster and the Postmodern Novel," in *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, ed. Dennis Barone (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Aliko Varvogli, *World That Is the Book* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

³ Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 91.

stories resonate with Auster's "real" life. Can the recognition of these pseudo-autobiographical elements assist in the reader's quest for understanding both the life and the work of the author? One consequence is apparent: because it is only possible to speak of Auster's life-work, whereby his fiction is inseparable from his life, and the other way round, and, because, at least on the surface level, the empirical author, the writer Paul Auster, and the writer-characters of his works appear to be the same (assembled by the same set of associations), there is a temptation on the reader's part to attribute to Auster's own commentary on his work the same significance as his creative works. This is slightly different from attributing critical authority to "the author." The significance of his personal commentary is no greater than that which gets expressed through his work, but it has the same equal value. That is to say, one approaches Auster's own interpretation of his texts as expressed through, for example, public interviews, the same way as one would approach his other texts, such as his novels or films. The presence of Auster's own commentary in the interpretative process will be acknowledged throughout this study.

Paul Auster, "Paul Auster," his many doppelgängers, and the work authored by any of these identities, however heterogeneous, seem to evoke in the reader almost the same set of associations: Brooklyn, Manhattan, detective, anti-detective, quest, the double, the city streets, an empty study room, baseball, urban labyrinths, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Jewishness, the figure of the absent father, storytelling, smoking, typewriting, coincidence, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, loss, identity, failure, existentialism. Some of these recurring motifs, as Rheindorf has pointed out, are suggested by the titles of Auster's texts themselves – solitude, hunger, chance, disappearance.⁴ Other themes derive from tangible things and biographical facts from Auster's own life, such as manual typewriters, spiral notebooks, Schimmelpenninck cigars, years spent in Paris, translating French poetry, and undergraduate studies at Columbia University. As Michelle Banks puts it, repetitions of recurring motifs for which Auster is "certainly known" – "artist-characters, the Fall, Brooklyn settings, story-telling, and so on" – have produced over time certain expectations in Auster's readers, who "now

⁴ These are references to Paul Auster's memoir *The Invention of Solitude*, the collection of essays *The Art of Hunger*, the novel *The Music of Chance* and the collection of poetry *Disappearances: Selected Poems*. See Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 5.

may approach a new Auster novel as a kind of lucid game of recognition.”⁵ Indeed, what happens when one notes these patterns frequently repeated in Auster’s literary, filmic and visual texts?⁶ The interconnectedness and self-referentiality of Auster’s texts prompt the questions that this thesis is interested in exploring.

It is not only readers and critics of Auster’s works who are forced to engage in the task of disentangling the web of intermingled identities and ambiguous authorship. There are also Auster’s characters themselves (in *The Locked Room*, *Leviathan*, *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, *The Book of Illusions*...) whose attempts to understand (or rather, reconstruct) the identity and life-work of someone else through scrupulous investigation of their life, their work and the things they own starts to resemble detective work. Some of Auster’s texts suggest a presumption that, in the words of the protagonist of *The Locked Room*, a human life can be read as “no more than the sum of contingent facts,”⁷ or, to use the almost-identical words expressed by Anne Blume from *In the Country of Last Things*, as “no more than the sum of manifold contingencies.”⁸ Auster’s writer-turned-detective characters, like Auster himself in the memoir devoted to his deceased father (“Portrait of an Invisible Man”), constantly has to face failure when trying to read the other’s life as a sum, or assemblage, of certain events, objects, texts, contingencies. To attempt to uncover the essence of someone else’s life and work means “to recognize, from the start, that the essence of [such a] project is failure.”⁹

Yet, as I argue in this thesis, the reason for failure lies not in seeing someone else’s life and work as constituted by a chain of assorted elements, and identity or text as an assemblage of multiple components. The problem, rather, lies in the failure to recognize the impossibility of drawing exact boundaries around those assemblages, and of ascribing any singular, stable meaning to them. In their work *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and

⁵ Michelle Banks in notes to her essay “The Connection Exists: Hermeneutics and Authority in Paul Auster’s Fictional Worlds,” in *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster*, edited by Stefania Cioca and Jesus A. González (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 170.

⁶ Banks asks a similar question when she writes: “Wide-ranging ontologically suggestive projects like Auster’s bring to the fore key questions of reception order and knowledge influence. What effects will such potentially (or inevitably) unpredictable ordering exert over the reader’s understanding of the larger fictional world being projected? ... The [reader’s] production of the *world* will be affected.” (her emphasis) See Banks, “Connection Exists,” 162.

⁷ Paul Auster, “The Locked Room,” from *The New York Trilogy*. Here, quoted in Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 21.

⁸ Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 143.

⁹ Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 20.

Guattari ask questions about the boundaries of a book, and, indeed, “literature” in its entirety, among other entities. “A book is an assemblage,” they conclude, “... and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity – but we don’t know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of the substantive. ... Literature is an assemblage.”¹⁰

In *Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault talks about the impossibility of a unity of discourse and of the idea of a finite oeuvre with one identifiable author: “[t]he frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.”¹¹ An obvious statement of intertextuality, this also reminds one of Roland Barthes’s postulate of the death of the author, which perceives reading practice as a collaboration between the text, the reader and the presumed author, while the book itself becomes a site for connections with other readings, texts and experiences. In other words, a book, rather than being a clearly structured, well-defined unity that generates a single reading, is itself a network, an assemblage of discrete parts in a dynamic relationship with other assemblages and therefore capable of producing an infinite number of “effects.” That is why in another early text, *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster elaborates on the implicit idea of reading the world (and the text), in terms of networks of assemblages by pointing to the dynamic relationship that exists between the components of each assemblage as well to as the connections established with other assemblages:

The world is not just the sum of things that are in it. It is *the infinitely complex method of connections* among them. As in the meanings of words, *things take on meaning only in relationship to each other*. ... it is possible for events in one’s life to rhyme as well ... The rhyme they create when looked at together alters the reality of each. Just as two physical objects, when brought into proximity of each other, give off electromagnetic forces that not only effect the molecular structure of each but the space between them as well, altering, as it were, the very environment, so it is that two (or more) rhyming events set up a connection in the

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 4-5.

¹¹ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 23.

world, adding one more synapse to be routed through the vast plenum of experience.¹² (my emphasis)

Indeed, further complicating the interpretative process are the elements that rhyme with other authors' texts and the high level of intertextuality that is characteristic of Auster's work, as suggested by the number of essays and a monograph so far published on Auster's literary affiliation with Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe and Knut Hamsun, among others.¹³ However, rather than trying to trace Auster's influences, intertextual references and his associations with particular genres or styles of writing, I have chosen to focus on the intricate relationships woven among his texts themselves. As I hope to show, these *intratextual* connections form the structural basis of all Auster's work – a principal feature that critics mainly tend to overlook.¹⁴ Because of their high level of inter-referentiality, Auster's texts in fact encourage horizontal, "rhizomatic" readings which acknowledge the presence of a certain Auster "intratext" that is constantly at work. That is to say, questions of perception, interpretation and meaning are interlinked with the reader's recognition that a particular Auster text is closely connected with a number of his other texts, whether fictional or (presumably) autobiographical, or that the same text has multiple "copies" or variations on the same theme, as it were, in different forms and media. There are, as Banks puts it, certain "phenomenological and material issues inevitably brought about by this particular type of multi-textual connectivity" (intratextuality, or what she calls "*auto-intertextuality*") and by the reader's recognition that several texts "rhyme" or appear the same. She therefore asks: "How are we to make sense of the worlds, or world, produced in and by Auster's texts, and what is at stake in recognizing either ontological sameness or ontological difference between, say, *The Locked Room* and *The Book of Illusions*?"¹⁵ Banks, with her recently published essay, "The Connection Exists: Hermeneutics and Authority in Paul Auster's Fictional Worlds" (2011), is among the few critics to acknowledge that "Auster's works have consistently pursued these very multiple

¹² Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 161.

¹³ See Varvogli, *World That Is Book*; Roberta Rubenstein, "Doubling, Intertextuality, and the Postmodern Uncanny: Paul Auster's 'New York Trilogy,'" *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 9.3 (1998): 245-262; Kifah (Moh'd Khair) Al Umari, "Intertextuality, Language, and Rationality in the Detective Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Auster" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 2006), among others.

¹⁴ The few exceptions are Markus Rheindorf's thesis "Where Everything is Connected," Gary Matthew Varner's thesis "Paul Auster's Rhizomatic Fictions" (MA diss., Mississippi State University, 2010), and the aforementioned Michelle Banks' essay "Connection Exists," all devoted to the interconnectivity of Auster's body of work. I will consider these texts further on in the chapter.

¹⁵ Banks, "Connection Exists," 150.

dynamics of connections.”¹⁶ She questions primarily the ontological coherence that the reader might be able – or unable – to establish between Auster’s interconnected, cross-referencing and fictional world(s), eventually, as I will shortly show, arriving at conclusions not dissimilar to those reached by this thesis.¹⁷

As noted above, for my study of the intratextuality and self-referentiality of Auster’s work I have borrowed Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome. It seems to best characterize the internal structure of Auster’s oeuvre, where each text functions as an embedded or linked part of another, as “a multiplicity” and yet “a part of” other texts, and where, in Auster’s own words, “everything is connected to everything else.”¹⁸ In botany, a rhizome is a horizontal underground stem that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes and propagates laterally through its own tubers, as ginger or the potato does. Within Auster’s rhizome-like intratext, any text not only refers to another text, but in many cases also appears as a source for a new project and a new rhizomatic offshoot. Therefore, as this and the following chapters will illustrate, it is impossible to talk about the interpretation of a single Auster book because, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a single, self-contained Auster text. When this study engages in close reading and the interpretative process – such as in the following chapter where I offer three different readings of Auster’s film *Smoke* – it aims to expose the simultaneous plurality of meanings and the text’s inherent multiplicity, which “varies according to the dimensions considered.”¹⁹ In the case of this particular study the dimensions considered will be the variable attributes and associations inherent in or produced by things and concepts that are recurrent elements in Auster’s life-work and that constitute the motif of his writer-character: cigarettes, typewriters and doppelgängers, and the space of New York. In other words, I will consider the dimensions of particular “things,” through which I will then read the respective Auster texts.²⁰

¹⁶ Banks, “Connection Exists,” 150.

¹⁷ Unlike this thesis, however, Banks’ essay is mainly interested in the questions of ontological stability and coherence of Auster’s fictional world(s) when his auto-intertextual texts and their repetitive elements are considered “together.” She does not move beyond the consideration of Auster’s novelistic output, and neither does she engage in the discussion of the relationship between Auster’s fictional and nonfictional works. However, her essay must be acknowledged as one of the few critical works that attempts to consider the implications of Auster’s intratextuality.

¹⁸ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

²⁰ Because, as the following chapters illustrate, a thing like, for example, a cigarette is more of a process or event than an “object,” and to foreground the process of its “thinging,” related terms, such as “cigarette,” “tobacco,” “cigar,” “smoking,” “smoke,” etc., will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis. The same

Uncontainable Assemblages

The interpretative challenges that Auster's work presents because of its complicated narrative structures, which include fragmentation and lack of closure, cross- and self-referentiality, and destabilized authorship, have led the majority of critics to consider his texts as practicing tenets of postmodern theory. These critics are mainly interested in the ways Auster problematizes his narratives by destabilizing their ontological ground. Approaching an Auster text from the viewpoint of French poststructuralism, including the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and Derridean deconstruction, they ask questions about the author's deliberate violation of generic conventions and readerly expectations; the multilayered authorship; the overlapping narrative voices; the merged identities and shifting subjectivities; the inadequacy of language to explain reality; or the shared fluidity between the signifier and the signified within the text and the world.²¹ In accordance with the ethos of postmodern theory, such critics do not look for unity in Auster's work but rather point to its fragmentary, polyphonic, multilayered and irresolvable nature and the open structure of his work. However, regardless of their preferred ways of positioning Auster's works – and his texts *a priori* seem to anticipate and encourage different readings – one of the conclusions reached by the majority of critics is the openness and lack of closure of these texts, and their somewhat elliptical quality.²² A disruptive and destabilized narrative, which leaves the reader with more questions at the end than in the beginning, lacks the sense of completion and conclusion of a classical Aristotelian story.

Since this criticism emerged in the mid-1990s, most of it has focused on separate early novels by Auster, such as *The New York Trilogy*, *In the Country of Last Things* and *Moon Palace*, which are considered paradigmatic of Auster's postmodernism. In the context of

applies to the "typewriter" and "typewriting," the figure of the "double," the "doppelgänger" and "doubling," etc.

²¹ See Chris Tysh, "From One Mirror to Another: The Rhetoric of Disaffiliation" in 'City Of Glass'..., *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 46-72; Paul Jahshan, "Paul Auster's Specters," *Journal of American Studies* 37.3 (2003): 389-405; Steven E. Alford, "Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's 'The New York Trilogy'," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 37.1 (1995): 17-33; and Robert Creeley, "Austerities," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 35-39; and Rubenstein, "Doubling, Intertextuality...", among other critical work.

²² See, for example, Stephen Bernstein, "Auster's Sublime Closure: The Locked Room," in *Beyond the Red Notebook*, ed. Barone, 88-106; or William Lavender, "The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass'," *Contemporary Literature* 34.3 (1993): 219-39. In her attempt to identify the novel's point of view and solve its narrator/author problem, where the characters, narrators, author(s) and the writer constantly swap roles and mirror each other, Lavender concludes that such "[narrative] construction is circular and seamless. ... The illusion is ... one of infinity." See Lavender, "Novel of Critical Engagement," 223.

Auster's prolific body of work, the focus of such critics is narrow and selective; it seems "to go in circles," or, as Rheindorf observes, "most of this scholarship has covered the same ground again and again," while ignoring his texts of other genres and media.²³ Until very recently, there has been no real attempt to look beyond the novels to Auster's films and other collaborations. A strange tendency has emerged: the postmodern critics who note the openness of the narrative structure in an Auster book, and its embeddedness in or connection with other Auster texts, rarely look beyond the given book's covers. Although they point to the narrative looseness and ambiguity of the book, and its inconclusive openness, they still tend to read it as a separate entity, failing to consider seriously what Auster himself implicitly states in one interview – that all his books are in fact the same book (this is, as this chapter will illustrate, a rhizomatic notion). That is to say, such critics may note the similarities between Auster's texts, but they fail to acknowledge the extent to which the texts are interconnected – inseparable from, and becoming, one another.

The only notable exception to the presumed singularity of texts pertains to *The New York Trilogy*, whose three short novels (also referred to as "novellas") are generally recognized by scholars and readers as belonging to what could be called the same Auster meta-text. This is because of their self-conscious self-reflexivity and the deliberate cross-referencing (the narrator of the last novel openly claims authorship of the trilogy), as well as Auster's play with the conventions of detective genre, which urges readers to seek interpretative clues. The connections between the trilogy's books are clearly rhizomatic, yet the question I am interested in here, and what has been overlooked by the majority of critics, is the rhizomatic network woven among all Auster texts, with the kind of interconnectivity that makes it impossible to distinguish where one text ends and where another begins. As this thesis argues, Auster's intratext is assembled from heterogeneous texts, where each text is itself made up of other texts (and is itself a part within others), and each textual element (a motif, a plot, a character) in itself is likewise a multiplicity, never semantically containable or finally definable, and in such a way that leads to interpretative infinity. This is what Umberto Eco calls the "openness" of a text. Auster's case illustrates that the uncontainable plurality of meanings that Barthes attributed to the shifting perspectives of the reader, the unstable meanings of words themselves, and the

²³ Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 1.

presence of innumerable intertexts, also arises from the paradox of intratext, where a body of work is seen at once as an unfinished textual fragment *and* as multiple texts.²⁴ To illustrate this, we might use the much-discussed *The New York Trilogy* as our gateway into what I have called “Paul Auster’s rhizomatic intratext.”

As Dragana Nikolic points out in her essay on Auster’s “postmodernist fiction,” the randomness and complexity in his narrative structure gives the writer freedom for “endless possibilities and combinations.”²⁵ No matter how hard the reader tries to interpret the text – and Nikolic looks in particular at the “detective” novels of *The New York Trilogy* – “the emaciated story always escapes him, until the reader is left with the feeling that nothing is sure and nothing adds up.”²⁶ This overwhelming uncertainty, and the lack of a visible solution at the end, prompts the desperate reader to consider alternative versions and to “look for” answers elsewhere. Auster’s deliberate and provocative inclusion in the text of intertextual references to his other works makes it almost certain that the reader will take them as clues. Towards the end of *The Locked Room*, the last book of *The New York Trilogy*, the anonymous narrator and protagonist suddenly directs the reader’s attention to the previous two novellas and announces, unexpectedly, that all three stories “are finally the same story,” suggesting that the key to understanding each of them is in their relationship to the other two texts.²⁷ The situation, then, becomes even more complicated: the fictional world of the story, its diegesis, is no longer limited to one book, but encompasses the writer’s other works as well, leaking from one story into another.²⁸

It has become a critical commonplace to view the three pseudo-detective novellas of *The New York Trilogy* – *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* – as one super-novel.

²⁴ See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) and Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author”, published in his *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

²⁵ D. Nikolic, “Paul Auster’s Postmodernist Fiction: Deconstructing Aristotle’s ‘Poetics’” (MA diss., The Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1998), <http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/aristotle.html>.

²⁶ Nikolic, “Auster’s Postmodernist Fiction.”

²⁷ Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 346.

²⁸ In Auster’s oeuvre, similar duplication of identities can also happen within a single text, such as his novel *Moon Palace*. Commenting on the life-stories of the three main characters, each of whom represent a different generation, Auster says: “There are three stories in the book, after all, and each one is finally the same.” See Auster’s interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, “An Interview with Paul Auster,” *Contemporary Literature* 33.1 (1992): 21.

That might seem self-explanatory as all three novels have since been published under the name of a trilogy and, although different in terms of style, diegesis and narrative voice, they display certain similarities in the development of the plot, themes and characters. All three protagonists – Quinn, Blue and the anonymous “I” – are isolated writers turned into self-proclaimed detectives who undertake cases that require them to construct false identities for themselves and to search for, follow up and spy on other people. Yet their investigations at the end turn inwards, becoming an introspective exploration of their own fragile, shifting selves. There is, as Robert Briggs has noted, “a certain persistence of duplicitous identities.”²⁹

The sense of this apparent interconnectedness is further enforced by other shared clues – objects such as, for example, the notorious (red) notebook. In *City of Glass*, Quinn, as well as his suspect, Peter Stillman Sr., both make notes in a red notebook; in the novel *Ghosts*, the character named Black writes in a notebook of unspecified color; and in the last part of the trilogy, a red notebook is owned by the mysterious Fanshawe. Since early on in each of the texts the reader is told that the notebook might be crucial in deciphering the story, and is more than just a prop, such details prompt the reader to consider all three novels together as a notebook appears in all of them.³⁰ But instead of a solution, clarity and sense of completeness, the credulous reader feels even greater confusion, because the words which promise a larger singular meaning – “these three stories are finally the same story” – are as mysterious as each of the three novels. The reader, who has tried to decipher the possible clues given to him by the author in the hope that they will lead to an understanding of the whole, arrives at never-ending detours and deadlocks.

The attempt to decipher the “mystery” of the red notebook (what exactly is the red notebook and who, after all, is its author?), to find its origin and follow its journey through different hands, initially led Briggs to a collection of essays that Auster published

²⁹ Robert Briggs, “Wrong Numbers: The Endless Fiction of Auster and Deleuze and Guattari and ...,” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 44.2 (2003): 213-224, http://curtin.academia.edu/documents/0028/6447/Briggs--Wrong_Numbers.pdf.

³⁰ In *City of Glass*, Quinn dreams of acquiring Stillman Sr.’s notebook because for him it “contained answers to the questions that had been accumulating in [Quinn’s] mind” (Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 73). Later, at the end of the novel, it is the anonymous narrator of *City of Glass* who tries to decipher Quinn’s diary. In the final book, *The Locked Room*, the notebook of the mysterious character Fanshawe is obtained by another nameless narrator (who meanwhile has become Fanshawe’s ghost by usurping his identity and authorship over his works, and also claims authorship over the previous two of the trilogy’s books, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*). When at the end of the book the narrator finally gets to meet and question Fanshawe, the latter responds – “it’s all [written] in the notebook.” See Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 368.

eight years after the trilogy and which he entitled *The Red Notebook: True Stories, Prefaces and Interviews by the Author of The New York Trilogy and Mr Vertigo*. This volume consists of two parts, one of which has the title *The Red Notebook* and three sub-parts (a trilogy!), in that way problematizing the issue of the “original” red notebook even further. A statement that Auster makes in one of the interviews published in this collection, that “the *Trilogy* grows directly out of *The Invention of Solitude*,”³¹ throws Briggs back to that work, which Auster published in 1982 and which is traditionally read as autobiographical.³² In the course of this investigation Briggs not only encounters nine texts (or eleven – as there are two possible ways of calculating) that are related to a/the red notebook, but also draws attention to the impossibility of drawing accurate lines between the end of one story and the beginning of another, and between what is fiction and what is autobiography.³³ Auster, for example, admits in *The Red Notebook* that *City of Glass* could be read as “a kind of fictitious subterranean autobiography,” an alternative history of himself, which would have happened if he had not met his wife Siri.³⁴ Briggs concludes: “Consequently, or according to Auster at least, *City of Glass* (and perhaps the entire *Trilogy*) is not the work of detective fiction that it always seems to be taken for, but rather is a work of autobiography, albeit a fictitious one.” At the same time, Briggs also doubts the claim made by *The Red Notebook* to tell “true stories,” calling the book “a sort of ‘fictitious autobiography.’”³⁵ It is also worth considering the statement Auster makes

³¹ Paul Auster’s interview with Joseph Mallia has appeared in separate editions of *The Red Notebook* and of another Auster collection of essays, *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews*, and was originally published in the BOMB magazine as “Paul Auster Interview,” *BOMB* 23 (1998): 24, <http://www.bombsite.com/issues/23/articles/1062>.

³² The book consists of two parts – “Portrait of an Invisible Man” and “The Book of Memory,” the first of which has been written in the first person narrative voice and contains Auster’s memories and meditations on his absent father, but the second, written as a third person narrative, although slightly less autobiographical, touches upon themes that Auster keeps returning to throughout his writing – coincidence, loneliness, fate, as well as Auster’s own reflection on being a father.

³³ The New York Trilogy (which is three stories and at the same time one textual entity), *The Red Notebook: True Stories, Prefaces and Interviews by the Author of The New York Trilogy and Mr Vertigo*, its part which bears the title “The Red Notebook” and which consists of three other subparts, etc. The different accounts of how the *City of Glass* story was set in motion by receiving a late phone call meant for a wrong addressee, in the novel itself and in Auster’s memory in *The Red Notebook*, allows Briggs to make a somewhat radical conclusion that there must be two *City of Glass* stories, multiplying the number of texts further.

³⁴ Mallia, “Paul Auster Interview.”

³⁵ Briggs, “Wrong Numbers.” Briggs is one of the first and the few critics to have questioned the structural and ontological singularity and totality of Auster’s texts and their intricate mutual relationships, and suggest that the nature of these texts resemble the Deleuzian rhizome. However, Briggs’ article is limited to the discussion of primarily Auster’s early written texts (*The New York Trilogy*, *The Invention of Solitude*, *The Red Notebook*) and the element of the red notebook which he uses to illustrate the connectivity among these texts and their consequent “uncontainability.” Although my research unquestionably builds on these early critical observations and extends them in scope to cover entire Auster intratext, the Latourian perspective I am introducing, and the way of engaging with tracing and exposing the plurality of associations and

in an early interview (the same interview in which he claims that the trilogy grew out of *Invention of Solitude*): “I don’t think of it as an autobiography so much as a meditation about certain questions, using myself as the central character.” Auster would directly return to these questions – what is truth? what is fiction? what are the components of a good story? – in his film *Smoke*, or, more precisely, in Auggie Wren’s “Christmas Story” that is featured in the film. In such a way, each text seems to be a part or fragment of something else, and more than it initially appears. *The New York Trilogy* is not a trilogy any longer, but something more altogether, while the borders of this “more” are quite impossible to draw.

Texts which duplicate or mirror each other, that leak and spill over their own boundaries, open up possibilities for ever new readings. The conclusion that Briggs reaches at the end of his analysis of *The New York Trilogy* points to the impossibility of just one interpretation, given each work’s openness to infinite readings, which Briggs calls “the endless fiction of Paul Auster.” And “so we come back to where we started,” he concludes at the end of the essay.³⁶ This statement seems to not only point to the uncrackable nature of Auster narratives, with their infinity of readings, but also to their circular relationships within his intratext, where texts endlessly point to each other, turning from over-determined signifiers into empty signs, trapped in cyclical cross-referencing. This is also why biographical readings of his texts fail. The strategy of

meanings through “things,” is my point of departure from Briggs’ article, which primarily is interested in establishing intertextual connections to show the infinity of each text.

The first critic to suggest the resemblance between Auster’s texts and the Deleuzian rhizome with its “pragmatics of self-difference” and the “logic of the AND” was Niall Lucy with her book *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1997). Lucy’s arguments, however, have gone unnoticed by Auster scholars and critics, none of whom refer to her work. In the chapter introducing Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, Lucy, like Briggs, uses Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* as an illustrative case. She notes that Auster’s writing “forms a kind of radical-system or rhizome of interconnecting links and filaments to his own and other writer’s texts.” In this way, “none of his titles may be seen to stand alone (as a root-book), but each text carries traces of the others.” Like Briggs and Banks, Lucy conducts a genealogical tracing of a few recurrent elements – in her case, personal names, such as “Quinn,” “MS Fogg” and “Zimmer” – to illustrate the “openness” and “a sort of multiplicity” of not only the identities of the characters, but also of what she calls “the undecidably coincidental or deliberate repetitions within and between his texts and those of other writers,” and of entire ontological structures constructed by those. Although Lucy clearly identifies the rhizomatic nature of Auster’s work and makes a point that his oeuvre should be indeed approached “not through a notion of his texts as different or separate entities,” but “in terms of the in-difference of the multiplicity of the text of writing,” her only point of engaging in the brief discussion on the rhizomatic nature of Auster’s work is to use it as an illustrative example for the Deleuzian concept, which is her primary point of interest. Lucy correctly notes that the openness of Auster’s work “calls for a certain loosening up on the part of criticism ... which must allow its findings to emerge pragmatically rather than be predetermined theoretically” – a principle that this thesis also follows. See Niall Lucy, *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 221-226.

³⁶ Briggs, “Wrong Numbers.”

looking at Auster's life and body of work in order to discern the meaning of a particular text only leads to recognition of the connections established between the two realms. The fact, for example, that the book-loving protagonists of *Invisible* and *Moon Palace*, like Auster himself, have attended Columbia University, does not significantly assist in the interpretative process, but only points back to the associations between Auster and his many stand-ins.

Consider for example *Leviathan*, the most political of Auster's novels, which was published in 1992 and which, because of the conspicuous similarities in the plot, motifs and setup of the relationships between the main characters with the abovementioned novella *The Locked Room*, can be read, as both Varvogli and Ilana Shiloh point out, as an alternative version of the latter. Varvogli concludes:

If, as Paul Auster has remarked, all his novels are really the same book, *Leviathan* is another version of *The Locked Room*. Both narratives involve a quest for a missing writer in the course of which the narrator, a writer himself, confronts the problem of gaining access to another person's self and trying to turn the events of another man's life into a coherent narrative.³⁷

If that is the case, there is no reason not to assume that both novels could well be "other versions" of *Invention of Solitude*, Auster's first published book, which deals with his futile struggles as a young author to make sense of and capture the life of his father (who has suddenly passed away and is "missing") by arranging his memories of him in a meaningful/sensible "biography." This suggests that the reader has arrived at another potentially "infinite fiction" of Auster.

Several things must be noted on the interconnectivity of Auster's texts, and the critical attempts to view them as a coherent "sum of particulars," in the hope of arriving, ultimately, at some singular, unifying meaning. Because Auster constantly exploits the notion of detection as the preferable method for reading someone else's life and work, the world and the text, similar instincts have been cultivated in Auster's readers since *The New York Trilogy* which tempt them to try to solve the narrative mystery by following a variety of "clues" conspicuously planted in the text by the author himself. Upon

³⁷ Varvogli, *World That Is Book*, 142; Ilana Shiloh, *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: On the Road to Nowhere* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 14.

recognizing the many striking connections and similarities between Auster's works, even the less ambitious reader will feel compelled to view these texts together, as if they were part of the same diegetic world. Banks, who is interested in exploring "the multiple impacts of the fluctuating status of the fictional world(s)" that result from the intratextuality of Auster's work – specifically how the variation and discrepancies in repetition of textual elements destabilize the authority and the entire ontological grounds of such a "world" or "worlds" – holds a similar view.³⁸ She notes that when Auster readers see a character (or any other component of the story – a thing, place, plot element, motif) from an earlier text reappear in another text, even if in a slightly different variation, they "want [these fictional] worlds to make sense *together*."³⁹ (her emphasis) She gives an example of how the "biographies" of certain Auster characters (Quinn, Peter Stillman, Anna Blume, David Zimmer, etc.), whose names keep reappearing in various Auster texts, when considered together, fail to make sense and are, in fact, "impossible."

It would therefore be futile to presume that one Auster text can provide an answer to another. In an interview with Auster, critic Jesús Ángel González points to a small story, "a written film," that has been included in *The Book of Illusions* as an ekphrasis and that five years later grows into a feature film directed by Auster called *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*.⁴⁰ The story's plot is simple: a writer in his attempts to overcome writer's block moves to an idyllic country cottage where one morning he wakes up in bed next to a beautiful, strange woman. The woman, who quickly becomes his intellectual companion and lover, ignites in him the inspiration to write, but as the writer's new story nears completion, the woman starts to lose her vitality, and finally dies and vanishes. She turns out to be the fruit of the writer's imagination, a self-generated source of inspiration, a muse. González asks if this story, which appears as a *mise en abyme* in *The Book of Illusions* but gains its full expression in the aforementioned film, then serves as "a clue to the real nature of the book," so that protagonist David Zimmer's trip to "Tierra del Sueño" was also "just an illusion?"⁴¹ Auster predictably replies yes, "there is that sense of 'mise-en-abyme'," but everything that is experienced by Zimmer and "the things he's talking about really do happen to him" (despite this "clue" and the book's suggestive

³⁸ Banks, "Connection Exists," 150.

³⁹ Banks, "Connection Exists," 153.

⁴⁰ Jesús Á. González's interview with Auster, "Smoke and Illusions: An Interview with Paul Auster," in *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* 12 (2007), 64.

⁴¹ González, "Smoke and Illusions," 64.

title). This means that each text holds the potential for a multitude of readings, all of which simultaneously co-exist. The texts are polyhedric, meaning the surface they reveal depends on the viewing angle, and “varies according to the dimensions considered.”⁴²

The interpretative challenges do not primarily occur because Auster exercises the postmodern sensibility of reflexivity, as suggested by many of his critics, including Madeleine Sorapure, Stephen Bernstein, and Brendan Martin, among others.⁴³ It is not postmodern writing practice – with its resistance to narrative conventions and lack of closure, clear authorship or adherence to genre-dictated rules – that problematizes a singular reading of an Auster text. The essence of the problem lies not in the insolubility of postmodern textual puzzles like Auster’s early “meta-anti-detective stories,”⁴⁴ as Sorapure calls them. It lies in the inherent dynamic multiplicity of every Auster text and its constituent parts – each is an assemblage, made of assemblages, which is part of other larger assemblages, *ad infinitum*.

The rhizomatic perspective that this chapter introduces exposes this ever-extending assemblage. In such a network of *mises en abyme*, the only possible approach is to read the text rhizomatically – horizontally – tracing the connections among these elements while keeping in mind the dynamics of both the assemblages and their constituent parts. Any attempts to “detect” narrative closure, stable authorship, traceable origins, or one interpretative solution, regardless of the text’s medium or genre, are necessarily bound to fail, as the aforementioned examples of genealogical tracings by Banks and Briggs illustrate. That is not a question of genre and form, or medium, but of a new ontology that demands the reader adopt a radically different way of looking at the fields of reality (the world), representation (the book) and subjectivity (the author), and the relationships between all three. The quests that Auster’s writer-detective characters undertake, and what the reader feels tempted to follow, are genealogical in their nature, but genealogy, which implies traceable origins, beginnings and ends, is an illusory construct. Hence, to look for singular, fixed meanings is futile, and one can only trace the connections and associations formed, acknowledge the dynamics of this process, and show how meanings

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

⁴³ See Madeleine Sorapure, “The Detective and the Author: ‘City of Glass’,” in *Beyond the Red Notebook*, ed. Barone, 71-87; Bernstein, “Auster’s Sublime Closure,” 88-106; Brendan Martin, *Paul Auster’s Postmodernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), among other works.

⁴⁴ Sorapure, “Detective and the Author.”

are assembled and simultaneously scattered. Instead of “detecting” the meaning, one can only engage in tracing and patterning, and reading the connections within the rhizomatic assemblages formed by Auster’s texts. In his study of connections of interior and exterior landscapes in Auster’s texts, Rheindorf suggests a similar approach, noting that “[i]n the world(s) of Auster’s writing, the only alternative to an enumeration of parts is to read the world as made up of connections.”⁴⁵

Rheindorf, one of the few critics to note the interconnectivity of Auster’s work, suggests a methodology reminiscent of Deleuze’s “mapping” and Latour’s “tracing,” or horizontal, rhizomatic reading. “If one accepts ... that everything is connected to everything else,” writes Rheindorf,

... then it must be possible for the reader to choose a given element in Auster’s work and trace its development over thirty or so years of writing, through poetry, essays and fiction. Not only should it be possible to pick such an element from his first or last works and follow it to its respective conclusion or beginning, but also to start somewhere in the middle, and uncover that particular strand extending in both directions across time.⁴⁶

However, Rheindorf is reluctant to divert the focus of his thesis from the canon of Auster’s texts (an exception is Auster’s early poetry to which he devoted a sub-section in a chapter), from which he selects and briefly considers what he believes to be the main features of Auster’s work. The result is a sort of catalogue of a number of characteristics conventionally attributed to Auster’s texts that Rheindorf also identifies as symptomatic of his work, predominantly his popular novels and essays. In his selection Rheindorf also heavily relies on statements found in Auster’s texts themselves. The list of “given elements” pertain to thematic continuities (the road/street metaphor, holism, solipsism, the language of innocence, and so on), narrative strategies (intertextuality, self-referentiality, meta-fictionality, *mises en abyme*, unreliable narration, etc.), and cultural and ideological critique (gender and class issues, political commentary, the politics of money, etc.). While this method of selecting and tracing a number plurality of heterogeneous trends across Auster’s body of work from “somewhere in the middle” resonates with the Deleuzian rhizome, Rheindorf’s heavy reliance on already established, singular readings of Auster’s texts, and the author’s own meta-fictional commentary,

⁴⁵ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 21.

⁴⁶ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 4.

shows arborescent inclinations. To break away from the conventional reading of Auster and the temptation to reinstate what has already been said, I will, as Rheindorf suggests, choose particular elements and trace them across Auster's oeuvre, but my point of departure from his work lies in the choice of the traceable elements (predominantly "things"), my way of reading them (through extra-textual social histories of these things), my awareness of the dynamics of meaning, and the chosen entrances into Auster's rhizome (his largely marginalized texts). The rationale for this choice will be explained in more detail below.

All Texts that are the Same Text

Repetition is one of the factors that leads to rhizomatic development; in fact, "Deleuze," as Nancy Armstrong puts it, "famously uses the figure of the rhizome to account for the formal consequences of repetition."⁴⁷ Auster's works tend to be repetitive, and it is understandable that critics find it difficult to avoid focusing on a very limited set of motifs in his work. Although most Auster criticism is devoted to his early trilogy (*The New York Trilogy*), which having been labeled as "meta-fiction" and "anti-detective," has largely overshadowed his later works, the studies on Auster published over the last decade mainly focus on the common and shared elements of his writing – the patterns of themes, characters and plots which overlap and are seen as repeatedly being rehearsed anew – on repetition, in other words.⁴⁸ This kind of traditional criticism takes a more

⁴⁷ Armstrong here refers to Deleuze and Guattari's description of the rhizome as "antigenealogy," "a short term memory, or antimemory." The rhizome, as is explained in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" of the repeated material. The rhizome "pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight." I will return to this quote further on in the chapter when introducing the rhizome in more detail. See Nancy Armstrong, "The Polygenetic Imagination" in *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 114. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

⁴⁸ For the critical essays on Auster's early works, see Charles Baxter, "The Bureau of Missing Persons: Notes on Paul Auster's Fiction," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 40-43; Alison Russell, "Deconstructing 'The New York Trilogy': Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 31.2 (1990): 71-84; Norma Rowen, "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass,'" *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 32.4 (1991): 224-233; Rubenstein, "Doubling, Intertextuality..."; Lavender, "Novel of Critical Engagement"; Barry Lewis, "The Strange Case of Paul Auster," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 53-61; Jeffrey T. Nealon, "Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass,'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.1 (1996): 91-110; and Sorapure, "Detective and the Author," as well as later critical texts, such as Anne M. Holzapfel *"The New York Trilogy": Whodunit?: Tracking the Structure of Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Novels* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); Cameron Golden, "From Punishment to Possibility: Re-Imagining Hitchcockian Paradigms in 'The New York Trilogy,'" *Mosaic* 37.3 (2004): 93-109; William G. Little, "Nothing to Go On: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass,'" *Contemporary Literature* 38.1 (1997): 133-163; and Dan Holmes, "Paul Auster's Deconstruction of the Traditional Hard-Boiled Detective Narrative in 'The

“humanistic” view of Auster, in the sense that it focuses on the representation of certain motifs that belong to the great commonplaces of human existence, the most notable of which is Auster’s obsession with the themes of quest and identity.

Three books on Auster’s work, respectively by Carsten Springer, Ilana Shiloh and Mark Brown, are illustrative examples. For Springer it is always crisis that, regardless of the work’s genre, serves as the initial catalyst for an Auster story. His *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster* (2001) is in fact the first critical volume to argue for the thematic unity of Auster’s oeuvre. Considering Auster’s work from the perspective of Erik Erikson’s stage theory of psycho-social development, Springer concludes that the underlying thematic skeleton that supports and holds together the corpus of Auster’s novels, plays, poems, autobiographical writings, essays and film scripts published up to 1999, involve searches for identity and crises experienced at different stages of life. Springer’s ideas are supported by the observation that almost every Auster work starts with a remark that the protagonist has recently experienced a loss or death of a person close to him, an event that has brought about a ground-shaking crisis in the protagonist’s identity.⁴⁹ What happens further has the potential to become Auster’s trademark story of redemption or rehabilitation. Springer foregrounds Auster’s own statement that all his books seem to “revolve around the same set of questions, the same human dilemmas” to back up his claim that the protagonists of Auster’s fiction are all “struggling to come to terms with their individual identity crises.”⁵⁰ He argues that most of Auster’s favorite themes – loss, solitude and isolation, quest and challenge, literature and writing, chance and fate, annihilation and emptiness – are to be understood in relation to identity crises.

The narrative form of quest or journey and the main elements of this model⁵¹ is the unifying element of all Auster’s work for Shiloh in *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: On the Road to Nowhere* (2002). For her, as for Springer, regardless of the novel’s

New York Trilogy,” *Crimeculture* (2006), <http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Articles-Summer05/DanHolmes.html>; among others.

⁴⁹ See Auster’s works *The Invention of Solitude*, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, *The Book of Illusions*, *Oracle Night*, *In the Country of Last Things*, as well as his later works, such as *The Brooklyn Follies* and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (full details in Bibliography).

⁵⁰ Carsten (Carl) Springer, *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 3.

⁵¹ Namely – a subject, who takes on a quest, an object that is being searched for, and a spatial displacement of the subject in pursuit of the object.

genre,⁵² these texts revolve around identity and selfhood and place the protagonists “on the quest ... for the mystery of the self,”⁵³ which is either a physical or inner journey finding, creating or destroying one’s being. Shiloh takes the different types of quest as her theoretical tools for analyzing Auster’s texts. Her critical position relies on her belief that “each novel, through its thematics, imagery, and even choice of vocabulary, suggests its own interpretative framework,”⁵⁴ as well as on “other philosophical and literary traditions suggested by Auster’s poetics,” namely the philosophical theories of the self developed by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Jean-Paul Sartre. Yet one could object that Auster does not write within any predefined generic conventions, and when he uses the framework of a particular genre he often does so to expose its limitations, to overturn its traditions and, as he himself admits, “to get to another place, another place altogether.”⁵⁵

Another more traditional interpretation of Auster’s work looks at the significance of urban space in his narratives. For Brown, the New York City that Auster has “consistently taken ... as a central feature in his work”⁵⁶ evolves from being a mere backdrop for action and becomes an active agent in the outcome of the story. Brown’s study reflects on the power of urban space to capture, subdue and consume an individual, as well as the overall dominance of space over plot and character development, as seen in Auster’s early novels, most notably in *City of Glass* and the dystopian *In the Country of the Last Things*. Like Springer, Brown regards the self as one of Auster’s hallmark themes, but for Brown identity is intangibly tied to the environment in which the character is placed, because for the founding or construction of a stable identity, “satisfactory and supportive correspondences between characters’ subjective ‘inner terrain’ and their physical, invariably metropolitan, outer one” are necessary.⁵⁷ Other clichéd Auster themes, “loss and disconnection, language and storytelling, and illusion,” are also all “affected by place.”⁵⁸ In Brown’s view, then, Auster in his work is primarily interested in “how the individual locates her or himself in the world.”⁵⁹ If, in accordance with Shiloh’s view, one presumed the quest to be a kind of “master narrative” within the Auster oeuvre, then in

⁵² What Shiloh identifies as a detective novel, a dystopia, a *Bildungsroman* and a picaresque for Auster’s *New York Trilogy*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *Moon Palace* and *The Music of Chance* respectively.

⁵³ Shiloh, *Auster and Postmodern Quest*, 199.

⁵⁴ Shiloh, *Auster and Postmodern Quest*, 14-13.

⁵⁵ Mallia, “Paul Auster Interview.”

⁵⁶ Mark Brown, *Paul Auster* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 2-3.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 5.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 2.

Brown's reading the object of the quest-like search would be this stable "I," which is attainable through finding, conquering and taming one's own space in this chaotic metropolitan world.⁶⁰ The spatio-temporal motion towards the lost object has been replaced by a pure "movement through space," a phenomenon that Brown regards as "the spatial turn of the new cultural geography."⁶¹

Indeed, while Auster, who lives and writes in New York, is read as a Brooklyn author, the anthropomorphic city itself functions at multiple levels in nearly all his novels and autobiographical writings, three films, and most collaborative projects. Auster, his work and his fictional stand-in(s) are unimaginable without the presence of New York. This is why I have devoted the last chapter of this thesis to further exploration of Auster's half-factual, half-fictional representation of New York, and the city's role as an actant, character, symbol, and spatial setup in his texts. This helps me to crystallize Auster's peculiar construct of New York as a character and space, and to question, in the Latourian sense, the city's work in assembling Auster's construct of the writer-figure. Chapter 5 is also an expression of the logic of reading as detection – a notion that Auster plays with in most of his texts – and my tracing of the meaning of the concept of the double, or the *doppelgänger*, which required me to go to New York and both "double" and follow Auster and his characters.

Crisis, quest and space, then, constitute three different yet related concepts that are seen as inherent in Auster's work. However differently the above critics approach Auster's body of work, they equally acknowledge the presence of explicit or implicit thematic patterns that are seen as repeated in different Auster texts and allow them to look for the unity of his oeuvre. Whatever their dominant theme, they each seem to feel that Auster's works are variations on one and the same theme. This common theme is human identity. The related concepts of crisis, quest and urban space are all made subservient to it, a view that, while, shedding light on the relatedness of all texts, is unable to escape the trap of singular readings because of its humanist prioritization of the self. Where Springer and Shiloh are more pessimistic,⁶² Brown detects a positive development of these patterns

⁶⁰ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 8.

⁶¹ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 5.

⁶² Shiloh emphasizes that in Auster's fictional world the ever-present quest is equally "almost invariably thwarted" as "[e]ach one of [Auster characters] has been bound on a quest – and failed." See Shiloh, *Auster and Postmodern Quest*, 199. Springer likewise points out that "the protagonist of the Auster novel does not

within the writer's career – from egocentric, nihilistic and fragmented texts that focus on one character's anxieties and identity quests and usually end with their disintegration (*New York Trilogy*, *In The Country of Last Things*, *Moon Palace*), to relatively more optimistic writings, as manifested, for instance, by the novel *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005).⁶³ And yet what is regarded as Auster's most optimistic and humorous story is followed by *The Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007), a novel that most critics proclaimed to be a return to the beginnings of Auster's literary career and "a reversion to old interests."⁶⁴ From this perspective, *Travels in the Scriptorium* would lead the reader back to the earliest of Auster's works – not only to the cold, detached and minimalistic, Beckett-like prose style and postmodern games with self-referentiality and authorship that we see in such early novels as *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, but also, quite literally, to a number of characters (Anne Blume, Peter Stillman Jr., Hector Mann) that the reader would unmistakably recognize from Auster's earlier fictions.

Either way, it then appears that Auster protagonists, regardless of their diegetic placement in novel, film or nonfiction work, are basically concerned with the same set of questions: identity and identity crises, creativity and creativity crises, the nature of chance, death, loss and redemption, as well as the relationships between fact and fiction, reality and text, the quest for truth and the failure of language to adequately represent meaning. A conventional reading of Auster would suggest that because of the unanswerable and uncrackable nature of these humanist/existential questions, the characters' quests are often left unsolved – instead of presenting a satisfactory solution, these works often collapse upon themselves at the end, or bring the reader back to the starting point. Such is the way of arborescent thinking: it is always looking for the roots, beginnings and ends; a problem's origins and its solutions. Rhizomatics, on the other hand, knows *a priori* the unproductiveness of such quests. As Deleuze and Guattari say:

Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a

reach a solution," and his crisis "only rarely arrives at a satisfactory solution." See Springer's commentary on Auster's work in Carsten (Carl) Springer, "Paul Auster and the Crisis of the Individual," *The Definite Website*, <http://www.stuartpilkington.co.uk/paulauster/carlcarstenspringer1.htm>.

⁶³ It should be added, though, that both critics published their works on Auster prior to this 2005 novel, in which Auster can be seen as breaking away from his usual exploration of doomed quests.

⁶⁴ Paul Kincaid, "'Travels in the Scriptorium' by Paul Auster," review of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, by Paul Auster, *Strange Horizons*, December 19, 2006, http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2006/12/travels_in_the_shtml.

beginning or foundation – all imply a false conception of voyage and movement But [there is] another way of travelling and moving: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing.⁶⁵

Novels like *City of Glass* or the recent *Travels in the Scriptorium* are illustrative of this inherent insolvability as they seem to generate more questions than stable answers. The words of the anonymous protagonist at the end of *The Locked Room*, who is reading Fanshawe's notebook which supposedly contains all the clues and answers he has been looking for, seem appropriate here:

If I say nothing about what I found there, it is because I understood very little. All the words were very familiar to me, and yet they seemed to be put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. ... It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity. ... He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again.⁶⁶

And even if the semantic and narrative structures are sustained until the end of the story, a sense of ambiguity remains, what Dennis Barone has called the “what if” question, which could be both a moral (or humanist) and a structural (or postmodern) question and which in fact alludes to infinite story possibilities. (I will return to this point later in Chapter 4, when discussing the role of the doppelgänger in generating narrative multiplicity.) Auster seems to be aware of the futility of his own quests, and of finding definite answers to questions of truth, existence or identity. In order to accommodate these quests he chooses postmodern narrative forms, which allow for plurality, flexibility and a lack of closure whilst retaining a certain ambiguity – a refusal to accept the arborescent model that is typical of Western thought. Nikolic, for example, in her thesis on Auster's postmodern narratives, argues that the task that Auster tries to face is “neither concerned with ordering nor explanation, it is rather a question of incorporating the chaos of the world ‘beyond understanding’ into his fiction” by choosing a form that would allow him to “accommodate the mess.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 28.

⁶⁶ Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 370.

⁶⁷ Nikolic, “Auster's Postmodernist Fiction.”

Since a solution to the narrative predicament is impossible at the end of any Auster story, the same scenario gets explored and rehearsed in different variations, reiterating the same basic concerns. As Varvogli states, throughout his work Auster gives “a different treatment each time to a limited set of questions or themes,”⁶⁸ while Marc Chénétier notes that Auster characters tend to be the same while appearing in “different manifestations, different permutations.”⁶⁹ As noted above, Auster himself has claimed that all his novels are actually the same book and that each new work represents an answer to its predecessor.⁷⁰ And, as he admits in interviews elsewhere, whenever he starts a new book he wants to “reinvent [himself], to work against everything [he] made before,” to “turn up and destroy all [the] previous work” and to “take a different approach.”⁷¹

This reinvention of Auster’s selfhood is most visible in the form of one storyline and one character – a lonesome typewriting chain-smoking writer – which often claims a major place – and sometimes a marginal one – in most Auster texts (Quinn in *City of Glass*, the nameless protagonist in *The Locked Room*, David Zimmer in *The Book of Illusions*, Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night*, Peter Aaron in *Leviathan*, Paul Benjamin in the film *Smoke* and *Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story*, and others), and which I have taken as my entry point into Auster’s body of work. Yet, in spite of these recurring “reinventions,” all that one discovers, as Auster himself has had to admit, are one’s “old obsessions” and “all the maniacal repetitions of how [one] think[s],” a statement that is proven to be true by his own intratext.⁷² Assembled from a conspicuously similar set of elements and placed in similar narrative situations, his characters, in the end, at least on the surface level, all appear alike.

It can be concluded, then, that Auster’s texts consist of repetitive assemblages and their connections; variations of the same sets of questions and themes; and the conspicuous

⁶⁸ Varvogli, *World That Is Book*, 12.

⁶⁹ Auster in an interview with Marc Chénétier, “Around Moon Palace. A conversation with Paul Auster,” *Revue d’Études Anglophones* 1 (1996): 5.

⁷⁰ See Auster’s interview with Gérard de Cortanze, “Le monde est dans ma tête, mon corps est dans le monde,” *Magazine Littéraire* 338 (Décembre 1995): 18-25. Translated by Carl-Carsten Springer as “The World Is in My Head; My Body Is in the World,” <http://www.stuartpilkington.co.uk/paulauster/gerarddecortanze.htm>.

⁷¹ See Auster’s interview with Gabriel Esquivada, “Interview Paul Auster Writer: ‘I want to reinvent myself in every new novel,’” *Cuba now.net*, Cuban Art and Culture, <http://www.cubanow.net/pages/loader.php?sec=7&t=2&item=1077>; and the interview with Jonathan Lethem, “Jonathan Lethem [Writer] Talks with Paul Auster [Writer],” *The Believer* (February 2005), http://www.believermag.com/issues/200502/?read=interview_auster.

⁷² Lethem, “Lethem Talks with Auster.”

patterns they form. Repetition is a trait acknowledged by many Auster critics, humanist and postmodernist alike, yet the implications of this replication across a variety of texts that are associated with not only different literary genres, but also different media, has hardly been explored. That is to say, the statement that Auster's texts deal with a limited set of themes or feature a limited set of motifs, and that, furthermore, are all pseudo-autobiographical, has become a critical commonplace within Auster scholarship, yet the effects of the reader's recognition of these repetitive patterns, characters and their mutual relationships on the perception of the text(s) and production of meaning(s) has hardly been touched upon. Using a rhizomatic approach to fill this gap in Auster scholarship is, as I will shortly illustrate, the best possible way to explore Auster's body of work and expose the kind of dynamic interpretative pluralism that his intratext presents.

Because, as Deleuze and Guattari note, the idea of an origin, a traceable beginning, is an illusory one, it follows that one can start the tracing of connections from any point – as Rheindorf has noted, to start reading any element, in any text, and follow its connections in any direction. Therefore, my tracing of certain elements and their assemblages within Auster's life-work will not rely on the idea of a particular textual origin but will give equal status to *all* Auster texts, minor collaborative ones and major canonical ones alike. For example, the fact that the film *Smoke* “originated” from a short article that Auster wrote for a newspaper's Christmas edition should not be given more significance than Auster's statement in an interview that the story grew out from his tin of Dutch cigars.⁷³ Dispersing the genealogy arranges all texts in a horizontally structured rhizomatic network, where no text is given priority over the others and where each might appear as simultaneously containing a new beginning, and an end, but is in fact always intermezzo, always in the middle, in-between. This way of looking at Auster's texts, which is interested in their connections and associations rather than singular meanings, allows one to read them across genres and media, and, therefore, to identify patterns that are common and shared, and that get transmitted from one text to another, in order to get to the repetitive core of his “writing.” I propose this approach as an alternative to the accepted “readings” which often start with an attempt to classify, categorize and label Auster. A

⁷³ Auster tells Anette Insdorf in an interview: “I opened a tin of my beloved Schimmelpennincks – the little cigars I like to smoke – and started thinking about the man who sells them to me in Brooklyn. That led to some thoughts about the kinds of encounters you have in New York with people you see every day but don't really know. And little by little, the story began to take shape inside me. It literally came out of that tin of cigars.” See Anette Insdorf, “The Making of ‘Smoke’,” in Auster, *Smoke & Blue*, 3.

critical attempt to “locate” Auster is a complicated, almost futile task, which nevertheless is constantly being rehearsed.

The Impossible Task of Locating Auster

Although Auster’s novelistic works have earned considerable critical response, there seems to be a certain tension between two major, radically polarized approaches to his texts, one of which views Auster as a humanist writer, rooted in the American literary tradition with strong thematic allegiance to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Edgar Allan Poe, while the other positions him as a postmodern author associated more with the European style of writing, and such authors as Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka. As one reviewer asks: “Are there, then, two writers, humanist and postmodernist, co-existing in Paul Auster?”⁷⁴ At the same time, however, most of his other works have suffered critical neglect.

Dennis Barone, who compiled the first collection of essays on Auster in 1995, writes in his introduction to the volume that these essays should be read “as groundwork essays, essays whose ideas can be taken in myriad other directions,”⁷⁵ a feature no doubt brought about by Auster’s own “disjointed postmodern fictions,” which, to use Nikolic’s words, “[branch] out in all directions, without a beginning, middle or end like some structureless ‘rhizome’.”⁷⁶ Because of their high self-reflexivity, inter- and intratextuality, it is as if Auster’s unconventional texts actually anticipate critical intervention with very different interpretations. Addressing the question “How to locate Paul Auster?”, Rüdiger Heinze gives a good summary of Auster’s problematic positioning:

His oeuvre is difficult to categorize ... The curious position of Auster is characterized by the fact that he is simultaneously

⁷⁴ Kincaid, “Travels in Scriptorium.”

⁷⁵ Dennis Barone, “Introduction: Auster and the Postmodern Novel,” in *Beyond the Red Notebook*, ed. Barone, 23.

⁷⁶ Nikolic, “Auster’s Postmodernist Fiction.” Although in this one instance Nikolic clearly refers to the Deleuzian concept, she only appears to be using it as a metaphorical illustration of the non-linearity of the classical Aristotelian story. She never considers rhizomatics as the way of approaching Auster’s texts. Nikolic is not the only critic to use in her description of Auster’s texts the kind of language that is unwittingly reminiscent of the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome. Lewis, for example, notes that “[t]he plots of *The New York Trilogy* and *Moon Palace* branch out disturbingly, without ever returning to their source; characters switch roles unexpectedly; and there is always the primacy of objects... [c]lues are proliferating ... new factors are [always] coming into play,” and Auster’s own texts in general seem “self-referentially to point to the dynamics of [his] fiction: his stories are built out of other stories.” See Lewis, “Strange Case of Auster,” 59.

recognized as postmodern and experimental, for example by [Norma] Rowen, [Alison] Russell and [Bernd] Herzogenrath ..., yet he is also recognized as almost premodern in his humanist concerns and thus firmly placed within a realist American tradition, for example by [Winfried] Fluck and [Kenneth] Millard.”⁷⁷

Critic Barry Lewis, who has followed the “clues” given by Auster’s texts and has himself “turn[ed] detective” in an attempt to solve their interpretative “mystery,” only to arrive at a conclusion that it is unsolvable, opens his essay by asking, “[t]he mystery is this: how can we best classify the works of Paul Auster?”⁷⁸ While he does suggest that one way to view Auster’s work would be as a late example of the postmodern “anti-detective genre,” he likewise recognizes the inherent contradiction and ambivalence of these texts that resist any labeling. In the end, he concludes, there is “the terrifying possibility” that Paul Auster, very much like his father Samuel Auster in *The Invention of Solitude*, remains “the invisible man.”⁷⁹

It appears that the two main critical approaches to Auster’s works, which could roughly be described as the humanist and the postmodernist, result from a schizophrenic reading experience: the humanist themes of loss, fate, chance, identity and creativity appear at odds with the postmodern intertextuality, self-reflexivity and open semiosis. Although it is impossible to avoid addressing this apparent dichotomy when thinking about Auster scholarship, this study is not primarily interested in situating Auster’s work in “this or that category of thought,” or in solving the problem of his dualism.⁸⁰ The idea, for example, that this thesis proposes about the prosthetic machinery of writing as the driving mechanism at work behind Auster’s text-generation is in its essence a dehumanizing notion. Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is anti-humanist, and so is the philosophy surrounding Latour’s actor-network theory which attributes equal agency to human and non-human actants. It removes the analytical divide between humans and objects, and the priority of human intent over the agency of non-human things. However, a rhizomatic reading does not exclude the possibility of simultaneous co-existence of a certain

⁷⁷ Rüdiger Heinze, *Ethics of Literary Forms in Contemporary American Literature* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 41-42. For the details of the respective works of Norma Rowen, Alison Russell, Bernd Herzogenrath, Winfried Fluck and Kenneth Millard, cited by Heinze, please refer to Bibliography.

⁷⁸ Lewis, “Strange Case of Auster,” 53.

⁷⁹ Lewis, “Strange Case of Auster,” 60.

⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

humanistic dimension (my example of the diverse readings of Auster's film *Smoke* in the following chapter will illustrate this paradox).

That is because, in a rhizomatic model, arborescent structures are allowed to co-exist alongside rhizomes, and, in fact, often intersect with them – “[t]here are knots of arborescence in rhizomes,” the same way as there are always “rhizomatic offshoots in roots.”⁸¹ Rhizomes themselves, as Deleuze and Guattari warn, can have “their own, even more rigid, despotism and hierarchy,” that is, arborescent traits.⁸² As they remind us, “the important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models.”⁸³ It is not a question of “either – or”:

No, this is not a new or different dualism. ... We invoke one dualism [of arborescent versus rhizomatic structures] only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models. Each time, mental correctives are necessary to undo the dualisms we had no wish to construct but through which we pass. Arrive at the magic formula we all seek-PLURALISM = MONISM-via all the dualisms that are the enemy, an entirely necessary enemy, the furniture we are forever rearranging.⁸⁴

Another way of thinking about rhizomatics, therefore, would be to see it not as a binary opposition to an arborescent model of thought but as a way of opposing dominant discourses (and their focus on a few dominant texts), and of creating plurality of thought. It is this sort of dynamics and pluralism that is required in order to think about Auster's oeuvre. I am suggesting a model that does not invalidate existing interpretations of his texts but merely points to their fragility and limitations, and helps to expand the critical horizon beyond humanist or poststructuralist approaches, even if at times it combines both tendencies.

I address this pluralism of interpretation, which allows arborescent (humanist) and rhizomatic (postmodernist) ways of thought to co-exist, in Chapter 2 on smoking, where I sketch out a few of the many different ways of reading Auster's films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*. A single thing, such as a cigarette, for example, can be read as a prosthetic

⁸¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 23.

writing machine that works in certain ways to facilitate production of a text, but it is also possible to see it as a thing invested with human moral values and thus to read the entire text, in which it plays its symbolic role, as a moral tale. The way one approaches and “reads” such a thing affects the way one reads the whole story in which that thing is embedded and functions. The intratext-extratext approach illustrates this principle of interpretative dynamics that can start with a small shift in the way one views a single element in a larger assemblage; therefore, assemblages are never “fixed” but always fluid, always changing. For Deleuze, this heterogeneity of components is an important characteristic of assemblages, while Manuel de Landa in his theory on social assemblages sees heterogeneity “as a variable that may take different values.”⁸⁵ That is also why “things” in general fail to fall into “this or that category of thought” – they themselves are bundles of varied associations and act out different values and functions.

Critics who attempt to “locate” Paul Auster are therefore missing the obvious point: Auster’s texts operate within a rhizomatic structure, and as such resist unified meanings or binary classifications, such as humanist versus postmodernist, or fictional versus biographical. There is also a real question as to whether Auster’s works can be viewed as whole in their entirety, and it is not my aim to do so in this thesis. Auster’s intratext, which is always operating in his work and which reveals the interconnectedness of all his literary, filmic and visual texts, can never actually generate a complete overview. In order to expose this intratext at work, one needs to draw imaginary lines around what one believes constitutes Auster’s body of work – that is what I mean when referring to his “oeuvre.”

Furthermore, Auster’s intratext is inseparable from other texts with which it forms rhizomatic relationships (but which are not the primary interest of this thesis). This inseparability results not only from intertextual references and shared authorship but also from the cultural histories of the things and concepts which constitute each text, each story situation, each narrative space, or the very image of “the writer” that is constantly operating within Auster’s work. There is present in Auster’s intratext what I call the “extratext,” the discourse of social history with its many layers of signification that is

⁸⁵ Manuel de Landa about the Deleuzian assemblages in Manuel de Landa, “Assemblages against Totalities,” in *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 11.

attached to each “thing” (such as the typewriter, the cigarette, the doppelgänger) and that affects the way that associations are formed and connections established within the texts. This thesis “opens up” Auster’s self-referential intratext by choosing to read his texts through objects, concepts, and things as much as through their own rhizomatic relationships. Reading rhizomatically means moving beyond the supposed boundaries of a text, an author, his oeuvre, a particular genre or medium. As such, “Auster’s intratext” must be recognized as an artificial concept introduced by this thesis for methodological purposes.

“Thinging” Things

Two things, then, should be kept in mind when thinking about rhizomatic texts such as Paul Auster’s: firstly, the uncontainability of a text as a dynamic assemblage that, furthermore, is always in relation to other such texts, sometimes intersecting, sometimes overlapping, or sometimes embedded in one another; and secondly, the plurality of meanings that resides in every constituent part itself that makes up any assemblage (a situation, a character, a story). Hence, the multiplicity of meanings of the texts, which themselves are structurally and ontologically never containable and never singular.

Clearly resonating with Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the assemblage is Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT), which opens up another dimension of discussion within my research. For Latour, as for Deleuze and Guattari, all entities are to be understood in terms of assemblages. Any kind of social situation or network is an assemblage of certain human and non-human actors, or actants. Latour emphasizes the role of objects in forming social networks or assemblages; for him objects are as “active” agents as humans, an idea he derived from Martin Heidegger’s “things that thing,” or “gather.” But if objects and “things” equally participate in forming an assemblage, alongside the presumed human “author,” and if they have equal power to dissolve it, then shared authority and authorship is implied. Assembling a text, an idea, a situation or a character becomes collaboration. Such an assemblage can never be stable, fixed, or finished, but, according to Latour, should be seen as a “type of connection,” and a practice of relations that is always in flux since “things accelerate, innovations proliferate, and entities are

multiplied.”⁸⁶ Objects and things that we encounter in texts are not static units invested with fixed meaning, but dynamic sites of “intensities” and associations, and active agents in the text-generating process.

The theoretical approach I have assembled from a number of sources for this thesis, then, has something of the Deleuzian nature of thinking about it, and echoes his idea of productive philosophy (“doing philosophy,” as Deleuze would call it).⁸⁷ Rather than relying on fixed, ready-made schemes of thought and systems of ideas, I have taken from different theories what I believe to constitute the most useful and productive means for discussing Paul Auster’s texts: Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the rhizome and the Deleuzian idea of the dynamic assemblage to address the interconnectivity of Auster’s oeuvre, the mutual relations between his texts, and each text’s uncontainability; and Latour’s ANT that also speaks of assemblages (or “associations”) established among heterogeneous elements, while foregrounding the work of non-human actants. Latour’s ideas will enable me to talk about the value and functions of things in what constitute Auster’s textual assemblages (both in terms of their structure and agency), such as his construct of his writer-character, and the role of things as “writing machines.”

To illustrate this concept of objects and things becoming prosthetic tools of text-generation (what I call “prosthetic writing” in alignment with Brian McHale’s ideas),⁸⁸ I have chosen to pay particular attention to Auster’s semi-autobiographical writer-character assemblage (the figure of the chain-smoking typewriting New York writer), which, regardless of genre and discipline, recurs in almost all of his texts as an intratextual link,

⁸⁶ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

⁸⁷ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Deleuze’s proposed way of doing philosophy involves constant movement and reformation of thought. That is why Paul Patton in his *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* calls the operation of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical concepts as “transformers”: “they intervene in established philosophical problematic in order to destabilize them, reworking old concepts and forging new connections among the distinctive features composing them.” Elsewhere, Patton summarizes the untamed, dynamic and productive nature of the Deleuzian philosophy by using the analogy of the rhizome: “One of the remarkable and appealing features of Deleuze’s way of doing philosophy is its commitment to movement in thought. This is apparent in his interest in the openness of concepts and their a-systematic relations with other concepts. . . . Deleuze and Guattari define philosophical concepts as open-ended multiplicities,” a thought which “displays the concept’s susceptibility to variation as components are modified in the passage from one plateau to the next, forming a ‘rhizome-book’ as an assemblage of open concepts that has no argumentative or narrative conclusion.” See Paul Patton, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 240, and Paul Patton, “Utopian Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Rawls,” *Deleuze Studies* 1 (2007), 41.

⁸⁸ See Brian McHale’s essay “Poetry as Prosthesis” in *Poetics Today* 21.1 (Spring 2000), 1-32.

gaining significance through repetition. As I hope to show through the dismantling of this figure, narrative functions are assumed by objects as much as they are by human characters, or “the author.” Among other functions and values, then, a cigarette or a doppelgänger is as much a prosthetic writing tool as a typewriter is; altogether they form what I call “Paul Auster’s writing machine.”

This thesis will also look at the discourse of the histories of these recurrent elements in Auster’s work – the typewriter, the cigarette, the doppelgänger, and New York – in order to understand how these “things,” in certain cultural contexts, have been invested with different meanings, becoming “bundles of associations” and over-determined signifiers, which complicates singular readings of any of Auster’s texts. Banks has noted that the characters from Auster’s “*auto-intertextual project*” have through repetition become empty, self- (or rather, cross-) referential signifiers who exist in “an elastic environment” and whose meaning is constituted by their “*ongoing* interrelationship; they are known in and through the complexity of their mutual existences, at times merging with previous versions of themselves, at other times recoiling from these past constitutions.”⁸⁹ (her emphasis) However, she ignores the other, alternative possibility of reading these “constitutions” through more arborescent interpretations of the things that work to assemble these characters (What are they “made of”? What do they do? What associations do they evoke?) and that operate within them, regardless of their self-referentiality. Banks ignores the extratext of the social histories that accompany each thing and that act to establish their own connections and associations. Seemingly flat, self-referential characters are constituted by elements that themselves are so abundant in meaning that they can tell their own stories (hence, “Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story,” which for Auster “literally comes out” of a tin of Schimmelpenninck cigars).

⁸⁹ Banks, “Connection Exists,” 152-153 and 165-166 for the quotes. Although Banks never engages with Deleuzian concepts, when she talks of the “elastic environment” of the relationships, which becomes the defining point(s) for the characters that are engaged in those relationships, her description suggests a Deleuzian understanding of the dynamic assemblage. For Deleuze, and unwittingly at times for Auster himself (cf. *The Invention of Solitude*), the assemblage is not a sum of its particulars, but is defined by the dynamic relationships between those particulars. That is, instead of foregrounding the properties inherent in things themselves, Deleuze would rather focus on the “capacities” of things, their external qualities, that only become manifest once they start to interact with other elements. Although my thesis is likewise interested in exploring the dynamics of assemblages, I somewhat depart from this radical view when I engage in the readings of the social histories of things, which, after all, is a more arborescent approach. See also Manuel de Landa, “Assemblages Against Totalities,” 10-11.

Therefore, Paul Auster's oeuvre can shed light on our understanding of the mechanics of writing in a broader, more general context. It exposes the composition of a text as an assemblage or gathering, where the work of non-human actants, objects and things, each with certain values and functions, is equally implicated in the process of text-generation. The problem pertaining to the quest for meaning and the failure to find a singular interpretation, then, likewise lies in our inability to see that every interpretative entity (a text, a book, a situation, an idea, an identity, or similar) is an assemblage that is composite and multiple in itself, and whose ambiguous authorship and textual boundaries can likewise only be presumed. The obvious question, then, again, is how to read such a multiplicity, something that is unfixed and infinite? The best way to answer this question in relation to Auster is by exposing and exploring this plethora of meanings by reading texts rhizomatically and by following or "tracing" the values and functions of actors that work to constitute each text.

My tracing of the work and associations done by the abovementioned Auster-elements (the cigarette, the typewriter, the doppelgänger, and New York) will take place across his whole body of work, with a particular focus on his films and collaborations because so far they have received the least critical attention. At the time of writing Auster scholarship is experiencing something of a revival, with critics starting to acknowledge the significance of Auster's nonfictional work and the actual scope of his body of work, as well as its interconnectivity. Yet for an author whose published work spans 30 years, the amount of criticism devoted to his non-novelistic works is still small and consists of two essays by Jesús Ángel González on Auster's films; a Master's thesis by Markus Rheindorf (2001) devoted to the interconnectivity of Auster's prose, poetry, and essays; and a Master's thesis by Gary Matthew Varner (2010) which looks at the rhizomatic nature (that is, the uncontainability, intratextuality and mutual embeddedness) of Auster's novels.⁹⁰ Most

⁹⁰ See Jesús Á. González's essay "Words Versus Images: Paul Auster's Films from 'Smoke' to 'The Book of Illusions,'" in *Literature/Film Quarterly* 37.1 (2009): 28-48; and his interview with Auster, "Smoke and Illusions." See also Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected"; and Gary Matthew Varner, "Paul Auster's Rhizomatic Fictions" (MA diss., Mississippi State University, 2010). There is a further point to be made with regard to Varner's thesis. As the title suggests, he reads Auster's texts (*The New York Trilogy* and a few of Auster's later novels, in particular – *Oracle Night*, *Travels in the Scriptorium* and *The Book of Illusions*) in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, which is not unlike what this thesis does. What is different, though, is Varner's more narrow angle of view on Auster's body of work by focusing on the author's written texts only (predominantly – the novels), and Varner's almost "static" use of the idea of rhizomatics and its application to Auster's texts. For Varner, Auster's texts become merely an illustrative case for and a representation of what he takes to be a fixed theoretical and conceptual framework – the concept of the rhizome as it is "encapsulated" in *A Thousand Plateaus*. What Varner does, then,

recently, adopting interdisciplinary approaches, a newly-published collection of essays titled *The Invention of Illusions* (2011) offers readings of Auster's "novels, films, and other projects" that "draw connections between the author's early and later production."⁹¹ This suggests an attempt to break away from the dominant view of Paul Auster as merely a novelist – one who furthermore has constantly been subject to critical efforts to categorize or label him as such. Gradually, an awareness is growing in Auster scholarship that his texts, in various genres and disciplines, are not only "repetitive," "uncontainable" and internally "intertextual," but, in fact, that his entire oeuvre functions as a rhizome and needs to be read as such.

Intratext

In their work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari call a book "an assemblage" and "a multiplicity," which refuses unity. In their anti-humanist approach, both philosophers deny the book a subject, an object and a singular or pre-existing point of origin, such as an author. In this way they uproot the classical Western arborescent model of thought and perception, which emphasizes origin and unidirectional evolution, and replace it with the freely-moving rhizome.⁹² Arborescence and rhizomatics, two concepts borrowed from botany, are used to expose two different ways of thinking, one of which believes in origins (and is therefore referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as the "root-tree"), the other in connections (referred to as the "canal rhizome"). Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly remind us to not look for origins and instead trace the connections: "[d]on't go for the root, follow the canal ..."⁹³

The emphasis in both theorists' questions about texts is directed not towards "what a book means, as signified or signifier," but rather "what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities than its own are inserted and metamorphosed ..."⁹⁴ If so, a book becomes a dynamic site

resembles "state philosophy," the kind of "representational thinking" that has characterized the Western philosophy since Plato and that tends to reaffirm the "established order" (what in this case, for Varner, is the idea of "the rhizome"). As such, it seems to go against the very essence of rhizomatic thinking and Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of "doing philosophy."

⁹¹ Stefania Ciocia and Jesús Ángel González eds., *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

⁹² Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*.

⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

that is in constant flux. For Deleuze and Guattari, as Briggs points out, a book “is not something that can be definitively identified, which is to say, reduced to the form of identity”; instead, it is “always simultaneously more than one (a multiplicity) and less than one (a part).”⁹⁵ It can also be seen as an outgrowth without an obvious beginning or end, a “plateau,” a “multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome ... Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau.”⁹⁶ Such a radical viewpoint excludes any possibility of a stable interpretation – in fact, Deleuze and Guattari make a firm stand against interpretation – but some of this theoretical model’s features are helpful in acquiring a better understanding of the structure of Auster’s oeuvre and the mutual relationships formed between his works.

Auster’s texts, as established earlier, operate and can be read at multiple levels. While some of his works, when taken separately, may be read in humanist terms because of their thematic preoccupations, they risk losing their humanistic dimension as soon as they become a part of Auster’s intricate rhizomatic structure. “Connection only works if the reader *recognizes* connection,”⁹⁷ as Banks reminds us, and, theoretically, it is possible to read even a heavily intratextual, cross-referential work like *Travels in the Scriptorium* as a singular entity (her emphasis). In other words, a story by itself, such as the quest for identity in an ambiguous, absurd and chance-ridden universe, may appear to be existentialist/humanist, but the moment one notices the same story being reproduced, copied and reflected in other related texts in a myriad of ways, it becomes merely a pattern in Auster’s infinite recycling of stories. This thesis is interested in exploring this machinery of rhizomatic writing – the copying and multiplication of the same assemblages through prosthetic tools of writing (a cigarette, a doppelgänger, a typewriter, among other things).

Within this rhizomatic structure, the usual Auster protagonist, the writer devastated by a loss, is reduced to a few repetitive components and becomes “a sort of bundling,” “a gathering of symptoms” tied to a limited set of signifiers.⁹⁸ Among these components are

⁹⁵ Briggs, “Wrong Numbers.”

⁹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 24.

⁹⁷ Banks, “Connection Exists,” 162.

⁹⁸ Curtis White, “The Auster Instance: A Ficto-Biography,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 26.

certain locations (a bare and empty room, the streets of New York), objects (a manual typewriter, a notebook and a pen/pencil, Schimmelpenninck cigars or cigarettes, jazz music records, baseball paraphernalia), and emotions or experiences (loss, crisis, chance, journey, transformation). These components, as well as other themes and tropes favored by Auster, constantly reappear in his works, becoming a kind of connective tissue for his texts, and assembling what I call Auster's construct of the writer-character.

These elements, in their own paradoxical way, are both writing tools *and* the thing produced or "written," as is the rhizome, which is both the way of writing *and* the written text. It is not unlike Anthony Giddens' attempt to "transcend the duality of agency and structure by arguing for their mutual constitution," an example which de Landa uses to characterize the dynamic assemblage.⁹⁹ As de Landa puts it, "[a]gency is constituted by its involvement in practice which, in turn, reproduces structure."¹⁰⁰ Auster's writer-character assemblage is also his own "writing machine," producing other writing-characters that keep operating as writing machines, and so on ad infinitum.

In order to illustrate this point – how Auster's texts are connected in a rhizomatic structure – Briggs uses the following metaphor: a book is "not a container" but rather something that is "full of holes," through which connections can be made to other books. He sees Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic book as "both an assemblage of multiple components and a part within other assemblages."¹⁰¹ Connections are made not only between "books," but any kind of text, not only fictional but also biographical, and not only texts as representations of the world, but also reality itself. The manual typewriter – the writer's main attribute – appears in *The New York Trilogy*, the novels *Oracle Night*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *Man in the Dark*, in the films *Smoke* and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, in the pseudo-autobiographical collaborative project *The Story of My Typewriter* (in which Auster's story about his relationship with his typewriter alternates with Sam Messer's nearly 30 colorful paintings of the typing machine), and in Auster's New York workplace and home, where it is also replicated as a small bronze figurine. The typewriter is both "a thing to write with," and the thing written about; as Chapter 3 illustrates, it is also the thing that works to produce the text's meaning and diffuse the

⁹⁹ de Landa discussing Anthony Giddens in de Landa, "Assemblages Against Totalities," 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ de Landa, "Assemblages Against Totalities," 10.

¹⁰¹ Briggs, "Wrong Numbers."

borderlines surrounding authorship, reality, and fiction. The typewriter produces a multiplicity of texts in which reality and fiction are woven together.

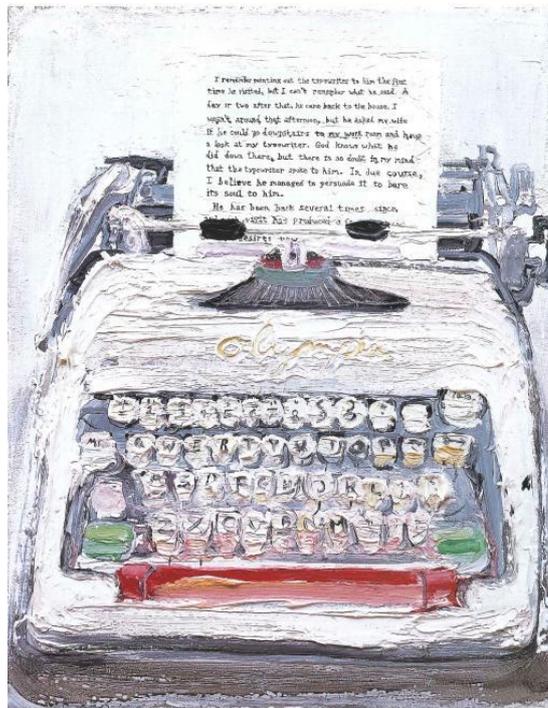


Figure 1 *The Story of My Typewriter* is a *mise en abyme* – alongside Auster’s text, the book contains Sam Messer’s images that themselves include Auster’s text. This image shows Auster’s Olympia typing up *The Story of My Typewriter*, which is the writer’s account of his manual typewriter, depicted here in this “portrait.” In this way, the typewriter writes itself, along with Auster’s life-work.

“The Player,” by Sam Messer, oil on canvas, 2001, from *The Story of My Typewriter*.

As Deleuze and Guattari explain,

[t]here is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject.¹⁰²

For both philosophers, contrary to the current “deeply rooted belief,” the book “is not an image of the world.” Instead, “[the book] forms a rhizome with the world,” problematizing the relationships between fiction (the text) and “reality” (the world). To form the rhizome, the book, the world and the author interact. Auster’s case, again, is

¹⁰² Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 25.

illustrative. Fact fuses with fiction not only through the personal names and biographical data that Auster often attributes to his characters, thus inscribing himself in his texts.¹⁰³ In a meta-fictional way, his writer-characters contemplate this borderline between reality and imagination, as David Zimmer does in the book *The Book of Illusions*, or Martin Frost does in the film *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. In Auster's world, as his films and other co-projects best illustrate, life is as strange as fiction, and fiction must become as strange as the world Auster believes he lives in. As Adrian Gargett points out,

the comprehensive worlds constructed in Paul Auster's fiction function like a Möbius strip. The Möbius strip that results from joining the two ends of a strip of twisted surface is unexpected and ambiguous. It is a surface with only one side, which may be called either the top or the bottom.¹⁰⁴

Although Auster's films and novels are full of ambiguous manifestations of fictional-real characters, the playfulness with the tripartite division between "the book," the author and the world that Deleuze and Guattari talk about reaches its full force in a co-project between Auster and the French conceptual artist and photographer Sophie Calle, which is explored in detail in Chapter 4. In his 1992 novel *Leviathan*, Auster creates a fictional double for Calle, which she starts doppelgängering, while at the same time re-writing Auster's text. A real person becomes fictionalized and the fictional gets played out in life; two authors intervene in each other's intratexts, re-writing each other's life and work. On the copyright page of their books, the writer and artist both extend special thanks to each other for permission to "mingle fact with fiction."

In spite of Auster's deliberate mingling of fact with fiction, the writer insists that, "in the strictest sense of the word," he is still a realist.¹⁰⁵ Varvogli, however, prefers to call him "a deceptive realist." She argues that "to claim that his books come out of 'the world' and

¹⁰³ Auster's works abound with biographical details and characters whose names resemble those of Auster and his family – see Carsten Springer's *A Paul Auster Sourcebook* (Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang, 2001) for an extensive list. In "The Book of Memory," Auster talks about the protagonist A.'s wife Dahlia (similarity with the name of Auster's first wife Lydia) and son David (spelling similar to Daniel, the name of Auster's son from the first marriage); in *City of Glass*, the private eye/writer named Paul Auster is married to Siri (the "real" Auster's wife is called Siri Hustvedt) and they have a son Daniel; in *Leviathan*, Peter Aaron (who has the same initials as Paul Auster) marries Iris ("Siri" in reverse); in *Oracle Night*, the protagonist is a writer named John Trause (whose surname is an anagram of Auster), and so on.

¹⁰⁴ Adrian Gargett, "Cruel Universe," *Spike Magazine* (online magazine/weblog), posted on November 1, 2002, <http://www.spikemagazine.com/1102paulauster.php>.

¹⁰⁵ See Auster's interview with McCaffery and Gregory, "Interview with Auster," *Contemporary Literature*, 3.

not out of other books is a very problematic statement” – it presupposes a clearly drawn distinction between lived experience and “books,” “between the world and the word.”¹⁰⁶ She adds that “the evidence from Auster’s fiction seems to contradict rather than support his statement.” For her, even if characters, things and incidents in Auster’s texts come from “real life,” the effect is one of “deceptive realism.”¹⁰⁷

Perhaps a better way to understand Auster’s “realism” would be to take into account Auster’s own conviction that “there is no single reality ... There are many realities.”¹⁰⁸ The protagonist of the novel *Man in the Dark* (2008), a writer called August Brill, has his fictional creation Lou Brick explain it in more detail: “There’s no single world. There are many worlds, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds, and each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world.”¹⁰⁹ It is not uncommon for Auster’s texts to unfold like “a universe of Russian dolls, in which everybody seems to be someone else’s puppet,” to use Antoine Traisnel’s words.¹¹⁰

Whether Auster’s works are approached as amorphous rhizomatic formations that run in all directions, entwining his life and work into one giant tangle, or whether they are seen as a Möbius strip, where reality and fiction turn out to inhabit one and the same plane, a feeling of paradox is always present. Auster’s works exhibit amazing resistance to secure, contained explanations and canonical interpretations, and cannot be reduced to conventional schemes. As González acknowledges, “there are so many self-references and cross-references in Auster’s books that they are very easy to notice, but they may be hard to understand completely.”¹¹¹ Such a mission – to trace every smallest reference in Auster’s textual web – is undertaken by Springer in *A Paul Auster Sourcebook* (2000), in which he tries to identify the original source of every allusion made to the writer’s life and his works, and to the life and works of other authors. Helpful as it is to expose the many connections proliferating within Auster’s inter-/intratextual web, this sourcebook predictably fails to assist in the interpretative process. That is because, as Deleuze and

¹⁰⁶ Varvogli, *World That Is Book*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Varvogli, *World That Is Book*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Auster, *Man in the Dark* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 69.

¹⁰⁹ Auster, *Man in Dark*, 69.

¹¹⁰ Antoine Traisnel, “Storytelling in Paul Auster’s Movies,” (BA diss., Université Charles de Gaulle - Lille 3, 2002), http://angellier.biblio.univ-lille3.fr/etudes_recherches/memoire_antoine_traisnel.html.

¹¹¹ Jesús Ángel González, e-mail message to author, February 20, 2009.

Guattari insist, “[t]he rhizome is altogether different” from the genealogical tree.¹¹² It is “a map” and not “a tracing.” Here, Deleuze and Guattari do not mean tracing in the Latourian sense of following the flight of connections made and associations established – quite the opposite. They warn against a kind of tracing that seeks for genealogy and an original meaning, the beginning and the end. Because the rhizome is in constant flux, transforming and proliferating, it is virtually impossible to represent its structure fully, or to “map” it out, in the traditional sense. All we can attempt to do is capture fragments and flickers, in the hope that they will reveal to us something about the larger picture.

In the novel *City of Glass*, Quinn tries for weeks to literally follow Peter Stillman Sr., writing down in a notebook everything his suspect does. Although Quinn “could ... see with his own eyes what happened,” and “dutifully recorded” all these things in his red notebook,” “the meaning of these things continued to elude him.” “What Stillman did on these walks remained something of a mystery to Quinn,” making him wonder “if he had not embarked on a meaningless project.”¹¹³ When Quinn finally comes up with the idea of tracing the route of his suspect’s walks and making schematic depictions of them, he realizes, to his astonishment, that they form an expression “THE TOWER OF BABEL,” a concept that the mad Stillman explored in his writing before he was put in jail. Quinn thinks he has found the key to the mystery of the Stillman case, but this clue leads to no understanding or solution. The whole thing was “so oblique, so fiendish,” that Quinn soon starts to doubt it: “He had imagined the whole thing,” and seen it only because he wanted to see it. Or, “even if the diagrams did form letters, it was only a fluke. Stillman had nothing to do with it. It was all an accident, a hoax he had perpetrated on himself.”¹¹⁴

To illustrate the failure of genealogical readings, Briggs, in a strikingly similar way, in the example given earlier, has tried to trace the origins and meaning of the notebook and of Auster’s intersecting diegetic worlds. Banks also engages in a similar process of detecting when she tries to disentangle the conflicting biographies of recurrent Auster characters that reappear in different Auster texts. Unsurprisingly, either taken separately or together, the texts fail to provide any coherent results to their quests. Auster’s texts, intertextually linked with each other, are always more than a closed narrative, and yet at

¹¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 13.

¹¹³ Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 73.

¹¹⁴ Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 86.

the same time merely a part of other narratives. To repeat Briggs' words, such texts are "always simultaneously more than one (a multiplicity) and less than one (a part)."¹¹⁵ They are like rhizomatic outgrowths that run in different directions, sometimes intersecting or coalescing, at other times splitting and falling apart. There is, as Banks has put it, "an undecided (undecidable?) flux of connective signification."¹¹⁶ Auster's stories are therefore "a thousand plateaus," always in the middle, always on the move, forming new connections with other stories, and contributing to Auster's rhizome. Or, as the philosopher Igors Šuvajevs explains,

A rhizome is a tangle of roots, a muddle of multidimensional meanderings. There is no centre, no periphery, no beginning, nor end in this labyrinth. One can arrive at the same point from different sides, and this point reveals roads that go in all directions – to seek for a purpose or base is pointless. The rhizomatic labyrinth is not an epitome of delusion, but, as [Umberto] Eco says, "the source of a game," which points to the initial groundlessness and existence without grounds. This labyrinth offers a venture of interpretation, a detective-like adventure.¹¹⁷

From within three distinguished types of labyrinths (the classic Greek linear-design labyrinth, the Mannerist's meandering maze, and the net), Eco posits the third, which he also calls the rhizome, referring to Deleuze and Guattari's concept.¹¹⁸ The playful adventure of interpretation that Šuvajevs refers to here can for Eco only take place within the rhizomatic labyrinth where one cannot make any mistakes but only meander, discover, and establish connections. As he writes in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*: "The main feature of a net is that every point can be connected with every other point, and, where connections are not yet designed, they are, however, conceivable and designable. A net is an unlimited territory ... The abstract model of a net has neither a centre nor an outside."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Briggs, "Wrong Numbers."

¹¹⁶ Banks, "Connection Exists," 151.

¹¹⁷ Igors Šuvajevs' afterword to the Latvian edition of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*. See Šuvajevs, "Eko vārds," in Umberto Eco, *Rozes vārds* (Rīga: J. Rozes apgāds, 1998), 683-694 (my translation). Here, Šuvajevs quotes Eco from his *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*.

¹¹⁸ Umberto Eco in the afterword to his novel *The Name of the Rose*, in *The Name of the Rose: Including the Author's Postscript*, translated by William Weaver (New York: Harvest Books, 1994), 525-526.

¹¹⁹ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 81.

“How can we enter into Auster’s work?” we might ask then, paraphrasing the rhetorical question with which Deleuze and Guattari start their study of Franz Kafka, a writer to whom Auster has often been compared. “The castle has multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren’t very well known,” they write, referring to Kafka’s novel *The Castle*.¹²⁰ After all, in such a rhizomatic structure, every entrance point has the same value: “none matters more than another,” and “no entrance is more privileged [than another].”¹²¹

From Auster’s early manuscripts, available at the New York Public Library, it becomes clear that Auster’s oeuvre indeed lacks an apparent point of origin. All that is known is that each of Auster’s published or screen works at some point or another has been a part of another work, as well as the fact that most of his works have originated as “responses” to other works of his. His body of work also lacks a centre, an *Urtext* or text that could explain his other texts. In spite of Auster’s statement in one interview that all his works seem to be rotating around *Moon Palace*¹²² – his most voluminous novel to date – there is no reason to attribute more significance to this book than to, for example, *The Red Notebook* or the pseudo-autobiographical *The Invention of Solitude*, of which the author has remarked that it gave birth to the subsequent *Trilogy*. In the same way, it is impossible to tell the direction in which a new Auster text might grow. Rhizomes, after all, spread underground in random directions, emerge on the surface in a variety of locations, and are connected in ways that are not always visible. One can never know which part of an Auster text will give birth to a new offshoot, which one will split or multiply, and what the connecting nodes will look like. Different texts from Auster’s own oeuvre interact with each other and turn out to be a source of inspiration for one another. For Auster, stories grow out of other stories, often forming a pattern of seemingly infinite, and often self-referential, *mises en abyme*.

Recall Rheindorf’s conclusion that in a network where “everything is connected to everything else” one can choose any given element and trace its development, starting

¹²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, transl. Dana Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3.

¹²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 3.

¹²² In the aforementioned interview with Chénétier, published in 1996, Auster admits: “I would say it’s a central book. I think of it as a source. First of all, it’s the longest novel I’ve ever written. To tell you the truth, most of the other novels I’ve written were first imagined as short stories or novellas.” See Chénétier, “Around Moon Palace,” 24.

from the middle and proceeding in any direction. As stated above, I have chosen as my entryway into Auster's rhizomatic oeuvre a particular writer-character assemblage, the chain-smoking typewriting New York writer, which I will now try to dismantle, to see what kind of things it has been assembled from, and how their different values and functions generate a multiplicity of texts and of meanings. Each chapter in this thesis will therefore look at the values and functions of a particular element – the cigarette (Chapter 2), the typewriter (Chapter 3), the doppelgänger (Chapter 4), and New York (Chapter 5) – and will attempt to trace its “thinging” in forming certain connections and associations. To understand how Auster's texts acquire their pluralistic meanings, I will, therefore, engage in certain interpretative processes and, borrowing from Latour's ANT, trace the associations generated by these “things” throughout the discourse of their histories. While such genealogical tracing might suggest an arborescent approach, “it is plausible that one could even enter [the rhizome] through tracings or the root-tree, assuming the necessary precautions are taken,” as Deleuze and Guattari note.¹²³

For Deleuze and Guattari, mapping does not involve representing (as in “mapping out”) but implies “an experimentation in contact with the real.”¹²⁴ It means that, unavoidably, my mapping of Auster's work will involve a degree of unpredictability and subjectivity. Mapping has to be performative, or else it falls into the trap of arborescent thinking – what both theorists call “alleged ‘competence’,” a mere reiteration of a dead thought.¹²⁵ That is to say, the Deleuzian “tracing” has a tendency to “always com[e] back ‘to the same’”¹²⁶ – the same old way of thinking about things, the same way of looking at the world, and the same pre-established reading of a book; it is an ontological trap. In spite of the risks of a heuristic approach, mapping, therefore, must become a productive process:

[t]he map does not reproduce ... it constructs ... Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight.¹²⁷

¹²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 16.

¹²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 13.

¹²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 14.

¹²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 14.

¹²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 23.

Using Paul Auster, therefore, I am constructing my own rhizomatic thesis, one, for example, that includes among other things becoming Auster's doppelgänger and following the traces inscribed by his texts in the streets of New York City (as in the final chapter of this thesis). Doubling Auster (and his fictional doubles) in an attempt to detect the meanings of his life and work opens up, rhizomatically, multiple pathways and lines of flight that I can follow simultaneously. It allows me to question the practice of reading as the process of forming associations and connections with the text and its constituent elements. It becomes a means for exploring, quite literally, the Austeresque trope of detection that equates the processes of reading and searching for meaning to detective work, and its predictable failure. This quest thus becomes an "inward quest" and thus open to the possible loss of objectivity and "critical distance," as well as to the growing self-reflexivity on the detective's part, which in turn opens up questions about the dynamic, unstable relationship between the author, the text, the critic and the reader in the (re)production of meaning. Auster's texts suggest that not only reading, but also writing implies a sort of doubling, because it is always only possible to speak about oneself as one's own double; there is always the shifting "I" that stands in between the writer and its writerly subject.¹²⁸ This becomes apparent in the last chapter of this thesis, where the stability of my authorial identity is constantly brought into question during the process of (re)constructing both Auster's texts and the text that is this thesis. This study therefore establishes a rhizomatic relationship with Auster's texts, not unlike Sophie Calle's project *Double Game*, which was conceived as her response to Auster's *Leviathan*.¹²⁹

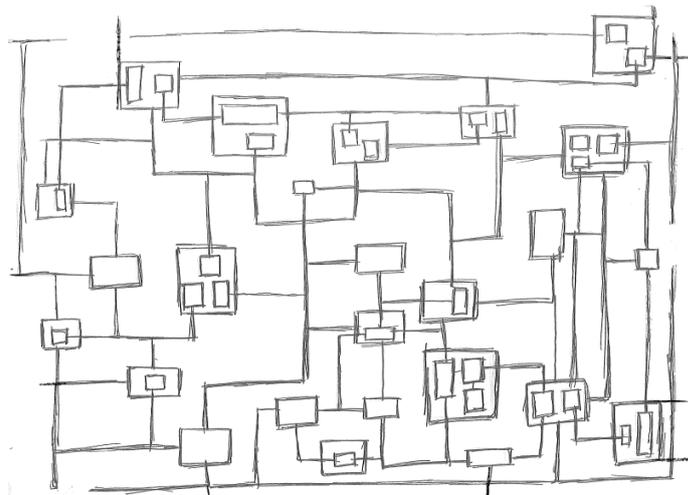
Several other things that pertain to the nature of this research and my methodology of reading Auster remain to be clarified. While performing the rhizomatic tracings of these "things" and assemblages, and looking at the connections established between Auster's texts, I will focus in particular on his films and collaborative projects, to emphasize that they are a part of "the same book" and equally work to construct our idea of who and what "Paul Auster" is. Auster's body of work is generated by the machinery of writing that is based on repetition, recycling, and multiplication, as well as fragmentariness, open-endedness and constant cross-and self-referencing. Consequently, my reading of this

¹²⁸ That is the reason that Paul Auster, when writing about himself in the second "book" of *The Invention of Solitude*, introduces the third person narrative and becomes "A.," his own double, which is the only way to reflect on oneself. Likewise, in texts such as *The Day I Disappeared*, a doppelgänger has to appear, so that the protagonist could reflect on his life and identity and, eventually, save himself from "drowning."

¹²⁹ See the Chapter 4 on the doppelgänger for a detailed discussion.

rhizomatic structure, and indeed this entire thesis, will unavoidably involve the aforementioned elements. In spite of my awareness of the challenges of the task, and the impossibility of achieving a complete overview, I believe that this project can result in a new way of reading “Paul Auster,” and present a more encompassing overview that is not limited to pre-defined frameworks and any particular genres or media.

It should by now be obvious that I do not intend to draw any finite or objective conclusions at the end of this thesis.¹³⁰ Such is the nature of the rhizome that it cannot be “contained.” But I believe that Auster’s machinery of the book can reveal something about writing in general (about writing as an assemblage), and be telling of the kind of relationships that exist between authors, texts, and writing processes and technologies, and our understanding and reading of all of the above. As such, Auster’s texts could be situated within the critical discourse that mistrusts the idea that books should be arborescent formations that through representation reveal to us some unified meaning and truth about the world and the human condition. Nor should his texts be seen as mere meta-fictional exercises of postmodern writing. Instead, perhaps, Auster’s works expose books for what they “really” are: little machinic assemblages made up of heterogeneous “things” (like cigarettes, and typewriters, and Brooklyn, and storytelling) that have different values and functions and that themselves are bundles of associations, and “multiplicit[ies] that var[y] according to the dimensions considered.”



¹³⁰ Hence, this thesis ends with an “Inconclusion,” combining what is “in conclusion” with what is “inconclusive.”

Chapter 2: Smoke that Means the Entire World

*“Smoke is something that is never fixed, that is constantly changing shape.”*¹

Paul Auster used these words to comment on the title of his film *Smoke* and to describe the kind of relationships between its characters who “keep changing as their lives intersect.”² Yet they should be seen as more than an allegorical comment on the intangible quality of human relationships and the dynamics of their mutual interaction. The metaphor of tobacco smoke is one of the central elements in Auster’s meta-story, and its changing symbolism (for smoking writers and detective-writers, for smoking advocates of tolerance and humanity, and for smoking storytellers) reveals the multilayered texture and the dynamic expression of both his characters and texts. As one recalls the pleasure that Quinn from *City of Glass* takes in smoking as he blows the smoke into the room and watches it “leave his mouth in gusts, disperse, and take on new definition as the light caught it” one senses that the ritual of smoking is not unlike Auster’s text-creating ritual where always the same ideas, the same substance, leave the author’s mind to take on a new form and definition.³

In some contexts, the significance of tobacco expands beyond its purely metaphorical dimensions, becoming an active agent in the process of constituting Auster’s universe. Rather than being seen as a passive and inanimate object, tobacco appears as a living element, which, like the manual typewriter, is always present in his work, albeit with changing moods and meanings. Like the typewriter whose “acting” is discussed in the following chapter, cigarettes, as I will show, are also capable of talking to the writer and channeling inspiration. The cigarette is that thing that opens up the space where the interior of the book (or the writer’s mind) merges and leaks out into the exterior of the world; the door that opens up the realm of the imaginary, and whose function as such is not unlike that of the writer’s bare room from which he produces his often solipsistic texts.

¹ Interview with Annette Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” in Paul Auster, *Smoke & Blue in the Face: Two Films* (New York: Miramax Books / Hyperion, 1995), 13.

² Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 13.

³ Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 24.

In the Heideggerian sense, tobacco in Auster's texts is the thing that "things." In order to understand how exactly tobacco and smoking "acts" in Auster's polyphonic texts, one has but to "follow the actors themselves," to see what kind of associations they establish, and how they work to make these textual networks fit together.⁴ The potential for parallel, multilayered readings of the metaphor of smoke and of Auster's texts reminds us that, rather than having one fixed meaning, "the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and ... and ... and ...'." In a rhizomatic way, then, this chapter will trace the associations of the elements of smoke and tobacco, their "metaphorical potencies"⁵ and the work they do in assembling certain concepts, ideas and relationships within particular Auster texts, most notably his film *Smoke*, and its sequel *Blue in the Face* (both of which are set in the quiet Park Slope and Prospect Park neighborhoods of New York, discussed in the last chapter of this thesis). Because the cigarette has what Umberto Eco calls a "plurifilmic personality," the texts which it helps to assemble and within which it acts also acquire a "plurifilmic" quality.⁶

According to Richard Klein, cigarettes are "especially ambiguous signs," which are "difficult to read," and the difficulty is related to "the multiplicity of meanings and intentions that cigarettes bespeak and betray" as they "speak in volumes."⁷ The cigarette is itself "a volume, a book or scroll" that "unfolds its multiple, heterogeneous, disparate associations around the central governing line of a generally murderous intrigue."⁸ In other words, the different possible ways of reading "smoking" open up the possibility for different readings of *Smoke* and its sequel, which this chapter will illustrate through tracing the meaning and the work of the cigarette within these two Auster texts in particular.

How to introduce this small cylindrical object, this thing – the cigarette – which in Klein's words turns out to be "bigger than life"?⁹ The following passages from *Cigarettes are Sublime*, Klein's book that itself has a dual function as both an elegy and an ode to

⁴ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 61.

⁵ To borrow a phrasing from Richard Corliss in "That Old Feeling: The Great American Smoke," *Time*, Saturday, November 22, 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,548824,00.html>.

⁶ Umberto Eco used this phrase in reference to Humphrey Bogart's chain-smoking character of Rick Blaine in the motion picture *Casablanca*. Here, quoted in Richard Klein, *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (London: Picador, 1995), 200.

⁷ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 22.

⁸ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 22.

⁹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 22.

smoking, sums up the impossibility of capturing the contradictory essence and trickster-like nature of the cigarette, whose laconic form, visual simplicity and “whiteness” deceptively hide complexities of meaning:

One has difficulty asking the question, the Aristotelian philosophical question, ‘Ti estin [What is] a cigarette?’ The cigarette seems, by nature, to be so ancillary, so insignificant and inessential, so trifling and disparaged, that it hardly has any proper identity or nature, any function or role of its own – it is at most a vanishing being, one least likely to acquire the status of a cultural artifact, of a poised, positioned thing in the world, deserving of being interrogated, philosophically, as to its being. The cigarette not only has little being of its own, it is hardly ever singular, rather always myriad, multiple, proliferating. Every single cigarette numerically implies all the other cigarettes, exactly alike, that the smoker consumes in series; each cigarette immediately calls forth its inevitable successor and rejoins the preceding one in a chain of smoking more fervently forged than that of any other form of tobacco.

Cigarettes, in fact, may never be what they appear to be, may always have their identity and their function elsewhere than where they appear – always requiring interpretation. In that respect they are like all signs, whose intelligible meanings are elsewhere than their sensible, material embodiment: the path through the forest is signaled by the cross on the tree.¹⁰

Yet nothing perhaps sums up its nature better than the statement that the cigarette and smoking always imply a certain paradox, epitomized by Zeno Cosino’s life-long attempt to quit smoking in Italo Svevo’s 1923 masterpiece *La coscienza di Zeno*, or *Zeno’s Conscience*.¹¹ The determination to give up cigarettes and the never-ending succession of repetitions of the same resolution to stop smoking become not only a lifestyle for Zeno but also what defines him as a smoker. Hating cigarettes becomes a major pretext for continuously smoking the “last” cigarette, a paradox encapsulated by Klein in the sentences below and illustrated by Jim Jarmusch’s smoking character in an episode in Auster’s film *Blue in the Face*, where Jarmusch’s “Bob” is sharing the moment of smoking his “last” cigarette with Harvey Keitel’s character Auggie:

¹⁰ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 26-27.

¹¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 97. “La coscienza di Zeno,” or literally – “the conscience of Zeno,” although in some editions the title has been translated into English as “The Confessions of Zeno.” For a more recent edition with a new translation from the Italian, see Italo Svevo, *Zeno’s Conscience: A Novel*, transl. by William Weaver (New York: Vintage International, 2003).

To stop, one *first* has to smoke the *last* cigarette, but the last one is yet another one. Stopping therefore means continuing to smoke. The whole paradox is here: Cigarettes are bad for me, therefore I will stop. Promising to stop creates enormous unease. I smoke the last cigarette as if I were fulfilling a vow. The vow is therefore fulfilled and the uneasiness it causes vanishes; hence the last cigarette allows me to smoke many others after that.¹² (his emphasis)

This unsolvable contradiction is inherent in the double nature of the cigarettes, which makes them appear as the Kantian “sublime”; deathly and therefore so desirable. The pleasure itself that the cigarettes offer, strictly speaking, is not really pleasure; cigarettes stink, they burn your throat, and you surely would not smoke them for the taste. From all the other “pleasure goods” that were introduced to the European society at the dawn of the modern age – such as coffee, or chocolate, or sweet spices – tobacco, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes, “is undoubtedly the most bizarre.”¹³ Cigarettes are so bad for you and therefore so good, simultaneously beautiful and ugly, tasty and repulsive, adored and hated, associated with the sacred and the demonic. The dual nature of the cigarette expresses itself also in terms of the physiological and psychological effects of smoking that vary according to the different conditions in which cigarettes are consumed: “they both raise the pulse and lower it, they calm as well as excite, they are the occasion for reverie and a tool of concentration, they are superficial and profound, soldier and Gypsy, hateful and delicious.”¹⁴ Nick Tosches’ description of the city of Las Vegas as “a religion, a disease, a nightmare, a paradise for the misbegotten” could be equally attributed to smoking.¹⁵ As Klein concludes, “[n]othing ... is simple where cigarettes are concerned” because “they are in multiple respects contradictorily double”; and this potential for containing an inner contradiction might be one of the reasons why Paul Auster’s life-work, which has the same inherently inconsistent quality (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 on doppelgängers), is full of characters who are essentially smokers.¹⁶

¹² Klein, *Cigarettes*, 91.

¹³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, “Tobacco: The Dry Inebriant,” in *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 96. As Schivelbusch notes, tobacco was an unusual source of pleasure also due to the unorthodox way of its consumption. The term “smoking” only appeared in the course of the 17th century, and up until then nobody knew how to call what one did with tobacco. One spoke of “drinking smoke,” while tobacco itself was referred to as a sort of dry intoxicant, dry alcohol. See Schivelbusch, “Tobacco,” 97.

¹⁴ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 21.

¹⁵ Nick Tosches, in the introduction to *Literary Las Vegas: The Best Writing About America’s Most Fabulous City*, edited by Mike Tronnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), here quoted in Corliss, “Great American Smoke.”

¹⁶ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 21.

It would indeed be difficult to visualize the Brooklyn writer Paul Auster without his low, smoky voice and the always-accompanying Dutch mini-cigars, which he passionately smokes ten to 12 of a day and which have become a special trademark of his personal style. Auster's enthusiasm for the particular Schimmelpenninck brand's "Media" cigarillos (dry-cured and machine-made in Holland, and sold in 20s in metal tins) is so remarkably strong that it is passed over to his fictional characters Peter Aaron (*Leviathan*), Paul Benjamin (*Smoke*) and James Freeman (from the recent novel *Invisible*). "What are you smoking these days?", someone asks *Leviathan*'s protagonist Peter at one point, and he replies: "*Schimmelpennincks*. The same thing I've always smoked."¹⁷ It does not even matter whether at this point one is thinking of the empirical Paul Auster, or the figure of the writer "Paul Auster" that one has constructed through a collage of bits and fragments gathered from his interviews and book reviews, or the implied author of his books, or even his fictional characters. As Brendan Martin points out, "Auster inhabits both factual and fictional universes,"¹⁸ and this "Auster" is a passionate smoker. Furthermore, tobacco not only appears throughout his works, but it is clear that every writer-character must smoke, as if without cigarettes the writer-figure would be inadequate – at least the image of the writer as seen and shared by Auster himself.

Let us return to the core of Auster's writer-figure. Certain signifiers mark his space as an urban writer – a bare study room in the city of New York, a desk, a chair, an old manual typewriter, a (red) notebook and a fountain pen, a pack of cigarettes, maybe a few books here and there, and in between all this, a writer, often one who is struggling with his inability to write. Different kinds of elements work to build up this image: the human actor/the author/the protagonist, the non-human objects, such as desks or cigarettes, but also intangible and abstract notions, such as (fairly consistently in Auster's oeuvre) the lack of creativity or sense of emotional comfort, or the ever-felt absence of the father figure, or other references extracted from his past.¹⁹ Consider as an example the assemblage of the writer-character Marco Stanley Fogg from Auster's novel *Moon*

¹⁷ Paul Auster, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 248.

¹⁸ Martin, *Auster's Postmodernity*, 11.

¹⁹ The absence of a father is another recurrent motif in Auster's oeuvre. The first prose work that Auster wrote, the memoir-like "A Portrait of an Invisible Man," is his exploration of the father's personality, which remained a mystery to Auster even after his father's death.

Palace: towards the end of this *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman*, when Marco returns to writing after years of wandering the Wild West, what defines him is but a string of actions and objects, all expressed in one sentence: “I took up smoking again, I read books, I wandered around the streets of Manhattan, I kept a journal.”²⁰ Why is it crucial that the writer smokes?

The Writer’s Prosthetic Cigarette

Rather than attempting to deconstruct this writer-figure, it would be more productive to recognize it as an assemblage, a network of elements with both material and semiotic value, one that is constantly in the process of making and that gains significance through rearrangement and reiteration of its basic components, which happens throughout Auster’s oeuvre. When seen from this perspective, the true function of these objects becomes apparent: they are there not only to set up the *mise-en-scène* of the work but in fact are defining parts of the character himself, acting almost as surrogates for his flattened-off physical and emotional body that is so often defined by an absence or lack. A cigarette, then, is a writer’s prosthesis as much as his typewriter or notebook is. As this thesis is consistently trying to show, these elements in their own paradoxical way serve as writing tools, while they are also the source and the end-product of writing itself; the Paul Auster writer-character assemblage is also his own “writing machine.”

The image of an often flat, two-dimensional character of a lonesome male writer who is confined to creative agony in his bare room constantly re-emerges with slight variations in Auster’s fiction, from the novels *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, *The Locked Room*, *Moon Palace*, and *Oracle Night* to the more recent *Travels in the Scriptorium* and *Man in the Dark*. Perhaps he is thinking about the mystery of someone else, since this “other,” whose life he must uncover and document, is present in almost every Auster text as the writer’s reflection and double (see Chapter 4). The process of investigation always at some point gets turned against the detective-writer himself, revealing his fragmented and unknowable identity and the impossibility of not only chronicling someone else’s life but also writing an emotionally accurate and meaningful story of his own life. In his bare study room, “[h]e smoke[s] a cigarette, and then another, and then another.”²¹ The ascetic space is

²⁰ Paul Auster, *Moon Palace* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 232.

²¹ Auster, *City of Glass*, 160.

dominated by emptiness, isolation and the absence of other objects and any emotional satisfaction.

In her essay on smoking in French culture, Dawn Marlan compares it to the pleasure of emptiness, “a pleasure that involves an experience of emptiness,” where a cigarette stands as an emblem for unfulfilled satisfactions and cravings, and concretizes the emptiness of the interiority of one’s self and body by filling them with the inhaled smoke.²² It also concretizes any anxiety that might result from such emptiness of thought or feeling. Every smoked cigarette reminds the smoker about the possible deathly consequences of smoking, so that the fear of suffering or dying from a smoking-induced illness replaces the fear of the unknown (which is at the basis of anxiety), making this new fear more concrete, and therefore more tolerable, more manageable.

For Auster, this emptiness is predominant in the blank page in front of the writer, or the blankness in his mind, or the bareness of the room in which this mind is situated, the subjective interior exteriorized through objects, as the writer struggles to start from point zero, always reinventing himself anew. This ever-present emptiness expresses the burden of insatiable craving that every writer must endure; what matters in art for Auster is ideas whose “compelling force is identical with that of hunger.”²³ Auster’s writer-figure needs to be, in his own words, “rootless, without friends, denuded of objects,” so that he can become “both the subject and object of his own experiment.”²⁴ Emptiness is separation, and the pleasure that the smoker gets through the formal repetition of beginnings by lighting yet another cigarette, also works to negate ends (very much like good stories do, leaving the reader always wanting more).²⁵

The cigarette also helps to ease the burden of emptiness that the writer might feel, and the anxiety evoked by it. The assumption is that tobacco, which calms the rest of the body by reducing its motoricity to a minimum (all one needs is a hand to hold a cigarette and lift it

²² Dawn Marlan, “Emblems of Emptiness: Smoking as a Way of Life in Jean Eustache’s ‘La Maman et la Putain’,” in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 256.

²³ Auster quoting Antonin Artaud. See Auster Paul, “The Art of Hunger,” in *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 9.

²⁴ Auster, “The Art of Hunger,” in *Art of Hunger*, 14 and 12.

²⁵ Marlan, “Emblems of Emptiness,” 258.

up to the mouth), increases brain activity.²⁶ If needed, it also works the other way round, whereby the physical act of smoking a cigarette briefly postpones or replaces the process of writing. It calms the writer's uneasy mind because, to paraphrase Schivelbusch, "[i]n the act of smoking the nervously restless hand [of the writer] fixes on a purpose [that is, holding the cigarette]."²⁷ The cigarette becomes the substitute for the writer's disobedient pen. Unlike writing, smoking is almost always a productive process that is visibly traceable and results in the consumption of the cigarette. It is easier for a smoker to smoke a cigarette than for a writer to write. Through a series of repetitive movements, the cigarette is being gradually smoked, its ash tapped off its end into an ashtray, its size shrinking until it is finished and gets extinguished. For a struggling writer this process grants a momentary satisfaction of "having done something." I will return to the discussion of smoking as a creative, performative act later in the chapter.

The cigarette has a very peculiar relationship with the emptiness that the writer feels, and that precedes the creative process. Apart from being a thing that gradually vanishes as it is being used, the cigarette itself is "empty." Like any other thing, it has a number of "objective properties," however, in the case of the cigarette, its attributes are not inherent in it.²⁸ As can be observed from Klein's passage quoted above, the "identity" and function of the cigarette lies "elsewhere" than the cigarette itself. According to Klein's argument, the cigarette is "analogous to what linguists call a shifter" – like the personal pronoun "I."²⁹ The word "I" is a device we use to express "the irreducible particularity of [our] innermost self" but because it is universally available to every speaker, it is also "the least particular thing in the world."³⁰ The cigarette, for Klein, is a similar shifter – the smoker manipulates it, like the word "I," to tell stories to himself about himself, or to someone other.³¹ (I will be looking more closely at the specific relationship between smoking and storytelling towards the end of this chapter.) As one smokes, one loses oneself and becomes the "I," which at the time the shift occurs could be anyone and yet no one in

²⁶ As Schivelbusch points out, it is actually the calming of the physical body that happens in smoking, that allows for the smoker to "wor[k] off those functionless, indeed dysfunctional bodily energies that had formerly been released in the physical work" and transfer them into mental activity, thinking. See Schivelbusch, "Tobacco," 111.

²⁷ Schivelbusch, *Tobacco*, 107.

²⁸ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 30.

²⁹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 9.

³⁰ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 9.

³¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 9.

particular. Smoking a cigarette helps one to “lose oneself,” only to become someone or something else, somewhere else.

This echoes the schizophrenic splitting of the self that occurs as a writer sits down at his desk to write, losing him or herself to become the “I” that gets inscribed in the text:

Rimbaud: “Je est un autre.” It opened a door for me, and after that I worked in a kind of fever, as though my brain had caught fire. What it came down to was creating a distance between myself and myself. If you’re too close to the thing you’re trying to write about, the perspective vanishes, and you begin to smother. I had to objectify myself in order to explore my own subjectivity – which gets us back to what we were talking about before: the multiplicity of the singular. The moment I think about the fact that I’m saying “I,” I’m actually saying “he.” It’s the mirror of self-consciousness, a way of watching yourself think.³²

This is why a writer, or at least Auster and his writer-figures, loves to smoke. Smoking “engenders the gauzy pleasure of ephemera; it promotes the dissolving of the I, the movement of depersonalization that is the condition of the Mallarméan poetic experience.”³³ That is the basic and most important role of the cigarette – its inherent “emptiness” allows the writer’s mind to fill it with substance that in its size and scope is no less than the entire world (I will return to this idea below). Cigarettes, after all, are not smoked for their taste, but for this quality, which could potentially create anything. Cigarettes, as Luc Sante writes, “fill the room with a screen of smoke on which anything can be projected,”³⁴ and it is, I believe, our desire to “surrender to, to be transported by,” to be “kidnapped by” what is “on the screen” – words that Susan Sontag attributes to the movies – that to a large extent fuels one’s wish to always light another cigarette.

However, before exploring this further – that part of the charm of the cigarette lies in its potential to symbolically appropriate the world – one should briefly stop to consider some of the cigarette associations that have emerged predominantly from the movie screen, in

³² Auster in conversation with McCaffery and Gregory, “Interview with Auster,” *Contemporary Literature*, 18.

³³ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 32.

³⁴ Luc Sante, “Our Friend the Cigarette,” in Sante, *Kill All Your Darlings: Pieces, 1990-2005*, introduced by Greil Marcus (Portland: Yeti, 2007), 93. The essay, originally written and published untitled to accompany Sante’s volume of smoking-related photographs and images, *No Smoking* (New York: Assouline, 2004) was later re-published in the respective collection of his essays. Because pages in *No Smoking* are unnumbered, for more convenient referencing I will cite the 2007 edition whenever referring to this text.

particular film noir and the trope of the private detective. Although the same association between smoking and the dissolving and shifting of one's identity also effectively works in the context of detective work, which itself is often associated with the process of writing, the combination of the cigarette and the figure of the detective evokes a new set of meanings and functions for smoking.

The image of Auster's writer-detective in his bare room is often as gloomy as it is clinical, and in his early texts it is supplied with qualities and icons derived from the standard repertoire of American film noir from the 1940s and early 1950s. Among these one always finds cigarettes, which play a dual role as *mise-en-scène* decorations and signs that "allegoriz[e] abstract qualities, virtues and, perhaps, most aptly, states of things."³⁵ That is why in the noir-like *City of Glass*, the writer-turned-detective Quinn lies in bed during a sleepless night "smoking a cigarette, listening to the rain beat against the window."³⁶ His desk is covered with debris – "dead matches, cigarette butts, eddies of ash, spent ink cartridges, a few coins, ticket stubs, doodles, a dirty handkerchief."³⁷ This is not unlike what Quinn is greeted with when he visits the hotel room of his suspect, Stillman Sr., which "stank of cockroach repellent and dead cigarettes."³⁸ Altogether this scene conjures up the Austeresque vision of a world in which things are falling apart, like the urban wastelands in *City of Glass* or *In the Country of the Last Things*. When constructing their identities based on hard-boiled detective heroes (whether self-invented or borrowed), Auster's writers take elements from iconic figures of the genre in an attempt to gain closer proximity to them. Because the noir attitude associates smoking with glamour, masculinity, and intrinsic sexual connotations, Auster's wannabe detectives are also required to smoke. When Quinn, the insecure and doomed faux detective, visits the house of the femme fatale Virginia Stillman and, overwhelmed by her sexuality and perfume, starts imagining her with no clothes on, his thoughts immediately turn to his idol, the fictional private eye and alter ego Max Work. "What Max Work might have been thinking, had he been there," he wonders, and impulsively "decide[s] to light a cigarette," in an attempt to merge with his fictional idol.³⁹

³⁵ Marlan, "Emblems of Emptiness," 260.

³⁶ Auster, *City of Glass*, 11.

³⁷ Auster, *City of Glass*, 63.

³⁸ Auster, *City of Glass*, 136.

³⁹ Auster, *City of Glass*, 24.

Alongside other key elements of the Auster's writer-character assemblage, smoking is visually emphasized in *City of Glass's* graphic adaptation, the editor of which, Art Spiegelman, calls "a strange *doppelgänger* of the original book," itself a schizoid offshoot of the work that deals with the *doppelgänger* theme. The visual treatment given to Auster's text by artists Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli, who use black-and-white graphics, rough brush strokes, light and shadow plays, as well as shifting focus between close-ups and wide shots, makes this project resemble noir cinematography. In the deliberately evoked noir chronotope, close-up "shots" of objects (burning cigarette in an ashtray, a telephone, a typewriter, a book, a record player) play a crucial role in defining Quinn as a writer and detective, as well as marking the space he inhabits. Besides its active role as a "thinging thing," the cigarette is, quite plainly, also an irreplaceable prop setting up a noir *mise-en-scène*.

Yet such constructed identities as Quinn's detective persona are essentially flat and fake, empty of any deeper content. Quinn remains a struggling writer and miserable impersonation of a detective, a symbol of emptiness and loss who never manages to solve the task assigned to him and who at the end of the novel vanishes into thin air. Did Virginia really kiss him and offer herself as a reward? Did she exist at all? After all, she too disappears from the story unexpectedly and without explanation. Perhaps it all happened in the weak imagination of Quinn-the-failed-writer? This pattern of externalized subjectivity is a trope in Auster's narratives, and is consciously thematized in such works as *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, or *Lulu on the Bridge*. As Dennis Barone notes, Auster knows how to exercise "one of the most basic methods of art" – selection – and what he selects he then "turns into a metaphor that merges an external object and the mind's interior."⁴⁰ The cigarette becomes a metaphor for expressing the interior of a struggling writer's mind. One possible, if slightly pessimistic, reading of the cigarette would equate it to the condition of creative agony and failure: the emptiness and hunger that fails to get fulfilled.

Another, very different, writer-character is portrayed in *City of Glass*. His name, somewhat unsurprisingly, is "Paul Auster," who earlier in the text had been mistakenly taken for a private investigator. When Quinn meets him for the first time, this Auster radiates an aura of authority and self-satisfaction: "Auster leaned back on the sofa, smiled

⁴⁰ Barone, "Introduction," in *Beyond the Red Notebook*, ed. Barone, 14.

with a certain ironic pleasure, and lit a cigarette. The man was obviously enjoying himself, but the precise nature of that pleasure eluded Quinn.”⁴¹ At the end of the story this Paul Auster feels guilt about having treated Quinn badly, as if he, as someone who is a writer by trade, in some inexplicable way could indeed be blamed for Quinn’s erasure from the pages of the book at the end of the novel. This Auster is everything that Quinn is not, and above all he is a successful and prolific writer, which is reflected in the way he smokes. For him, smoking is not an emblem of emptiness, but becomes an embodiment of reward for productivity. Or, in other words, the characters of Quinn and Paul Auster are revealed as two sides of the same figure, the creatively empty and unfulfilled one, and the fulfilled and productive one.⁴²

In both cases smoking becomes an inseparable part of the writer, who appears dehumanized, reduced to an assemblage of tangible and intangible elements, such as the objects or spaces within which he is located. When watching the film *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, one may not know much what kind of a person the protagonist Martin Frost is, but one immediately knows that he is a writer because the camera shows him tapping away at the keys of his typewriter, next to which stands an ashtray with a lighted cigarette. For an Auster character, elements like cigarettes assume a prosthetic function, not only extending his capabilities and efficiency, but becoming what French philosopher Henri Bergson calls “instruments that the body must learn to accommodate, instruments that transform both the thingness of things, and the body itself.”⁴³ The cigarette becomes a part of the body, a prosthetic instrument attached to it (I will talk in more detail about prosthetic writing in Chapter 3 on the typewriter.)

In his essay on the meaning of smoking in art, Benno Tempel describes 18th- and 19th-century artists, writers and philosophers as always “lost ... in thought amid colors of

⁴¹ Auster, *City of Glass*, 155.

⁴² Such a twofold interpretation is not necessarily self-contradictory if one recalls the symbolic meanings of smoking as represented in the 17th-century Dutch paintings. A pipe was often used in artist’s self-portraits where its meaning depended on how the artist (and his pipe) was positioned in the frame. As Benno Tempel explains, “When the artist is seen smoking with his back turned to an empty canvas, it stresses that he is wasting his time; when the artist is facing the canvas, the implication is that smoking brings inspiration.” See Benno Tempel, “Symbol and Image: Smoking in Art since the Seventeenth Century,” in *Smoke: Global History*, eds. Gilman and Xun, 207.

⁴³ Elizabeth Grosz discussing Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution (L’Evolution créatrice)*. See Grosz, “The Thing,” in *The Object Reader*, eds. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 129.

smoke curling into the air.” Like Auster’s writer-character who is recognized by his cigarette and typewriter, the “contemplative gaze” of the artist of that time “was recognizable by the fact that he smoked.”⁴⁴ Consider Édouard Manet’s 1876 portrait of the French poet and Auster’s inspiration, Stéphane Mallarmé, where the poet’s right hand, holding a cigar, rests on pages of a notebook, as if suggesting that the actual agent through which the lines of the poems are written is a cigar and not a fountain pen. The cigarette/cigar, then, literally works as a writing tool. Tempel agrees by suggesting that smoking not only brought inspiration – it was in fact “the rising clouds of smoke” that “wrote a ‘poem’.”⁴⁵ Yet this seems to suggest a more intimate bond between the wordsmith and his cigarette than the reflection of his thoughts in smoke patterns. The ghostly patterns of rising, fleeing tobacco smoke appear to form letters or words in the air.

The same “trinity” of values and functions that hold true for a thing like a typewriter (discussed in detail in the next chapter) can also be seen at work here: the cigarette is not just a writing tool but, simultaneously, also the source of the writing (as inspiration, or muse). Indeed it is often also its subject (as in Auster’s films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*). Klein seems to agree when he notes that the cigarette is “not just an object one holds in one’s hand,” but something that

must be considered a subject, a creature alive with a body and spirit of its own. Not merely a poem, the cigarette is a poet, -esse or -ette: the fiery cinder ash is the heart of a living being, and effemin-ette, perhaps even a feminine being, endowed with abundant resources of seduction and diverse powers to focus the mind.⁴⁶

The cigarette, like the typewriter, talks to the smoking writer. That is why Klein himself, when unsure how to start writing his book – a book on smoking after all – eventually decides to let the cigarette itself speak (and speak for itself). He quotes another smoking writer, the protagonist of Svevo’s *The Confessions of Zeno*, who admits: “Not knowing how to begin, I invoke the aid of all the cigarettes similar to the one I am holding in my

⁴⁴ Tempel, “Symbol and Image,” 210.

⁴⁵ Tempel, “Symbol and Image,” 210.

⁴⁶ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 10.

hand.”⁴⁷ As Klein observes, literary authors like Svevo’s Zeno (or Mallarmé, as above), “often hold both pen and fag in hand, spilling ink and taking drags interchangeably,” suggesting that the muse of smoking cigarettes “frequently accompanies writing.”⁴⁸ Ned Rival, in his *Tabac, miroir du temps*, “reproduces old valentines of men with cigarettes sitting writing at desks, while a bubble of smoke over their heads contains an image of their beloved.”⁴⁹ Klein explains:

The cigarette gives the writer, inhaling, the inspiration that permits him to summon the beloved image, bodied forth in a lyric effusion – a recent muse in the tradition dating back to Petrarch. The cigarette is itself a woman – the word, the concept, and the thing being identified, from its origins with a certain feminine – and poets have not been lacking who have written sonnets and odes to praise its darkly modern beauty.⁵⁰

Yet the image of the desired and inspiring female muse is not the only image that the cigarette helps evoke. Although throughout the discourse of its history the cigarette has always been associated with feminine seduction, it appears that its main attraction lies in the fact that it acts as an empty shifter and as such can be filled with any desired contents, including the female figure.

Thus we arrive at another paradox of the cigarette – it is a thing that cannot be appropriated. A cigarette literally vanishes as one smokes it and, unlike a pipe, it cannot be possessed and called “mine.” However, at the same time the cigarette facilitates the appropriation of anything in the world through association precisely because it is “empty” and depersonalized. The power of cigarettes lies not in the “things-in-themselves” but in their capacity as things to traverse “towards something other than themselves; fleeting, “they are always signs or mediators for something else that unveils itself in the moment they vanish ...”⁵¹

Firstly, that appropriation happens through the cigarette’s ability to “gather” thoughts through associations. That is one of the reasons why, throughout its history, the cigarette

⁴⁷ Klein, quoting Italo Svevo’s *La coscienza de Zeno* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1988) in Klein, *Cigarettes*, 18.

⁴⁸ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 18.

⁴⁹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 18.

⁵⁰ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 18.

⁵¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 32.

has been associated with contemplation. The coupling of smoking and contemplation can be found in all the literary and artistic representations of smoking that are not hostile to tobacco.⁵² As Schivelbusch points out, in the portraits by the 17th- and 18th-century artists Martin Engelbrecht and Johann Kupetzky, “smokers always appeared as relaxed, meditative contemporary figures seated often at writing desks, as lost in wreaths of pipe smoke as they were in their own thoughts” (here, the connection between smoke and thoughts gets reinstated again).⁵³ An 18th-century text cited by Schivelbusch states: “There is nothing better for contemplation than tobacco smoking, for here *straying thoughts are recollected*, this being most beneficial for students [one could say writers], in that while smoking they can grow accustomed to pondering everything well.”⁵⁴ (my emphasis) Smoking “gathers” the straying thoughts, pulls together images and assembles ideas.

Secondly, the cigarette, as Klein observes, is an effective instrument for associatively appropriating various things in the world precisely “because it allows us, in a symbolic act, to take into ourselves the world around us, the whole landscape that smoking a cigarette accompanies.”⁵⁵ That is why the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre struggled to quit smoking. Smoking meant to him no less than “the entire world”:

Through the tobacco I was smoking it was the world that was burning, that was being smoked, that reabsorbed itself in steam to reenter in me. To maintain my decision to stop, I had to achieve a sort of decrystallization – that is, without exactly realizing it, I reduced tobacco to being only itself: a leaf that burns; I cut the symbolic links with the world, I persuaded myself that I would take nothing away from the theatre, from the landscape, from the book I was reading, if I considered them without my pipe, that is, it finally came down to my having other modes of possessing these objects than that sacrificial ceremony.⁵⁶

That is to say, when smoking, not only does one breathe in the dissolving object (a solid cigarette, a dried plant wrapped in a leaf and set alight at one end) but one in fact “possesses” the entire world, which gets sucked in through all the associations that are

⁵² Schivelbusch, *Tobacco*, 105.

⁵³ Schivelbusch, *Tobacco*, 105.

⁵⁴ Schivelbusch, *Tobacco*, 107.

⁵⁵ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 37-38.

⁵⁶ Klein quoting Jean Paul Sartre from his 1943 philosophical text *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (In French, *L'Être et le néant : Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*), in Klein, *Cigarettes*, 37.

evoked by the act of smoking; all the world is breathed in with every puff a smoker takes.

For Sartre, tobacco, then, becomes

“the symbol of the appropriated object” because, as it is smoked, the solid thing is gradually turned into smoke which enters my body. Smoking mimes the desired transformation of an object into myself through an act of appropriative possession; the object becomes “mine” by a process of “continuous destruction,” “the transformation of the consumed solid into smoke,” whereby it passes into me and becomes (part of) myself.”⁵⁷

Yet, if Sartre talks about inhaling tobacco smoke as a means of appropriating the world, and sums up the whole world in smoking a cigarette or a pipe, then Mallarmé describes the reverse act in one of his poems – the externalization of what was held within by exhaling smoke – and sums up the whole “soul” in the process of smoking a cigar:

Toute l'âme résumée
Quand lente nous l'expirons
Dans plusieurs ronds de fumée
Abolis en autres ronds...

The whole soul summed up
When slowly we exhale it
In several rings of smoke
Abolished in other rings...⁵⁸

The act of smoking tobacco, then, works in two directions, allowing the writer first to take in the whole world through association, and then to respond to it with his or her soul – a response externalized and manifested in the created text, either spoken or written. The cigarette opens up that space, which for Auster is accessible also through the blank pages of a notebook or through his bare study, a space that *has room* to fit “the entire world” that then gets projected back as the text inscribed onto the pages of the notebook, the typescript, the book.

⁵⁷ Klein quoting Sartre from his *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), in Klein, *Cigarettes*, 38.

⁵⁸ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 73; here quoted in Klein's translation in Klein, *Cigarettes*, 64-65.

As an actant the cigarette wants to substitute its own emptiness with meaningful contents, which are so close to the creator's thoughts that the cigarette that is being smoked becomes the created text itself, transformed and externalized. That is why the substance of smoke is often seen as the closest approximation to human thoughts, or, alternatively, as a "matter as close to the demateriality of spirit as soul is to the corporeality of the body"; smoke is like the human soul because it is "substance less dense than matter" yet "more corporeal than mind."⁵⁹ The smoke that fills the air as the artist or the writer smokes a cigarette represents symbolically an expression of his or her mind or soul that consequently gets externalized in the form of the created artwork or text. Reflecting upon the French intelligentsia's passion for smoking, Corliss marks that in the 1960s, film director Jean-Luc Godard, for example, "blew smoke rings as profligately as he exhaled movie ideas; that cloud of smoke was a thought-balloon in the comic strip of French aesthetic life."⁶⁰ The cigarette is transformed into the text through the creative process; it is the text-to-become. In such a way, artistic creation becomes a means of appropriating the vanishing cigarette.⁶¹ In other words, smoking propels this creation through mind and soul, thought and emotion, which is why Auster and his fictional characters smoke along with almost the entire Western canon of male writers, philosophers, thinkers and artists.⁶² That is also the reason why, within Auster's texts, smoking signposts, above all, the presence of the writer-figure, which, in turn determines the way a particular text most likely will be read.

This is how the mechanism of recognition-association works within Auster's intratext. It is a curious paradox that by exposing the question of identity, which is portrayed as never fully solvable, fluid, schizophrenic and trespassing the conventional, Auster nevertheless chooses to clearly identify his characters through the repetitive use of these attributes, such as cigarettes, notebooks or typewriters. In spite of the complexity, ambiguity and insolvability of existential questions, in its essence the self as constructed and portrayed by Auster is skeletally primitive, transparently exposed, requiring from the reader only to notice and follow the identifying markers. That is why Auster's intratext, which

⁵⁹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 67.

⁶⁰ Corliss, "Great American Smoke."

⁶¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 32.

⁶² Ernest Hemingway, Jean Paul Sartre, Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett, Julio Cortázar, Jean Cocteau, Bertolt Brecht, Knut Hamsun, John Steinbeck, to name but a few.

externally seems to rely on creative ideas, such as arbitrary chance, random play and imagination, in fact is always *a priori* limited, restricted by particular signifiers that constantly keep pointing back to the same story over and over again. In some ways, his characters are anything but free, trapped in the cycles of endless repetition of their names, their occupations and life stories, and even of what Auster would call chance events and unpredictable fate.

In Auster's oeuvre, then, the presence of elements that constitute the dehumanized and as-if-objectified figure of the writer seems to point back to the same meta-story that is constantly repeated and recycled in a different variation. That is why in Auster's film *Smoke*, as soon as the iconic writer-character is introduced (and that happens in the opening scene), the spectator feels compelled to read the story in one particular, indeed already familiar, way. A man, a writer, as one learns, walks into a cigar store to buy a tin of Schimmelpennincks. What follows confirms the spectator's recognition of not only a familiar character but also a well-known story pattern. After the writer leaves the store, we are told about a tragedy that struck his life years before, robbing him of the ability to write, which is of course a classic setup for an Auster story.

On the narrative level, Auster's meta-story is always the same symptomatic story of an existential and artistic recovery from a crisis after a loss or death of a close person, which has resulted in the character also losing his ability to write (or perform music, as in the case of *Lulu on the Bridge*, where the traditional writer protagonist is substituted by a jazz musician). Unsurprisingly, this story repeats itself again in *Smoke* in the life of Paul Benjamin, who experiences a writer's block after the loss of his pregnant wife when a robber's stray bullet killed her outside Auggie's tobacco store a few years earlier. After this personal tragedy the writer "hasn't been the same since."⁶³ At this point, it becomes clear that *Smoke* organically fits alongside Auster's novels as a slightly different version of the story that deals with the same themes that have preoccupied the writer throughout his creative career. Stripped down to his bare essence, Paul Benjamin becomes indistinguishable from his doublings Martin Frost, Sydney Orr, Peter Aaron or any other of Auster's fictional stand-ins. The re-emergence of the same writer-figure that faces the

⁶³ Paul Auster, "Smoke," in *Smoke & Blue in the Face: Two Films* (New York: Miramax Books / Hyperion, 1995), 15.

same problems across a number of novels and films confirms the thesis that to a large extent Auster's works are – with slight variations – an infinite repetition of the same story, over and over again, *ad infinitum*.

That the story of the blocked writer, which is embedded in the general narrative of *Smoke*, is at the same time the principal story of the film is suggested by the place that has been structurally allotted in the film's narrative to the story of Paul Benjamin. The film opens with Paul's problem – his inability to recover and write following the family tragedy – and closes with its solution. The culmination takes place at the end of the film, when Paul "retells" Auggie's Christmas story by typing it on his typewriter (I will return to this episode in the following chapter). The story that the character of Auggie tells Paul at the end of the film has brought him back to writing.

Yet, when seen in the context of Auster's intratext, the positive solution to writer's block suggests the possibility of seeing the film in an entirely new light. As Paul's narrative of creative block and its solution becomes dominant, a new interpretation is made possible that views all other characters and stories featured in *Smoke* as the fruit of the writer's imagination. Curtis White suggests a similar interpretation, equating the appearance and role of Claire, "the muse" from *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*,⁶⁴ with the figure of Rashid in *Smoke*:

The scenario is not dissimilar to a subplot of a film Auster himself scripted, *Smoke ...*, in which a writer named Paul Benjamin ... accepts an apparently homeless boy as a guest in his Brooklyn apartment after the boy saves his life. Both films – the real and the fictional – include relatively conventional uses of montage, in which cinematographic shots of the writer banging away on a typewriter (Martin Frost and Paul Benjamin respectively) are juxtaposed with actions *which may or may not be anything more than a scenario being played out in the writer's head and on his page*.⁶⁵ (my emphasis)

⁶⁴ She appears in both the story-within-story of *The Book of Illusions*, and also in the film itself, although White in particular talks here about the *mise en abyme* story from the novel.

⁶⁵ Curtis White quoted in Timothy Bewes, "Against the Ontology of the Present: Paul Auster's Cinematographic Fictions," in *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 292.

This view is further enforced by the words expressed by Rashid (who may or may not be an imaginary character) to Paul when he tells him: “The material world is an illusion. ... The world is in my head.”⁶⁶

According to Klein, there is a “peculiar ambivalence that surrounds the ‘act’ of writing and the curiously intimate relation it bears to the ‘act’ of smoking cigarettes.”⁶⁷ Klein asks why is it that cigarettes, of all drugs, have the power to induce particular states: “[a] calm and virile resignation, inalterable mystic joy.” According to him, however, they correspond to conditions observed in Charles Baudelaire’s praise to cigarettes, or “the author’s pipe” (in his poem “La Pipe”), which Klein describes as “the double postulation of the artist, concentration and evaporation, the steeling of the self that comes from resignation and the loss of the self in mystical expansion.”⁶⁸ The cigarette allows the smoking writer to

dream of possibilities unrealizable perhaps in actuality but not in the fiction of the magical space and time that the cigarette opens up for daydreaming. Cigarettes are fiery batons with which you can summon the future and conduct it, slim, white facilitators of anticipatory thinking and imaginative hypotheses, instruments of ecstatic projection away from the present to a future time in which the present for a moment no longer exists. Their magic derives perhaps from their capacity to moderate the anxiety occasioned by thinking about the future, all anticipation ... They allow you calmly to project yourself forward to possible future worlds that may never be, but, for the time of a cigarette, are – more intimately than the present moment.⁶⁹

Cigarette smoke, which can be easily associated not only with “thoughts” or “soul” but also with “dreams,”⁷⁰ and which has the power to evoke “the most distant, deep, forgotten memories,” is “a further sign of its special link to the realm of imagination and poetry.”⁷¹ Smoking encourages daydreaming. Smoke fills the bare room, turning it into a sort of mythical space, a “mysterious locale, poised between fiction and reality,” and “between dreaming and writing.”⁷² It is in this “poetic space” that “the cigarette may be, as Sartre

⁶⁶ Auster, “Smoke,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 35.

⁶⁷ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 48.

⁶⁸ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 48.

⁶⁹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 52.

⁷⁰ “Of all substances,” according to Klein, “[smoke] is the one that is closest to the material consistency of thoughts or dreams.” See Klein, *Cigarettes*, 61.

⁷¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 61.

⁷² Klein, *Cigarettes*, 71.

would say, an instrument for symbolically appropriating the world. ... Filling a room with ... smoke is a way of taking possession of its volumes, its surfaces and edges, surrounding and transforming them with [one's] own incorporations.”⁷³ French poet and writer Pierre Louÿs notes the ability of cigarette smoke to erase the “hard edges” between here and there, now and then, me and the other, the exterior and interior, and fact and fiction – boundaries that must collapse as a writer sits down to write:

The important thing is always to have a cigarette in hand; one must envelop the surrounding objects with a fine celestial cloud which bathes the light and shadows, erases hard edges, and, by means of a perfumed spell, imposes on the agitations of the mind a variable equilibrium from which it can fall into daydreaming.⁷⁴

In this way, the cigarette generates *mises en abyme*, narratives opening within one another, as a seemingly “truthful” story turns out to have existed solely in the writer’s imagination. Yet, in Auster’s case, it is not only the boundaries between the interior and exterior that get erased in such a way, making one question the credibility of the story. It is also, as noted before, the distinction between fact and fiction that is always vague, unfixed, and fluid. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, Auster has christened the writer-character of *Smoke* with his own name (Auster’s full name is Paul Benjamin Auster), in order to “add to the confusion,” to “bring reality and fiction as close together as possible” and to “leave some doubt in the reader’s mind as to whether the story was true or not.”⁷⁵ In this way, with the appearance of this character on screen, Auster continues his usual game with autobiography and fiction.

In Auster’s work, these border-marking threads between real life and fantasy are deliberately and skillfully interwoven so that it is no longer possible to untwine them. Particular characters, episodes and nuances in Auster’s work simultaneously are and are not perceivable as autobiographical references. The character of Paul Benjamin from *Smoke*, which bears a strong resemblance to the real Paul Auster, is at the same time a

⁷³ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 71.

⁷⁴ Pierre Louÿs, *Œuvres complètes: Contes* (Paris: Montaigne, 1930), 65-66, quoted in Klein, *Cigarettes*, 70.

⁷⁵ Taken from Insdorf’s interview with Auster, “Making of Smoke,” 15. Auster also used this name when publishing his first novel, the hard-boiled detective *Squeeze Play*, back in 1984. As Carsten Springer writes in *A Paul Auster Sourcebook*, “Auster plays with the possibility that the author of the detective novel and the character in the screenplay are identical. The untrue person from the “real” world (Auster hidden by a pseudonym) is turned into a fictional character. A sentence from the first paragraph of the detective book is spoken in the screenplay by the character Felicity.” For reference see Springer, *Auster Sourcebook*, 57.

fictional construct that Auster uses for the representation of a writer, and, allegedly, an allusion to his own life as writer.⁷⁶

Paul Auster's universe is to be found neither solely in the real (the world), nor the fictional (the book), but in both entwined together; what appears to be fictionalized reality in Auster's texts is but a twisted side of the same surface of the real. Hence, "The World that is the Book," the title which Aliko Varvogli gives to her study of intertextuality in Auster's work, seems fully appropriate for describing the point of intersection between the two worlds where Auster has located himself, always between the real world and the imaginary, in the space between the physical room and the writer's mind, a room filled with and obscured by smoke. Perhaps the kind of distortion of meaning caused by the blurring of reality and imagination can be best illustrated again by the twisted Möbius strip discussed in Chapter 1. And if so, then semi-fictionalized and semi-biographical characters (like Paul Auster from *City of Glass* with his wife Siri, or Peter Aaron from *Leviathan* with his wife Iris, or all the Schimmelpenninck-smoking men) who inhabit the much-exploited and fictionalized spaces of New York (*The New York Trilogy*, *In the City of the Last Things*, *Moon Palace*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, etc.) appear to belong to the same universe we recognize as our physical reality, and where the "real" Paul Auster with his family inhabits Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood, writing his novels and smoking his cigarillos.

And yet, like the idea of smoking itself, the film *Smoke* appears to insist on several parallel readings, one of which suggests that the film is not about the isolated writer-character and his existential quest and attempt at creative recovery. It is more about basic human values and experiences shared by all of humankind than the solitary writer's solipsistic worldview. Auster's description of the image of smoke as something that is intangible yet present, "never fixed" and "constantly changing shape" illustrates the kind of dreamlike texture and shifting surfaces of his own narratives. Auster equates the way that dreams operate through "a kind of repetition of objects, or just putting one thing next to another," with the collage-like multilayered structure of his texts where "several stories

⁷⁶ As expressed by their shared preference for traditional methods of writing, using longhand and a manual typewriter, rather than modern technologies such as computers; their passion for baseball and a certain type of the Danish "Schimmelpenninck" cigars, and even in their calm manner of speaking and the settled voice.

[are] going on at once.”⁷⁷ (my emphasis) There is “story one, story two, and story three all on the same canvas,” which creates “interesting energy” between them.⁷⁸ Several contrastive interpretations are therefore allowed to coexist.

The Gathering of the Tobacco Shop

Smoking fills, smoking gathers, not only within an isolated smoker’s mind (think of a cigarette that helps a soldier in the trenches “pull himself together” before a battle) but also within a group of people that it assembles and “holds together” through its social, moral, and spiritual associations. As Sante puts it, “[i]f a cigarette is a stalwart companion in solitude, in company it is an ally.”⁷⁹ A lit cigarette, like a bonfire, has that peculiar force to draw, quite literally, people around itself, as in the episode in Erich Maria Remarque’s World War I novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (or *All Quiet on the Western Front*), where, towards the end of the book, “[t]he munificent cloud of smoke,” as Klein calls it, “draws a ring around the battle-hardened comrades and circles them in its embrace, drawing them closer together.”⁸⁰ The novel’s protagonist, Paul Bäumer, describes the gathering: “We drink and I look them in the face, one after the other. Albert sits next to me and smokes, and slowly we all gather together. ... Over our heads a cloud of smoke spreads out. What would a soldier be without tobacco?”⁸¹

The function and meaning assigned to tobacco here echoes not only the idea of the prosthetic cigarette (which becomes a defining part of the soldier), but also Heidegger’s concept of “the thing,” where the objects from their inanimate passivity are transformed into the more active role of “thinging”; that is, having and exercising a capacity of assembling around them humans and non-humans, physical entities as well as abstract concepts. Drawing on the etymology of the word from the Old German “*das Ding*” (which denotes a certain type of archaic assembly as well as the matter for concern of those that have assembled), Heidegger prefers to describe things as “gatherings.” When

⁷⁷ Paul Auster in a telephone interview conducted with Jill Owens on January 18, 2007, and published as “Author Interviews: The Book of Paul Auster,” Powells Books, <http://www.powells.com/authors/auster.html>.

⁷⁸ Owens, “Author Interviews.”

⁷⁹ Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 93.

⁸⁰ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 153.

⁸¹ Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer un Witsch, 1990), 110-11; here quoted by Klein in Klein, *Cigarettes*, 153.

“the thing things,” its “thinging gathers.”⁸² In Auster’s *Smoke*, and its sequel *Blue in the Face*, the epitome of “a thing thinging” is embodied in a number of smoke-related concepts – smoking, tobacco, cigars, cigarettes, and also The Brooklyn Cigar Co. tobacco store – which, like many other “things” in the film, assemble “a sheaf of relations that come together then go again their separate ways.”⁸³ Instead of mobilizing an isolated concept – like that of the lonesome writer-protagonist – tobacco works here to connect (“associate”) and hold together an entire Brooklyn neighborhood. This recognition, in turn, leads to a different perspective on the film that encourages a reading of *Smoke* as a “communal” story, and, essentially, a story about humankind.

Auggie’s tobacco shop, for example, is one such spatial and social network, assembled from things, objects, people, ideas, actions, and their dynamic relationships, and is itself a “thinging” thing. It is revealed to contain the double meaning of Heidegger’s “thing”/*das Ding*, which designates both an assemblage of people as well as what causes their concerns. The tobacco shop not only assembles in itself the neighborhood’s people who are all associated with it one way or another, but it also becomes a matter of concern for the gathering when plans for its closing it become obvious. When Vinnie, the owner of The Brooklyn Cigar Co., announces to Auggie, its manager and salesperson, his plans to sell it because of financial setbacks he has suffered to a health food company (here a threatening concept in contrast to a shop dealing in tobacco!), the shop starts to act as Heidegger’s “thing,” and also becomes its own “thingstead” (the place where the archaic Germanic assembly met). Auggie makes an appeal to Vinnie’s conscience: “Sure,” he says, “it’s just a dinky little nothing store, but everybody comes in here. Not just the smokers... The whole neighborhood lives in this store. It’s a hangout, and it helps hold the place together.”⁸⁴ The tobacco shop is more than a site selling tobacco to those who indulge in the habit of smoking; it is “the thing” that holds the whole neighborhood together. Like the object-turned-thing discussed in an essay called “Reflections on a Table,”⁸⁵ a thing like a shop can be an assembly, a gathering, not only of the objects

⁸² Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *The Object Reader*, eds. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 113-123.

⁸³ Richard Aczel et al., “Reflections on a Table,” in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Germany: Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005), 204.

⁸⁴ Auster, “Blue in the Face,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 191.

⁸⁵ Aczel et al., “Reflections on Table.”

contained and exchanged within it, but also of human beings, their emotions, ideas, actions, stories that emerge with every person who enters the store.

I now turn to the material agency of cigarettes as Latourian actants and “things that thing,” while also looking at the symbolic meanings with which they have been invested throughout their history – the association between cigarettes and basic human values that is still so strong that their presence in Auster’s texts unavoidably triggers moral questions, which, in turn, allow one to read these texts in humanistic terms. Looking at *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* from this perspective, let us ignore the embedded meta-story of the writer’s creative recovery, discussed in the previous section, and instead acknowledge the presence of diverse other characters and *Smoke*’s broader focus on them all. It is possible to suggest that the film does not have a single protagonist but multiple main characters, which vividly contrasts with Auster’s solo/novelistic works, especially from his early period, where the narrative deals with an isolated protagonist’s subjective perception of the world and the self. Partly because of this widened focus and partly because of its collaborative nature, *Smoke*, along with its sequel, is among the most optimistic of his works and in its lightness of mode can only rival his novel *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), which has been tagged as Auster’s most humane and most positive book.⁸⁶ Supporting this idea of multiple protagonists is the film’s structural division into five segments, each of whom has been named after one character (Paul, Rashid, Ruby, Cyrus and Auggie), as if suggesting to the viewer that this part of the film will be about this particular person. Cut into little episodes, the film takes turns focusing on each of the characters, at the same time trying to keep in balance the overarching narrative about the ways that people interact and how they influence each other’s life.

Set in a Brooklyn tobacconist shop, which becomes the film’s epicenter, *Smoke* emphasizes the bond between people united by either their smoking habit or their belonging to the same neighborhood. The modest-size space embodies the spirit of the big city, accented by cigars, cigarettes and other combustibles, and the black-and-white photographs hanging on the walls, with portraits of smoking celebrities – mainly

⁸⁶ As Auster says in an interview with Carlos Graieb – “*Smoke* is, without doubt, the lightest and most optimistic thing that I’ve ever written.” See Carlos Graieb, “Auster Creates His Universe in a Brooklyn Apartment” / “Auster cria seu universo em sobrado do Brooklyn,” translated by Carl-Carsten Springer and Ricardo Miranda, and published at *Paul Auster: The Definitive Website*, <http://www.paulauster.co.uk/carlosgraieb.htm>.

Hollywood actors – as well as by its ability to attract through these objects all kinds of colorful characters and unpredictable events. The majority of character interactions take place within this space, which is both intimate and domesticated, and yet so public, open, and unprotected. Although the film contains only a few shots of street life, the surrounding hustle and bustle can be sensed in the background noises, or it might sneak into the shop in a form of a thief. The elements establishing all connections (“associations”) in the film are both human and non-human actants, such as the diverse Park Slope residents, the tobacco shop, and the habit of smoking, as well as the street corners and thieves. All these elements are necessary to set up the scene so that “things” and exchanges can happen and the plot can be driven forward.

When Bruno Latour, who with Michel Callon and John Law pioneered the idea of actor-network theory (ANT), examines “the social,” he speaks of particular networks formed by humans and non-humans together rather than the abstract notions of “the social sphere” of traditional sociologists. Since the words “social” and “association” evolved from the same Latin root “*socius*,” which means both “to share” and “to associate,” then the social could likewise be acceptably defined as “a trail of associations between heterogeneous elements.”⁸⁷ Auggie’s tobacco shop in *Smoke* is the epitome of such an assemblage – it is not merely a spatial construct but an entire social network built by objects, people, “things,” and ideas, all of which participate and interact to incessantly reconstitute and reassemble itself.

An even better example highlighting the role of non-human actors in forming a “social” assemblage can be found in *Smoke*’s sequel, *Blue in the Face*, where objects and things are constantly the focus of attention. There is Waffle Man on a pursuit to get a \$4.95 Belgian waffle; the man whose hobby is to remove plastic bags from the Prospect Park trees;⁸⁸ there is Man With Strange Glasses (played by Lou Reed) who wants to receive a patent for his invention; and, of course, tobacco and cigarettes themselves, the centre of the discussions of Auggie, Jim Jarmusch’s character Bob, and Man With Strange Glasses.

⁸⁷ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 5.

⁸⁸ A scene shot in video in Prospect Park shows a Brooklyn resident who is speaking of his relationship with the borough, the park and the plastic bags he finds in trees there. A plastic bag stuck in a tree for him is “a flag ... of chaos ... a symbol.” So he finds a way to remove these bags, which soon develops into a hobby if not a mission, and defines his relationship with the Prospect Park and objects found in it: “It used to be, I would see a bag like that and just sort of shrug and think, ‘Well, there’s that bag.’ And now I see a bag and I think, ‘You’re coming out, pal’.” See Auster, “Blue in the Face,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 254.

Although the film features a few sustained narratives that get developed in its course (such as the relationship between the couples Auggie and Violet, and Vinnie and Dot, or the story surrounding the sale of the tobacco shop), it also constantly steps away from these narratives to expand horizontally and reveal more about Brooklyn as a rhizomatic assemblage of the relationships between its heterogeneous elements. In pseudo-documentary style, the film attempts to literally show the things that Brooklyn is “made of,” while Brooklyn “residents” stand in front of the camera to recite additional facts and statistics about Chinatown, street corners, underage thieves, Tahitian music, salsa dances, Belgian waffles, baseball and the Dodgers, little convenience and specialty shops, but also Brooklyn’s 90 different ethnic groups, 32,000 businesses, 1,500 churches, synagogues and mosques, 3,268,121 potholes (as registered in 1995), 1,600 miles of streets, 4,513 fire boxes, 50 miles of shoreline, 30,973 robberies, 14,596 felonious assaults, and so on and so forth. Each chain of associations, and every assemblage built on it, is, of course, potentially infinite and semantically uncontainable.

Smoke, likewise, consists of assemblages of human and non-human actants, which all work together to form situations where a variety of exchanges and interactions become possible. The film has minimal plot in terms of action as people simply disappear or unexpectedly appear in one another’s lives. Ruby, Auggie’s lifelong love, storms into his cigar shop one day after 18 years of absence from his life; Auggie suddenly learns that he might be a father to a grownup daughter and travels to the slums of Brooklyn to meet her; writer Paul Benjamin mourns the death of his wife and unborn child until Rashid suddenly appears in his life, saving him from a serious traffic-related injury or perhaps even death. Paul then becomes a father figure for the young and troubled Rashid, while the boy himself goes off to find his real father, who, having left Rashid after a family tragedy 17 years ago, has started a new life with his new wife and child, and his modest gas-station business in Peekskill, where the last person he expects to be visited by is his long-lost offspring. The kind of connections these characters form between themselves is to a large extent based on the exchange of objects that circulate among them, the quintessence of which is the tobacco shop itself, which “holds together” the whole Brooklyn neighborhood. Perhaps, another actant in *Smoke* could be used to better illustrate this point about human and non-human interactions: money. The ultimate token of exchange, money is, as I will show, in many ways related to tobacco in the films.

A paper bag with \$5,814 in cash in *Smoke* becomes a kind of a relay baton, which the characters in turn pass on to one another (bank clerks – bank robbers – Rashid – Paul – Auggie – Ruby – Ruby’s daughter?), so that their personal narratives can be developed. In *Smoke*, the work of the money-thing that questions each character’s moral actions is concealed behind another trademark feature of Auster’s novels, that of chance and coincidence, which makes the plot appear to be relying on strange incidents and unbelievable coincidences. Is it not strange that the nearly \$6,000 that Rashid picks off the street during a gang robbery is the same sum which Auggie would have earned by selling his contraband Cuban cigars, if Rashid had not messed the deal up by accident? Is it not a strange coincidence that – as it is implied – this is the sum that was also needed to cure Ruby and Auggie’s (possibly) common daughter from drug addiction? And, after all, is it not interesting that, after finishing his story about Mikhail Bakhtin to Rashid – a story that I will discuss in more detail shortly – Paul approaches the large bookshelf in his room and stretches his arm towards exactly that one book (a study of Bakhtin), behind which Rashid has hidden the paper-bag with all the cash? This repetition of limited and homogenous chance encounters only confirms that the notion of chance implies for Auster, unlike Sophie Calle, something predetermined rather than arbitrary. Or, in other words, because Auster’s characters always experience the same kind of “unexpected” events and coincidences, their fates are likewise similar.

Thus money, an object in itself charged with undermining morality, not only connects and assembles people around it but also makes them expose their personal lives, tragedies and weaknesses to each other and confronts them with moral dilemmas that affect not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them. A paper bag containing pieces of green paper turns out to be exactly what is needed to make up with one’s boss after ruining his business deal; to save a tobacco shop from bankruptcy; and to cure one’s daughter from drug addiction. As Elizabeth Grosz states in her essay, “The Thing”: “The thing poses questions to us, questions about our needs and desires, questions above all of action: the thing is our provocation to action and is itself the result of our action.”⁸⁹ To reiterate Latour’s point, material objects play a certain role in prompting moral actions from humans exactly because social networks, such as the one that the Brooklynites in *Smoke* belong to, are always built by non-human and human actants (also called “actors”)

⁸⁹ Grosz, “The Thing,” 125.

together. As such (invested with certain moral values), these things, such as money or cigarettes, actively participate in building and changing social relationships and/or assembling new social networks. It is therefore possible to simultaneously read Auster's films in both Latourian terms, that is, a postmodern, dehumanizing way of reading which prioritizes the agency of objects over human beings, and in humanistic terms, which perceive the text as a story with a moral value.

Yet, how does a little thing, such as a cigarette, have this ability to "hold together" a whole neighborhood? One has to look at the social history of the thing, to see what kind of associative forces and functions it has acquired and still holds. Because smoking is a social activity that affects both smokers and non-smokers (who are often exposed to the burning presence of the thing, as it were), it has always been accompanied by strong moral convictions that have changed from, for example, idolizing the cigarette at the beginning of the previous century, and demonizing and renouncing it at the start of the present one. In such a way, the cigarette has always been able to make a statement not only about the smoking individual but about the entire society via its attitude towards it; the cigarette has always been a small but telling sign of the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. As Sante writes in his photo-essay compilation *No Smoking*, "[b]orn in the late 19th century, the cigarette's history coincides with a century of glamour and industry;" the 20th century, which "created, promoted, and glorified the cigarette" all of a sudden "declared war on it," and, nowadays, in most Western countries, "smoking is considered a provocation, a shameful urge – almost uncool."⁹⁰ In the 21st century, which prioritizes longevity and health over the sublime pleasures of the cigarette, smoking has acquired a stigmatized social status – it is shameful, condemnable, increasingly "antisocial," and almost taboo. As Richard Corliss laments in his article on the increasing "tobaccophobic vigilantism" in contemporary society, "what was once a seductive pleasure is now an endangered cult, subject to demonization by the fuming, non-smoking majority."⁹¹

Very soon, perhaps, the cigarette will disappear altogether. Hence the significance of books such as Sante's *No Smoking* (2004) and Richard Klein's *Cigarettes are Sublime* (1993) – two social histories of smoking, one visual and one textual, that are simultaneously elegies to smoking and the values it signifies and the authors' protests

⁹⁰ Sante, *No Smoking*, back cover.

⁹¹ Corliss, "Great American Smoke."

against the growing “anti-tabagisme” that could ultimately mark the end of these values. Auster’s *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*, which were released around the same time as Klein’s book, can be seen in the same light.⁹² While acknowledging the dangers to health of smoking, these texts want to remind us about the hidden strength and value of the cigarette – how, throughout centuries, it has served as a powerful symbol and advocate for tolerance, sharing, compassion, equality, and peace. Smoking through its acting in Auster’s films conveys all these associations which seem to encapsulate the moral views that Auster expresses through his work, his public commentary and, of course, his habit of smoking.

I will now try to trace some of these associations to see how they are put to work in Auster texts and how they affect one’s reading of them. If one stops regarding smoking as “one of most grievous examples of destructive behavior in the history of humankind,”⁹³ and instead thinks about the cigarette in these terms – as a sign of tolerance, freedom, equality and moral responsibility within one’s community – it is possible to read Auster’s texts as “moral tales,” to use Jesús Ángel González’s description.⁹⁴

However, it is impossible to capture a single fixed “moral value” ascribed to tobacco, and, in particular, the cigarette. Rather than evoking one “thing,” its meaning and significance are disclosed as a long chain of related connotations, so that one can only move from one association to another, and see how each of them works in different situations. Tobacco, for example, inspires generosity. Klein draws attention to the opening scene of Molière’s version of *Don Giovanni* (the play *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre/Dom Juan or The Feast with the Statue*), which begins with an extended monologue “praising tobacco for the generosity with which it inspires felicitous human exchange.”⁹⁵ Part of the pleasure of smoking cigarettes comes from the pleasure of sharing and giving that the cigarettes themselves facilitate. There is something

⁹² *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* appeared in 1995, two years after Klein’s book was published. In *Cigarettes Are Sublime*, Klein reminds us: “At the time when tobacco has again been demonized, it is useful to recall that in pre-Columbian times it was considered to be a god, a minor divinity that found acolytes among Native American tribes stretching from the Iroquois of New York to the Mayans in the Yucatan” (137). As Klein states elsewhere, “Cigarettes are bad enough; they do not need to be demonized” (*Cigarettes*, 182).

⁹³ The words by Charles Lemaistre, former president of the American Cancer Society. He is quoted here by William G. Cahan, who in his preface to *Smoking: The Artificial Passion* talks about “the shocking example[s] of the power of nicotine addiction,” and its devastating effects that he has witnessed as a surgeon in a cancer hospital. See “Foreword,” in Krogh, *Artificial Passion*, ix-xi.

⁹⁴ González, “Words Versus Images,” 37.

⁹⁵ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 85-86.

inexplicable about the cigarette's ability to encourage generosity. The cigarette is a thing best enjoyed when shared, like a gift. As Klein puts it, "[t]he value of cigarettes, their use as a universal token of exchange, is linked to their insertion in a gift-giving economy. Cigarettes give the gift of giving – to the other, to oneself, to the beyond."⁹⁶ This "gift of giving" is manifested throughout both Auster films (but *Smoke* in particular) as its characters, puffing away on their cigarettes and cigars, pass on to one another things such as money or books, but also their time, attention, affection, and stories. Sharing, in turn, is what brings people closer to each other; sharing "gathers." The cigarette becomes, above all, "a bond, a token of the camaraderie that rivets soldiers to one another." Klein goes on to illustrate how the cigarette moves from generosity to bonding to solidarity: "It is a veil like the dusk at the end of a day of fighting that throws a beneficent shadow over fears and inspires generosity, allowing even the most miserly to communicate their solidarity with their comrades..."⁹⁷

Within both small and large communities then, smoking as a communal "thing" seems to have a highly social function; it works as a kind of a binding substance that brings and holds people together. Yet smoking is more than just socializing. In a sense, the act of smoking, even when shared by two strangers, is like a conversation about the weather between strangers who meet in the street. For Auster, the act of conversing about weather with a stranger (or, alternatively – sharing a cigarette) becomes "a sign of good will, an acknowledgement of your common humanity with the person you are talking to."⁹⁸ Human beings, after all, can be distinguished from animals by the fact that they smoke; it is a distinctive sign of humankind.⁹⁹ Weather is "the great equalizer;" one of "the things that bring us together. The more we insist on them in our dealings with strangers, the better morale in the city will be," as Auster explains.¹⁰⁰ To discuss weather with a

⁹⁶ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 137.

⁹⁷ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 152.

⁹⁸ Paul Auster, "Gotham Handbook," in Sophie Calle, *Double Game* (London: Violette Editions, 1999), page 2 of typescript. When citing text from the letter with instructions that Auster wrote for Calle and that has also been included in *Double Game* under the section "Gotham Handbook" (pages unnumbered in that particular section), I will indicate the page number that appears on the upper corner of Auster's letter in typescript. When referring to Auster's text for "Gotham Handbook," I will indicate him as author; when referring to Calle's response texts to his instructions, I will foreground her authorship within the project (Calle, "Gotham Handbook"). Where available, I will also cite the original page numbers of *Double Game* (e.g., Calle, "Gotham Handbook," 246).

⁹⁹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ Auster, "Gotham Handbook," 2.

stranger is “to shake hands.”¹⁰¹ Smoking, sharing a cigarette together, like discussing weather conditions, is elevated to philosophical prominence and becomes a sign of humanity, mortality, equality, and tolerance.

Such is the cigarette’s power to unite people under the name of humankind that it can, quite literally, save lives. Think of the episode from Georges Bizet and Prosper Mérimée’s opera *Carmen* and the narrator’s encounter with Jose Navarro, “the most noted bandit in Andalusia,”¹⁰² during which a shared cigar, accompanied by the gesture of offering and accepting the light, establishes an immediate “*socius*, a bond or contract,” which, as Klein argues, “on this occasion and others saves the narrator’s life (and saves the tale for us).”¹⁰³ This is because “[t]he offer of tobacco humanizes the murderer and institutes civilized exchange”;¹⁰⁴ the tobacco has the power to “tame the beast,” and to “institute a relation of civility.”¹⁰⁵ In Mérimée’s words: “In Spain [where the tale of *Carmen* is set], the giving and accepting of a cigar establishes bonds of hospitality similar to those founded in Eastern countries on the partaking of bread and salt.”¹⁰⁶ Sante explains it in the following way: the cigarette could be “a ceremonial dagger,” “an ornamental emblem of power and a symbolic protection,” “a colonial officer’s swagger stick”; it functioned “as an extension of the body, an exoskeletal limb with potential menace at its glowing tip,” and, consequently, “to give someone a cigarette” meant “to confer power.”¹⁰⁷

The same connotations that accompany the act of offering a cigar or a cigarette as a sign of hospitality, well-meaning, and peace can also be found in Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (written, as Klein points out, over a hundred years after *Carmen*, but evoking “exactly the same stereotype”), in an episode where the protagonist Robert Jordan, immediately after his arrival at the cave of the loyalist partisans, “offers round his Russian cigarettes.”¹⁰⁸ At that point, the cigarette becomes a sort of calumet, smoked to seal a mutual covenant, treaty, or peace pact. Such is the power of tobacco to introduce

¹⁰¹ Auster, “Gotham Handbook,” 2.

¹⁰² Prosper Mérimée, “Chapter 1,” in *Carmen*, transl. by Lady Mary Loyd, The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2006, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2465/2465-h/2465-h.htm>.

¹⁰³ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 119.

¹⁰⁴ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 119.

¹⁰⁵ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 120.

¹⁰⁶ Mérimée, “Chapter 1,” in *Carmen*.

¹⁰⁷ Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 90.

¹⁰⁸ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 120.

peace that even amidst battles, “[t]he act of rolling and lighting and drawing at length on a cigarette establishes an intimacy that almost makes the enemy a guest...”¹⁰⁹ This is also why in *Smoke* cigars are smoked in silent re-union immediately following a scene of argument – to turn the enemies back into friends, to make up; this happens first after Rashid’s dispute with Paul, and later after the fisticuffs between Rashid, his father, and the others involved.

Furthermore, cigarettes are “frequently represented as being democratic, international, cosmopolitan” and, as such, they overcome the barriers erected by disagreement and even war.¹¹⁰ Smoking unites. Yet to be “democratic,” “international” and “cosmopolitan” also requires one to show tolerance and acceptance of diversity. How does smoking encourage tolerance? Because the cigarette itself is “imperfect” (it is unhealthy, filthy, stinking), it “tolerates imperfections” also in those who smoke it, or, vice versa, tolerance on the smoker’s part is a pre-requisite for smoking a cigarette.¹¹¹ To be “smoker-friendly” means to be tolerant of one’s impurities, faults, and bad habits. Advocates of smoking would insist – or such would be the implied argument – that one should tolerate smoking because tolerating smoking means accepting and tolerating that we human beings are imperfect in ourselves; smoking is not merely a sign of this imperfection but also a commendable tolerance of it.

That is also why the imperfect characters of Auster’s texts, all marked by a lack or absence of some kind (a missing arm, a missing eye, missing father or a missing family, or a dysfunctional relationship), constantly signal their acceptance of these imperfections by smoking or not minding being surrounded by smoke. Auster seems to recognize that one’s tolerance of smoking has a broader significance as one’s acceptance of human imperfection, of diversity and equality among all men. “Smoking and letting people smoke is a sign of tolerance, ‘undogmatic behavior,’” writes González, referring to what Auster says in one interview.¹¹² For González, too, smoke as symbol seems to represent “human relationships, friendship as something intangible but present, constantly

¹⁰⁹ Klein refers here to an episode in Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* where Robert Jordan, while smoking near the bridge that he is supposed to blow off, observes his enemy smoking at the other side of the bridge, and feels slightly disheartened by his sudden recognition that he can relate to the smoking man. See Klein, *Cigarettes*, 149-150.

¹¹⁰ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 150.

¹¹¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 63.

¹¹² González, “Words Versus Images,” 30.

connecting and influencing the characters.”¹¹³ This belief, that smoking, like human relationships, should be regarded from an unconventional and undogmatic viewpoint is emphasized not only by the sustained ideology of *Smoke*, but also by other Auster texts, such as his recent novel *Invisible*. In this text, the character James Freeman at one point wants to enjoy his Schimmelpenninck cigarillo, but hesitates since at that moment he is a guest at the house of a vaguely known acquaintance. Yet the host does not object to his smoking and finds an ashtray for him, which leads to James describing her as “matter-of-fact, sympathetic,” and “one of the last Americans who had not joined the ranks of the Tobacco Police.”¹¹⁴

The act of giving out cigarettes to people and in such a way encouraging smoking, which Sophie Calle implements under Paul Auster’s instruction in their co-project “Gotham Handbook,” becomes a gesture towards equality, freedom, and humanity, not unlike the historical march of smoking women during New York’s Easter Parade of 1929. In that year, a group of young models, in an attempt to break the taboo against women smoking in public, walked down Fifth Avenue in New York, lighting their “Torches of Freedom” – Lucky Strike cigarettes – in their war for gender equality.¹¹⁵ The importance of this cigarette brand as a symbol for freedom and equality is reiterated in *Blue in the Face* where the Lucky Strike-smoking Bob (played by Jim Jarmusch) criticizes the ban on smoking in public places. Cigarettes, it seems, because of their subversive status in contemporary society, make a perfect weapon in the fight against restrictions on personal liberties, smoking being one of them.¹¹⁶

Smoking has often been “oppressed.” In the 19th century (when smoking was the exclusive prerogative of men) it was confined to specific places and restricted or banned elsewhere; it was banned in most public places, including outdoor spaces – a restriction

¹¹³ González, “Words Versus Images,” 30.

¹¹⁴ Paul Auster, *Invisible* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 161.

¹¹⁵ Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, “Introduction,” in *Smoke: Global History*, eds. Gilman and Xun, 23. The right to smoke for women has always been associated with the struggle for gender equality. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, rebellious women likewise insisted on their right to smoke (and thus became a subject of caricature), which was, according to Schivelbusch, “demanded as much as the right to wear trousers” (Schivelbusch, “Tobacco,” 120). Throughout the history of tobacco, any sort of oppression has often been accompanied by oppression or ban of smoking, so that smoking itself, at least for particular social groups, becomes a symbol of resistance and rebellion and expression of personal rights and freedom.

¹¹⁶ It is interesting to observe that, along the lines of this argument, Klein’s book itself can be seen as partly his counter-reaction to what he calls the growing *anti-tabagisme* in the United States and Europe in the early 1990s.

originally justified by the danger of fire in cities that at that time consisted mainly of wooden houses.¹¹⁷ When this justification no longer applied, writes Schivelbusch, the official prohibition of smoking in public places quickly became “a symbol of political oppression.” He adds: “Once the streets, squares, and parks were ‘liberated’ for smoking, it assumed a symbolic character similar to that which it had had for the women’s emancipation movement.”¹¹⁸ While for the oppressed the right to freely smoke in public is a symbol of liberation, the ruling authorities tend to regard it as “a sign of political recalcitrance,” or rebellion.¹¹⁹ For Corliss, too, the battle over smoking is always “part of a bigger fight”; it is “the crusade some people want to wage over regulating what other people are allowed to consume.”¹²⁰

Auster not only suggests one should be tolerant of smoking, but also seems to encourage making use of the cigarette’s ability to offer – paradoxically – support and help. In this way the cigarette becomes not only a sign of tolerance but also of compassion and benevolence. The busy and crowded streets of the New York neighborhoods become Auster’s testing site for humanity in several of his texts (*Smoke*, *Blue in the Face*, and also “Gotham Handbook”) as cigarettes are handed out to beggars, distributed in telephone booths, and constantly consumed by everyone around, including minors.¹²¹ In the instructions that he gives to Calle in “Gotham Handbook,” he urges her to distribute cigarettes to beggars (whole packs and not just one cigarette) because he understands the precious comfort that they provide to the smoker.¹²² Giving out cigarettes to people becomes an act of benevolence and sympathy rather than irresponsibility. And, conversely, anyone who condemns encouraging smoking fails to see or prefers to forget that the cigarettes are, in Klein’s words, “the traditional luxury of the poor – the ultimate

¹¹⁷ Schivelbusch, “Tobacco,” 125-129.

¹¹⁸ Schivelbusch, “Tobacco,” 129.

¹¹⁹ Schivelbusch also quotes historian Egon C. Corti’s *A History of Smoking* to give an example from Germany’s Vormärz era where smoking in public assumed an important role, while the authorities viewed it as a sign of political rebellion: “Just as someone who wore a felt hat instead of the then fashionable top hat was suspected of harboring revolutionary ideas, every smoker seen on the street was suspected of being a dangerous democrat.” See Schivelbusch, “Tobacco,” 129.

¹²⁰ Corliss, “Great American Smoke.”

¹²¹ In several episodes in *Smoke* the adolescent Rashid enjoys a cigar together with Paul Benjamin.

¹²² As Auster puts it, “Common wisdom says that cigarettes are bad for your health, but what common wisdom neglects to say is that they also give great comfort to the people who smoke them.” He therefore instructs Calle: “Don’t just give [to beggars] one or two [cigarettes]. Give whole packs.” See Auster, “Gotham Handbook,” 3.

consolation of those who are bereft, who sacrifice much of the little they have for the solace and comfort that cigarette smoking provides.”¹²³

Cigarettes are “a deep well of consolation” for people at times of misery – either for soldiers at war, or for homeless people who are fighting their war for survival out on the streets of the urban jungle.¹²⁴ I noted earlier how the cigarette helps the smoking writer achieve a sort of daydreaming state (allowing the doors of the imagination to open), or helps the writer lose his sense of self (allowing him to pretend to be someone else). This same ability of the cigarette can also be used as a means of escapism, granting the smoker a brief illusion of being someone else, someplace else, which means forgetting, however briefly, one’s current condition. Klein explains the association between smoking and forgetting:

The condition of daydreaming appears to be forgetting, and tobacco smoke becomes a metaphor for the power of cigarettes to mask the cruel reality of war, to veil pain with mist, and to smoke over the mirror of negative experience, obliterating even the privation and misery of war. Smoking cigarettes promotes forgetting, and forgetfulness is the soldier’s patron saint, what the prayer calls his “divine consoler.” One historian of tobacco [Marc Alyn] takes up the theme of forgetfulness: “The soldier smokes the way others drink, to forget. ... One smokes to counter boredom, fear, cold or heat, against the discipline which produces the pitiable inertia of armies, against the injustice of living and dying; one smokes to replace love, liberty, the need to be clean and to walk bare-headed, alone, where the air is fresh and free.”¹²⁵

While smoking and escapism can be seen as condemnable and cowardly concepts, another association – between bravery and smoking – suggests they should not be. Rather than just serving as “a fleeting antidote to depression,” the cigarette can, in fact, become one of the most encouraging “things” in the world. With a cigarette in one’s mouth, Klein suggests, one is bound to feel brave because smoking implies a certain kind of bravery; in some ways, one must be brave to be voluntarily smoking poison that brings one closer to death with every puff taken – a small death with each cigarette.¹²⁶ Klein explains: “it is

¹²³ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 187.

¹²⁴ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 137.

¹²⁵ Klein is quoting here French poet Marc Alyn’s prose from his *Célébration du tabac*. See Klein, *Cigarettes*, 138-139.

¹²⁶ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 153.

the poison in cigarettes that recommends them to the heroic – a strong poison; it takes an infinitesimally smaller amount of nicotine to kill an adult than it does of, say, heroin or cocaine.”¹²⁷ Smoking constantly reminds one of one’s own mortality, and it is exactly the lurking presence of death that accompanies every smoked cigarette, and the courage to accept it and contemplate it that makes not only soldiers but also many writers, artists, and philosophers smoke (Corliss calls nicotine the “Existentialist’s drug of choice”).¹²⁸ As Jonathan Jones, who has explored the relationship between smoking, death and art, observes, “for the truly cultured smoker, smoking is about knowing you will die,” and “about acknowledging the fragility of your body.”¹²⁹

This is also why history and literature speak of another kind of “last cigarette” – not the last one before quitting but the one granted to the smoker before he faces his own death.¹³⁰ Courage, then, even in the face of death, is the last cigarette’s message as it performs a function similar to “gallows humor.” When one is able to look in the face of approaching death laughing, the cigarette that represents one’s highest values – dignity and courage, among them – also helps one “pull oneself together” and experience “the most elevated sense of self,” so that, even in the face of imminent execution, one’s self (or superego, as Freud would put it) feels indestructible.¹³¹ Klein goes on to explain:

The benefit that cigarettes, like jokes, procure for those who are about to die, depends on their capacity to erect a posthumous (or divine) perspective outside time, in another time and place where one is momentarily, gaily invulnerable. Recall the death of Walter Raleigh.¹³²

Sir Walter Raleigh, a passionate smoker who introduced and widely advocated tobacco smoking in 17th-century England, has been lauded for his courage and bravery in the face of execution for treason. Allegedly, Raleigh’s last words as he was being led to be beheaded were directed to his executioner: “Let us dispatch. At this hour my ague comes

¹²⁷ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 139-141. The dangerousness of tobacco is also highlighted by Schivelbusch who calls nicotine “a nerve toxin” – so dangerous to that “if a habitual smoker were to take in all at once the amount of nicotine that he consumed piecemeal in the course of one day, he would die from it” (*Tobacco*, 97).

¹²⁸ Corliss, “Great American Smoke.”

¹²⁹ Jonathan Jones, “It’s About Knowing You’ll Die,” *The Guardian*, Monday 14, May 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2007/may/14/art>.

¹³⁰ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 153.

¹³¹ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 137.

¹³² Klein, *Cigarettes*, 137.

upon me. I would not have my enemies think I quaked from fear.”¹³³ Shortly after his execution at the Palace of Westminster on October 29, 1618, a small tobacco box was found in his prison cell bearing an engraved inscription in Latin: *Comes meus fuit illo miserrimo tempo* – “It was my companion at that most miserable time.”¹³⁴ Tobacco has ever since been associated with bravery and encouragement, the final measure of which is to stand up to death itself.

Other associations with bravery and courage, and with the will to forget, are put to work in two of Auster’s darkest texts – in the early dystopian novel *In the Country of Last Things* and the more recent *Man in the Dark* – where the simple satisfaction of smoking “real, old-fashioned cigarettes” attains a melancholic dimension as the devastated characters smoke themselves into oblivion, and cigarettes become one of the few small consolations and pleasures left to them that they can still indulge in without remorse or any feeling of guilt.¹³⁵ This contrasts with *Smoke*, which acknowledges the importance of Raleigh and features a story praising his wit and sharp mind (not, however, his courage) that are implicitly associated with his passion for tobacco (I will return to this episode shortly).

González sees *Smoke* and other Auster films as “moral tales, stories of moral responsibility where the characters need to consider the ethical implications of their acts.”¹³⁶ Yet Auster is not a conventional moralist, as González recognizes. Via the moral perspectives that are mobilized and questioned throughout the film, the traditional view that posits smoking as a harmful and degrading habit is turned on its head, and the issue of closing the cigar shop down becomes a moral dilemma whose outcome will determine the well-being of the whole neighborhood. As Auggie says to Vinnie during their discussion about closing down the store, “go twenty blocks from here, and twelve-year-

¹³³ These often-quoted words have been popularly attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh. See, for example, the *Wikipedia* entry on Raleigh, *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Walter Raleigh,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Raleigh.

¹³⁴ Gene Borio, “Chapter 3, The Seventeenth Century – ‘The Great Age of the Pipe’,” in *Tobacco History Timeline*, 1993-2003, Tobacco.org Tobacco News and Information, http://www.tobacco.org/resources/history/Tobacco_History17.html. Sir Walter Raleigh’s smoking articles are also presented in Schivelbusch’s study “Tobacco,” 109, where he points out that the inscription on the inside of the tobacco case that speaks about the “most miserable time” refers to Raleigh’s imprisonment in the Tower of London between 1603 and 1616.

¹³⁵ Auster, *Country of Last Things*, 109.

¹³⁶ González, “Words Versus Images,” 37.

old kids are shooting each other for a pair of sneakers. You close this store, and it's one more nail in the coffin. You'll be helping to kill off this neighborhood."¹³⁷

In other words, Auster, who often toys with questioning the conventional moral values and truths of society, such as whether stealing or lying can at the same time be seen as an act of empathy and kindness, fills the concept of smoking with a new meaning and significance which urges one to look beyond established understandings and the obvious surface matter, and discover new depths. As an apparition of the legendary baseball player Jackie Robinson says to the dilemma-torn cigar shop owner, "[m]ind over matter," "that's what counts, Vinnie."¹³⁸

This "mind" of the cigarette- and cigar smoker, then, seems to be invested with a symbolic meaning of bonding through shared experiences of humankind, and basic human values (such as kindness, tolerance, well-meaning, compassion, etc.), an image that is sustained throughout many Auster texts. Things, then, are needed to trigger, signal, and embody our moral responses. From a humanistic perspective, all the little thing-related incidents that take place in *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* serve only as initiators for the characters to change something in their outlook, action, and attitude towards people around them, making them finally choose in favor of an altruistic gesture, and, therefore, push all the film's narratives towards a positive solution at the end. This optimistic thought – that "all the characters in the story are a little better off at the end than they were in the beginning"¹³⁹ – in fact is the prevailing motif in the already mentioned Auster novel *The Brooklyn Follies* (which almost reads as the other side of the same coin in relation to *Smoke*), as well as the more recent novel *Man In the Dark*. Unlike the cigarette that accompanies the isolated writer, in these texts smoking equals shared experience and, as a positive affirmation, is present whenever the lives of the characters take a turn at being "a little better off."

Smoke, which marks turning away from the narrative and identity quests of self-obsessed writer-protagonists, is a filmic production, which means it is collaborative work. Collaborations suggest rhizomatic rather than arborescent relations, both within the

¹³⁷ Auggie to Vinnie, in Auster, "Blue in the Face," in *Smoke & Blue*, 190-191.

¹³⁸ Auster, "Blue in the Face," in *Smoke & Blue*, 193.

¹³⁹ Auster in an interview with Insdorf, "Making of Smoke," 15.

project's authorship and within the text itself, where a variety of characters can claim their share of story in a more democratic and inclusive way. This allows one to draw the following conclusion: the cigarette, just like collaboration, in its essence means sharing – the sharing of a ritual, a habit, of a certain space and amount of time; the sharing of a thing itself, and of many other “things,” too, including, as I will argue next, the sharing of storytelling and stories.

Smoke is the Story Itself

Tobacco has stories to tell. As Sante puts it, every cigarette, from the American Marlboro to the French Gauloises, or the hand-rolled Samson, has its own “biography” to tell.¹⁴⁰ This is what often makes smoking good subject matter for a story. And, even if “the lives of cigarettes” are “seldom interesting,” they, nevertheless, “like sundry zoological parasites, are the secret sharers of countless lives, of moments of impenetrable intimacy.”¹⁴¹ Cigarettes have “witnessed romance, rage, epiphany, confusion, elation, despair, serenity, chaos.”¹⁴² Significantly, as Sante correctly notes, cigarettes were “not just present in those moments, but according to their consumers they played an active role, either in enhancing the sensation or in attempting to assuage it.”¹⁴³ Cigarettes and cigars have inspired, witnessed, and played a part in stories.

Yet, apart from the invested symbolic meanings and associations of tobacco, the very act of smoking also “things.” Smoking becomes part of storytelling, it aids the process, is visually compelling and dramatic, in itself telling a little tale:

So after inhaling you wait one beat and then release the smoke through your nostrils, do you? That's one way to do it, although it tends to communicate impatience. They make you look like a dragon, those twin jets rushing downward from your nose. It's the sort of exhale you might employ while negotiating with someone over whom you have an advantage, or when arguing with a lover.

¹⁴⁰ Referring to the iconic position that the cigarette has occupied in the American culture, Allan M. Brandt, who in his study of tobacco marketing and legislation in the United States in the 20th century looks at smoking from a different vantage point, muses: “It seems striking that a product of such little utility, ephemeral in its very nature, could be such an encompassing vehicle for understanding the past.” A small thing such as a cigarette tells not only stories, but entire “histories.” See Allan M. Brandt, “Introduction,” in *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 2-3.

¹⁴¹ Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 93.

¹⁴² Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 93.

¹⁴³ Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 93.

In a calmer or more tender moment, you are better off letting the smoke out though your mouth, in little puffs, like clouds for cherubim to ride upon. Yes, little puffs – a long stream of smoke is another matter altogether. It can often indicate hostility, especially if you aim it at someone’s eyes. By contrast, moments of poetic idleness are best conveyed with smoke rings.¹⁴⁴

As Klein argues throughout *Cigarettes are Sublime*, “[s]moking cigarettes is not only a physical act but a discursive one – a wordless but eloquent expression.”¹⁴⁵ Smoking is “a fully coded, rhetorically complex, narratively articulated discourse with a vast repertoire of well-understood conventions that are implicated, intertextually, in the whole literary, philosophical, and cultural history of smoking.”¹⁴⁶ This means that each cigarette that is being lit and the particular way it is being held, sucked on, smoked, stubbed out, transmits associations with the many other cigarettes smoked in real and fictional lives. One cigarette may not look much different from hundreds of other cigarettes, yet the strength of each cigarette lies in this potential to evoke immediate powerful associations with imagery and stories derived from the entire discourse of the history of smoking. This thesis is attempting to do a similar thing – to read Auster’s texts through objects, things and concepts, and to see what kind of associations they evoke, what values they present, and what functions they assume in adding new layers of meaning to his novels and films, and ultimately to one’s understanding of “Paul Auster,” the chain-smoking, typewriting New York writer.

This last section of the chapter will attempt to follow the “thinging” of smoking in the context of storytelling, which, in turn, will allow me once again to change my interpretive perspective on Auster’s film *Smoke* (and its sequel) and observe how the film is in fact “all about telling stories.” This reading of the film incorporates some of the conclusions derived earlier in this chapter, where the cigarette was seen firstly as a prosthetic element in the writer-figure assemblage and then as an actant that brings and holds together a wider community of people, encouraging mutual co-participating, sharing, and tolerance.

Here, we can follow the cigarette’s role in assembling the idea of a storyteller – in essence a concept related to that of the writer – and of shared rather than solitary

¹⁴⁴ Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 86.

¹⁴⁵ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 182; also quoted in Sante, *No Smoking*.

¹⁴⁶ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 182; also quoted in Sante, *No Smoking*.

storytelling. The focus is no longer on the lonesome writer confined within the empty space of his room and disconnected from the rest of the world, but a number of people who engage in collective smoking and storytelling. The outcome is more positive than the solitary writer's struggle to write, and the characters' enjoyment in sharing a story is made obvious by the way they smoke. The move that both *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* enable from the naked cigarette of Auster's writer-figure to the more enjoyable cigarillos (and implicitly Cuban cigars) is another way of signifying the transition from solitary agony to a shared pleasure.

For Auster, the writer-figure is unimaginable without a cigarette, which externalizes his inner being, and the typewriter, which assumes the function of materializing the story. Without it, the story could not be written down and would remain "locked" in the writer's mind. It is equally impossible for Auster, as both films show, to imagine the character of the storyteller and the process of storytelling without the cigarette or cigar. Without smoking these notions would not be possible; writing stories, like telling stories, is clouded with tobacco smoke. The inseparability of smoking and storytelling is physically and visibly manifested in the many conversation-based episodes of the films, which I will look at shortly.

As Heidegger suggests in *Being and Time*, the world (as the physical reality consisting of objects) and the mind (or our subjective mental world) cannot be separated; in other words, there is no split between subject and object – the two are one.¹⁴⁷ Tobacco and the act of smoking are inseparable from the writer/storyteller and the act of writing/storytelling. Tobacco serves as a tool of trade for the storyteller; it is that which creates a story and also provides a channel through which the story is communicated to the audience. This is why the storyteller *has* to smoke in Auster's texts; it is one of the several functions assumed by tobacco alongside its work in constructing the atmosphere and "a storytelling situation" (discussed below). The process of smoking itself is a creative act that involves the smoker's gestures and facial expressions, body positions, and the sounds made while smoking, and, of course, the exhaled smoke. It is an emblem of creativity.

¹⁴⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

Smoking, in other words, involves “acting,” and is itself a little performance. And, as such, the creative “act” of smoking is yet another way in which the smoker tries to substitute for the “nothingness” of the vanishing cigarette as it burns down and disappears into the air. To return to Klein, artistic creation – in the form of “creative smoking” – becomes a means of appropriating the cigarette which cannot be otherwise appropriated.¹⁴⁸ Smoking, in this sense, is not so different from writing, painting, acting, *storytelling* – which is why it is so often an indispensable attribute of creative people.

In the opening sequence of the film *Smoke*, even before the title appears on screen, Paul Benjamin enters a tobacco store and joins “a philosophical discussion about women and cigars” being held among the shop’s owner Auggie and three idle loafers who regularly hang around the shop: Tommy, Jerry, and Dennis.¹⁴⁹ At this point, the agency of tobacco as a way of gathering many disparate things together is condensed to maximum effect. This happens through the space of the shop that assembles a certain kind of people, through the shared act of smoking that presupposes a certain kind of interaction between them, and through “the matter of concern” itself, which is the focus of their attention – tobacco. Paul says: “I suppose it all goes back to Queen Elizabeth,” and shares with everyone a story about Sir Walter Raleigh who won a bet with the queen that he could measure the weight of smoke.¹⁵⁰

The story itself – a curious attempt to determine the weight of smoke – is a reminder of the mythical dimension and the magic aura that has accompanied tobacco since its introduction to the Western world at the end of 15th century. In their introduction to *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun explore the unique characteristics of tobacco products that give it its “magic aura.” In particular, they focus on the smoke that a cigarette or cigar produces, which is “ineffable yet perceivable; real yet illusionary; present yet transient; breathable yet intoxicating.”¹⁵¹ Likewise, the physicality of a cigar or cigarette changes from a tangible thing to something intangible; it

¹⁴⁸ Klein, *Cigarettes*, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Auster, “Smoke,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 24.

¹⁵⁰ Auster, “Smoke,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 24.

¹⁵¹ Gilman and Xun, “Introduction,” in *Smoke: Global History*, eds. Gilman and Xun, 9.

visibly vanishes as it transforms itself into smoke, and becomes “smoke itself – an object of pure essence.”¹⁵²

While the contents of Paul Benjamin’s story reinvests smoking with the qualities of the myth and sublime, the way the story is told foregrounds the importance of the act of storytelling that will be repeatedly performed by different characters throughout the film. A medium-range shot captures Paul in the frame and, for nearly two minutes, the camera motionlessly fixes on his body and face, as slowly and expressively he tells the others the story, gesticulating with a Schimmelpenninck cigar in one hand. The camera is very still when the dialogue takes place; this undivided attention given to the storyteller, even as his story occasionally gets disrupted by remarks from other characters from outside the frame, and the camera’s refusal to show the impact of the story on the audience and the absence of typical inter-cut close-ups clearly foregrounds the act of storytelling.

A number of agents work to make this episode possible and to construct the storytelling situation: a space that allows for a sustained conversation like this to take place, a storyteller and his listeners, and the smoking of tobacco that is shared between them, and without which the storytelling would be inadequate. An analogous setup featuring these basic elements is repeated several times throughout the film – in Paul’s apartment between Paul and Rashid, in Auggie’s apartment between Auggie and Paul, in Auggie’s tobacco shop between numerous characters, at the roadside opposite Cyrus’s gas station between Cyrus and Rashid, and at the end in the diner between Auggie and Paul, where the former tells his climactic Christmas story. Similar setups function in *Blue in the Face*, where story-based conversations mainly take place between its smoking characters (Man With Strange Glasses, Auggie, Bob) within the tobacco store, while rows and arguments are set on the chaos-driven space of Brooklyn street corners and streets. In Auster’s oeuvre, these setups gain significance through repetition, where smoke defines the world of Auster and designates the space where stories are told.

Within the particular prerequisites that must operate in both *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* to make storytelling possible, tobacco plays a decisive and active role. It sets up the *mise-en-scène*, forms the atmosphere, and helps both the storyteller and his listeners fulfill their

¹⁵² Gilman and Xun, “Introduction,” in *Smoke: Global History*, eds. Gilman and Xun, 17.

functions. Storytelling is not an abstraction, but an assembly of particular elements where every element – both human and non-human – has a certain function and force. In order for the story to be told, a combination, an assemblage, of mutually completing elements is required, and if one of the elements is missing, then the network cannot function anymore, and the storytelling becomes incomplete, if not impossible.

In one episode in *Blue in the Face*, Bob (played by Jim Jarmusch) in his conversation with Auggie mentions other iconic combinations that are associated with a cigarette. Bob, who is planning to quit, comes to the tobacco shop in order to share the experience of smoking his “last” cigarette with Auggie, and laments the bliss he is about to lose by eliminating smoking from his life: “sex and cigarettes, you’ve got to admit ... that’s one thing I’m really going to miss. ... [h]aving a cigarette after sex ... that’s like ... a cigarette never tasted like that. You know, share a cigarette with your lover...” To which Auggie responds in agreement: “That’s bliss.” And Bob continues: “That’s what I’m going to miss ... and also with coffee. Coffee and cigarettes, you know? That’s like ‘breakfast of champions’.”¹⁵³

It is not for nothing that the same Jarmusch, this time as director, went on to make his own film devoted to a similar assemblage where cigarettes play the key role. *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003), which bears close resemblances to *Blue in the Face*, consists of short etudes in which iconic celebrities (including rock musicians and actors), play out situations born out of a certain combination: coffee plus cigarettes plus a table plus people.¹⁵⁴ The characteristics and implications of a table as an actant and Heideggerian “thing” have been explored in the aforementioned essay “Reflections on a Table,” in which the authors rhetorically ask: “Imagine there were no table between us; how could we begin to talk to each other?” The table is “a born negotiator: It draws us together; it holds us apart.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, the table is a prerequisite for conversation, like coffee and cigarettes for Jarmusch, or tobacco for Auster. The comic vignettes that feature the coffee-drinking and smoking characters are but a series of short, absurd conversations, which, like *Blue in the Face*, have been partly improvised by its actors.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Auster, “Blue in the Face,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 229-230.

¹⁵⁴ Aczel, et al., “Reflections on a Table,” 204-205.

¹⁵⁵ Aczel, et al., “Reflections on a Table,” 205.

¹⁵⁶ Unlike *Blue in the Face*, however, Jarmusch’s film is a compilation of shorter segments of earlier films, made over a period of 17 years.

Such a combination is not unlike a similar construction already discussed in this chapter, that of “cigarettes and storytelling,” a hallmark situation in Auster’s diegesis. Recall, for example, the philosophical debate about Don Quixote between Quinn and Paul Auster in the early novel *City of Glass*: this situation would not have been possible if Auster had not been sitting on his sofa, puffing away on his cigar. However, what distinguishes Auster’s films from his novels is the new physicality and the power of visual manifestation that has been granted to objects, making their prominence literally visible.

The omnipresent element of smoke in both Auster texts also dominates the screen by filling the spaces and surrounding its characters. In this way what cannot be conveyed in written form is manifested in visual terms; the text becomes the smoke in the air. In a book, the fact that all the characters constantly smoke would not be recognized as significant in terms of plot (“what is happening?”). In the film, however, smoking is not only seen as part of the *mise-en-scène*, but also appears as “action,” something that characters do all the time, while also doing something else, which is mainly talking and/or listening. This visual manifestation signals that *Smoke* is all about smoking and talking.

Smoke indeed stands out with its peculiar reliance upon a certain type of conversation, clearly marking Auster’s authorship of the film as its scriptwriter. To a great extent, the film pushes the narrative forward through dialogues rather than action. All background information about the characters is revealed not by the camera or a voice-over narration but simply through what can be heard in conversation. This, however, is a shift from Auster’s usual style of writing, which is almost free of dialogue; whatever dialogue there is tends to be criticized by reviewers as clumsy, artificial, and unconvincing.

Instead of foregrounding story-making and storytelling by deliberately making the narrative techniques conspicuous and self-reflexive, which one observes in *City of Glass* for example, *Smoke* thematizes storytelling by substituting a lot of action with stories that the characters literally tell each other. Except for a few climactic scenes (like, Auggie and Ruby’s verbally abusive encounter with Ruby’s pregnant crack-addict daughter Felicity, or Rashid’s confrontation with his dad Cyrus, which ends in fisticuffs between the two), all the other episodes in *Smoke* are played out through conversation. The conversations

themselves either contain “stories” that explain the life of the film’s characters or are half-mythical stories about unusual incidents from other people’s lives that are narrated mainly by Paul.¹⁵⁷

So, when Ruby storms into Auggie’s cigar store the spectator listens to the two of them conversing and through that dialogue is exposed to the history of their relationship, as well as an unexpected twist, which is that Ruby gave birth to a girl whose biological father might or might not be Auggie. Likewise, unaware that he is speaking to his long-lost son Rashid, Cyrus tells him, and the viewer, the story of how 12 years ago he lost his family and his arm (now replaced by an artificial limb with a hook) in a drink-driving accident. Both Ruby and Cyrus are visually marked as characters with an embedded story to tell, mainly thanks to the conspicuous elements of their external appearance that signal extraordinary experience: their missing arm and missing eye are but visible stories, waiting to be told. Seeing Ruby’s eye-patch that has replaced a glass eye she has apparently lost, Auggie cannot resist a bitter remark: “What’s with the patch, anyway? What’d you do with that old blue marble – hock it for a bottle of gin?”¹⁵⁸ Although we never learn how Ruby lost the glass eye, or her natural eye in the first place, this object – the pirate-like eye-patch – defines her and immediately positions her as someone with a story to tell, and, as it later turns out, confirms Auggie’s assumption that she is broke. Cyrus’ hook is no less intriguing and serves as a catalyst for his story of the past. So, when Rashid asks him about the arm, Cyrus unfolds his tale:

Twelve years ago, God looked down on me and said, ‘Cyrus, you’re a bad, stupid, selfish man. First, I’m going to fill your body with spirits, and then I’m going to put you behind the wheel

¹⁵⁷ In a way, these semi-fictional stories intervene with the film’s main events, creating a typically Austeresque diegetic world which is sustained by inter- and intra-textual stories that also serve to move the plot forwards. Paul Benjamin finds out about the money that Rashid has stolen only because a few moments earlier he has told Rashid an allegedly true story from the life of Mikhail Bakhtin. After telling that story Paul walks to the bookcase in his living room and reaches towards a book on the top shelf that contains that story, and, in doing so, catches sight of the paper bag with the money, which Rashid planted there earlier. That moment becomes a twist in the film’s plot, as Rashid is forced to confess that he took the money from a gang of bank robbers. Likewise, Paul at the end of the film is able to write his story for a newspaper’s Christmas edition because Auggie comes up with a(n) (invented) story (“bullshit,” as Paul calls it) which is, nevertheless, allegedly rooted in a “real” event from Auggie’s own life. Auggie fuses fact with fantasy when creating his Christmas story, which is a remarkably Auster-like technique. Whereas, two of the three semi-mythical stories that Paul Benjamin shares with the others are directly linked to tobacco and the habit of smoking, which are among the central diegetic components of the film, and one of these stories is told in the cigar shop.

¹⁵⁸ Auster, “Smoke,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 69.

of a car, and then I'm going to make you crash that car and kill the woman who loves you. But you, Cyrus, I'm going to let you live, because living is a lot worse than dying. And just so you don't forget what you did to that poor girl, I'm going to rip off your arm and replace it with a hook. ... Every time I look at this hook, I remember what a bad, stupid, selfish man I am. Let that be a lesson to you, Cyrus, a lesson so you can mend your ways, a warning.¹⁵⁹

In a way, however, in spite of their eccentric appearance, Ruby and Cyrus represent common people in the film. They wear an eye-patch and a false arm not because they are "eccentric odd balls," like the eye-patch-wearing housewives and one-armed men one encounters in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* series or David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, but because their ordinary lives were marked by extraordinary experiences, investing them with material for interesting stories.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, it is also possible to read *Smoke* as an ode to productive creativity, the magic of storytelling, and the power of fiction. Always accompanied by smoking, stories and the process of storytelling become the film's central axis around which all episodes revolve. As such, "*Smoke* is all about telling stories," as Harvey Keitel, the actor who plays Auggie Wren, has stated in an interview.¹⁶¹ The little dialogue that takes place between Auggie and Paul after the latter has listened to Auggie's story becomes a self-reflexive commentary on the film itself, which says that, whether true or false, a good story is what matters:

PAUL [cont'd]: Bullshit is a real talent, Auggie. To make up a good story, a person has to know how to push all the right buttons. (*Pause*) I'd say you're up there among the masters.

¹⁵⁹ Auster, "Smoke," in *Smoke & Blue*, 75.

¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, however, the hook-handed Cyrus together with the eye-patched Ruby in the film can be seen as pastiche characters that represent the urban eccentricity of the cultural melting pot that is Brooklyn, and also as very traditional second-role players from Auster's works in general. These characters are usually more interesting and eccentric than the story's central character (in this case – Paul Benjamin). If in Auster's books, the protagonist is often a one-dimensional, ordinary and boring figure, then other characters that appear in the story are unarguably more lively, interesting and unusual. This can be observed, when one thinks about the secondary characters in such novels as *Moon Palace* (the old millionaire Effing), *The Brooklyn Follies* (the bookstore owner Harry Brightman), *The Music of Chance* (its two eccentric millionaires, Flower and Stone), *Book of Illusions* (the "legendary" silent film comedian Hector Mann), and, of course, *City of Glass* (the two Peter Stillman characters, and the femme fatale Virginia Stillman), which are often contrasted with Auster's traditional writer-figure.

¹⁶¹ In an interview with Kenneth M. Chanko, "Smoke Gets in Their Eyes," *Entertainment Weekly* 281-282, June 30, 1995, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,297840,00.html>.

AUGGIE: What do you mean?

PAUL: I mean, it's a good story.¹⁶²

Auster's fascination with extraordinary stories is apparent in two other works. The first is the famous four-part collection of "true" tales entitled *The Red Notebook* (2000). In these, Auster relies on his own life as well as the lives of his friends and acquaintances to recount anecdotes molded in the form of pure storytelling. Unsurprisingly, these stories deal again with objects and things that "act," and the relationships between them and human characters: a book, a lost-and-found dime, a burnt onion pie, a scrap of paper discovered in a Paris hotel room. Although these little encounters, which all testify to the paradox of coincidence and document the bizarre if not catastrophic turns of everyday reality, claim to be true, their truthfulness is undermined when one realizes that they also reappear in identical or slightly modified versions in Auster's fictitious texts (like, the story of the "wrong phone number," which also plays a role in *City of Glass*).

The second work, entitled *The National Radio Story Project*, is a collection of real-life stories about the coincidences and absurdities of life, written this time by ordinary American people, but selected for publishing and edited by Auster. The project's authorship exceeds more than 3,000 people, who sent in their stories from all over the country, and Auster sees these stories as "vindication" against accusations of his own work being too "unbelievable." Therefore, Auster, who believes that reality is stranger than fiction, and that "[the] unexpected occurs with almost numbing regularity in our lives," uses ordinary characters to prove this claim.¹⁶³

Auggie Wren, from *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*, who is likewise a seemingly unremarkable man in charge of a small cigar shop in Brooklyn, is made "special" by his amusing photography project, to which he refers as his "life's work."¹⁶⁴ Apart from a story of his store, told through 30 years and thousands of photographs, there is also his "Christmas story" about bonding with a strange woman, which he tells to Paul at the end of the film. As Auster comments in an interview, "Working behind a cigar store seems like such a nothing job. ... But is it really? *Everyone has a story*. Everybody is interesting,

¹⁶² Auster, "Smoke," in *Smoke & Blue*, 149.

¹⁶³ Paul Auster in conversation with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, "An Interview with Paul Auster," *Mississippi Review* 20.1-2 (1991): 51.

¹⁶⁴ Auster, "Smoke," in *Smoke & Blue*, 43.

no matter what they do. If you just keep your eyes and ears open, someone very ordinary becomes quite amazing.”¹⁶⁵ (my emphasis)

Paul’s otherwise habitual life as writer is shaken by a tragedy when his wife gets gunned down during a bank robbery; it is a death “unusual” for “ordinary people,” but this Hollywoodesque death of his wife does not make Paul special – it makes his *story* special. Each of the characters therefore has “a story of their own” to tell, while the role of Paul Benjamin, who like Paul Auster is a writer and “a great storyteller,” of course, is pre-eminent here.

Apart from the anecdote about Raleigh and the weight of smoke, there are two other vivid stories that Paul tells other characters, which in their presentation do not differ much from the abovementioned story. Since these same two stories reappear in two other Auster texts (the early novels *The Locked Room* and *Ghosts*, respectively), the boundaries of the authorship of these stories, of the agency of the storyteller and indeed of all three of Auster’s texts, are once again being brought into question. There really is no difference between these texts and the characters these stories are recounted by – the voice of the smoking storyteller belongs to Paul Auster/“Paul Auster.”

The first of these stories was referred to earlier in the chapter and is about the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin. The story reiterates the interconnectedness of things and human beings, the cigarette and the writer, and the fluid relationship between the two, which in this instance goes in reverse direction. Trapped in his apartment in Leningrad during the 1942 German siege, Bakhtin smokes heavily, and writes a study of the German novel in the 18th century (the *Bildungsroman*) which he calls *The Novel of Education and Its Significance in the History of Realism*. Yet due to the paper shortage, he was forced to tear his manuscript up, page by page, to make wrappers for his “endless chain of cigarettes.”¹⁶⁶ Bakhtin literally consumed his own creative work; it “went up in smoke when he used it for cigarette paper.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Paul Auster in an interview with Joe Dziemianowicz, “Lights, Camera, Cigars!” in *Cigar Aficionado* (1995). http://www.cigaraficionado.com/Cigar/CA_Archives/CA_Show_Article/0,2322,719,00.html.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Holquist in his introduction to the Bakhtin collection *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. See Holquist, “Introduction,” in Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*,

The other story that Paul recounts is about a man who went skiing in the mountains but was buried in snow, only to be discovered frozen in Alpine ice years later by his son, who by that time looked older than his father. It would be possible to try and read these stories in relation to the film's main narratives (that is, to note the similarity between the frozen man and Paul's frozen apathy and refusal to go on living after the death of his wife and child, etc.). Yet the conspicuous way these stories have been presented rather suggests the filmmakers' fascination with good stories in themselves, and their admiration for the skill of storytelling.

The Hollywood tradition of visualizing the re-telling of a story by using the flashback technique is ignored in the film *Smoke*, which brings it closer to a literary narrative. Auster, who has complained about the medium's two-dimensionality, where the spectator, unlike the reader, has been left without any room for imagination, in this case has minimized this intervention on the spectator's perception.¹⁶⁸ The spectator sees the speaker's face and hears his voice, but the story itself is not shown using visual means. The climax of *Smoke*, of course, is the ending sequence of the film, where Auggie's ten-minute long Christmas story is delivered to the spectator through a single continuous shot. The camera fixes only on Auggie's body, drawing closer to his face as the narration progresses, until at one point we see the way his lips move as he talks. In this way, story has been transformed back into its original ancient form – oral storytelling. Without any montage tricks or special effects to rely on, everything depends on how well it is conveyed by the speaker. In a way, then, the conscious use of this storytelling method may be interpreted as Auster's critique of film's reliance on the image and its overuse of all kinds of cinematographic techniques (montage, sound and soundtrack, lighting, camera angles, etc.) that manipulate the reader's perception of the story and simultaneously turns him into a "passive" recipient of it.¹⁶⁹ In *Smoke*, the story is in a way

transl. Vern W. McGee, eds. Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), xiii.

¹⁶⁷ Gary Saul Morson, "The Baxtin Industry," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 30.1 (Spring 1986): 87.

¹⁶⁸ González, "Smoke and Illusions," 67.

¹⁶⁹ Auster summarizes the difference between the two media in his interview with Insdorf: "We tend to watch [films] passively, and in the end they wash right through us. We're captivated and intrigued and delighted for two hours, and then we walk out of the theatre and can barely remember what we've seen. Novels are totally different. To read a book, you have to be actively involved in what the words are saying. You have to work, you have to use your imagination. And once you imagination has been fully awakened,

preserved in its purest form so that the spectator, while listening to the story being told, has to use his or her imagination, just as when reading a book.

In the interview with Annette Insdorf¹⁷⁰ that complements the book of the two screenplays, Auster talks about his “problems with the [cinematic] medium,” which he mainly attributes to its two-dimensionality. For Auster, the movies are “flat pictures projected against a wall,” “a simulacrum of reality,” and “not the real thing.”¹⁷¹ For Auster, the “real thing” is the book where one through the use of imagination can “smell things,” “touch things,” “have complex thoughts and insights,” and in general “find [oneself] in a three-dimensional world.”¹⁷² The writer criticizes the inability of the film to leave space for imagination in the spectator’s mind, as opposed to how a novel works. Hence, the frequent use of smoke on screen in *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* not only symbolizes the five human senses but also obscures the view and adds depth and another dimension, mystifying the objects and persons seen amidst it.¹⁷³

González, in his article “Words versus Images: Paul Auster’s Films from ‘Smoke’ to ‘The Book of Illusions’,” has observed that *Smoke* is basically Auster’s attempt to re-create and add that missing third dimension to film. In *Smoke*, it is mainly achieved through its peaceful, slow and “natural” pace, the emphasis on conversations and long takes rather than action and editing, as well as the filmmakers’ refusal to use conspicuous and manipulative cinematographic techniques. González has noted that *Smoke* follows the “realistic” approach in cinema as manifested in works by such directors as Jean Renoir, Yasujiro Ozu and Robert Bresson, who “emphasize telling stories over technique” by letting their characters speak for themselves and giving them time to show their emotions so that they can “unfold before our eyes” on screen and “exist as full-fledged human beings.”¹⁷⁴ As Auster has commented: “We wanted to make an Ozu film, but with Americans. ... Hence the little bracketing shots of the Brooklyn subway train, which echo Ozu. We were shooting mostly indoors with just faces and bodies, and their story to

you enter into the world of the book as if it were your own. ... you find yourself in a three-dimensional world.” See Interview with Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 6.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 6.

¹⁷¹ Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 6.

¹⁷² Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 6.

¹⁷³ As Tempel marks in his essay, “Tobacco smoke is strikingly frequent in representations of the five senses. Besides standing for smell, it can also be a symbol of taste.” See Tempel, “Symbol and Image,” 208.

¹⁷⁴ Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 6.

tell.”¹⁷⁵ The film is indeed dominated by space that, whether private or public, indoors or outdoors, “encourages” conversations – a cigar store, a Brooklyn street corner, a bar, the living room of a writer’s apartment, or a bookstore.

The fact that most events are told rather than shown in *Smoke* complies with this principle, because the spectator has to work and use his or her imagination (in Auster’s words, “be actively involved in what the words are saying”¹⁷⁶), like a reader of a book. Auster tries to add more “real” substance to the medium of film not by packing it with cinematic effects but, quite the opposite, by stripping the stories bare in order to bring the film closer to an oral or written narrative. As he indicates in an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, the greatest influence on his work has been fairytales and the oral tradition of storytelling.¹⁷⁷ Dragana Nikolic suggests that what Auster most likely admires in these stories and tales is “their economy of bare-boned narrative and lack of detail which leaves enough space in the text for the reader to inhabit it. The text acts as a ‘springboard of imagination’ and it is up to the reader to complete it.”¹⁷⁸

The narration in *Smoke* does not belong to the camera as it traditionally can be observed in Hollywood cinema where the plot is propelled forwards by camerawork. Instead, the priority is given to *mise-en-scène* and “long takes over editing.”¹⁷⁹ In *Smoke*, narration belongs to the characters who are allowed to take their time when telling their stories. In an Ozu-like manner, then, a nearly static camera captures characters in mid-shot, letting them speak uninterruptedly for five or ten minutes.¹⁸⁰

In a way, then, Auggie’s advice to Paul, who initially fails to understand the meaning of a photo project that involves more than 4,000 pictures of the same place – “You’ll never get it if you don’t slow down, my friend” – can be seen as the key to understanding the entire

¹⁷⁵ Paul Auster in an interview on *Smoke* with Chris Peachment from *The Independent*. See Chris Peachment, “Give the Man a Cigar,” *The Independent*, 7 March 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/give-the-man-a-cigar-1340694.html>.

¹⁷⁶ See Peachment, “Give Man a Cigar.”

¹⁷⁷ Auster in conversation with McCaffery and Gregory, “Interview with Auster,” *Contemporary Literature*, 22.

¹⁷⁸ Nikolic, “Auster’s Postmodernist Fiction.”

¹⁷⁹ González, “Words Versus Images,” 30.

¹⁸⁰ It takes five minutes for Cyrus to tell Rashid the story of how he lost his family and arm while Auggie Wren’s “Christmas story” runs for 10 minutes.

film. Like the Auggie's Christmas story, this episode becomes the self-reflexive core of the film's meaning, and for director Wayne Wang it is "the heart of the film."¹⁸¹

When thinking of *Smoke* in these terms, the role of the agency of smoking as a method for "slowing down" its tempo becomes obvious, and can be placed alongside the cinematic techniques of montage and sound, and the direct encouragements to do so as expressed by its characters. When one smokes for pleasure, the activity of smoking presupposes a myriad of other processes that are acted out simultaneously with it; it is a certain mental and physical condition, which is placed within a relaxed and tranquil atmosphere. Cigarettes, and especially cigars, are meant to be enjoyed slowly, and savored for their feel, taste, and aroma. Since the late 18th century, artists have been using smoking as a symbol of pleasure and "timeless contemplation."¹⁸² Describing the aforementioned Manet's painting of Mallarmé, Tempel notes how the cigar, in combination with the poet's posture, aptly illustrates "bodily calm and spiritual stimulation," through the supposed effect of nicotine.¹⁸³ Jackie Robinson's reminder to Vinnie of "mind over matter" again seems appropriate to capture the kind of the transcendental atmosphere that dominates *Smoke* and the type of action that takes place within it.

Several moments in *Smoke* vividly portray such transcendence – the peacemaking episodes that were briefly mentioned in the previous section. The episode following Rashid's culminating fight with his long-lost father Cyrus is a contrasting moment of tranquility and peace as the group of characters are sitting around an outdoors table smoking cigarettes and cigars, evoking in the spectator recognition of the symbolic and ritual meaning of smoking as inducement to peacemaking. An analogous moment takes place in Paul's apartment after his quarrel with Rashid, when the two of them are portrayed sitting in the room, watching a baseball game on TV and silently puffing away on cigars. Like the previous episode, it is devoid of any speech, a moment of silence and reunion with an almost transcendental quality. In setting up the scene, smoking in Auster's texts is associated with certain quietness, contemplation, or non-aggressive conversation. In other words, what Auster throughout the film seems to be emphasizing is the emotional reality over superficial realism, human time over mechanical or natural

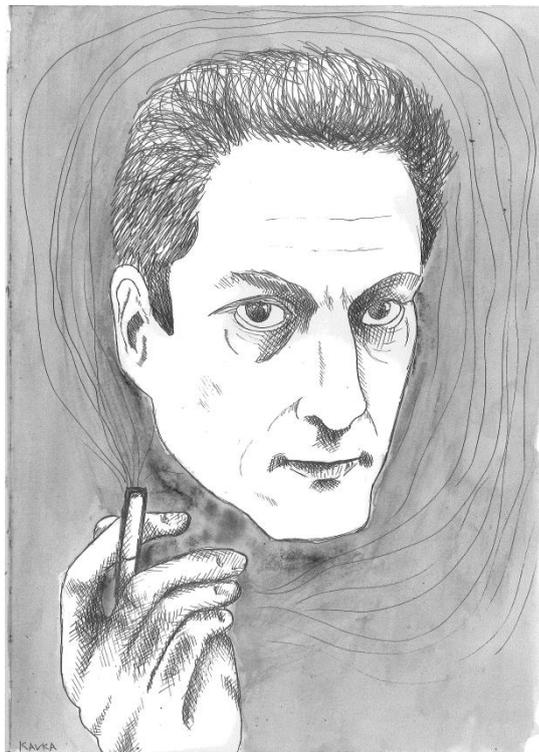
¹⁸¹ Wayne Wang in an interview with Dziemianowicz, "Lights, Camera, Cigars!"

¹⁸² Tempel, "Symbol and Image," 210.

¹⁸³ Tempel, "Symbol and Image," 210.

time, the “mind” over the “matter” which smoking-related objects and activities illustrate, express, and support better than any other element.

In the end, it is impossible to sum up the work of the cigarette. A small “thing,” it, nevertheless, has the potential to contain “the entire world” within it, or open up another temporal dimension. Like other elements in the Auster-assemblage that are discussed in this thesis (the typewriter, the concept of the double, the space of New York), the cigarette is an over-determined signifier that cannot be contained in a singular reading; it is always fluid, ambiguous, contradictory, multiple, and irreducible to a single type of associations. It is, as Sante puts it, “like the language of flowers, or of postage stamps, in which every nuance is pregnant with significance, and there is no possible communication that does not entrain a string of secondary and tertiary meanings”¹⁸⁴ – and this makes it a perfect tool for exposing the multilayered texture and dynamics of the meanings of Auster’s own rhizomatic texts.



If Auster’s storyteller character is unimaginable without a cigarette or a Dutch cigarillo in his hand, then Auster’s writer-figure also needs an old, manual typewriter – another

¹⁸⁴ Sante, “Our Friend Cigarette,” 95.

prosthetic writing tool which contains its own multiplicity of ambiguous values and functions in the process of text-production. “Why Type?” we could ask, paraphrasing Auster.¹⁸⁵ The next chapter seeks answers to this question as it traces the connections and associations of the typewriter in Auster’s works.

¹⁸⁵ See Auster’s essay “Why Write?” that he originally wrote for *The New Yorker*’s “Life and Letters” section, December 25, 1995, 86, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/1995/12/25/1995_12_25_086_TNY_CARDS_000375140. It has also been re-published in the collections of essays *Why Write?* (New York: Burning Deck Books, 1996) and *The Red Notebook*. See the Bibliography for details.

Chapter 3: The Story of the Typewriter

“I write by hand then I type it up on an old manual typewriter,”¹ says Paul Auster on his process of writing. It is a widely advertised fact that he refuses to use computers in favor of ballpoint pens, spiral notebooks, and vintage typewriters.² Auster claims that since the day in 1974 when he bought for \$40 a used, manual Olympia SM-9 typewriter from his acquaintance, “every word that [he] ha[s] written has been typed out on that machine.”³ This little technical aspect of his writing process has come to define Paul Auster as a writer, and, unsurprisingly, his writer-characters (Quinn from *City of Glass*, Blue from *Ghosts*, Sam from *In the Country of Last Things*, Sachs from *Leviathan*, Fogg from *Moon Palace*, Zimmer from *The Book of Illusions*, Martin Frost from *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, Paul Benjamin from *Smoke*, and ...). The fact that both Auster and his textual stand-ins choose old Underwood, Olympia or Smith-Corona typewriters as their writing tools makes the reader question the significance and function of this object in Auster’s writer-figure assemblage.

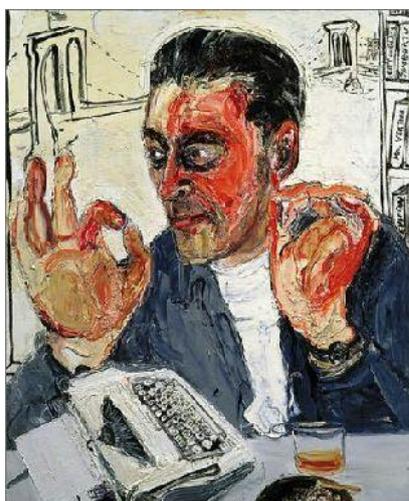


Figure 2 The Auster-assemblage. “Mr Coincidence,” by Sam Messer, oil on canvas, 1998, from *The Story of My Typewriter*.

¹ Paul Auster in an interview with Juliet Linderman, “A Connoisseur of Clouds, a Meteorologist of Whims: The Rumpus Interview with Paul Auster,” in *The Rumpus*, November 16, 2009, <http://therumpus.net/2009/11/a-connoisseur-of-clouds-a-meteorologist-of-whims-the-rumpus-interview-with-paul-auster/>.

² See Auster interviews with Linderman, George Dunford, Lethem, and Michael Wood, among others. See Bibliography for details.

³ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 10.

This assemblage of the writer, which can be reduced to three core elements: a male figure, a cigarette, and a typewriter (as “the chain-smoking typing writer”), can be encountered in nearly all of Auster’s literary and filmic works; it is what Deleuze would call “an extensive multiplicity.”⁴ The *mise-en-scène* the figure is placed in is equally repetitive within Auster’s rhizomatic oeuvre – it is a bare room in a New York apartment, ascetic in its simplicity, and consisting of a desk, a few books, some paper, a ballpoint pen, a spiral notebook (Portuguese, preferably), as well as perhaps a bed and a telephone. Images that supplement Auster’s written texts, depicting this assemblage of objects and spaces, like those of *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, could therefore be replaced with analogous shots taken from his films (e.g., *Smoke* or *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*), or with textual descriptions from his books, because the contents they all signify are analogous.

When Paul Benjamin from *Smoke* is working, he is

writing in longhand, using a pad of yellow legal paper. An old Smith-Corona typewriter is also on the desk, poised for work with a half-written page in the roller. Off in the corner ... a neglected word processor. The workroom is a bare and simple place. Desk, chair, and a small wooden bookcase with manuscripts and papers shoved onto its shelves. The window faces a brick wall.⁵

Blue, in the early novel *Ghosts*, “sets his typewriter on the table and casts about for ideas, trying to apply himself to the task at hand.”⁶ His study space appears identical: “Pencils, pens, a typewriter. A bureau, night table, a lamp. A bookcase on the north wall, but no more than several books in it...”⁷ Whereas, Auster himself prefers to work in “a little apartment” in his Brooklyn neighborhood, which he has created as “a very Spartan environment,” “a rougher, meaner environment” (presumably it involves the same minimum necessities for writing – a desk, some pens and pencils, a notebook and a typewriter...), because he feels “happier in a bare space.”⁸ Of all these elements that act to construct an assemblage of Auster’s writer-figure, the typewriter is the ever-present signifier that seems to have the most symbolically laden contents. Like the cigarette, the

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 36-37.

⁵ Auster, “Smoke,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 28.

⁶ Paul Auster, “Ghosts,” in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 175.

⁷ Paul Auster, “Ghosts,” in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 219.

⁸ See Auster’s interviews with Linderman (“Connoisseur of Clouds”) and Letham (“Letham Talks with Auster”), in which he talks about his working habits and workspace.

typewriter is an over-determined signifier which does not yield to a uniform reading, yet the meaning of the typewriter is further complicated by its ambiguous placement as “an ‘intermediate’ thing,” to use Heidegger terminology.⁹ It is always in-between, “between a tool and a machine,”¹⁰ and between “a tool and a finished product”;¹¹ it is also between a machine and its operator (the word “typewriter” can mean both). The typewriter literally is a mediator, an agent of textual transmission, installed between the one who types and the typed text. This chapter will explore the typewriter associations – in both the “traditional” and Latourian senses, as an element that “acts” to establish certain systems of connections which make Auster’s rhizome possible.

Like the pen, which for centuries dominated the cultural history of writing as a symbol of power associated with authority and authorship, the typewriter has become a visual cliché signifying writing and those who write. The associations evoked by the typewriter not only embody and express the idea of “true” writing (which originated around the 19th century), but also work to fill the outlines of otherwise flat Auster characters with illusory contents. The prosthetic typewriter literally merges with the writer, forming an assemblage of a “TYPE-WRITER” whose rendered texts signal diluted and ambiguous authorship. The rules dictated by the typewriter (or one could call them “algorithms”) create, in Brian McHale’s terms, “prosthetic writing”;¹² its core, which always stays the same, can be moved from text to text. Hence, another typewriter function – the machine whose predecessor was a copying device works in Auster’s rhizomatic network to make duplication and multiplication possible. Finally, the typewriter holds associations with the production and verification of truth, and therefore in Auster’s case works to validate the statement: “I am a writer.” This chapter will look at each of these aspects in turn.

Typewriter Associations

In the contemporary setting, the classical writing tools of pen and paper have lost their significance as symbolic and practical evidence for supporting one’s position as a writer.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Martin Heidegger on the Hand and the Typewriter (1942-43)” in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, transl. and introduced by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 198-200.

¹⁰ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 183.

¹¹ Martin A. Rice, “Amor me Jubit Mechanoscribere (Love Bids me Type),” in *Typewriter Tributes*, The Classic Typewriter Page, <http://site.xavier.edu/polit/typewriters/rice.pdf>, 2.

¹² Brian McHale, “Poetry as Prosthesis,” 24.

Industrialization at the beginning of the 19th century nullified simultaneously writing by hand and hand work.¹³ The handwritten word has come to be seen as neither credible nor lasting (one might recall here the misleading nature of Auster's notebooks, discussed in the introductory chapter of this study). What became required was a tool that was sufficiently objective, trustworthy, distanced and stable, so that in the process of copying the written word could materialize with a new quality. This function historically has been fulfilled by the typewriter. Akin to the first typewriters were pantographs – devices invented in the mid-17th century that could accurately copy a handwritten text for use by lawyers, scribes, merchants, scholars, registrars, clerks, and the like. It guaranteed precision in the act of the copying as well as prevention of falsification. These qualities attributed to early pantographs later worked to form the typewriter associations with production and transmission of the truth – an idea which continued to dominate in the typewriting discourse for the next few centuries. Typewriters were assumed to be neutral and objective, unmarked by the biases and idiosyncrasies of an amanuensis (one who is employed to take dictation or copy manuscripts) or a dictator, and, therefore, capable of delivering the truth. It is not a coincidence that the word “polygraph” (the correct term for a fixed-width pantograph) is also the official name of what is generally known as a “lie detector,” the machine used by law enforcement bodies to test whether a subject's claims are truthful.¹⁴ Because of these claims to accuracy and authority, the typewriter became an apotheosis for rational thinking and writing, and came to be seen as a machine that produces and/or verifies the truth.¹⁵

It would seem, then, that for Auster, who is known to write his first drafts by hand, typewritten text is required to finalize and verify his story. The typewriter, in other words,

¹³ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 186-187.

¹⁴ Darren Wershler-Henry, *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 36-37.

¹⁵ Another historical detail that only consolidated the view that typewriters are capable of producing and delivering the truth was the inclusion of the typewriter, typescripts and typewritten texts in the list of approved material evidence by courts in criminal cases. The first to note a similarity between the uniqueness of each human fingerprint and each typewriter's typescript, was, as Wershler-Henry notes, Arthur Conan Doyle, who made his detective Sherlock Holmes claim in *A Case of Identity* that “a typewriter really has quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting.” However, it required another 20 years until The 62nd Congress enacted the United States Statute of 1913, Chapter 79, which approved of typewriter-related evidence. The statute that until then had permitted the use of proven handwriting exemplars for comparison in courts was extended to cover “specimens of typewriting.” A court case in 1940's, however, proved that a typewriter can be duplicated to resemble a typewritten text of another original, hence falsifying the evidence. The evidence was discovered as forged only decades later. See Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 177-185.

becomes both “a tool and the finished product, tangible.”¹⁶ Because Auster’s texts so often expose the process of writing in dealing with a writer’s struggle to produce a text, the typewriter and typewriting, which are used by these characters, become marks of the progress of their embedded narratives. To put it simply, the typewriter makes possible the solution to the protagonist’s creative crisis by materializing his *mise en abyme* story which until then existed only in his mind as unverified, unreliable, and intangible.

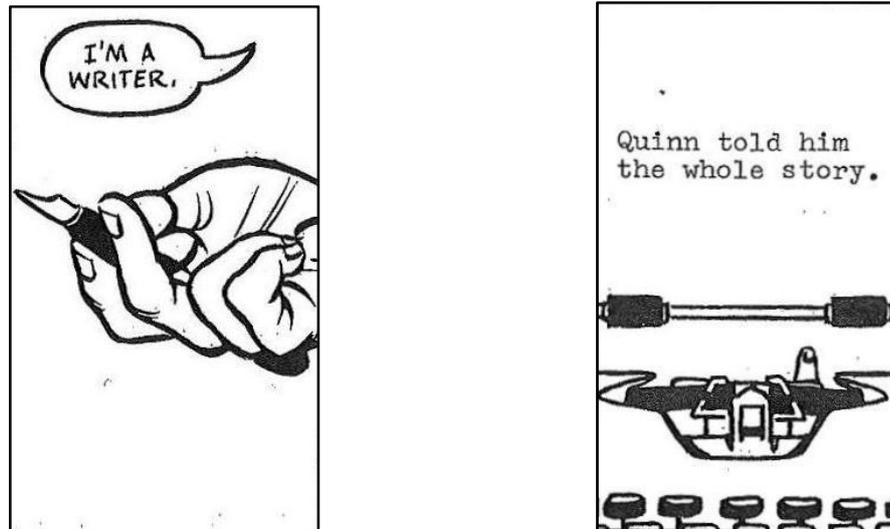


Figure 3 I am a writer, and I use a typewriter.

Two frames from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, by Auster, Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

In its most condensed form this “action” of the typewriter is depicted by visual means in two of Auster’s works – a film and a comic book. A frame in *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* equates the telling of a particular story to the process of typing it up, and a shot at the end of the film *Smoke* informs the spectator that Paul Benjamin has produced the desired piece of text. This marks the solution of the major conflict of the film’s subplot about Paul Benjamin’s writer’s block. The solution is signaled to the spectator by a single shot in which the writer types up – on what is presumably his manuscript’s title page – his new story’s title and his own name. Typing up the title of a story on its title page is to be read as an affirmation of the final stage of the writer’s creative process.

¹⁶ Rice, “Amor me...,” 2.

This ability to materialize and verify a story not only distinguishes the typewriter from pen- and handwriting, but also from the computer, towards which Auster displays a certain distrust; a computer-typed word that appears onscreen never appears “finished.” Although Auster admits in interviews that, at times, he has felt tempted to follow technological progress and purchase “one of those marvels,” the writer is concerned by the instability, fragility, disruption, and unreliability that he associates with computers as tools of text-production and storage. Auster has no doubt mythologized the computer no less than he has the typewriter, but his attitude towards the former has been mainly shaped through secondary experiences. From his friends, Auster has heard “too many” computer-related horror stories “about pushing the wrong button and wiping out a day’s work – or a month’s work” and “about sudden power failures that could erase an entire manuscript in less than half a second.”¹⁷ The unreliability, intangibility, and fragility of digital text and of the machine itself, turn computers into “un-reality,” “the stark opposite of the typewriter.”¹⁸ In his tribute to the typewriter, “Amor me Jubit Mechanoscribere (Love Bids Me Type),” Martin A. Rice mocks the fragility of the modern-day computer: “[d]rop an Underwood 5 on a laptop and see which survives. ... You can beat a computer to death with a typewriter, but, as with implication, the converse does not hold!”¹⁹ Unlike any computer, Auster’s Olympia, in his own words, remains “dependable” and “indestructible.”²⁰ Perhaps, to some extent this affection of the writer towards his old typewriter could be interpreted as his desire to leave a lasting imprint behind him; one that a computer cannot secure.

Auster, therefore, uses a fountain or ballpoint pen for writing and – as the next step – an old and rattling typewriter, which allows him to literally and physically leave his author’s imprint on the white page, either through “the tactile experience [of] scratching [the words] into the page” with his pen or by striking them onto the paper through an inked ribbon.²¹ The handwritten word must be later consolidated into typescript, because the

¹⁷ Both in Paul Auster, Sam Messer, *The Story of My Typewriter* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2002), 21.

¹⁸ Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

¹⁹ Rice, “Amor me...,” 2.

²⁰ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 16.

²¹ “I need the tactile experience of the pen in my hand, scratching it into the page,” says Paul Auster in an interview with Sarah Saffian, “Where There’s Smoke, There’s Paul Auster: Author Reveals How His Yule Story Lit the Way for Nicotine-Fiend Friendly Film,” *NYDailyNews.com* June 26th 1995, http://articles.nydailynews.com/1995-06-26/entertainment/17970344_1_auggie-wren-paul-auster-auster-and-wang.

typewritten word “forces itself onto the paper” so that “the paper has no choice.”²² One of the first typewriters, which has been identified as an inaugural object in typewriting history, was patented by the British engineer Henry Mill in 1714 and described at that time as “an artificial machine for the impressing ... of letters ..., as in writing,” with “the impression being deeper and more lasting than any other writing, and not to be erased or counterfeited without manifest discovery.”²³ It produces “durable writing,” in other words; a textual signature that will last.²⁴

This desire to “sign” his text manifests itself in an interesting and unexpected (while possibly unintentional) way in Auster’s films also. First of all, Auster emphasizes his partial authorship over *Smoke* by inserting a shot in the film that shows how this hallmark signature (a typing writer) placed under the film’s main *mise en abyme* story about a writer’s productivity, i.e., “Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story.” I already mentioned how in one of the film’s epilogue moments the spectator is reassured that Paul Benjamin has genuinely regained his ability to write when a close-up shot shows the title of the story typed by a typewriter on a white sheet of paper, with the writer’s name under it:

AUGGIE WREN’S CHRISTMAS STORY

BY

PAUL BENJAMIN

The spectator does not see the writer’s face but, accompanied by the opening of Tom Waits’ song “Innocent When You Dream,” two hands are seen, loudly striking the keys and, letter by letter, almost melodically arranging the words until they form the story’s title. It is not a widely known fact that the hands that can be seen in this shot belong to the “real” writer Paul Auster. This tiny shot, therefore, not only allows Auster to place his signature in the film, but also brings him closer to the character of Paul Benjamin, with whom he shares a not entirely comprehensible and controversial relationship, because Benjamin seems to be Auster’s prototype, while at the same time he has “nothing to do with [Auster]” and is “an invented character,” as Auster himself insists.²⁵

²² Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

²³ Michael H. Adler, *The Writing Machine*, quoted in Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 43.

²⁴ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 44.

²⁵ Insdorf, “Making of Smoke,” 15.

This small and concealed cameo appearance gains more significance if one notices that each of the four films in whose production Auster in one or another way has been involved contain similar “signatures,” in the form of episodic roles played either by Auster or by one of his family members. Apart from Auster’s hands, *Smoke*’s cast includes his son Daniel in the role of book thief. Auster’s daughter Sophie appears in *Lulu on the Bridge* as Sonia Kleinman and also in Auster’s latest filmic production *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* as a writer’s clumsy muse, Anna James, while in the ending sequence of *The Music of Chance* we see Paul Auster himself again. Even if some of the author’s “signatures” were unintentional,²⁶ they have already become a kind of hallmark, similar to the fleeting appearance of Alfred Hitchcock in all of his films.

I mentioned above the alleged instability and unreliability of digital media and computers as some of the reasons behind Auster’s reluctance to engage with these tools in his writing process. Yet the differences between computers and typewriters stretch far beyond their physical nature or the materiality of the finished text. The fundamental difference is this: they are different thinking tools. A computer, which may be physically reminiscent of the typewriter (especially a laptop), is not the latter’s more advanced sibling but an object of a different kind, because it operates according to a different logic or mode of “thinking.” The differences between these thinking modes – what Michael Foucault call a “discontinuity” and what Wershler-Henry describes as the “space that appears between modes of thinking (and the technologies that help to create and propagate them)”²⁷ – is what distinguishes varied writing styles. Auster puts it simply: “talking about writing in the book is talking about thinking, finally. Talking about how you tell the story because that really is what it’s all about.”²⁸

Nicholas Carr and Sven Birkerts are among the many who have written on the computer’s impact on the way a subject thinks, reads, and writes.²⁹ An electronic medium like the computer seems to disrupt the logic of linear thinking that has come to be associated with

²⁶ Initially, when offered this cameo appearance in *The Music of Chance*, Paul Auster wanted to refuse and accepted the offer later rather reluctantly.

²⁷ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 263.

²⁸ Paul Auster in an interview with Austin Allen, “When Literary Games Get Personal.” *Big Think*, November 5, 2009, <http://bigthink.com/ideas/17290>.

²⁹ See, for instance, Nicholas Carr’s article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” in *Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2008), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/6868/>; or Sven Birkerts’ *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006).

print, partly because it is so forgiving on the writer's mistakes – “[i]t might even correct them for you.”³⁰ Because it does not demand the discipline of thought and ability to think ahead, like in chess, the computer is “tailor made for soft and fuzzy thinking.”³¹ The lack (or “pure avoidance,” as Rice would put it) of required effort in thinking, and, by implication, in writing, and the lack of “physical character” makes computer-assisted writing appear ethereal, false, misleading, and un-real. A computer-typed text is “un-reality” in contrast to a typewritten text.³²

If the computer is “un-reality” then the typewriter is “reality” because neither reality nor typewriters “tolerate fluff, or slop, or laziness.”³³ Typewriting is “like logic – hard, cold, brutal, unyielding,”³⁴ and it is exactly in the act of typewriting that the typewriter machine starts to exert its influence over the thoughts of the one operating it. When Friedrich Nietzsche sat down at his “Schreibkugel” (a Malling Hansen “writing ball,” patented in 1870), he soon observed that the machine had a curious effect on his thinking and writing style. “Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts,” Nietzsche typed.³⁵ A similar observation was made by T.S. Eliot, whose writing under the influence of a typewriter became more “lucid.” Henry James, too, adapted his speech patterns to the necessities of typewriting, as his secretary Theodora Bosanquet observed.³⁶ It is nothing but “the effect of its technology on style,” observes Friedrich Kittler.³⁷ After all, August Dvorak himself, the inventor of the Dvorak keyboard, perceived typewriting as “designed to develop you into a thinking machine.”³⁸

In a similar fashion, the austere and laconic style of writing that is often attributed to Paul Auster and that, according to Barry Lewis, “partakes of both the dryness of a clinical

³⁰ Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

³¹ Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

³² Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

³³ Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

³⁴ Rice, “Amor me...,” 1.

³⁵ As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in a letter to Peter Gast in February 1882, “Unser schreibzeug arbeitet mit an unseren gedanken,” – “Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts.” Here, quoted in English in Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 51; and Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 200.

³⁶ Theodora Bosanquet, quoted in Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 99-100.

³⁷ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 229. More on the impact of typewriting on style in Robert Messenger, “Typing Writers: An Endangered Species (But Not Yet Extinct),” in *The Canberra Times*, Panorama, February 14, 2009; Rino Breebart’s short essay “Typewriter Love,” in *Typewriter Tributes*, The Classic Typewriter Page, <http://site.xavier.edu/polit/typewriters/breebaart.html>; and Rice, “Amor me...”

³⁸ August Dvorak, *Typewriting Behavior: Psychology Applied to Teaching and Learning Typewriting* (New York: American Book Company, 1936), 74.

report and the inventiveness of fiction”³⁹ – seems to be somehow related to Auster’s collaboration with his Olympia typewriter. It seems that because of the typewriter’s involvement in the writing process, Auster’s texts have managed to retain their desired laconic form and certain “flatness,” while leaving enough room for the reader’s imagination, so that in the reader’s mind the text could acquire a third dimension; this three-dimensionality of the text, for Auster, is a mark of good writing. Because the typewriter in its interaction with the writer also seems to command the tempo of writing, the process may be painstakingly slow (“it’s an incredibly tedious process,” says Auster),⁴⁰ yet the patience on the writer’s part awards his text an aesthetic quality that computer-written texts seem to lack. Because of the effort invested in producing a typewritten text, every word in typescript appears to carry greater significance and this quality could be said to apply to the whole text, because what is a text but an assemblage of words? This leads to the typewriter’s associations with hard labor and “real writing,” and explains how the machine itself became a symbol of “unalienated labour.”⁴¹

Considering all the aforementioned typewriter-associated qualities, including those that ascribe to the typing subject logical thinking, hard work that results in “real” writing, and the ability to produce legible, meaningful truth, there is little wonder that the typewriter itself becomes viewed as a possible source of some confidence and stability in a world which is otherwise dominated by confusion, disorder, and instability – i.e., a computer-dominated world. Wershler-Henry points to this when discussing the reluctance he sees on the part of some writers to move from typewriting to computer-writing: “[t]he consequences of hewing to the old order from within the new one are not simply aesthetic; they’re also ontological.”⁴² The typewriter evokes associations with “the mythical time when words had unequivocal meaning, and the machines used to produce them were free from error or duplicity”⁴³ – a time which vividly contrasts to the diegetic setting of Auster’s *City of Glass* or *In The Country of Last Things*, in which things have lost their meaning because the link between the signifier and the signified has been

³⁹ These words are taken from Paul Auster’s *Ground Work* and his description of the writings of schizophrenic Louis Wolfson; to characterize Auster’s style, Barry Lewis uses Auster’s own words “in evidence against him.” See Lewis, “Strange Case of Auster,” 60.

⁴⁰ Paul Auster in an interview with Michael Wood, “Paul Auster, The Art of Fiction No 178,” in *The Paris Review* 167 (2003), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/121/the-art-of-fiction-no-178-paul-auster>.

⁴¹ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 27.

⁴² Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 265.

⁴³ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 28.

broken; they portray a world which is disintegrating and falling apart. In the dystopian novel *In the Country of Last Things*, the protagonist Anna Blume makes her living by “scavenging” for broken and half-forgotten things on the streets of the city because objects that have a capacity for being reused or recycled are collected and “salvaged.” At some point, she stumbles upon a crippled old typewriter which has become just another piece of discarded junk; Blume’s universe is a place marked by instability and uncertainty, where “things fall apart and vanish” before one’s very eyes, and “[e]ntire categories of objects disappear – flower-pots, for example, or cigarette filters, or rubber bands – and for a time you will be able to recognize those words, even if you cannot recall what they mean.”⁴⁴ The typewriter’s strength lies in its promise that what has been typewritten will not perish and that, furthermore, it will remain readable and meaningful (unlike the notebook from *City of Glass*, whose contents the narrator is unable to “decipher”).⁴⁵ The typewriter-related mythical time, which Wershler-Henry refers to, can be seen as “the antithesis of the present,” which is “the world of information flows and endless cheap digitized texts.”⁴⁶

In a sense, one could propose that in order to somehow anchor his fragile sense of stability and order, Auster needs the typewriter as much as he needs the figure of a detective, which keeps reappearing in his works. “Everything breaks, everything wears out, everything loses its purpose in the end,” writes Auster in *The Story of My Typewriter*, “but the typewriter is still with me.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere in the same book, he describes his typewriter as “battered and obsolete, a relic from an age that is quickly passing from memory” but nevertheless “the damn thing has never given out on [him].”⁴⁸ It is a curious fact, though, that for Auster his typewriter transforms from a mere working tool into something more personally meaningful after the writer starts to realize that the machine is a relic embodying a past era which is about to disappear; the typewriter that can serve as “a sign of the passage of time”⁴⁹ and as a key to the past. “It was simply a tool that allowed me to do my work, but now that it had become an endangered species, one of the last surviving artifacts of twentieth-century *homo scriptorus*, I began to develop a certain

⁴⁴ Auster, *Country of Last Things*, 89.

⁴⁵ Auster, *City of Glass*, 40.

⁴⁶ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 28.

⁴⁷ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 40.

⁴⁸ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 55.

⁴⁹ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 23.

affection for it,” admits Auster. This is the moment when the typewriter moves beyond its primary function of reproducing a copy of a text in typescript and starts to operate on a more metaphorical level.

In his essay “The Things We Carry,” Joshua Wolf Shenk suggests that one of the functions of antique objects is to commodify emotions and memories by conserving them into artifacts.⁵⁰ In Shenk’s house, his grandfather’s Hebrew typewriter takes an honorary place. But it is not the typewriter’s mechanical functionality that holds the key to its attraction (the computer clearly outpowers the typewriter). Shenk’s vintage machine is even out of order – “the ribbon is dry, the platen so hard that it could crack the type.”⁵¹ And still, as Wershler-Henry points out, this “doesn’t mean that [Shenk’s] machine has stopped functioning powerfully on the level of imagination.”⁵² The typewriter has become “a sort of monument,” with symbolic value that is closely tied to the person who used it, and, since it is a monument, its main task becomes the “impossible attempt to suppress time by providing a summation of a complex being that can’t help but fall short of being definitive”;⁵³ to encapsulate the essence of the person who was attached to the object, in other words. Shenk’s attempts to revoke memories of his grandfather by beholding this old object that his grandfather used to use fail; they are not unlike Auster’s futile attempts to grasp the essence of his deceased father’s identity from the things and objects that his father left behind.⁵⁴ “If I strain,” writes Shenk, “I can picture my grandfather hunched over [the typewriter], striking its keys ... But I am touching an absence. The typewriter speaks of my grandfather but is, for me, forever silent.”⁵⁵ Auster experienced a similar frustration because the apparent promise of objects to reveal something more about the identity of their users (as if in those objects one could read traces left there by their user) is illusory. Things are “inert” for Auster, they have meaning “only in function of the life that makes use of them. When that life ends, the things change, even though they remain

⁵⁰ Joshua Wolf Shenk, “The Things We Carry: Seeking appraisal at the Antiques Roadshow,” in *Harper’s Magazine* (June 2001): 46-56, available online from Shenk’s personal website <http://www.shenk.net/things.htm>.

⁵¹ Shenk, “Things We Carry”; also quoted in Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 23.

⁵² Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 23.

⁵³ Wershler-Henry referring to Jean Baudrillard’s early work *The System of Objects: For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, in *Iron Whim*, 22-23.

⁵⁴ See Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 10-13.

⁵⁵ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 23.

the same. They are there and yet not there: tangible ghosts, condemned to survive in a world they no longer belong to.”⁵⁶

If an object fails to bring back memories, it nevertheless works to stimulate imagination.⁵⁷ The true value of the object is not tied to the typewriter itself, but ““what it can conjure,’ its invisible connections, what it ushers forth...”⁵⁸ For Wershler-Henry, these invisible connections are the sublime object-associated ties that an antique, like a vintage manual typewriter, can evoke in the imagination of its user – ties with other users, things or notions that inhabit the same milieu. The object, in this case the typewriter, becomes a sort of gateway connecting two realms – the real with the imaginary, the present with the past, the external with the internal; the typewriter makes it possible to explore both sides of the Möbius strip. This is also why it is one of the central elements in Auster’s *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, a film which explores the writing process and questions the relationship between reality and imagination, constantly crossing the threshold between the two.

Antiquated objects, then, have a more direct relationship with imagination than with reality or history. What matters is “not the object itself in its original context, but the comforting memory of memory, the nostalgia of nostalgia, of a time.”⁵⁹ Typewriters, for example, let their present-day users connect with an imaginary past “when things – in this case – writing – ‘meant something’ and it was possible to ask the big questions without wondering about the presumptions involved.”⁶⁰ From a cold, 40-pound heavy iron-cast industrialized machine, the typewriter has become a poetic symbol of “true” modernist writing. It allows the one who sits at it and types to access an imagined cultural experience of the past, the space that Wershler-Henry describes as

a non-existent sepia-toned era when people typed passionately late into the night under the flickering light of a single naked bulb, sleeves rolled up, suspenders hanging down, lighting each

⁵⁶ Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 10.

⁵⁷ Another illustrative example can be found in Auster’s *The Book of Illusions*, where the protagonist Zimmer is trying to evoke the image of his dead wife through sensations and memories associated with certain objects. He attempts to re-experience her presence by trying on her clothes and putting on her perfume. See Paul Auster, *The Book of Illusions* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 8.

⁵⁸ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 24.

⁵⁹ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 24.

⁶⁰ Wershler-Henry referring to Fredrick Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, in Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 25.

new cigarette off the smouldering butt of the last, occasionally taking a pull from the bottle of bourbon in the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet.⁶¹

The typewriter, like the cigarette, is a “thing that things,” or “gathers,” only the typewriter’s gathering works on the level of the imaginary. The cigarette – a social object – gathers smoking people around it. The work of the typewriter, like that of the writer, presupposes a solitary experience; its “thinging” takes place in the writer’s mind where it acts to create “invisible connections” with other typing writers of the past. Martin A. Rice, another typewriter devotee, explains, “[w]hen I type, I’m linked to all the hard thinking men of the past, the Raymond Chandlers, the Erle Stanley Gardners, the Dashiell Hammetts, the Russell’s, the Moores and the Searles.”⁶² Whereas, for Auster, it is not so much the typewriter itself as the kind of shared solitary experience that (type)writing requires which allows him to connect with other writers with whom he feels a strong affiliation. As he notes in *The Red Notebook*, “The more intensely you are alone, the more deeply you plunge into a state of solitude, the more deeply you feel that connection.”⁶³ The typewriter as a writing tool first provokes, then externalizes, these connections which serve as a source of inspiration for Auster and in his texts generate intertextuality:

No matter how apart you might find yourself in a physical sense – whether you’ve been marooned on a desert island or locked up in a solitary confinement – you discover that you are inhibited by others. Your language, your memories, even your sense of isolation – every thought in your head has been born from your connection with others ... That is why that book is filled with so many references and quotations, in order to pay homage to all the others inside me.⁶⁴

Throughout the discourse of the history of typewriting it can be observed that the typewriter, since its genesis, has always been connected with a “sense of uncanniness that ... some force inside or beyond the machine is actually doing the composing”⁶⁵ – whether, as in Auster’s case, it is one of “the others” inhabiting his mind, or someone or something else. As Wershler-Henry and Kittler point out, the idea of the typewriter as potentially channeling someone Other from elsewhere probably stems from the invention and

⁶¹ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 25.

⁶² Rice, “Amor me...,” 2.

⁶³ Paul Auster, *The Red Notebook* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), 144.

⁶⁴ Auster, *Red Notebook*, 144.

⁶⁵ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 55.

construction of semi-automatic machines (writing machines, clocks, and similar objects), which temporally coincided and partially overlapped with the advent of the typewriter, and which, like the latter, seemed to manifest autonomy and independence from human intervention in carrying out certain tasks.⁶⁶ As more and more people rejected the pen as a symbol of authorship and authority, and turned to the typewriter as a means of text-production, the question of “exactly who – or what – was doing the thinking that produced typewriting” became increasingly prominent.⁶⁷ Nobody is ever alone at the typewriter, and to engage in typewriting is never an innocent act. To better understand the typewriting situation, one must consider another assemblage – that of typewriting itself.

The Typewriter-Assemblage

The typewriter is ambiguous. Since its coinage the word “typewriter” itself has denoted two entities – that of the writing machine and of the person operating it. Or, from a slightly different way of looking, there is always someone or something typing (“type-”) and someone or something writing (“-writing”). Is “writing” the same as “typewriting”? If yes, who or what is doing the job of (type)writing? Confusion arises because the typewriter always demands an assemblage; it cannot function on its own, as computers do (and even then, a computer always presupposes a human being who has assembled it to function). Either way, the name suggests that what one gets with “typewriting” is “a package deal,” an assemblage of a human and a machine. This means that typewriting is a kind of collaboration. A single week of typewriting was enough to plant the half-blind Nietzsche “into an assemblage with the machine that, as Henry Ford fantasized, would do away with the shortcomings of the flesh ... [Nietzsche wrote:] ‘the eyes no longer have to do their work’.”⁶⁸ In other words, the two become one, and the border between the non-human and the human is erased. In the same year that Nietzsche recognized the impact of his writing machine on his thoughts, he typed a poem about his “writing ball”:

⁶⁶ One could mention as example “L’Ecrivain,” a writing clock-work boy, which was invented around 1772 by the Swiss watchmaker father and son, Pierre Jaquet-Droz and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz. The mechanical boy could write a number of certain phrases, including a parody of the Cartesian *cogito* “I don’t think, therefore I am not.” Another example is the chess-playing “Turk,” a certain device which took the shape of a four feet long and three feet high wooden trunk and presumably was filled with clockwork machinery which enabled it to play chess with human opposites. Although it later turned out to be a hoax (the wooden construction allegedly hid a small human) this case contributed to the initiated discussion on the extents of autonomy that machines could have. The most radical example, of course, is the machine built by Alan Turing in the beginning of the 20th century and the so-called “Turing Test.” For a more detailed discussion see Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim* and Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.

⁶⁷ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 55.

⁶⁸ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 51.

THE WRITING BALL IS A THING LIKE ME: MADE OF IRON
YET EASILY TWISTED ON JOURNEYS.
PATIENCE AND TACT ARE REQUIRED IN ABUNDANCE
AS WELL AS FINE FINGERS, TO USE US.⁶⁹

Wershler-Henry derives a syllogistic conclusion from the poem: “If the writing ball is a thing – an object – so too is the philosopher: ‘A THING LIKE ME’. If the philosopher is alive, so too is the writing ball.”⁷⁰ Typewriting results in mutual impacts – a part of the typing human becomes de-humanized, machine-like, and a part of the machine gains human characteristics. Auster, for example, has trouble “thinking of [his] typewriter as *it*. Slowly but surely, the *it* has turned into a *him*.”⁷¹ (his emphasis) His Olympia “has moods and desires now, it expresses dark angers and exuberant joys, and trapped within its gray, metallic body, you would almost swear that you could hear the beating of a heart.”⁷² The reverse process also seems to take place as soon as Auster or his characters start typing. Recall one of the final shots in *Smoke* which shows Paul Benjamin/Paul Auster typing, or the almost-identical shots of typewriting from *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*: a close-up of two hands whose fingers are dancing on the typewriter’s keyboard. Those are hands that have been severed from the writer’s body; the image of the dehumanized, typing hands which have merged with an old Smith-Corona typewriter reminds us of prosthetic hands at work. The organic and the inorganic fuse into “US”, with the machine becoming human-like, and the human more like a machine; an assemblage of iron and meat, becoming, in Wershler-Henry’s words, “one continuous instrument at the disposal of an entirely other set of ‘FINE FINGERS’.”⁷³

⁶⁹ On February 16, 1882 Nietzsche typed on his “Schreibkugel”:
SCHREIBKUGEL IST EIN DING GLEICH MIR VON EISEN
UND DOCH LEICHT ZU VERDREH'N ZUMAL AUF REISEN.
GEDULD UND TAKT MUSS REICHLICH MAN BESITZEN
UND FEINE FINGERCHEN, UNS ZU BENÜTZEN.

For a scanned copy of the poem in its original typescript, and the poem’s English translation, see Sverre Avnskog, “Friedrich Nietzsche and His Typewriter – A Malling-Hansen Writing Ball,” *The International Rasmus Malling-Hansen Society*, February 2, 2008, <http://www.malling-hansen.org/friedrich-nietzsche-and-his-typewriter-a-malling-hansen-writing-ball.html>.

⁷⁰ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 51.

⁷¹ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 33.

⁷² Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 32.

⁷³ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 51.



Figure 4 A set of fine fingers at work. Stills from *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*.

The comparison of a typewriter to a prosthetic limb is an apt one. After all, the first writing machines were invented to give blind people access to the written truth and let them proclaim the truth through their own (type)writing; this fact takes us back to the typewriter's alleged ability to produce and channel the truth. The inventor of Nietzsche's writing ball, Hans Rasmus Johann Malling Hansen (aka Malling Hansen) saw his machine "purely as a prosthetic."⁷⁴ A prosthesis, according to David Wills, "disturbingly combines natural and artificial, human and mechanical, the spontaneous and the contrived, overriding the distinction between these categories."⁷⁵ It simultaneously "extends a human organ or capability and replaces it."⁷⁶ In this sense, typewriting is prosthetic because, the production of the text involves an assemblage where, as Brian McHale observes, "a human [is] attached to a writing machine."⁷⁷ But typewriting is also prosthetic because the typewriter's imposed rules, limitations, and possibilities, its "algorithms," likewise simultaneously extend and replace handwriting. Therefore, during the typewriting process, Auster and his fictional stand-ins become part humans, part machines, cyborgs, Auster-machines. This process is never innocent. Typewriting, like any other machine-writing, always creates ambiguity, and, in McHale's words, "a case in which machine mediation becomes indistinguishable from machine generation."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 48.

⁷⁵ Here Wills is referred to by a quote from McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," 24.

⁷⁶ McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," 24.

⁷⁷ McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," 24.

⁷⁸ McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," 13.

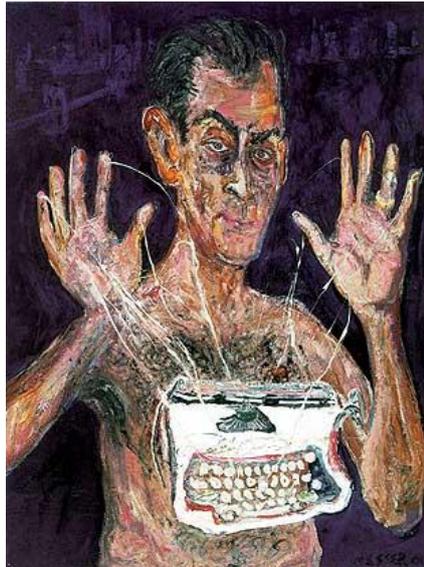


Figure 5 “Which is the puppet and which is the puppeteer?” asks Darren Wershler-Henry. Paul Auster and his typewriter in “As One,” oil painting by Sam Messer, 2002, from *The Story of My Typewriter*.

Wershler-Henry believes that it was exactly typewriting that “blurred and complicated the lines that Enlightenment thinking had drawn between body and machine, inanimate and animate.” Typewriting, therefore, makes the question of authorship even more difficult to determine because it removes even the illusory certainty that a handwritten manuscript offers. With typewriting, as Heidegger lamented, the script is torn from “the essential realm of hand – and this means the hand is removed from the essential realm of the word. The word itself turns into something ‘typed’.”⁷⁹ Typewriting de-humanizes. For Heidegger, for whom the hand, together with the word, formed “the essential distinction of man” – “Man himself acts [*handelt*] through the hand [*Hand*]”⁸⁰ – the two were inseparable. The typewriter violates this principle. Furthermore, it is not only the man that is changed through the act of typing. As Wershler-Henry puts it, “[t]ypewriting ... rewrites first language itself, then the body of the typist, then of the world around the typist, in its own image.”⁸¹ The question is: when an Auster film shows Martin Frost or Paul Benjamin working at the typewriter, are they “typing” or are they “writing”? And if one accepts that the typewriter-assemblage not only presupposes the human becoming

⁷⁹ Heidegger, “On Hand and Typewriter,” in Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 198.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, “On Hand and Typewriter,” in Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 198.

⁸¹ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 136.

machine-like, but also the machine becoming more human-like – who or what is the author then, and where does the dictating voice come from?

Wershler-Henry states that the bipartite division of the typewriter-assemblage into a machine and its operator is in itself a categorical mistake.⁸² For him typewriting includes not only the process of copying or recording a dictated text, which is done in collaboration between a human and machine, but also the dictator itself. The first element in the typewriter-assemblage therefore is the typewriter, the actual machine that makes writing possible. The second one is the amanuensis or the other “typewriter,” the one who copies, who types, through which the words that come from the dictator are channeled into the typewriting machine. The hands that we see typing then (in *Smoke* they are Auster’s actual hands) are no longer the same hands as those of Paul Auster the dictator, the author. The third element is the dictator, or someone who dictates, the dictating voice and the “source of the words being dictated.”⁸³ This triangle was most evident in the middle of the 19th century when typewriting became prominent in office work and the dictating person entrusted recording of the dictated text to a secretary (aka typewriter). Although this division appears simple in itself, the problem is that the typewriter itself creates a schizophrenic situation where the identity of the dictator (the dictated “I”) fluctuates back and forth and interacts with the identity of the amanuensis (who is forced to write this “I”). In Wershler-Henry’s words, “dictation weaves them [both] together in a manner that makes their writing styles indistinguishable.”⁸⁴

Even if one imagines the process of writing as taking place in a solitary environment (as in Auster’s case), present always is “... someone or something, even if it’s just another part of ourselves,” who “dictates to us, tells us what to write until we internalize it and forget about it. ... No one is ever alone at a typewriter.”⁸⁵ It means that from a categorization that included three elements one can distinguish at least four forces that all participate in the typewriting situation: the machine, its operator or the amanuensis, the dictator, and this dictating, inspiring voice, which could claim to have the authorship and which could originate in any of the three abovementioned sources. This appears to be the

⁸² Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 32.

⁸³ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 75.

⁸⁴ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 75.

⁸⁵ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 74.

main problem of the typewriter – it renders authorship ambiguous. And that, in turn, could be yet another reason why Auster stays loyal to the typewriter. The typewriter defies origins. It makes possible rhizomatic text-generation, where authorship is always obscure and mingled.

Auster's *The Story of My Typewriter* (2002), as the name suggests, is dedicated to his old Olympia typewriter. Visually reminiscent of a children's book, it is part textual book, part art book. Set in large type and accompanied by Sam Messer's colorful oil paintings of Auster's manual Olympia, it tells a story of how Auster acquired, and grew affectionate towards, his typewriter. Together, the text and the images are also telling of the kind of ambiguous relationship that has come to exist among the three of them – “[b]etween a writer and an artist. Between a writer and his typewriter. Between an artist and his obsession with the writer's typewriter.”⁸⁶ The book is therefore a collaboration between Auster and his acquaintance Sam Messer. Yet Auster claims that his typewriter “talks” to him, has a mind of its own, and that, in fact, the book was written not by him but by the machine – “Letter by letter I have watched it write these words,” he writes.⁸⁷ Auster attributes a soul to his Olympia – a soul, which he believes the typewriter laid bare when posing to Messer for paintings and which has now “possessed” the machine.⁸⁸ Hence, the possibility for the ambiguous fourfold authorship – Auster, Messer, the Olympia and “whatever spirits might be possessing” it.⁸⁹ From this observation Wershler-Henry too concludes that typewriting is always “an assemblage that produces text,” and one whose authorship is furthermore collective and fused.⁹⁰

The idea that a writer's tool (be it pen or typewriter) is possessed and capable of transmitting to the writer an inspiring or dictating voice from somewhere else, an intervening outside source, is not new to the discourse of typing writers. Wershler-Henry

⁸⁶ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, front flap text.

⁸⁷ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 56. Auster's claims are not unlike those of William S. Burroughs who in the Introduction to his novel *Naked Lunch* writes that he has “no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*.” Whereas, David Cronenberg who later made a filmic adaptation of Burroughs' novel, attributes the authorship of the film's script to his laptop (“it was almost as if his laptop was writing the script itself,” notes Wershler). See Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 119.

⁸⁸ Auster and Messer, *Story of Typewriter*, 29.

⁸⁹ The curious relationship between the writer, the painter and the typewriter has also been discussed briefly by Wershler-Henry in *Iron Whim*, 32.

⁹⁰ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 32.

and Kittler both point to two exemplary documented cases of what can be called “ghostwriting.” Henry James, for example, allegedly felt he had channeled the ghost of Napoleon Bonaparte during a typewriting session with his typist Theodora Bosanquet, when he dictated to her in a clear and coherent manner two letters that Bonaparte wrote to one of his married sisters.⁹¹ After James’ death, it was Bosanquet who, whilst (type)writing (presumably on James’ old Remington Priestess) her biography of James, *Henry James at Work*, claimed to have encountered his ghost who had dictated to her the contents of the book. The result of this collaboration between the living, the dead, and the typewriter is a situation where “it becomes impossible to determine the typewritten text’s origins.”⁹²

Rhizomatic Typewriting

Yet the typewriter situation does more than confuse the authorship of a single typewritten text; it seems to affect the whole network of texts it has (co-)produced. In the case of Paul Auster, this entanglement surrounding authorship and origins is passed on from one text to another, problematizing the structure of his whole body of work. From the typewriter-actant perspective, it is the typewriter’s tendency to first depersonalize and then reproduce copies of texts that seems to fuel the rhizome-generating machinery. After the typed text with its austere laconism and uniformity of typescript has eliminated any remains of individual authorship, the detached text, stripped to its bare essentials, gets reproduced, duplicated or recycled to reappear in a variety of forms.⁹³ Auster’s use of a limited set of elements to create always the same story with slight variations resembles the prosthetic writing that McHale describes.⁹⁴ Indeed McHale’s observation that the aesthetics of prosthesis does not differentiate between genres seems to explain the multidisciplinary and multimediality of Auster’s texts.⁹⁵ Prosthetic writing “systematically blurs that genre distinction” so that “the output of algorithms is just as

⁹¹ See both Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 101-104; and Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 216.

⁹² Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 102.

⁹³ The most extreme example of typewriter-generated multiplication of texts is William S. Burroughs’s Dadaist-inspired “cut-up” method, where a new text is created like a mosaic from putting together cut out bits from another typewritten text. Burroughs, for example, as Wershler-Henry points out, saw the typewriter as collaboration “on an unprecedented scale,” between numerous live and dead writers. Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 114.

⁹⁴ McHale, “Poetry as Prosthesis.”

⁹⁵ McHale, “Poetry as Prosthesis,” 26.

likely to be one as the other.”⁹⁶ All the distinctions of genre and discipline erode, and “what remains is an extra- or supra- or infra-generic practice of *writing*, which may include discourses of nonverbal media. Prosthesis seems to promise (or threaten) a realignment of genre categories,” writes McHale (his emphasis).⁹⁷ When considering the overall development of Auster’s texts, one senses, as Markus Rheindorf points out, that there is a “change of shape, an outward metamorphosis that [nevertheless] leaves the core intact.”⁹⁸

This is why Auster’s texts, through duplication, form a rhizome that spans across genres, disciplines, and media, erasing all borderlines between them, and resulting in textual hybrids such as “graphic novels” (the graphic adaptation of *City of Glass*) and “written films”⁹⁹ (such as the ones included in *The Book of Illusions*). Besides, this transfer of a story from one genre or discipline to another is a dynamic process that is often reversible. In Auster’s film *Smoke*, for example, the duplication of “Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story” first from oral narration to a typed-up story, and then from typescript to a film, is, to borrow the words of Jesús Ángel González, “a metafictional paradox: images become words (because the pictures taken by Auggie create stories and emotions in Paul’s mind and are then transformed into words) and words become images (because Paul Benjamin’s story for the newspaper is shown in images).”¹⁰⁰ At the same time the black-and-white sequence at the end of *Smoke*, which shows words becoming images (or the novelist becoming filmmaker), appears like “the other side of the coin” of *The Book of Illusions*, where a reverse process is happening. David Zimmer, the novel’s main character, presents to the reader a silent movie ... through the written word, thus turning from a filmmaker into novelist.¹⁰¹

The “written films” of *The Book of Illusions* that as *mises en abyme* take up to one-third of the book’s length, indeed appear unlocatable within any of the distinguished genres and text types. One of them, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, for example, is presented in

⁹⁶ McHale, “Poetry as Prosthesis,” 26.

⁹⁷ McHale, “Poetry as Prosthesis,” 27.

⁹⁸ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 1.

⁹⁹ The term was first suggested by Paul Auster’s friend and American filmmaker, Hal Hartley, and has since been taken over by critics to refer to the *mise en abyme* films featured in *The Book of Illusions*.

¹⁰⁰ González, “Words Versus Images,” 32.

¹⁰¹ González, “Words Versus Images,” 43. See also González’s interview with Auster, “Smoke and Illusions,” 63.

the book in neither as a film script for silent movies nor a filmic review or description of scenes; it is an ambiguous amalgamation of both. As González rightly points out, “Auster does not just describe images, he also summarizes, describes, and provides shot description using the specialized language of the most common way of translation between film discourse and literary discourse: the language of scripts”;¹⁰² yet he also offers “the interpretation of the images,” “the critical commentary and, very significantly, the audience reaction.”¹⁰³ This brings one back to the idea that the rhizome is not characterized by filiation but alliance, not by pretension “either... or,” but by conjuncture “and ... and ... and ...”

A hybrid text itself, the “written film” of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* that is included in *The Book of Illusions* predictably exists in multiple other copies within Auster’s oeuvre; this text, therefore, has multiple entryways for the reader or the spectator. First of all, in *The Book of Illusions* (2002), the character of Hector Mann, a film director from the bygone era of silent movies, allegedly makes a film of the same title, and the narrator-protagonist Zimmer is one of the few to be able to view the film before its destruction. Through Zimmer’s narration, Mann’s film becomes a “written film,” which is neither a review, nor a detailed description; neither a film script, nor the director’s commentary, but simultaneously all of these combined. The clarity of the film’s authorship is further problematized by the fact that one of the book’s interpretations suggest (and I will look at this shortly), that both Zimmer’s meeting with the film director and the viewings of his films are in fact invented by Zimmer and happen in his imagination.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, back in 1999, Auster wrote *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* as a screenplay for a 12-film project *Erotic Tales*, which he however eventually pulled out of.¹⁰⁵ Thirdly, this unused script later grew into a full screenplay (published in 2007), and a film of the same title, directed by Auster himself (2007). Finally, this title also belongs to a collaboration project between Auster and graphic artist Glenn Thomas – half art book, half large-scale textual book (2008), whose subtitle informs us: “From *The Book of Illusions*.” One can,

¹⁰² González, “Words Versus Images,” 42.

¹⁰³ González, “Words Versus Images,” 42-43.

¹⁰⁴ Indicative of this are also Zimmer’s notes about the film that he passes on to the reader. Although the film-watching and note-taking processes take place simultaneously, what Zimmer has written down hardly resemble critic’s notes in shorthand, as when watching a film for the first time, but they appear more like a director’s commentary, both explaining and interpreting the many details in the film, and the possible audience reaction.

¹⁰⁵ See González, “Smoke and Illusions,” 64.

therefore, count at least six different “copies” of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, each of which have a slightly different appearance.

However, a closer look at the story itself reveals that it is yet another slightly altered copy of Auster’s meta-story about the crisis-stricken writer, working within the same assemblage and with the same principles. The constant self- and cross-referentiality which exists between the abovementioned story of Martin Frost and all of Auster’s other texts arranges them in a complicated rhizomatic network where each text not only becomes a copy of another, but also “a multiplicity” and “a part of” one another. For example – the protagonist Zimmer in *The Book of Illusion* learns that Hector Mann has written a book called *Travels in the Scriptorium*, but in the embedded narrative of the same book, the “written film” of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, the character of Claire tells Martin that *Travels in the Scriptorium* is the best novel he has ever written. In the “real” novel *Travels in the Scriptorium*, written by Auster and published in 2006, the reader is told that Zimmer from *The Book of Illusions* has married the protagonist of *In the Country of Last Things*, Anna Blume. It appears, therefore, that within Auster’s rhizome, the hypodiegetic text of each novel or film serves to explain or augment the master-narrative, and the resulting Chinese-box effect makes them all indistinguishable from each other. Such a method for constructing stories seems to correspond with Auster’s own observation about the nature of reality which he gives in his pseudo-autobiographical work *The Invention of Solitude*: “Everything seemed to be repeating itself. Reality was a Chinese box, an infinite series of containers within containers.”¹⁰⁶

In *The Book of Illusions*, which has at its basis the same traditional Auster story of recovery from existential and creative loss, a significant role is played by a woman named Alma, who unexpectedly appears in Zimmer’s life and takes him with her to a ranch at the other end of the world, in order to meet the legendary filmmaker Hector Mann. Alma, who becomes Zimmer’s lover, brings him back to life and writing, but dies at the end. One of Mann’s silent movies, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, focuses on the protagonist Martin’s struggles to regain his ability to write, and in such a way exposes the process of literary creation. A strange woman also appears in Martin’s life, and she too plays a crucial role in his recovery. As one learns at the end – this woman is in fact Martin’s

¹⁰⁶ Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 117.

invention, his self-made muse, who, unsurprisingly, also dies once Martin finishes writing his story. Most of the story, then, appears to have taken place in Martin's mind. This *mise en abyme* in *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, when taken in the context of the extradiegetic story of the book (i.e., Zimmer's narration), adds an extra layer of signification to it and becomes "much richer than in its previous isolated form, because it interacts with the main story of the novel and acts as *mise-en-abyme* of the diegetic story by means of a semantic network of analogies and contrasts."¹⁰⁷ When considered in the context of the main narrative of *The Book of Illusions* (and all of related Auster's texts, in fact), it opens up a possibility for a new reading which suggests that what the reader perceives as happening to the protagonist Zimmer may well have taken place in the writer's mind. Equally suggestive of the imaginary nature of his story are other clues, like the name of the ranch that he supposedly visited, Tierra del Sueño, which is Spanish for "land of dreams." As González points out,

... if Claire in the film [*The Inner Life of Martin Frost*] is 'a spirit,' ... Alma's name also suggests her spiritual, dream-like nature ('Alma had walked in and out of my life so quickly, I sometimes felt that I had only imagined her' 315). ... As a matter of fact, all the clues about the nature of perception that suggest the unreal quality of the Martin Frost story may be applied to *The Book of Illusions*, explaining one possible meaning of its title. The entire Alma-David story, including their trip to Tierra del Sueño ..., might have been an illusion, a fantasy created by David Zimmer himself.¹⁰⁸

Because of the reader's awareness of the self-referential nature of most of Auster's texts, which likewise aim to "open up the process" and "expose the plumbing"¹⁰⁹ of writing, *The Book of Illusions* also appears as a self-conscious writing exercise. After all, as González points out, its title is no less suggestive than that of Tierra del Sueño, and the protagonist's name, Zimmer, itself bears strong connotations of the kind of imaginary spaces in which Auster's characters locate themselves to come up with their stories.

Zimmer means "room" in German and a room in Auster's oeuvre often functions as a metaphor for the writer's mind, denoting a kind of domain, where the internal and

¹⁰⁷ González, "Words Versus Images," 41.

¹⁰⁸ González, "Words Versus Images," 41.

¹⁰⁹ Auster in McCaffery and Gregory, "Interview with Auster," *Contemporary Literature*, 14.

external worlds meet.¹¹⁰ Or, in Markus Rheindorf's words, the room appears in Auster's works as "the image and *locus* of his characters' descents into solipsism,"¹¹¹ "a sanctuary of inwardness,"¹¹² a place where "the spirit can project itself against the walls."¹¹³ It is not only the bare physical room in which the writer-assemblage does its work, but it is also "the room of the book," as in Auster's "The Book of Memory" (the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*). It is a space, where, in Stephen Fredman's words, "life and writing meet in an unstable, creative, and sometimes dangerous encounter."¹¹⁴

When recounting his time spent in Paris where he met a composer by the name of S., the protagonist of "The Book of Memory," A., gives a description of the composer's room that, although physically a rather claustrophobic space, is infinitely generative for the mind, and can possibly contain the whole universe:

For there was *an entire universe in that room*, a miniature cosmology that contained all that is most vast, most distant, most unknowable ... *the representation of one man's inner world*, even to the slightest detail. ... The room he lived in was *a dream space*, and its walls were like the skin of some second body around him, as if his own body had been transformed into a mind, a breathing instrument of a pure thought.¹¹⁵ (my emphasis)

When Zimmer from *The Book of Illusions* is working on his book about Hector Mann, he "hole[s] up in that small apartment" he has rented in Brooklyn, and, entrapped in that solitary space without a telephone, TV, or any social life, works "seven days a week, sitting at the desk from ten to twelve hours a day." Except for small excursions to Montague Street "to stock up on food and paper, ink and typewriter ribbons," he rarely leaves his studio.¹¹⁶ Yet, as Zimmer confesses, he "wasn't in Brooklyn either."¹¹⁷ Instead,

¹¹⁰ See Brown, *Paul Auster*; Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected"; Stephen Fredman, "How to Get Out of the Room that is the Book? Paul Auster and the Consequences of Confinement." *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 6.3 (May 1996), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v006/6.3fredman.html; Alexis Plékan, "Confinement in Paul Auster's Moon Palace and The New York Trilogy" (MA diss., University of Caen Lower Normandy, 2001); Markus Rheindorf, "Processes of Embodiment and Spatialization in the Writings of Paul Auster," *Reconstruction* 2.3 (2002), <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/023/rheindorf.htm>; Steven E. Alford, "Spaced-Out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster's 'The New York Trilogy,'" *Contemporary Literature* 36.4 (1995): 613-632; among others.

¹¹¹ Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 26.

¹¹² Auster, *Moon Palace*, 56.

¹¹³ Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 26.

¹¹⁴ Fredman, "How to Get Out..."

¹¹⁵ Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 89.

¹¹⁶ Auster, *Book of Illusions*, 55.

he types, “I was in the book, and the book was in my head, and as long as I stayed inside my head, I could go on writing the book.”¹¹⁸ As Zimmer says later on about another house that he has bought in the outskirts of the city (and its description conspicuously resembles the retreat that Martin Frost visits), “... to inhabit those blank, depersonalized interiors was to understand that the world was an illusion that had to be reinvented every day.”¹¹⁹ Everything that is inessential therefore must be removed from the given space/room until it resembles a white sheet of paper, or the writer’s mind before writing. That is why Auster’s room, in which the typewriter functions, always must be set up in laconic and bare style. The room, which like the typewriter, is a “thing in-between” (between the graspable, physical reality and the elusive nature of imagination), allows Auster to retain the kind of ever-present epistemological ambiguity that characterizes all his works.¹²⁰ Rheindorf describes this duality in the following way:

Intricately bound up with the principle of a connected whole, the process of a partial or complete transformation between interior and exterior (and vice versa) can be taken as [another] organizing principle of Auster’s work. Like the former, it often finds expression in characters’ thoughts, as it does in Marco Fogg’s realization that ‘the inner and the outer could not be separated except by doing great damage to the truth’.

In the end, one could argue, in Auster’s rhizomatic oeuvre, where authorship is always dispersed and decentered, there is no other identifiable site of textual origin identifiable other than the bare room, which may or may not reflect the physical reality, and the writer-assemblage within it.

The Machinic Muse

The two films solely written and directed by Paul Auster, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*¹²¹ and *Lulu on the Bridge* (which can be seen as slightly different versions of the

¹¹⁷ Auster, *Book of Illusions*, 55.

¹¹⁸ Auster, *Book of Illusions*, 55.

¹¹⁹ Auster, *Book of Illusions*, 57. Likewise, the film *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* starts with Martin’s arrival at his friend’s house and the narrator’s voice-over informing that “[t]he house was empty...” See Paul Auster, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (New York: Picador, 2007), 27.

¹²⁰ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 3.

¹²¹ For the sake of simplicity and consistency, discussed will be the filmic version of the Martin Frost story, at the same time keeping in mind that this story exists in different versions, including as an embedded subordinate narrative within *The Book of Illusions*.

same story)¹²² are both, more than any other Auster text, devoted to the exploration of the fragile boundaries between reality and imagination, and the “plumbing” of the creative process of writing and filmmaking, respectively.¹²³ At the same time, both films also introduce a new element in the Auster assemblage – the female figure that functions as a muse, which immediately prompts questions about the curious and tense relationship that can be observed between her function and the text-generating typewriter. Both are required for the protagonist’s recovery from (creative) crisis, yet the combination of the two, or their simultaneous co-existence, turns out to be impossible. As one can observe in several Auster texts, the typewriter and the female are mutually exclusive within Auster’s writer-assemblage.

Female characters are usually either absent or marginalized in Auster’s works, which always focus on a male protagonist,¹²⁴ with the (problematic) exception of *In the Country of Last Things*, where the narrator-protagonist has a female voice. Yet for critics, such as Markus Rheindorf, even this voice appears as unconvincing from the gender perspective.¹²⁵ Accordingly, whenever a female character appears in an Auster text, she is “inevitably defined as the ‘female other’, and only in relation to [Auster’s] (and his male narrators’) concept of maleness.”¹²⁶ Certain traits are attributed to the female character that repeat throughout Auster’s body of work: the woman is something that the male

¹²² The similarities between both stories are obvious. This film has been constructed using the same principle as the previous one, while differences lie in nuances. The writer-character has been substituted by a jazz musician who after being shot in an incident in a bar (traditionally, also this film starts with a loss), loses his lung and therefore his ability to play saxophone, and, consequently, his purpose of life. He is also lonesome and divorced. Then, unexpectedly, Izzy meets a beautiful woman, Celia, who brings him back to life, but whom he nevertheless loses at the end of the film. The spectator learns that the whole story has happened in the unconscious Izzy’s mind after the shooting in the bar, while an emergency car is rushing him to hospital. He dies on the way, but already as a different person, because, thanks to Celia, he has experienced a sort of redemption in his life.

¹²³ This has also been noted by González who likewise states that, in *Lulu on the Bridge*, this interest by Auster in “opening up the process” and exposing “the plumbing of cinema,” and the implications and complications of filmmaking, can be seen in the scenes from the *mise en abyme* Lulu film. See also González, “Words Versus Images,” 39.

¹²⁴ The role of the woman in Auster’s work has gained very little critical attention so far. The very few critical works devoted to exploration of the female gender roles in Auster’s texts include González’s essay “Words Versus Images”; Carlos Azevedo’s article “A Portrait of the Indian Woman as Ghost Dancer: Mother Sioux in Paul Auster’s ‘Mr. Vertigo,’” *Estudos/Studien/Studies* 1 (2001), 117-126, which, however, looks at the significance of one female character in one particular novel; Stefania Cioca’s recent essay “A Doomed Romance? The *donna angelicata* in Paul Auster’s Fiction” in *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster*, edited by Stefania Cioca and Jesús Ángel González (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011); and small sub-sections in Rheindorf’s MA thesis “Where Everything is Connected,” and Traisnel’s BA thesis “Storytelling in Auster’s Movies.”

¹²⁵ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 115.

¹²⁶ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 111.

protagonist has lost, or she is the missing element. Once she appears, she usually takes the role of a rescuer, “truly deified as a saving presence,”¹²⁷ or, as Marco Fogg says about Kitty in *Moon Palace* – “an angel from another world.”¹²⁸ It seems that the prototype for this character is Auster’s own wife, the Norwegian-born writer Siri Hustvedt, whose fictional doublings play episodic roles in the novels *City of Glass* (where the fictional Siri appears together with Paul Auster and his son Daniel), and *Leviathan* (as a character named Iris who marries the protagonist Peter Aaron; the anagram of her name and the initials PA are suggestive here). As Auster confesses in *The Red Notebook*, his novel *City of Glass* with its desperate and self-destructive character Quinn is in fact his attempt to imagine what would have become of his life if he had not met his wife.¹²⁹ The overpowering female character, which always seems to come at the moment when the protagonist experiences a crisis or creative blockage, seduces the passive male figure and brings him back to both writing and life, only to die herself at the end. The female figure appears as highly mystified; more often than not, she turns out to be “invented,” imagined, yet, paradoxically, it is exactly this imaginary character that the protagonist needs in order to reclaim his own imaginary powers, and thus the ability to write.

The woman (as it later turns out – a muse), usually turns up in the protagonist’s life unexpectedly and under strange circumstances: Alma surprises Zimmer by waiting for him at the front of his house in the middle of the night; Martin Frost wakes up one morning to find a strange woman lying next to him in his bed. Throughout these texts, the protagonists are constantly prompted to question not only whether these female characters are “real,” but whether they can trust *anything* they experience and perceive as real. In *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, for example, Claire is reading aloud to Martin excerpts from works by David Hume and George Berkeley, two philosophers of human perception, who question whether what we see and experience is “really there,” or just exists in our minds. “Everything is in our head,” Claire tells Martin, referring to Berkeley.¹³⁰ Whereas, in *Lulu on the Bridge*, it is Izzy who asks Celia: “Are you a real person ... or a spirit?”¹³¹ Later, towards the end of the film, when Izzy’s friend, a film

¹²⁷ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 111.

¹²⁸ Auster, *Moon Palace*, 95.

¹²⁹ Auster, *Red Notebook*, 142.

¹³⁰ Auster, *Inner Life of Martin Frost*, 34.

¹³¹ Paul Auster, “Lulu on the Bridge,” in *Lulu on the Bridge: A Film by Paul Auster* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 45.

producer named Philip, informs him about the conditions of Celia's sudden disappearance from the film set in Dublin, he says: "The whole thing's like a dream, like she was never really there."¹³² In another episode the agent/angel interrogating Izzy, Dr Van Horn (played by Willem Defoe), speculates about Celia's name, which originates from Latin and means both "heaven" and "blind." "Celia," suggests Dr Van Horn, by spelling out her name on a piece of paper, could perhaps reveal something about the untrustworthy nature of one's perception and epistemological beliefs: "Celia – Celia – Ce-li-a – S'il y a." The last phrase means in French "If there is...", or "if she exists," suggesting a possibility of something that might or might not exist (Auster has obviously borrowed this pun from Samuel Beckett's solipsistic novel *Murphy*).¹³³ Ultimately, as Auster himself has admitted, "to a large degree, the film [*Lulu on the Bridge*] is about how men invent women."¹³⁴ This invention and re-invention of the female character is done through both the story of Celia and her relationship with Izzy on one level, and through the *mise en abyme* of Celia playing Lulu in a film production on another.¹³⁵ In either case, the ongoing epistemological uncertainty surrounding the female character, and events related to her, are maintained throughout the film, yet there is no doubt that, regardless of her provenance, she is to a great extent responsible for the writer's creative and existential recovery. Apart from her qualities to inspire, she often *is*, in fact – like the typewriter – the voice that is dictating to the writer his text.

When Auster was asked in an interview with Larry McCaffrey and Sinda Gregory about the origins of his novel *In the Country of Last Things*, noted above as his only text featuring a female protagonist and narrator, he confessed that he felt that the whole text was being "dictated" to him by a strange female voice: "I *heard* her voice speaking to me, and that voice was utterly distinct from my own."¹³⁶ (my emphasis) This is the voice of the protagonist Anna Blume, who towards the end of the book presents herself to the

¹³² Auster, "Lulu on Bridge," 132.

¹³³ In Beckett's novel, it is Mr Willoughby Kelly, the uncle of Murphy's lover Celia, who comes up with this pun: "He found it hard to think, impossible to expand the sad pun (for he had excellent French): *Celia, s'il y a, Celia, s'il ya*, throbbing steadily behind his eyes. ... What had he done to her, that she did not come to see him any more?" See Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 115.

¹³⁴ Auster in a conversation with Rebecca Prime, "The Making of 'Lulu on the Bridge': An Interview with Paul Auster," in Auster, *Lulu on the Bridge*, 149.

¹³⁵ Most of the film-within-the-film scenes, however, were later cut out from the original film, and are only retained in the U.S. release version (2006) as "Deleted Scenes." The aspect of rewriting classical myths, from Eve to Lulu/Pandora, including the material from these deleted scenes, is explored by González in his essay "Words Versus Images" and by Springer in his published thesis *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster*.

¹³⁶ Auster in conversation with McCaffery and Gregory, "Interview with Auster," *Mississippi Review*, 59.

addressee as “your old friend from another world.”¹³⁷ What is more, this female voice dictating to Auster, like the typewriter, seems to be functioning as the agency of truth. This has been noted by Rheindorf who writes that:

... Auster ascribes – or follows others in ascribing – almost mystical (and certainly mythical) qualities to ‘a woman’. In *The Invention of Solitude*, one of these qualities is the power of storytelling, another that of speaking the truth – ‘[f]or it is his belief that if there was a voice of truth ... it comes from the mouth of a woman’ ... – and, in particular, speaking to a man the truth of himself.¹³⁸

As soon as the writer-character has recovered from his “crisis,” and specifically his creative crisis (he types up a new story), the woman-character must disappear, or die. At the end of *The Book of Illusions*, Alma commits suicide; as she explains to Zimmer in her farewell letter, “It’s good that it’s ending before you find out who I really am” – a phrase that, like her whole letter, presents some interpretative ambiguity.¹³⁹ Celia likewise vanishes at the end of *Lulu on the Bridge* by jumping off a bridge into a canal; her fate is left unknown. Yet to understand the co-relation between the completion of a creative work and the death of the muse, one should turn to *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, which directly investigates such a situation.

Within the typewriter assemblage, set up early on in the film, the typewriter, as always, is the agent producing the story. Yet before the production starts, Martin Frost is hit by inspiration: “... a few hours of silence, a few gulps of fresh air, and all of a sudden an idea for a story was turning around in his head. That’s how it always seems to work with stories. One minute, there’s nothing. And the next minute it’s there. Already sitting inside you.”¹⁴⁰ This is equated to the ensuing sudden appearance of a strange woman, Claire,

¹³⁷ Auster, *Country of Last Things*, 188.

¹³⁸ Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected,” 69.

¹³⁹ Allegedly Alma decides to end her own life after accidentally killing her mother-figure and Hector Mann’s partner Frieda. Alma feels she has let herself down, and if she let Zimmer talk her out of suicide, it would “destroy” them both later on. “In order to stop myself, I would have to give up the truth,” she writes, “and once I did that, every good thing in me would start to die.” Yet Alma’s references to the power held over her by Hector Mann and Frieda (“I’ve never belonged to anyone but them”), among other similar hints (she feels she is crazy, snooping into other people’s lives and writing books about things that don’t concern her – coincidentally, she too, like Zimmer, is writing a biography of Hector Mann), places her close to the character of Claire in *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (the longer filmic version) who is likewise controlled by “them” (whoever they are that have sent her to “work for” Martin). See Auster, *Book of Illusions*, 308.

¹⁴⁰ Auster, *Inner Life of Martin Frost*, 28. The same lines also appear in Auster, *Book of Illusions*, 246.

whom he finds lying beside him next morning. As the two become close, Martin feels inspired to write, and sits down at an old typewriter he has discovered stored away in a closet.

The film, which explores the work of imagination in writing, pays little attention to the contents or form of Martin's story. Instead, it exposes the process of writing, foregrounding the objects from the writer-assemblage which confirm and verify this process of writing. The act of writing becomes objectivized, its materiality emphasized through the camera's focus on close-ups of things used in writing, and sounds made by them. There is the writer sitting at a desk, the insistent clacking of the typewriter keys and the tinkle of the carriage return, the rustle of paper and the squeaking of a pencil as the hand slides it over sheets of paper. As Martin later says to the resurrected Claire about his newly-written and destroyed manuscript (he throws it into the fire, once he understands the connection between writing and Claire): "You see, Claire, it's only words! 37 pages of nothing but words."¹⁴¹

In addition to these objects that are shown to signify the physical effort involved in "real" writing (the camera shows Martin typing, throwing a fresh draft in a wastebasket, editing the typewritten text with a pencil, etc.), commentary is also given about "the interior representation of things," the elusive form and transient nature of the story that takes place in the writer's mind.¹⁴² This meta-fictional commentary provided by the narrator (whose voice in the film belongs to Auster himself) is supplemented by suggestive visual metaphors set against a black background – "a pot of boiling water, a puff of cigarette smoke, a pair of white curtains fluttering in the wind"– which are all formless, insubstantial things with no fixed form. Together with the narrator's off-screen voice, they inform that:

[e]very story has a shape. And the shape of every story is different... from the shape of every other story. Some stories move in straight lines, others make circles or zig-zags, or pirouettes. Rather than go in one general direction, Martin's story seemed to be looping back around itself, or veering off in a series

¹⁴¹ Auster, *Inner Life of Martin Frost*, 59.

¹⁴² Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 32.

of sharp, right-angled turns, or spiraling into some invisible point at its centre.¹⁴³

Yet as Martin's story through typewriting gradually starts to materialize ("every day he added a few more pages to the pile"),¹⁴⁴ the woman who turns out to be Martin's muse falls sick, becoming weaker and weaker until she dies. Significantly, she is never close to the typewriter or Martin when he is (type)writing; it is either her or the typewriter that Martin engages with. The writing-assemblage can only incorporate either the female element or the typing machine; in a writing situation, the two are mutually exclusive.

An inscription on the cover of the film's American DVD release states that the film explores "[w]hat bearing ... this mysterious muse has on Martin's work and what consequences ... Martin's writing have on her ..."¹⁴⁵ Yet a more appropriate question would be: what consequences does Martin's "typewriting" have on his muse, since it is the typewriter, above any other thing, which kills her? In the film, the shots that show the writer's fingers in a synthesis with the typewriter, forcefully striking its keys, interchange with shots that show Claire lying in her bed next door in obvious agony; the correlation between the two is made obvious by the use of parallel montage. Each tap on a key seems to cause her pain, killing her at the moment that Martin types a full-stop to end his story.

At this point, the typewriter has become a dangerous weapon, somewhat reminiscent of David Cronenberg's visions of talking typewriters in his adaptation of William S. Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch*. In Cronenberg's film, the various half-mechanical, half-biological typewriters become "metaphors for the varying and often contradictory mental states of the film's characters, almost all of them writers,"¹⁴⁶ while the organization controlling the machines appears as "a symbol of [the protagonist's] own internal muses."¹⁴⁷ In both Cronenberg's film and Burroughs's novel, the female-typewriter combination is an equally impossible assemblage, and the writer-protagonist Lee has to shoot his wife Joan before he actually can start typing. As Wershler-Henry points out, "in

¹⁴³ Auster, *Inner Life of Martin Frost*, 40-42.

¹⁴⁴ Auster, *Inner Life of Martin Frost*, 42.

¹⁴⁵ See Paul Auster, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, directed by Paul Auster (New York: New Yorker Video, 2007), DVD.

¹⁴⁶ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 118-119.

¹⁴⁷ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 123.

the discursive universe of Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, operating a typewriter and operating a pistol [become] equivalent acts."¹⁴⁸ Although this act of murdering a spouse is interpreted by Wershler-Henry as "the moment where authorship begins"¹⁴⁹ – and in Auster's texts there are no "spouses," only "muses" – this relationship between a female and a typewriter is still telling of the kind of tensions and complicated or contradictory relays that have always existed between the female gender and writing technology. If one replaces the other, then maybe the two are the same? What if the typewriter in essence is no different from the female muse?

A similar thesis has been expressed by McHale, who equates the typewriter with the female figure of the muse, and with one's internal imagination. Whether it is a muse inspiring the writer, or whether it is the typewriter itself, "machine composition reinvigorates the traditional assumption that [writing] involves collaborations between [writers] and something beyond or outside themselves."¹⁵⁰ For McHale, there are several "sources" that can be attributed to the dictating voice:

Before the onset of Romanticism, that sense of poetry as collaboration was captured in the figure of the Muse; the Romantics psychologised the Muse, internalizing it as the imagination, or the power lodged in the poet's unconscious. Postmodernist prosthetic poetry returns to pre-Romantic assumptions, in a sense, externalizing the Muse again, projecting "her" outside the poet, into the machine; [Charles O.] Hartman's book on computer-poetry experiments is titled *Virtual Muse*, with reason.¹⁵¹

It seems, then, that the typewriter and the female are used interchangeably as twin agencies of inspiration and dictation in Auster's texts. The two concepts – the female muse and the writing machine – work together to assemble the idea of the "doppelgänger in the other sex," a semi-automaton which has the ability not only to reproduce an Auster text, but also to re-write it, as the example of Sophie Calle, discussed in the next chapter, illustrates. Next I explore the associations of the double and the work of doubling, to

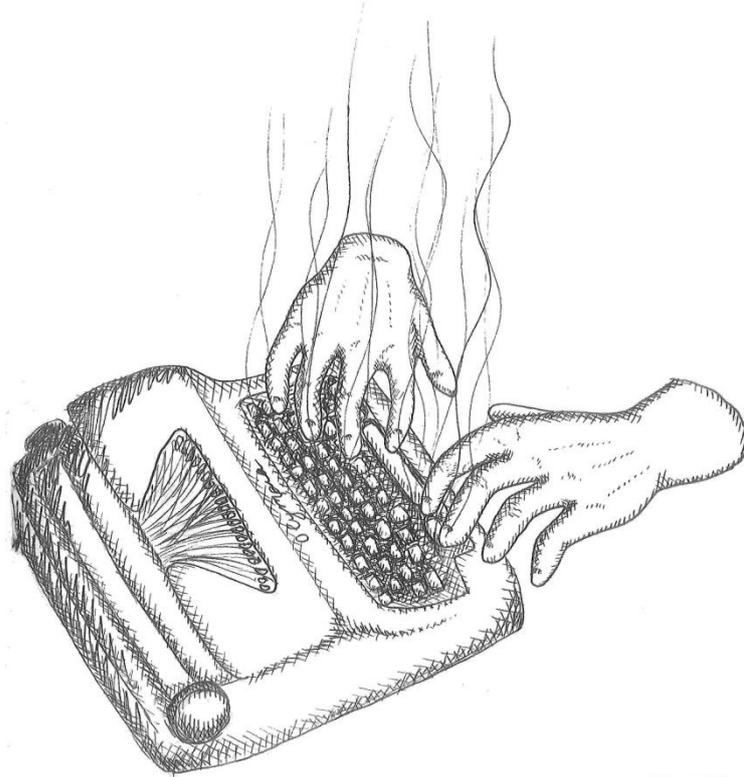
¹⁴⁸ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 131.

¹⁴⁹ Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 121.

¹⁵⁰ McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," 28.

¹⁵¹ McHale, "Poetry as Prosthesis," 28. Charles O. Hartman experimented with computer-assisted text generation whereby he used computer software called Prose to produce texts based on certain algorithms, which he afterwards edited. Hence, in a very direct sense, the project can be seen as Hartman's collaboration with a computer.

show how the concept of the doppelgänger, which is another trope in Auster's intratext, likewise functions as a rhizomatic writing machine.



Chapter 4: Doubles and Disappearances

While trying to solve his existential identity crisis, Auster's lonesome writer-turned-detective figure also explores meta-fictional questions related to the essence of writing, authorship, and meaning. This process is evident in *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, *The Locked Room*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *Leviathan*, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, *The Book of Illusions*, *Smoke*, and other works. In order to do that, this character needs an object of detection – a double, a doppelgänger, which functions as a mirror that ensures that the detection and investigation of the “other” at some point get turned toward the detective himself; the quest is turned inward. Auster's texts abound with doubles – from characters doubling another characters, to the “Paul Auster” character in *City of Glass*, and Auster's “lookalike” Paul Benjamin in the film *Smoke*, as well as the “doppelgänger in the other sex,” artist Sophie Calle in a collaboration project between the two.¹ In fact, through *mises en abyme*, adaptation, collaboration and intratextuality, Auster's texts themselves become each other's doubles. This confirms the thesis that the postmodern double not only works on different levels (character, linguistic, narrative and intra-/intertextual) but is also always a multiple. Instead of one mirror, in Auster's oeuvre the double functions as an assemblage of multifaceted, fractured mirrors that reflect each other ad infinitum. How to read such an assemblage of doubles, and how to read the double itself? Throughout history, this concept has accumulated layers of associations and principles that all are set to work as soon as a double appears in a text.

¹ Ghosts and doppelgängers of his own fictional characters seem to hunt Auster and prove to be a typical feature of his early writings in particular (such as *The New York Trilogy* and *The Invention of Solitude*). The idea as such is hardly innovative as the theme of mirror reflections has already been exploited by the great figures of 19th century American literature (see, for instance, Herman Melville's description of Narcissus in *Moby Dick*, the opening lines of Hawthorne's work *Monsieur du Miroir*, and the stories and poems of Auster's great influence, Edgar Allan Poe). As Motoyuki Shibata, translator of Auster's work from English into Japanese, points out, it is not for nothing that the protagonist of *City of Glass* has chosen as his *nom de plume* the name of William Wilson, “a famous Poe character [who is] pursued by his own double” and is hence led to insanity. See Motoyuki Shibata, “On the Impossibility of Not Being a Ghost,” *Ghosts Catalogue* (2003): 3-5, <http://www.jonkessler.com/articles/shibata.htm>. Also Poe's authorial intervention in his own story, by attributing to the main character the date of his birth, is nothing avant-garde. For Poe, as Shibata notes, “the whole world is an immense mirror” (Shibata, “Not Being Ghost”). However, for many of Auster critics his use of literary doublings in his texts would appear as more than his tribute to the great American Renaissance writers.

Even in its simplest, most traditional sense, the double has what Andrew J. Webber calls a “programmed ambiguity” that evades sustained and unified interpretation.² The ambivalence of the double first of all lies in the fact that the term “doppelgänger” itself can be read in two ways. It literally translates from German as “doublewalker” (from “*doppel-*” – “double” and “*-gänger*” – “goer”), and is usually read as the double of someone. A doppelgänger is perceived as the other – the uncanny, the ghostly, the repressed version of the original. However, the term’s earliest definition is thought to have appeared in a footnote to Jean Paul Richter’s novel *Siebenkäs*. There Richter describes doppelgängers as “Leute, die sich selber sehen” or “people who see themselves.” This explanation overturns the dominant view that the doppelgänger is the “other,” the one who doubles the “original” self. “From the start,” writes Andrew Webber, “it seems that the subject may not so much have as actually be the *Doppelgänger* by seeing itself.”³ Because of this contradiction in terms, from the very beginnings there has been uncertainty as to whether the doppelgänger in question would be the original self or its alter ego. The doppelgänger has a “doppel” meaning.

As Webber points out, in an autoscopic situation, where one sees one’s own body in extrapersonal space, the “subject beholds its other self as another, as visual object, or alternatively is beheld as object by its other self.”⁴ This indicates, as Colin Blakemore and Sheila Jenett note, “the fundamental level at which the phenomenon challenges conventions of identity, by making the self see itself double (or, more precisely, see itself going double, as a duplicate body which may go its own way.”⁵ The fact that the apparition of the double is not static, but characterized by movement (as “goer”), further problematizes the sense of certainty and fixedness one may want to attribute to it, as well as to the related concept of identity. The doppelgänger is always on the move, fluid, in the process of becoming and transforming, but the starting and ending points of its “going” often remain obscure. In such a way, it seems, the doppelgänger defies origins and genealogical readings.

² Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

³ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 3.

⁴ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 3.

⁵ Colin Blakemore and Sheila Jenett, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Body* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 222.

Furthermore, Webber's observation suggests, in the *doppelgänger* situation, there is no "original" self that then has a double, or a copy of itself; just the splitting of the self into two doubles (think of monozygotic twins), both of whom often "see themselves," and both of whom, to a varying degree, are affected by the consequences of this act. The double, therefore, possesses a somewhat lenticular quality, which, depending on the angle of viewing, foregrounds one or other of the doubles, and one or another of its features.

This description of the double as a lenticular image is probably what Gordon E. Slethaug had in mind when he called the double "hologramatic." As he points out in his *The Play of the Double*, an attempt to conduct a historical reading of the double implies "a blending of the evasive and direct, occluding and clarifying, self-differing and analytically categorical,"⁶ and, therefore, is compatible with the uncertain, schizophrenic nature of the double itself. Such an approach is

implicitly self-contradictory, a strategy that [nevertheless] is in keeping with *the flickering, hologramatic presentation of the double in literature*. The double is constituted upon difference, and despite ... anyone's ... attempts to categorize, elucidate, resolve differences, and validate categories through well-poised examples, will always remain *duplicitous, dialogic, and relativized*.⁷ (my emphasis)

Likewise, the first part of this chapter traces the major associations the double has acquired throughout history and which are assembled to work in Auster's texts, while keeping in mind that the double can never present itself as a complete image. Instead it appears as a stream of continuous, flickering and fragmentary reflections and duplications; as the concept itself suggests, it is always "a part of" something (because it is generated through splitting) and yet "a multiplicity" (because it always embodies more than itself – it is also "the other" that it reflects). However, I am likewise interested in the function of the double on the narrative, meta-fictional, and intratextual levels, and the ways that the process of doubling generates rhizomatic structures that mirror each other in Auster's intratext. This is the focus of the second part of the chapter. The double, after all, as both Friedrich A. Kittler and Gilles Deleuze suggest, may be more than a ghostly alter

⁶ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 3.

⁷ Gordon E. Slethaug, "The History of the Double: Traditional and Postmodern Versions," in *The Play of the Double in Postmodern American Fictions* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 8.

ego to be read in psychoanalytic terms. Rather, it is a “messenger” of the medium within which it appears; in Auster’s case it is an adaptation, a collaboration, or a rhizomatically generated doppelgänger of another cross-disciplinary text. In other words, doubles proliferate in Auster’s texts exactly because *the texts themselves are doublings of one another*. The doubling of Auster by Sophie Calle, which I explore in the chapter’s final part, not only further complicates the question of the authorship of Auster’s rhizome, but also foregrounds the gender issue in his work – an area so far entirely neglected by critics, and hence deserving closer attention even more.

It seems that the ghost of the double has always haunted literature and mythology, from the Ancient Greek myth of Narcissus to Aristophanes’ gender creation myth as retold by Plato in his *Symposium*, through to Shakespeare’s twins in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* and the fearsome Gothic doubles of Lord Byron. However, as the most significant point of reference in the history of this discourse, one should mention late 18th century German Romanticism and its birthing of the doppelgänger as a transformed and more frightful version of the double, which then gradually spread throughout Europe. The doppelgänger of Romanticism above all is both fear-evoking and fascinating, reflecting Europe’s increasing interest in the emerging science of psychology at the time. It unquestionably has an eerie quality about it.

The obsession with the idea that someone could all of a sudden acquire a doppelgänger, and the fears related to this predicament, emerged at a time when interest in hypnosis, mesmerism and animal magnetism was increasing. In fact, both the literature and early psychology (and later psychoanalysis) of the time used the early practices of mesmerism and hypnosis, as well as theories of animal magnetism, as their basis for the fantastic and for explaining Freudian concepts (such as the conscious and unconscious mind, and the uncanny).⁸ Therefore, the history of the double and the early history of psychology are “in some senses the same,”⁹ and so entwined that for critics like Friedrich A. Kittler, Webber, or Lexey Anne Bartlett, psychoanalysis, which has become the predominant mode of explaining the uncanny nature of the double, fails as a satisfactory method of analysis precisely because of this reason. As Webber points out, “[i]n the case of the

⁸ Lexey Anne Bartlett, “The Double Redux: Multiplying Identity in Postmodern Fiction” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 2005).

⁹ Bartlett, “Double Redux,” 6.

Doppelgänger, theory and creative writing are engaged in a complex and highly ambivalent exchange of reciprocal readings and representations.”¹⁰ The two discourses are therefore to an extent inseparable.

Indeed, while literary texts such as E.T.A. Hoffmann’s doppelgänger tale *The Sand-Man* offer a psychological explanation for the protagonist’s hallucinations of an evil phantom and its controlling power, psychology and psychoanalysis use these texts as case studies (e.g., Otto Rank’s and Sigmund Freud’s seminal readings of the theme of the double in *The Sand-Man*). The double, in other words, becomes one of the dominant motifs in both Romantic literature and early psychoanalysis. For Kittler this means that “certain basic assumptions [about the double] remain unquestioned in the psychoanalytic verification of the fantastic, precisely because it transfers poetry into science”¹¹ without actually questioning “why the figure of the Double populates the literary record since [the 19th century] and only since then,” and “why the Double turns up at the writing desk, of all places.”¹² An ironic conclusion can be drawn here – the history of the literature of the double and the history of early psychology are themselves but doubles, each one reflecting, mimicking and exploiting the other in an attempt to understand the double.

The greatest impact that psychoanalysis through this relationship has had on the literary double is this: it liberated the concept of the double from the tyranny of blood-freezing horror that the literature of the double initially evoked. The turning point in the literary discourse of the double happened at the beginning of the 20th century, when psychoanalysis, psychology, and clinical psychiatry were already flourishing throughout Europe. With the publication of Joseph Conrad’s short story “The Secret Sharer” in 1910, for the first time ever the double was portrayed as not evoking fear in the original self, and no sense of uneasiness is created in the reader who witnesses the confrontation. In Conrad’s story, the protagonist (an unnamed captain on a ship) and the mysterious stranger (Legatt, his doppelgänger) whom the captain rescues from drowning, act to save each other. While the captain hides Legatt, a fleeing murderer, from the crew and helps

¹⁰ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 1.

¹¹ Friedrich A. Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film: A History of the Double,” in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Literature. Media. Information Systems: Essays (Critical Voices in Art, Theory, and Culture)*, edited and introduced by John Johnston (Amsterdam: OPA (Overseas Publishers Association), 1997), 87.

¹² Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film,” 87-88.

him escape to a secluded island, the latter helps the captain come to terms with his self-doubt and discover a new sense of confidence.

This liberation from the fear of seeing oneself “going double, as a duplicate body which [goes] its own way,” is best epitomized by a curious and marginal collaboration project between Paul Auster and French artist Jacques de Loustal, “The Day I Disappeared.” This is Auster’s first original comic book story and it directly deals with the doppelgänger motif. In this story for children, published in Art Spiegelman’s *Strange Stories for Strange Kids (Little Lit, Book 2)* in 2001, the protagonist wakes up one morning to discover that he cannot see his reflection in the mirror. Immediately after this discovery, he sees, through the window, himself walking down the street, and decides to follow. This discovery evokes no fear in the protagonist; rather, it is a strange curiosity that prompts him to rush out into the street to follow his other self. As he does so, he makes an observation that he “looked sad” and “seemed lonely.”¹³ He follows himself through the empty city streets down to a lake, where he saves himself from accidental drowning. In the evening, he lies next to himself in bed, and wakes up next morning to discover he has his reflection back and is wholly himself again. The story ends with the protagonist going to his place of work, which, predictably, is “The Bureau of Missing Persons.”



Figure 6 The ultimate doppelgänger situation: the self sees itself going double. A frame from “The Day I Disappeared,” by Jacques de Loustal and Paul Auster.

¹³ See Paul Auster and Jacques de Loustal, “The Day I Disappeared,” in *Strange Stories for Strange Kids (Little Lit, Book 2)*, eds. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: RAW Junior/ HarperCollins Children’s Books, 2001), 57.

One of Auster's favored tropes, one which allows him to equate writing and detecting to investigate identity, is set at work also in this text. What is more interesting, though, is the fact that what the protagonist encounters in this story is not a phantom of himself, a doppelgänger that would be defined as "a ghostly double of a living person, especially one that haunts its fleshly counterpart."¹⁴ It is the protagonist himself that has become a phantasm, unperceivable to the "original" self, as well as the rest of the world. Nobody out in the streets can see him or hear him. Which one of the two is the disappearing "I" that the title refers to? One is reminded here that the "doppelgänger" itself possesses a "doppel" nature, as observed by Webber above. The doppelgänger goes in both directions at once.

In either case, the Romantic horror and shock from encountering one's double (whether misleadingly classified as the alleged original seeing its ghostly double, or vice versa), is gone, yet a sense of uncanniness remains, which in postmodern fiction finds its expression in *mises-en-scène* and the "strangeness" of the text itself, with unexpected narrative twists and the lack of ontological closure. Although the psychological theories of the 20th century led to general acceptance of inherent duality, and later fragmentariness and multiplicity – of both the human identity and the world itself – the effect of this primeval, irrational fear that the apparition of the double evoked can still be sensed. The fear and associations with evil that the doppelgänger has accumulated over centuries continue haunting the concept up to present. That is also why many of Auster's texts, like the abovementioned "The Day I Disappeared," are set in noir-like diegesis (a descendant of Gothic urban spaces). These texts have lost the highly intense, horror-inducing language of Romantic literature, but can be described as having an "austere," "bizarre" or simply "clinical" quality (the setting of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, in which the amnesiac protagonist is trapped, for example, resembles a psychiatric ward).

¹⁴ *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. Also available at <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>.



Figure 7 The doppelgänger generates a noir chronotope.
Frames from “The Day I Disappeared.”

However, there is a fundamental difference between the sensations of horror sparked by the pre-psychological Romantic doppelgänger and the split of the self it causes, between the way that psychoanalysis regards the double, and what could be described as the postmodern curiosity in (rather than fear of) fragmentariness of the self, language, and the world. The Romantic literature of the double most often relied on binary oppositions within the self, where the other side of the personality, revealed through the materialized figure of the doppelgänger, appeared as evil, immoral, repugnant, and phantasmal – horrifying, in other words. It belonged to the realm of the unknown and the inexplicable, and often leant itself to superstitious beliefs (e.g., the doppelgänger as an omen of impending death, a harbinger of bad luck). Although postmodernism has dispersed the horror associated with the apparition of the double, it is worth considering the historical discourse surrounding the figure of the doppelgänger because some of the early associations still find their way into the post-Romantic and post-psychoanalytical literature, including Auster’s texts.

The Birth of the Double

The origins of the fears associated with the double are closely related to the emergence of hypnosis, mesmerism, and the idea of animal magnetism in early 19th century society. Firstly there was the fear that there might be an unconscious side of the self that is repugnant to the real, “waking” self (as evidenced by actual cases of hypnosis at the time), and secondly that it was possible for the self to be remotely controlled by (an evil) outsider, as manifested by the puppet-puppeteer situation in Hoffmann’s *The Sand-Man* (1816), one of the central doppelgänger stories that, as we saw above, was later subjected

to psychoanalytical study to explain the workings of the double. In Hoffman's short story, the protagonist Nathaniel falls in love with a "woman" named Olimpia who turns out to be an automaton, produced by a certain Spalanzani (Olimpia's "father") and controlled by an evil force expressed through the multiple figures of a mythical "Sand-Man," "the repulsive barometer-dealer, Coppola," and "the satanic Coppelius."¹⁵ Obsessed by Olimpia, and haunted throughout by this evil power, Nathaniel in the end falls into a state of insanity and plunges to his death from a high tower, while Coppelius looks on laughing.

With the three analyses of *The Sand-Man* by Ernst Jentsch, Freud, and Rank nearly a hundred years after its publication,¹⁶ psychoanalysis became the dominant mode for explaining the psychology of uncanny sensations evoked by texts like Hoffmann's, and the reason why, gradually, the doppelgänger gets freed from the effects of shock and terror its appearance initially induced. For his discussion, Freud takes as the starting point Jentsch's argument that uncanny effects are produced by mind's inability to determine whether "an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object (such as a wax-work figure, artificial doll or automaton) might not be in fact animate," and rejects this claim, instead prioritizing another element that he believes to evoke fear and uncanniness – "the 'Sand-Man' who tears out children's eyes."¹⁷ What follows is Freud's part literary criticism, part psychoanalytic study of Nathaniel's (and Hoffmann's) suppressed childhood trauma in relation to the father figure, and the Freudian concept of the fear of castration (epitomized in the story as the recurrent threat to losing one's eyes). For Freud, the uncanny (in the form of Sand-Man, Coppelius, and Coppola) arises due to the return of repressed traumatic infantile material, while the motif of the double is explained (in one way) as the return of the primary narcissism of the child – the self-love. For Freud, the Jentschian uncertainty as to "whether an object is animate

¹⁵ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sand-Man*, translated by J.Y. Bealby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), <http://manybooks.net/titles/hoffmannetother06sand-man.html>.

¹⁶ See Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," translated by Roy Sellars, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/22868433/On-the-Psychology-of-the-Uncanny>. Originally published as "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen." *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8.22 (25 August 1906): 195-98 and 8.23 (1 September 1906): 203-05; Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Uncanny (Penguin Modern Classics)*, translated by David McLintock, introduced by Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin Books, 2003). Originally published as "Das Unheimliche," *Imago* 5 (5/6) (1919): 297-324. See also Otto Rank, *Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, translated and edited by Harry Tucker Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971). Originally published (the earliest version) as "Der Doppelgänger," *Imago* 3 (1914): 97-164.

¹⁷ Freud, "Uncanny," 136.

or inanimate, which we were bound to acknowledge in the case of the doll Olympia,” is “quite irrelevant in the case of this more potent example of the uncanny.”¹⁸ Olympia, the automatic doll, “cannot be anything other than a materialization of Nathaniel’s feminine attitude to his father in his early childhood,” as well as “a complex that has been detached from Nathaniel and now confronts him as a person,” and the control that this complex exercises over him “finds expression in his senseless, compulsive love for Olympia.”¹⁹

Auster is undoubtedly familiar with Freud’s writing on the uncanny, as evidenced by the passage he devotes to the discussion of the Freudian concept of “homelessness” (or *das Unheimlich*, the central trope for the uncanny) in his own work, “The Book of Memory” section of *The Invention of Solitude*.²⁰ Auster briefly toys with the Freudian concepts and associations that psychoanalysis has established between the sense of uncanny self-estrangement, suppressed childhood trauma, and the father-son relationship in his *The New York Trilogy*, and especially in *City of Glass*, where in a twisted way, the puppet–puppeteer relationship between an evil father and his traumatized son gets played out in the figures of the mad Peter Stillman Sr. and Peter Stillman Jr. (who is described as “machine-like, fitful,” like ... a marionette ... without strings”).²¹

This has prompted critics like Roberta Rubenstein to construct a psychoanalytical reading of *City of Glass* (as well as of the other two parts of *The New York Trilogy*). To ground her argument, Rubenstein turns to Auster’s discussion of the absence of his father figure in *The Invention of Solitude*, and picks up on such aspects of the uncanny in *City of Glass* as the recurrent “imagery of eyes and automatons,”²² as well as the similarities between the figures of Peter Stillman Jr., Hoffmann’s Olympia, and the protagonist Quinn himself, who, according to her, at the end of the story becomes a homeless “‘no-body’ – an automaton, a ‘still man’.”²³ Yet the claim that Quinn is “obsessed with eyes and vision”²⁴

¹⁸ Freud, “Uncanny,” 138-139.

¹⁹ Freud, “Uncanny,” 160.

²⁰ Paul Auster writes, “It would be impossible to say that we are not haunted. Freud has described such experiences as ‘uncanny,’ or *unheimlich* – the opposite of *heimlich*, which means ‘familiar,’ ‘native,’ ‘belonging to the home.’ The implication...is that we are thrust out from the protective shell of our habitual perceptions, as though we were suddenly outside ourselves, adrift in a world we do not understand. By definition, we are lost in that world.... Unhomelessness, therefore, [is] a memory of another, much earlier home of the mind.” See Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 148.

²¹ Auster, *City of Glass*, 25.

²² Rubenstein, “Doubling, Intertextuality...” 246.

²³ Rubenstein, “Doubling, Intertextuality...” 250.

by reading the element of detection (Quinn as “the private eye” or “private I”) in exclusively psychoanalytical terms loses its persuasiveness when applied to the wider context of Auster’s intra-connected work, where it is a recurrent motif, and where the double assumes functions beyond the mere expression of the protagonist’s psychological state by becoming, instead, a structuring principle of the whole Auster intratext.

In fact, there are several possible objections to an exclusively psychoanalytical interpretation of literary works such as Auster’s texts. Firstly, psychoanalysis assumes that the reader perceives all external events through the perspective of the protagonist as mere projections of the character’s psyche. While such readings are possible, as Rubenstein has illustrated, they cannot account for other possible readings of the text that presume that the text has multiple characters or multiple perspectives. An example would be Auster’s film *Smoke*, discussed in Chapter 2. As I have shown, one way of reading the film would presume that the majority of its narrative takes place in the imagination of Paul Benjamin, the writer-character. Yet equally valid are also interpretations, which posit that the film has multiple decentered characters. As stated earlier, Auster’s texts do not yield themselves to unitary readings. Psychoanalysis, unlike rhizomatics, fails to acknowledge the co-existence of a plurality of meanings.

Secondly, psychoanalysis has impetuously turned its back to the relation between uncanniness and emergence of new technology, as described by Jentsch, the pioneer in exploring the uncanny. Like Freud himself, psychoanalysis has discarded as irrelevant the claim that new technologies and mechanical devices that bear uncanny resemblance to life can become a source of simultaneous fear and fascination. To illustrate, the period between the mid-19th century and the first decade of the 20th century is known as “the Golden Age of automata” in Europe (predominantly in France), and was marked by society’s obsession with life-like mechanical devices and the exploration of their possibilities and limits. Nathaniel’s friends in Hoffmann’s *The Sand-Man*, although praising Olympia’s singing and piano-playing skills as “disagreeably perfect,” feel an uncanny anxiety towards her.²⁵ They sense that, although in all respects she appears human-like, she seems “to be only acting *like* a living creature, and as if there was some

²⁴ Rubenstein, “Doubling, Intertextuality...” 246.

²⁵ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sand-Man*.

secret at the bottom of it all.”²⁶ In fact, they admit to be feeling “quite afraid of this Olimpia,” and would rather not “have anything to do with her.”²⁷ Nathaniel, on the other hand, feels captivated and inspired by Olimpia’s “divine charms.” Although she can only repeatedly sigh (“Ach! Ach! Ach!”) in response to her admirer, for Nathaniel, “[t]he glance of her heavenly eyes says more than any tongue of earth,” and she is “such an exemplary listener,” that, in her presence, he feels compelled not only to return to all his previously written work (“poems, fancy sketches, visions, romances, tales...”) but also generate new texts.²⁸ In other words, Olimpia becomes Nathaniel’s muse. In this sense, Olimpia is not that different from Olympia, the SM9 model typewriter that Auster regards as his talking muse, and whose eerie qualities and associations concerning its being possessed while possessing the one who uses it were discussed in Chapter 3.

A machine (or medium) that works on our thoughts through inspiration has the ability to simultaneously fascinate and scare because it makes one question the autonomy of one’s thoughts which the machine appears to be generating. As Kittler illustrates, the double is “the ghost of poetry”²⁹ – of the medium itself. The double of classical Romanticism “essentially emerged from books”;³⁰ books being the only medium or “machine” for reading at the time. Kittler relates the emergence of the ghost of the double to the prescribed way of reading literary texts in the culture of Romanticism, which on the reader’s part presupposed strong use of imagination and instant visualization of the written word. He refers to the early German Romantic author and philosopher Novalis, who instructed that: “If one reads correctly, then a real, visible world unfolds itself in us internally according to the words.”³¹ Kittler concludes: “[t]he printed word was skipped and the book forgotten, until somewhere between the lines a hallucination appeared – the pure signified of the printed sign. In other words, Doubles in the era of classical Romanticism originated in the classroom where we learn to read correctly.”³²

²⁶ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sand-Man*.

²⁷ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sand-Man*.

²⁸ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sand-Man*.

²⁹ Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film,” 85.

³⁰ Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film,” 89.

³¹ Novalis, quoted in Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film,” 90.

³² Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film,” 90.

A book that generates hallucinations, a typewriter that appears to have a dictating voice, and a lifelike automaton which seems to imitate (double) human actions in a seemingly autonomous way all generate uncanny sensations in those who experience these actions. While each time period in history has been marked by a different type of emerging new technology or medium (what Kittler would call “a discourse network”), this fear of the new technology “becoming alive” by talking to us, haunting us, doubling us, and “writing” us, has been always present throughout history. That is why, for Deleuze, as Harris points out, the doppelgänger is above all “an encounter with the horror of the non-organic.”³³ It renders, according to John S. Titford, “anthropomorphic urban surroundings [as] devils no less real than the golems of Nordic legends.” It highlights “a realm,” in Harris’s words, “uncovered but not created by the convulsions of the individual or collective mind.”³⁴ When it comes to the uncanniness of the doubles, “things are much simpler than psychoanalysis imagines.”³⁵

The Double Functions of the Double

Psychoanalysis fails to deal with the double in yet another respect – it ignores the multiple levels on which the double (which has become the multiple) acts in postmodern discourse. Auster’s *City of Glass*, which so often is read from a psychoanalytical perspective, is the epitome of the postmodern multiple that is always in flux, threatening to disintegrate and disrupt its own genealogy. Bartlett’s attempt to trace the entangled network of mutual character doublings in *City of Glass*, where a double mirrors another double who mirrors yet another double ad infinitum, corresponds to what several critics, such as Bernd Herzogenrath, Steven Bernstein and Alison Russell,³⁶ have noted regarding what is best called the “rhizomatic relationship” between the characters. To quote Patricia Merivale, “the characters of the trilogy collapse into one another through their own

³³ Jan Harris, “Cinema and Its Doubles: Kittler v. Deleuze,” in *Cinema and Technology: Cultures, Theories, Practices*, edited by Bruce Bennett, Marc Furstenau and Adrian Mackenzie (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 101.

³⁴ John S. Titford quoted from his essay “Object-Subject Relationships in German Expressionist Cinema” in Harris, “Cinema and Its Doubles,” 101.

³⁵ Kittler, “Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film,” 90-91.

³⁶ See Bartlett, “Double Redux”; Bernd Herzogenrath, *An Art of Desire. Reading Paul Auster* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999); Bernstein, “Auster’s Sublime Closure”; and Russell, “Deconstructing ‘New York Trilogy,’” 71-84.

labyrinthine (but illogical) interrelationships and then, finally, into multiple images of the author himself.”³⁷ Rubenstein herself comes to a similar conclusion:

As each character of *City of Glass* splits and disintegrates into fragmentary doubles of himself and/or disappears, as impersonators become the figures they impersonate, the narrative virtually doubles back on itself, threatening to cancel itself out. The title image thus suggests not so much a transparent surface as an opaque glass or the glass of a distorting mirror; alternatively, glass connotes a fragile material, susceptible to shattering into multiple pieces, all of which reflect the same (multiplied) image.³⁸

Subsequently, “there is no ‘master key’ to *The New York Trilogy* – even at the end, the locked room remains locked.” What the reader who “perseveres until the conclusion of the final novella” does encounter is “deliberate patterns of repetition that provide a kind of coherence in Auster’s interlocking, overlapping tales: each *thematically mirrors, narratively ‘doubles,’* and even threatens to cancel out, the other versions.”³⁹ (my emphasis) A structure of doubling patterns characterizes *The New York Trilogy* and, as I showed in the introductory chapter, that structure is applicable to the entire Auster oeuvre, which is built up from characters, themes, and narratives perpetually doubling and mirroring each other.

Although Rubenstein does not discuss in detail the question of the thematic and narrative doubling in Auster’s work, she inadvertently heads in the right direction and to some extent liberates the concept of the double from the burden of psychoanalytical representation and centering on the psychology of identity. As Bartlett points out, the new “comfort” with the uncertainty of one’s identity, and the lack of interest in psychoanalytical unveilings of its construction, can be accounted for by Brian McHale’s explanation of the difference between what he calls the dominants of modernist and postmodernist fiction. Although in postmodernism the interest in identities and doubles (multiples) continues, the epistemological questions have long since been replaced by

³⁷ See Stephen Bernstein, “The Question is the Story Itself: Postmodernism and Intertextuality in Auster’s ‘New York Trilogy,’” in *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, ed. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 143.

³⁸ Rubenstein, “Doubling, Intertextuality...” 251.

³⁹ Rubenstein, “Doubling, Intertextuality...” 246.

ontological curiosity. There is a move from questioning the limitations of human knowledge about the world, and our ability to interpret that, towards, as McHale points out, questions that Dick Higgins calls “post-cognitive”: “Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?” And, no less importantly, there are questions of another kind that relate to

the ontology of the literary text itself or the ontology of the world which it projects: “What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on.”⁴⁰

As Bartlett puts it, the 20th century required “a new double” that would help it “imagine the implications of new realities and new ideas of subjectivity, rather than the psychoanalytic theories grounded in Romantic psychology.”⁴¹ This task – embarking on a quest that is an exploration at once of the postmodern identity, world, text, its authorship and language, with an awareness that any stable solution is unlikely attainable – is constantly rehearsed in Auster’s texts with the help of the double. The double is not only a phantom, a mystery, and an ambiguity; it is the very opportunity to pose a question, to challenge a norm, to go in an alternative direction. It is a chance to receive several answers, not just one (assuming there are any). Although it is always attached to some other entity, which it then doubles, mirrors, and mimics (and hence is a “part of”), the double as *doppelgänger* also seems to act on its own, to go its own way. This is a liberating movement, mobility, multiplicity and dynamics itself, an essential driving force of the rhizome. That is why, instead of reading the double in psychoanalytical terms, it is more productive to view the double as a function, an actant, an opportunity to ask and explore such post-cognitive questions in a wider scope of Auster’s intratext.

⁴⁰ Bartlett quoting Brian McHale, in Bartlett, “Double Redux,” 49-50.

⁴¹ Bartlett, “Double Redux,” 40.



Figure 8 Curiosity has replaced the fear of the double. A frame from “The Day I Disappeared,” by Jacques de Loustal and Paul Auster.

In Auster texts, for example, one of the functions that the double takes on is to split the narrative into two, and in that way inscribe a possibility for a simultaneous alternative narrative. This vaguely echoes the Borgesian idea of the “forking paths,”⁴² which presupposes a world where multiple narratives with different outcomes of events are allowed to co-exist simultaneously; each one, furthermore, leading to new rhizome-like proliferations of possibilities. That is why in *City of Glass*, the Stillman Sr. figure appears as a double – to remind us that the text is a rhizome, and to mark a node which has the potential to produce a new narrative offshoot. Quinn, who is supposed to follow a certain Peter Stillman Sr. from the moment of the latter’s arrival at the train station, sees emerging from the train two almost identical men who both correspond to the description of Stillman Sr., the only difference between them being that one looks respectable and poised while the other appears shabby and slightly demented. This doubling results in a forking situation as each goes away in a different direction. At this point, Quinn must make a choice – which of the two “Stillmans” to follow? However, regardless of the choice he makes (he eventually decides to follow the shabby-looking man), the ontological foundations of the narrative are shaken, since, as of this moment, it has

⁴² See Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” in *Labyrinths*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, with an invitation by William Gibson (New York: A New Directions Book, 2007). First published in English translation by Donald A. Yates as “The Garden of Forking Paths,” *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* (Spring, 1958).

acquired a ghostly alternative double. A shadow of doubt is cast over the story that does not disappear with the last pages of the book. As the “detective story” progresses, making less and less sense to both the reader and “detective” Quinn, one cannot but start wondering if, by some chance, the wrong man was being followed all along. This question never gets answered, and the narrative obtains an “indeterminate” quality.⁴³ That creates in the reader an uncanny feeling, that there might be several versions of the story existing, and that, possibly, the reader has been offered the wrong one.

A related feeling is that the characters, situations, and stories might actually exist beyond the pages of the book, where they live through alternative experiences. One gets such sensations when reading, for example, *Moon Palace* or *The Book of Illusions*, or *Travels in the Scriptorium*, which arouse a déjà vu feeling in the reader. The characters therein bear names that are familiar to the reader from other Auster texts, yet they fail to establish a coherent link with these texts; they seem to be somehow different, as alternative versions or doppelgängers of their namesakes in the other texts.⁴⁴ As long as there are such doubles wandering through Auster’s texts, none of his stories will ever be a single finished story; instead, there will be at least two versions.

⁴³ As Bartlett marks regarding the postmodern double, “the problem of the double has been transformed into one of indeterminate identity and ... indeterminate reality.” See Bartlett, “Double Redux,” 47.

⁴⁴ In *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the story’s amnesiac protagonist Mr Blank wakes up one morning to find himself locked inside of an empty room, which contains only a typewriter, a manuscript and a few mementos in the form of texts and photographs. He gets visited by characters from his own fictional works, texts that the reader recognizes as Auster’s earlier novels, therefore acting as Auster’s authorial stand-in. Among the doppelgänger characters that (re)visit him are Peter Stillman Jr. (the mysterious Kaspar Hauzer-like figure from *City of Glass*) who wants Mr Blank to dress all in white, Mr Blank’s “doctor” Samuel Farr (Anna Blume’s partner from *The Country of Last Things* who also there impersonates a doctor at one point), a certain writer John Trause (the writer-protagonist from *Oracle Night*, whose name, moreover, is an anagram of “Auster”), and others. When taken together, the lives of these recurrent characters, and, consequently, their entire diegetic worlds, do not make sense as they appear contradictory, or even “impossible,” as noted by Banks in her essay “Connection Exists.” This condition of instable, fluctuating, multiple identities that coexist in an otherwise interconnected oeuvre has also been explored by Varner in his aforementioned thesis “Auster’s Rhizomatic Fictions,” where he writes: “If identity, for characters, is as fragile as Fogg’s edict indicates, then could not a novel’s ‘identity’ be equally fragile? [...] Auster’s short novel is predicated on the idea that characters’ ‘lives’ or ‘existence’ extend beyond the pages of a novel; *Travels in the Scriptorium* suggests a deistic creation whereby a god-like author writes a world into motion, like winding a clock, and lets the world tick on its own. [...] characters ‘live’ beyond the time and space of the novels which ‘contain’ them.” See Varner, “Auster’s Rhizomatic Fictions,” 30-31.



Figure 9 The doppelgänger creating a Borgesian “forking path” – a frame from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, by Auster, Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

In a similar way, the double generates not only parallel and alternative versions of the narratives, but also *mises en abyme* and embedded narratives. Because the figure of the doppelgänger is often revealed to be an imaginary construct projected by the protagonist’s mind rather than a “real” character (as can be seen in *The Book of Illusions*, *Lulu on the Bridge*, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *Man in the Dark*, etc.), one of the ways the double acts is by creating *mises en abyme*, or stories within stories. As Webber notes, “[d]oppelgänger stories are ... rife in the effects of *mise-en-abyme*, whereby figures or structures are reflected within each other. ... The *mise-en-abyme* of emblematic figures at once serves to repeat and so affirm *ad infinitum* the identity for which they stand, and yet to cast the sign of identity into abysmal or groundless non-identity.”⁴⁵ The doppelgänger emerges to challenge the constructions of reality by transcending the borders between the real and the imaginary, and by introducing instances of alternative diegesis. In this way, the doppelgänger or the double is directly involved in the construction of the story, and is to be held responsible for the narrative multilayeredness of Auster’s texts.

If such a method for generating stories seems mechanical, it has its explanation in the nature of objects that work to assemble the story-making situation in Auster – like the

⁴⁵ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 6.

typewriter, the double/doppelgänger is a machinic tool of writing. One of the earliest narratives about the double – the myth of the creation of sexes and genders that is attributed to Aristophanes and is retold by Plato in his *Symposium* – depicts the creation of the two sexes and three genders⁴⁶ as an automated process, whereby the gods, threatened by the growing strength of people (as round, eight-limbed creatures), as Zeus says, “cut those human beings in two,” “the way people cut sorb-apples before they dry them”; they cut them one by one, so that they “lose their strength” and also “increase in their number.”⁴⁷ If one of the abilities of the typewriter, whose early predecessor was a copying device, is to multiply by copying, then the double multiplies by splitting. These mechanical and seemingly autonomous processes at the same time allow the author to inscribe himself in the text. If typewriting allows Auster to leave a lasting imprint on a tangible page, then doubling addresses one’s desire to create an imperishable double; that is what André Bazin in relation to the cinema called “the mummy complex.” Through surrendering himself to the seemingly infinite, mechanical process of self-splitting and multiplication, the author loses himself in the machinery of text and its numerous doubles.

That is also why Auster in an early interview refers to his writing process as “the machinery of the book,”⁴⁸ and talks about his desire to implicate himself in it; a human using a prosthetic writing machine to produce texts. This resembles the Deleuzian spiritual automaton, which puts into play “the distinctions between inside [the author’s mind] and outside [the writing machine], human and technics.”⁴⁹ David Norman Rodowick describes the concept of the spiritual automaton as “machinic thought”⁵⁰ – at once spiritual and immaterial (as the flow of writer’s imagination) and automatic (as determined by the dictates of external laws of the writing tools, such as the typewriter, or the double). In Auster, the spiritual automaton is manifest as the assemblage of the writer and his typewriter, or the writer and the figure of his double – two semi-automatons that seem to be the sources of inspiration and/or the dictating voice from “outside,” whilst constantly undermining the author’s authority and control over the text.

⁴⁶ Male and female, and heterosexuals, gays and lesbians, respectively.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, transl., with introd. and notes by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 26.

⁴⁸ See Auster in McCaffery and Gregory, “Interview with Auster,” *Contemporary Literature*, 14.

⁴⁹ David Norman Rodowick, quoted in Harris, “Cinema and Its Doubles,” 98.

⁵⁰ Rodowick quoted in Harris, “Cinema and Its Doubles,” 98.

The Doppelgänger in the Other Sex

Aristophanes' myth of the splitting and multiplication of man highlights another issue that Auster critics so far have paid very little attention to – the gender question. It cannot pass unnoticed that at the centre of Auster's core assemblage of the smoking-typing-detective writer who is investigating a double is always a male character. The logic of splitting, according to Plato, is simple: by splitting a hermaphrodite into two, one gets a female and a male, by splitting a female, one gets two females, and by splitting a male, two males,⁵¹ so it only makes sense that the doubles that mirror the protagonist should always be male. But perhaps, rather than this simple formula, one should return to the nature of the doppelgänger itself, which, as Webber points out, has always been a male construct. One of the nine premises that Webber has developed to define the double states that “the *Doppelgänger* host and visitant are axiomatically gendered as male”;⁵² it has the “axiomatic property of male gender.”⁵³ In German, there is no term that denotes a female doppelgänger; there is no “doppelgängerin.” Whenever the doppelgänger appears as female, the transgender double can only be framed as “Doppelgänger im anderen Geschlecht,” or the “*Doppelgänger* in the other sex.”

More significantly, in cases where “forms of female doubling are indeed effected,” they have little to do with altered or divided states of female subjectivity.⁵⁴ Instead, “the female *Doppelgänger* are typically in the service of male fantasies of the other,”⁵⁵ ever more so since the male protagonist is chronically lonesome – “sex-less, even if [he is] racked by sexuality.”⁵⁶ That is exactly how the female doubles are rendered in Auster's body of work, starting from Virginia Stillman, the over-sexualized femme fatale apparition that Quinn encounters in *City of Glass*, to the imagined muse figures, Celia and Claire, as projections of male imagination and desire in the two films, *Lulu on the Bridge* and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. To use Auster's own words, “[*Lulu on the Bridge*] is

⁵¹ Plato explains: “... long ago our nature was not what it is now, but very different. There were three kinds of human beings ..., not two as there are now, male and female. In addition to these, there was a third, a combination of those two” The shape of the primeval man was “completely round, with back and sides in a circle; they had four hands each, as many legs as hands, and two faces, exactly alike, on a rounded neck. Between the two faces, which were on opposite sides, was one head with four ears. There were two sets of sexual organs, and everything else was the way you'd imagine it from what I've told you.” Splitting of the primeval man into two generated what we recognize as a human body. See Plato, *Symposium*, 25.

⁵² Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 4.

⁵³ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 17.

⁵⁴ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 20.

⁵⁵ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 20.

⁵⁶ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 13.

about how men invent women”⁵⁷ to a large degree and this invention is based on imaginary constructs not unlike those of the female Hollywood stars whose photos decorate the male bathroom in the opening sequence of the film. Either way, the feminine in Auster seems to belong solely to the realm of the imaginary, or rather the spiritual. However, the female doppelgänger, although a source of inspiration and self-reflection for the character, like the typewriter also turns out to be capable of manifesting uncanny autonomy and authority. The invasive force of the female double not only mimics and doubles the original but deprives it of its authorial power, and this is clearly illustrated by the case of Auster’s ultimate double and “doppelgänger in the other sex,” French artist Sophie Calle.

Like Hoffmann’s Olympia and Auster’s Olympia typewriter, the double that in Auster’s work is gendered as female and epitomized by Calle turns out to be not only spiritual but also machinic. She is another kind of “spiritual automaton” that holds the potential to reverse Auster’s text-generation process and turn it against the author himself. One might recall here McHale’s idea of the muse of automatic writing discussed in Chapter 3, according to which a writer’s muse, his imagination, and a prosthetic writing tool, such as the typewriter, are seen as performing similar functions, as all three imply the writer’s collaboration with “something beyond or outside themselves.”⁵⁸ Auster’s text-generating process which, regardless of his humanist concerns, seems very rhizomatic and mechanical, is in fact best revealed through the intervention of a female double that is both machinic and spiritual. It seems, then, that it is exactly this supposed spirituality, in combination with prosthetic writing tools such as typewriters or doubles, which generates Auster’s rhizome and exposes the problematics of the mingled authorship, origin, and generic boundaries of his work. Like typewriting, writing that involves doppelgängers is never a straightforward, innocent process. The doppelgänger threatens to destroy the supposed division between itself as a double and the origin it copies, and between its text – which can be seen as a copy of an alleged original one – and other Auster texts, undermining the author’s position and, in fact, overtaking it. In other words, the doubles that are constructed and projected by Auster are capable of reversing the process of text-generation at some point by turning it against the author himself. Auster then becomes manipulated by his own fictional doubles. The more Paul Auster implicates himself in the

⁵⁷ Auster in an interview with Prime, “Making of ‘Lulu on the Bridge’,” 149.

⁵⁸ McHale, “Poetry as Prosthesis,” 28.

“machinery of the text,” and the more he lets himself be copied and repeated, the more Paul Auster becomes dispersed in and subjected to his own doubles.

This process of reversing subordination is best revealed by female doubles because the female-gendered spiritual automaton appears to be the most “truthful” doppelgänger – the one that, in Webber’s words, “operates as ... a phantasm which enters into and challenges the constructions of realism,”⁵⁹ and destabilizes the notions of authorship and origins of work. While Auster’s female doubles often fulfill Webber’s premise by yielding themselves to “male fantasies of the other [sex],” and are therefore “invariably bound up with ... the question of gendering,”⁶⁰ their presence and the impact of their performance on the text in destabilizing its conventions seems to be more commanding than that of Auster’s male doubles. Auster’s female doppelgängers function at the core of text-creation as one of the sources of the dictating voice. As I illustrated earlier, a typewriter and a male-imagined female-muse can act as writing tools that operate synchronically; the text generation itself is perceived as both a “machinic” (or “automatic”) and “spiritual” process. One should therefore turn to examine the role of Auster’s female double – as epitomized by Sophie Calle – to see how it acts in doubling and overturning the conventions of textual authority and authorship.

As this thesis has demonstrated throughout, Auster’s texts are inseparable from each other. Each is a part of, and yet a multiplicity of, his other texts and together they form a complex factio-fictional rhizomatic structure, which I refer to as Auster’s intratext. Narratively or thematically mirroring or doubling each other, these texts often overlap, becoming different sides of the same image, resembling fragments of a cubist painting, such as those by French artist Fernand Léger, where each plane, while presenting a slightly different perspective, is part of the same larger mosaic. Auster’s *Leviathan* (1992), for example, is argued by Varvogli and Shiloh to be another version of his early novel *The Locked Room* (1986), due to the conspicuous parallels in the narrative, character, and plot constructions.⁶¹ With the principle of embodiment so explicit in Auster’s oeuvre, each of his texts is always already part of another one and itself a multiplicity of texts.

⁵⁹ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 232.

⁶⁰ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 20 and 12.

⁶¹ Varvogli, *World That Is Book*, 142; Shiloh, *Auster and Postmodern Quest*, 137.

Leviathan, however, is more than an illustration of Auster's obsessive repetitions of a set of textual assemblages. This novel, which became part of an early collaboration between Auster and Calle, seems to stand out in Auster's textual rhizome as a strange node, an anomaly. It brings together two authors' intratexts whose boundaries have now become indefinable. *Leviathan* becomes an intersection, an entry point, or "a hole" (to use Briggs' term) in Auster's intratext through which connection is made to another author's work. In a peculiar way, which a rhizomatic perspective can nevertheless accommodate, a part of Auster's texts merges with that of Calle's work. Auster and Calle's game of mutual doubling (aka the "double game"), which started with Auster creating a semi-fictional double for Calle, reveals how the other then becomes implicated in generating an intertextual rhizome. Maria, the prototype of Calle, who at first is undeniably portrayed as a pure object of male desire,⁶² transforms from "spiritual" into "automatic," and starts doubling Auster's every move. Intrigued by her own double Maria, Calle decides "to turn Paul Auster's novel into a game and to make [her] own particular mixture of reality and fiction."⁶³ By implicating herself in the creation of Auster's intratext through either correcting his work (she literally re-writes parts of *Leviathan*), perfecting the projects he attributed to her double Maria (Part 1 of *Double Game*), or through making him produce new texts featuring her doppelgänger (the result of which is "Gotham Handbook"), Calle undermines Auster's authority and authorship over his own work. It is this work of the doppelgänger, where the spiritual or feminine double becomes machinic, which through its ability to turn the tables (the possibility of reversal is simply "necessary" for the act of doubling, according to Jean Baudrillard) transforms Auster from a master puppeteer into a puppet of his own creation.

The collaborative project with Calle, which results in a book compiled by her (*Double Game*, 1999), is a kind of textual mutation. It has evolved from bits and pieces of earlier texts written by Auster and Calle separately, and a new text that they worked on together. As suggested by the book's title, the textual game has two participants – the project's author is Sophie Calle "with participation of Paul Auster." It also has a two-way

⁶² As the protagonist of *Leviathan* introduces Maria's character, he recalls: "I liked the way she carried herself in her clothes, with a kind of prim, sensual grace, a reserve that would unmask itself in little flashes of erotic forgetfulness – letting her skirt drift up along her thighs as she crossed and uncrossed her legs, for example, or the way she touched my hand whenever I lit a cigarette for her." See, Auster, *Leviathan*, 65.

⁶³ Calle, *Double Game*, back cover.

development, where both authors in turn claim and reclaim authorship over each other's work by rewriting it. It illustrates one of the main premises of the doppelgänger situation – the staging of a power play that, in Webber's words, is "always caught up in exchange, never to be simply possessed as a mastery of the self, of the other, or of the other self."⁶⁴ During this power game, even as the roles of subject and author get exchanged, there is always a possibility for the process to be reversed – in the authorial games of Auster and Calle, the textual and authorial identity is trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of exchange and repetition. In this way Auster and Calle "disrupt the stability and fixity of identity," as Anna Khimasia has pointed out.⁶⁵ By mimicking and usurping the other, the doppelgänger destabilizes and questions the collaborators' basic positions of identity, authority, and authorship.

The game starts when Auster decides to create a doppelgänger for Calle. In his novel *Leviathan*, he introduces a character named Maria Turner, an eccentric Parisian artist whose "work ... had nothing to do with creating objects commonly defined as art."⁶⁶ This artist, whose creative activities resist all attempts at categorization ("some people called her a photographer, others referred to her as a conceptualist, still others considered her a writer, but none of these descriptions was accurate"),⁶⁷ is a prototype of Calle, a fact acknowledged in the front matter of *Leviathan*, which states that "the author extends special thanks to Sophie Calle for permission to mingle fact with fiction." For his novel, Auster borrows from Calle not only her personality and biographical data, but also all her artistic projects. Calle's project *The Striptease* (1979), for example, appears in *Leviathan* as Maria's project *The Naked Lady*. Among other projects attributed to Maria, whose detailed descriptions span nearly ten pages of the novel, one can recognize other Calle works published by the French publisher Actes Sud: *The Wardrobe* (1998), *To Follow...*

⁶⁴ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 4.

⁶⁵ Anna Khimasia, "Authorial Turns: Sophie Calle, Paul Auster and the Quest for Identity," *Image [&] Narrative* 19 (2007), <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/autofiction/khimasia.htm>. Along with Khimasia, the question of the authority and authorship in Auster-Calle's cross-media collaborative projects has been discussed by Jeanine Griffin's "Watching the Detectives," in *Creative Camera* 354 (Oct/Nov 1998): 16-19; Maud Lavin's book review of "Double Game," "Imitation of Life," *Art in America* 88.7 (July 2000): 33-34; Charlotte Schoell-Glass's essay "Fictions of the Art World: Art, Art History and the Art Historian in Literary Space," in *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*, edited by Rui Carvalho Homem and Maria de Fátima Lambert (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); and, recently, Ulrich Meurer's essay "Life Transmission: Paul Auster's Merging Worlds, Media and Authors," in *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster*, edited by Stefania Ciocia and Jesús Ángel González (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), 2011.

⁶⁶ Auster, *Leviathan*, 66.

⁶⁷ Auster, *Leviathan*, 66.

(1978–1979), *Suite Vénitienne* (1980), *The Detective* (1981), *The Hotel* (1981), *The Address Book* (1983) and *The Birthday Ceremony* (1980–1993).⁶⁸ In addition to these “borrowed” projects, Auster invents for Maria new fictional ones, such as observing a diet based on foods of a particular color each day, or living each day under a certain letter of the alphabet. In *Double Game*, Calle’s response to *Leviathan*, these projects reappear as *The Chromatic Diet* and *Days Under the Sign of B, C, & W*. This work, *Double Game*, has three parts, each of which is worth close examination, as they expose the double-bound nature of the double, where the double takes turns in becoming both submissive puppet *and* active puppeteer, lost in the other yet capable of consuming it, denouncing its own authorial rights only to reclaim authorship over the work of the other. In the first part of *Double Game* Calle publishes the two aforementioned projects that were invented by Auster for Maria’s character and later reprised by Calle herself. The second part contains Calle’s previously published projects that Auster used for *Leviathan*. The third part, named “Gotham Handbook,” is a new collaboration between Auster and Calle. This chapter will consider these parts in turn, but one must first look at the female double that is involved in production of these texts.

Maria plays a pivotal role in *Leviathan* and, like any other element in a rhizomatic assemblage, functions at multiple levels. At first she appears, not unlike Lulu and Claire, as “a woman invented by men” – a muse and bed partner of the writer-character Peter Aaron, and the story’s femme fatale. Her strong charisma, overwhelming sexuality, and “habit of courting trouble in whatever form she could find it” in the end leads to “catastrophic” consequences – “at least two lives were lost” because of her, the narrator states.⁶⁹ The character of Maria then resembles what Webber calls “[t]he demonically erotic [female] double,” a devastating automaton and “a sophisticated sex-doll,” who “might usefully be called a sort of bachelor machine, a spin off from the prototype of Olympia in Hoffmann’s *Sandmann*.”⁷⁰ As such, Maria clearly carries within herself traces of outdated connotations of doppelgängers as harbingers of bad luck, and has the potential to become a catalyst for plot developments. She is the “reigning spirit of chance,” “the goddess of the unpredictable,” and, as the narrator of *Leviathan* laments, “the whole miserable story” starts when Maria finds a black address book lying on the street: “Maria

⁶⁸ Sophie Calle and Fabio Balducci, *En finir* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2005).

⁶⁹ Auster, *Leviathan*, 72.

⁷⁰ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 21-22.

opened the book, and out flew the devil, out flew a scourge of violence, mayhem and death.”⁷¹ Maria/Calle that appears in *Leviathan*, therefore, already has a hybrid nature: part fictional character, part “real” person, part fruit of the male imagination, and part mythical construct resembling the Romantic doppelgänger.

The situation gets further complicated when Calle later asks Auster to continue the double game and to “invent [another] fictive character which [she] would attempt to resemble.”⁷² Calle seeks to double a new version of her double that, like the other doppelgänger, would be authored by Auster. As Calle later recalls in an unpublished brief for an exhibition of the project,

I proposed that he write a story about a fictional character named Sophie. I would borrow events from the life of that character and offer myself, for one year, to fulfil the obligation. I would try to become “his” Sophie and complete the story wherever it would take me.⁷³

Although Calle’s fantasy of total submission to Auster and his creation of the double never comes true (see the section “Gotham Handbook” further on in the text), her determination once more confirms the two basic premises of the doppelgänger situation – that the characteristic positions of power and authority, and the total lack of those, are exchangeable, and that there is no such thing as an “original” to be found among the doubles. Already with the *Leviathan* project, the impossibility to tell the two apart – Calle and her double Maria, or vice versa – has become apparent. *Leviathan* and *Double Game* (which includes “Gotham Handbook”), allow Calle to merge the boundaries between the fictional and the real, the double and its alleged “original,” arriving at an equation of the postmodern multiple: Sophie Calle = Maria Turner = “Sophie Calle” (Auster’s Sophie).

When it becomes apparent that the doubling takes place not only between Auster and his fictional characters, or Calle and her fictional stand-ins, but also between the two authors themselves and their individual texts, things become still more complicated. Certain parallels can be seen, for example, between Calle and her life-projects and those of Auster’s fictional protagonists. Auster, like Calle, displays “devotion to intensive self-

⁷¹ Auster, *Leviathan*, 73.

⁷² Calle, “The Rules of the Game,” in Calle, *Double Game*.

⁷³ Calle quoted in Jeanine Griffin’s “Sophie Calle and Paul Auster: Watching the Detectives,” in *Creative Camera* 354 (Oct/Nov 1998), 16.

fictionalising,” a “well-tested method for questioning authorship,” and also identity.⁷⁴ For instance, the protagonist of *Leviathan*, the writer-figure Peter Aaron, shares with Auster not only his occupation and initials, but the names of their wives and children are also similar.⁷⁵ Aaron, as Saltzman points out, is “a writer whose career suspiciously reflects, or refracts, Paul Auster’s own.”⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the Christian name of the second most important character in the novel, another writer-turned-detective character called Benjamin Sachs, is Auster’s middle name. These two characters therefore become the two faces of Auster. The attempts by the quester (Aaron) to decode the essence of the quest’s object (Ben) then appear as Auster’s own inward journey, and his own quest for identity, which is so characteristic of his texts.

So, when looking at both Auster’s *Leviathan* and its version as rewritten by Calle, one sees “the slippage between the characters Auster/Aaron/Sachs and Calle/Maria/Calle” that “makes it particularly hard to establish *who is speaking*”⁷⁷ (her emphasis). *Leviathan* serves as a meeting point for two authors and two intratexts, where such overlapping, replacing, or doubling of identities, facts, fictions, and authorships, allows both Auster and Calle to present the book as an unstable multiplicity by “denying and deferring the singularity and fixity of representation, identity (and authorship).”⁷⁸ A text like *Leviathan* becomes an “unattributable” assemblage, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s terms; it lacks fixed authorship, subject, object, and identity. For both Calle and Auster, collaboration becomes “a good instrument with which to challenge both artistic identity and authorship, and therefore to stimulate anxiety”; it pushes their explorations of the theme of identity and authorship further beyond the realm of their “own” texts.⁷⁹

If there is a difference between Auster and Calle’s self-fictionalizing, then it is this: Calle’s art gets “lived out” and performed in real-life circumstances through various self-

⁷⁴ Maria Lind, “The Collaborative Turn,” in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, edited by Johanna Billing et.al. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 26.

⁷⁵ Aaron’s first wife is Delia, the second – Iris, but son’s name is David; the names of Auster’s two wives are Lydia and Siri, while the son is called Daniel.

⁷⁶ See Arthur. M. Saltzman, “Post Hoc Harmonies: Paul Auster’s *Leviathan*,” in *This Mad Instead: Governing Metaphors in Contemporary American Fiction* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 64. Also quoted in Khimasia, “Authorial Turns.”

⁷⁷ Khimasia, “Authorial Turns.”

⁷⁸ Khimasia, “Authorial Turns.”

⁷⁹ Lind, “Collaborative Turn,” 16.

imposed rituals.⁸⁰ Calle is the ultimate postmodern double-player. She documents her fictionalized performances and experiences in diary-style first-person narratives, where descriptions of emotions are supplemented with bare reports of facts and details, and “authentic” documentary photographs. In such a way, her experiences become “entangled in a series of displacements and supplements of ‘Sophie Calle’ making it difficult to determine and define the edges of her roles as author and subject.” Calle, as Khimasia points it out, “not only disrupts the binaries of author/subject and fact/fiction, but simultaneously explores the materiality and temporality of identity in such a way that the latter remains ambiguous.”⁸¹ Or, as Aaron puts it in *Leviathan*, “her pieces exhibited the same qualities one found in Maria herself,” an observation that suggests Maria/Calle’s artistic projects should be called “life-projects” and “life-art” rather than “art.” It is Calle, more than Auster, who in a loosely Deleuzian sense can be said to “live her philosophy,” or cultivate “practical philosophy” – philosophy that can be lived and experienced rather than merely theorized about; she “aspire[s] to fieldwork in which theory and practice seem to be reconciled.”⁸²

And yet, comparisons of Calle’s life-projects and Auster’s texts, especially his early “detective” stories, suggest striking similarities in the ways that the doppelgänger motif is used. In its performance of doubling of identity, the doppelgänger, according to another of Webber’s premises, recurrently introduces “voyeurism and innuendo” into “the subject’s pursuit of a visual and discursive sense of self.”⁸³ This motif, which is so symptomatic of Auster’s whole *New York Trilogy*, is also rehearsed in Calle’s “detective” projects, such as *Suite Vénitienne*, *The Shadow*, *Address Book*, or *The Hotel*, which are all based on the acts of stalking and voyeurism that the double has to carry out in its pursuit of the other. As a result, the authors’ texts appear as “accidental” doubles of one another.

⁸⁰ In an article written for *The Observer* on creativity and the pleasures of reading, Auster talks about writing as “a vehicle to tell stories, imaginary stories that have never taken place in what we call the real world.” Unlike Calle, Auster’s work is born through the solitary experience of “sitting alone in a room with a pen in your hand, hour after hour, day after day, year after year, struggling to put words on pieces of paper in order to give birth to what does not exist – except in your head.” See Paul Auster, “I Want to Tell You a Story,” *The Observer*, November 5, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/nov/05/fiction.paulauster>.

⁸¹ Khimasia, “Authorial Turns.”

⁸² Griffin, “Watching the Detectives,” 19.

⁸³ Webber, *Doppelgänger*, 3-4.

Consider Calle's first conceptual project, *Suite Vénitienne*. After coincidentally meeting a stranger, identified as Henri B., twice on the same day, Calle decides to follow him from Paris to Venice, unaware that her actions would one day constitute a "life-project." *City of Glass* begins with the devastated Quinn feeling lost – "lost not only in the city, but within himself as well."⁸⁴ To him "New York was an inexhaustible space" that "always left him with the feeling of being lost." Yet the city is also his only escape as it allows himself to be reduced to "a seeing eye," and distracts him from what he believes to be an otherwise purposeless existence.⁸⁵ Calle, too, embarked on her quest when she found herself "lost," estranged, and alone. As she says in a *Suite Vénitienne* review, "I felt totally lost. I followed a person to find a direction for myself. I had no energy, so I would absorb someone else's purpose."⁸⁶ Later Calle admitted: "He [Henri B.] is consuming me."⁸⁷ Jeanine Griffin draws this analogy: "During this project, ... Calle was subsumed in the Other, usurping his impetus just as Auster's 'detective', Quinn, is subsumed in the life of his quarry and of his assumed role of 'Paul Auster, detective'. Through tracking and documenting the other they lose a grip on their selves."⁸⁸ Calle's Venice is not unlike Quinn's New York – an urban space that makes one lose oneself and that is constructed "like a trap, a maze, a labyrinth that inevitably, however fortuitously, brings back people to the same point."⁸⁹

In Venice, Calle, disguised in a blonde wig and sunglasses, follows Henri B. around the streets and canals of the city for two weeks, photographing the man and documenting his movements. In *Double Game* one can read Calle's sleuth-style surveillance reports, complete with black-and-white photographs of the object:

11:05 A.M. The woman goes inside the Banco di Roma. I guess that he went in before her. To see him, I approach the front windows of the bank. I can just make out the woman on the other side of the glass. I back away.

⁸⁴ Auster, *City of Glass*, 8.

⁸⁵ Auster, *City of Glass*, 8.

⁸⁶ Sophie Calle, "Review of 'Suite Vénitienne'," in *Contemporary Visual Arts*, here quoted in Griffin, "Watching the Detectives," 19.

⁸⁷ Sophie Calle and Jean Baudrillard, *Suite vénitienne / Please follow me*, translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 10/11. The essay that Baudrillard wrote for his collaboration with Calle has also been republished, and will be cited in this thesis, as "Please Follow Me," in *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*, edited by Steve Redhead (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁸⁸ Griffin, "Watching the Detectives," 19.

⁸⁹ For Baudrillard, Venice "has no equal in the inverse extreme except New York." See Baudrillard, "Please Follow Me," 78.

11:15 A.M. She leaves and heads toward the Ponte di Rialto. She's alone. I rush into the bank. He's not there. I run after the woman. She's disappeared. For the next few minutes, I search for them in all directions in vain.

[Etc.]

At the same time, the text also reflects Calle's own anxieties and doubts when her vigilance fails her and when, like Quinn, she loses control of her task ("I give up."), or experiences sudden flashes of irrational hope ("I have high expectations of him."). Her book also features scanned copies of a map of the city and her tracings of the man's movements, which corresponds to Quinn's belief that drawing a map of his suspect's urban travels would bring him closer to understanding the man. Quinn, too, when shadowing the suspect, decides "to record every detail about Stillman he possibly could."⁹⁰ Later, in the graphic novel version of *City of Glass*, Quinn's observations appear as hand-written records that he has made in his notebook, along with the little hand-drawn maps:

Continues north to 82 St. Turns left.

Buys sandwich in deli at corner. Walks along 82 St. to Riverside Park

Sits on bench in park and reads through notebook

Searches through bushes – finds discarded coffee cup, puts in bag...⁹¹

At some point in the works of both these authors, the process gets reversed and the follower-detective becomes the centre of attention of another who surveils and reports on them. For Baudrillard, an unexpected surprise, a sudden turn of events in which the followed catches the follower in the act, or becomes the follower of his follower, reversing the whole system, is a crucial element of shadowing: "[t]he possibility of reversal is necessary," he writes.⁹² Meanwhile Griffin has noticed that "[t]he objects of surveillance change constantly in both artists' works; viewing subject and viewed object may become viewing object and viewed subject depending on who is manipulation the relation."⁹³ For both Calle and Auster, this self-imposed surveillance, it seems, is part of

⁹⁰ Auster, *City of Glass*, 99.

⁹¹ Paul Auster, Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli, *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* (New York: Picador, 2004), 62-64.

⁹² Baudrillard, "Please Follow Me," 79.

⁹³ Griffin, "Watching the Detectives," 16.

identity exploration, marking the surveilled object's desire to be affirmed of existence by the Other. Or, in Baudrillard's words, "[o]ne must follow in order to be followed, photograph in order to be photographed, wear a mask in order to be unmasked, appear in order to disappear ... all that is ... the most profound, symbolic requirement. One has to be discovered."⁹⁴ This, in both cases, seems to be the main task of the doppelgänger.

Double Game, and the Mingling of Texts

The reversal of doppelgänger roles can be observed in two other texts by Auster and Calle. In Auster's novel *Ghosts*, the trained private eye Blue spies on a man named Black, writing detailed reports about him and submitting those to a client named White. At the end of the novel Blue learns not only that White is the same person as Black and the request to be spied on was made by White/Black himself, but also that throughout this time, Black had been spying on Blue as well. This scenario is justified at the end by Black who says: "That's the whole point, isn't it? He's got to know [that he is spied on] or else nothing makes sense. ... He needs my eyes looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive."⁹⁵ Likewise, in 1981, after the *Suite Vénitienne* project, Calle asked her mother to go to a detective agency and hire someone who would "follow [her], report on [her] daily activities and ... provide photographic evidence of [her] existence."⁹⁶ For several days, the detective, unaware that Calle knows about him, took pictures of her and recorded her movements in a small notebook, "omitting nothing from the account, not even the most banal and transitory events."⁹⁷ Later the results are published in *Double Game* as the detective's report and black-and-white photographs:

REPORT

Thursday, April 16, 1981

At 10:00 a.m. I take up position outside the home of the subject,
22 rue Liancourt, Paris 14th.

⁹⁴ Baudrillard, "Please Follow Me," 79.

⁹⁵ Auster, "Ghosts," in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 216.

⁹⁶ Calle, "The Detective," in Calle, *Double Game*, 123.

⁹⁷ The narrator's account of Maria's "detective" project as it appears in *Leviathan*, quoted in Calle, "The Detective," 123.

At 10:20 the subject leaves home. She is dressed in a gray raincoat, gray trousers, and wears black shoes with stockings of the same color. She carries a yellow shoulder bag.

At 10:23 the subject buys some daffodils at the florist's on the corner of rue Froidevaux and rue Gassendi, then enters Montparnasse cemetery at 5 rue Emile-Richard. She lays the flowers on a tomb then leaves the cemetery on the boulevard Edgar-Quinet side..."

[Etc.]

It is the ease with which Calle complies with the rules of the doppelgänger game that seems to account for Auster's fascination with her. Yet including Calle/Maria in *Leviathan* would have remained merely another intertextual reference for Auster, if Calle had not responded to this creation of her double by a decision to reverse the process and double her doubling as well as its creator, thus directly intervening in Auster's work. The result is her *Double Game*, whose essence is to mirror, mimic and merge with Auster's text. In the front matter of her book, Calle acknowledges Auster in exactly the same way as Auster acknowledges her in *Leviathan*: "The author extends special thanks to Paul Auster for permission to mingle fact with fiction." Auster's authorship over his work is undermined when Calle includes a copy of the relevant fragment of his *Leviathan* (the eight pages that deal with the fictional Maria) in her *Double Game* as a book-within-a-book text. With a red pen she edits the miniature replica of Auster's book by striking out or correcting any words or sentences that, to her mind, are not adequate or factually true. She also adds her own bits of information, along with personal comments:

~~"Some time after before that, she followed a man tried to pick up Maria on the street. She found him distinctly unattractive and rebuffed him. That same evening, by pure coincidence she ran into him at a gallery opening in SoHo Paris. They talked onee again, and this time she learned from the man that he was leaving the next morning soon."~~⁹⁸

The precision with which she responds to her double by mimicking it resembles a sort of writing machinery at work. Calle becomes machinic in copying, editing, and multiplying Auster's work. She not only re-writes Auster's text but also turns the fictional back into the factual. A fictional text written by Auster, which was partly built on Calle's

⁹⁸ Calle, "Leviathan," in Calle, *Double Game*.

personality and life, becomes Calle's (auto)biography, written by Auster and edited by Calle. But if the lives of Maria and Calle can be equated, and if Maria = Calle, then the fragments of *Leviathan* that are dedicated to Maria also become part of Calle's fictional autobiography, which in this case has been authored by someone else (Auster).

The conceptual works of Maria/Calle have been described by critics as "autofiction," which is a term applied to works "through which authors create new personalities and identities for themselves, while ... maintaining their identity (their real name)."⁹⁹ Yet there is also another way of looking at Calle's "autofictionality." Although her work has a strong performative element, it is almost always ritualistic and based on her obedience to preset rules. It therefore can be seen as prosthetic, automatic. Or, along the lines of McHale's arguments discussed Chapter 3, Calle's "life-writing" is purely prosthetic because it is limited, enhanced, and shaped by a set of prescribed rules (an automaton). "Autofiction," for Calle, therefore, is not only autobiographical fiction, but also "automatic fiction." Her act of editing Auster's text as well as carrying out the tasks and roles ascribed to her by Auster is likewise purely automatic. As I shall show below, the mechanical nature of Calle's text-generation makes her a more powerful doppelgänger than Paul Auster, whose texts are haunted by his humanist and existentialist concerns. In the Calle-Auster doppelgänger game, what we witness therefore is a machine versus a human.

As Calle begins to edit Auster's text, she reclaims her authorship over it and all the facts inscribed in it. She also claims authorship over *Leviathan*. But, if Auster's works are inseparable from his life and are two sides of the same Möbius strip, then by doing so Calle also rewrites Auster's life. In other words, Auster is no longer the sole author of his life, but his life is partly authored by Calle. In this way, as Khimasia points out, Auster and Calle problematize not only the distinction between reality and fiction, but even the concept of autofiction, and authorship over that.¹⁰⁰ The borders between two texts, narrators, authors, and their lives are once more demolished by the work of the double, who with its intervention overturns all textual conventions.

⁹⁹ See Olivier Asselin and Johanne Lamoureux, "Autofictions, or Elective identities," in *Parachute* 105 (2002): 11-18.

¹⁰⁰ Khimasia, "Authorial Turns."

In a sense, the game of collaboration between Auster and Calle reflects the form and contents of their own creative texts, and what is happening within them; the double becomes a messenger of its medium. In Alain Badiou's terms, then, their philosophy reveals itself performatively as it “*enacts* what it speaks of”; an idea not so different from Deleuze's creative performance of philosophy.¹⁰¹ Their collaboration becomes another example of surveillance, shadowing, and reporting; a game this time played not between fictional characters created by Auster or Calle, but between the two authors themselves as they become each other's doubles, impersonators, and chroniclers. What Quinn does in *City of Glass*, and Calle in *Suite Vénitienne*, is not so different from what Auster and Calle do to each other with their work. Not only the fictional diegeses of both authors, but also their own identities and life, have become complicated through what appears as a never-ending game of mutual doubling and detection. In case of the Auster-Calle collaborations, it is not only that “the *mise-en-abyme* (as endless, ‘illimitable’) becomes a motif in both Calle's and Auster's work,” but both Calle and Auster get implicated in a mutual re-writing of the self and the other as they merge their intratexts together.¹⁰²

Calle's intervention in Auster's intratext does not stop at including his text in her project and partially re-writing it. Calle equates fact with fiction, and herself with Maria, when she edits with a red pen the “factual mistakes” that appear in the pages of Auster's *Leviathan*. She also reverses this process – from the fictional to the factual – by carrying out in real life the fictional projects that Auster invented for Maria. Published in her *Double Game* as *The Chromatic Diet* and *Days Under the Sign of B, C, & W*, they appear in the first part under the title “The life of Maria and how it influenced the life of Sophie.” In the words of Maud Lavin, “[w]hen Calle enacts and lavishly documents Maria's esthetic exercises, they become hers, and when she republishes the art works originally hers that Auster ascribed to Maria, they become hers again.”¹⁰³ Calle also rewrites Auster's projects by improving the parts she does not like, as in her project *The Chromatic Diet*.¹⁰⁴ In other words, Calle acknowledges Auster's authoritative and

¹⁰¹ Oliver Feltham, “Translator's Preface,” in Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, transl. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), xxiv.

¹⁰² Khimasia, “Authorial Turns.”

¹⁰³ Lavin, “Imitation of Life,” 33-34.

¹⁰⁴ In *The Chromatic Diet*, for example, which envisages Maria eating products of a different color each day (Monday – orange, Tuesday – red, Wednesday – white, etc.), Calle adds her own meals and chooses to continue the ritual also on days “that Paul Auster had given his characters the day off.” On a Wednesday, when Auster had Maria eat “flounder, potatoes, cottage cheese,” Calle modifies the menu, “because [she] was not satisfied with the yellow color of the potatoes,” and replaces potatoes with white rice and milk. Or,

authorial voice, yet at the same time she undermines it.¹⁰⁵ A similar attempt to regain her authority can be seen in the second part of *Double Game* entitled “The life of Sophie and how it influenced the life of Maria.” As if to reinforce her authorship, Calle there republishes her earlier projects that Auster had “borrowed” for Maria.

According to Baudrillard, following someone’s footsteps, with or without documenting and reporting on their activities, in itself is already an aggression, compared to which even “murder is more subtle,” because following someone step by step means “erasing his traces along the way, and no one can live without traces.”¹⁰⁶ Baudrillard’s commentary on Calle’s ability, after losing herself “in the other’s traces,” to steal those traces and by doing so reclaim her own existence, should be seen in the light of the different outcomes of the quests undertaken by Calle and Auster’s pseudo-detectives. As I shall shortly illustrate, the main difference between Auster and Calle can be encapsulated in the following way: while the former seeks meaning, the latter acts purely “automatically.”

For Calle, like for Deleuze, destruction is a part of productive creation, which distinguishes her from Auster, who seems at times to be too humanist, too driven to achieve some sort of final existential solution at the end of his texts, the unattainable goal of finally finding a unity and wholeness within one’s self. The self-confidence and submissiveness with which Calle throws herself at the mercy of the other, and the aggression with which she approaches it, as noted by Baudrillard, is most visible in her “attacks” on Auster when she invades his *Leviathan* and literally erases (and at places – replaces) parts of it. This reminds one of Hoffman’s inspiring automaton Olympia. Men are afraid of Calle’s work as they are afraid of the Olympia doll – because, as Olivier Renaud-Clement puts it, “[s]he pins them down.”¹⁰⁷

on a Monday, when the menu’s color is orange, Calle adds some orange juice because “Paul Auster forgot to mention drinks.” See Calle, “The Chromatic Diet,” in Calle, *Double Game*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ Khimasia, “Authorial Turns.”

¹⁰⁶ Baudrillard, “Please Follow Me,” 74.

¹⁰⁷ Olivier Renaud-Clement, a private dealer as well as a friend of Calle’s, quoted in Daphne Merkin and Navad Kander, “I Think Therefore I’m Art,” *The New York Times Style Magazine*, October 19, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/indexes/2008/10/19/style/t/index.html#pageName=19calle>.

When critics address the similarities between Auster and Calle's projects, they tend to view both authors as conceptual artists.¹⁰⁸ Their argument is that coincidence can potentially give birth to a kind of action, ritual, or performance that can then be seen growing into an artistic life-project. This reliance on one of the main features of conceptual art – the principle of coincidence – which stipulates that, in terms of plot, “anything can happen any moment,” is viewed by these critics as the structuring device for many of Auster's works, and most of Calle's projects. Auster's characters, then, like Calle and her characters, are conceptual artists, “art historians,”¹⁰⁹ who know how to turn a chance encounter into an artistic project and a performance of their life. Apart from such novels as *Moon Palace*, which features an ekphrastic analysis of a Ralph Albert Blakelock painting by the protagonist Marco Fogg, or *The Book of Illusions* and *Man in the Dark*, where the characters conduct cinematic analysis of movies, Auster's works are, according to Schoell-Glass, “reflecting also an increasing interest in visuality and the image, and in art form situated between the creation of objects and the enactment of rituals,”¹¹⁰ or, in other words, conceptual art.

Self-imposed and “accidental” projects, which Auster's characters involve themselves in, allow one to see the analogy between Auster's rhizomatic texts and Calle's life-works. While Peter Stillman Sr. from *City of Glass* inscribes his messages on New York's urban space through his daily walks, Quinn tries to decode and interpret them. At first glance, this seems not unlike Calle's own detective-projects in Venice and Paris. On the other hand, Benjamin Sachs from *Leviathan*, whom the twists of fate and chance have turned into a terrorist, starts blowing up Statue of Liberty's replicas throughout the United States. Schoell-Glass sees Sachs' actions as similar to conceptual art projects, carefully planned and performed, with messages left for the public.¹¹¹ Whichever way viewed, the

¹⁰⁸ See Charlotte Schoell-Glass, “Fictions of the Art World: Art, Art History and the Art Historian in Literary Space,” in *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*, edited by Rui Carvalho Homem and Maria de Fátima Lambert (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 107-118. See also Griffin, “Watching the Detectives.”

¹⁰⁹ Schoell-Glass seems to be using the term “art history” in a very wide sense as recognition, description and interpretation of art. Alternately, she uses terms “art historian” and “artist-conceptualist,” attributing to Auster both.

¹¹⁰ Schoell-Glass, “Fictions of the Art World,” 107.

¹¹¹ As Schoell-Glass points out, these characters can be seen “inscribing [their] obsession[s] in the urban space,” as well as objects and things, making them and Auster as their author all conceptual artists. Schoell-Glass, “Fictions of the Art World,” 116.

similarities between Auster and Calle, and their respective texts, at first seem striking, so that the two almost appear as one another's double.

It would be a critical commonplace to view both authors' work as based on coincidence, letting their creative practices "depend upon it to a great extent to constitute an aesthetic reality," and to "rely on coincidences to define 'reality'."¹¹² A set of objects become involved in unexpected situations and together generate assemblages that make the storyline possible. In Auster's case, one example would be the often-quoted episode of the mistaken phone call that Quinn receives in the middle of the night that opens *City of Glass*. Another would be a seemingly ordinary notebook that Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night* buys at a stationery store and which turns out to have an incredible impact on his life. For Calle, in *Address Book* it is the eponymous object found lying on a street that prompts her to start a new "detective" quest. She decides to try to reconstruct the identity of its owner, "to get to know this man through his friends, his acquaintances," to "discover who he was without ever meeting him and to produce a portrait of him" by calling all the names from the address book and interviewing them about the owner.¹¹³ Or, as Auster describes the origins of Calle's *The Address Book* project in *Leviathan*, "[t]he book had been transformed into a magical object for her ... Chance had led her to it, but now that it was hers, she saw it as an instrument of fate."¹¹⁴ This remark by Auster, I believe, reveals the main difference between Auster and Calle: if for the former the element of coincidence, or chance, is to be read as "an instrument of fate," then for Calle it becomes "the instrument of writing," or creating art – a tool, in other words.

How then to explain this difference? Firstly, Calle sees herself a conceptual artist and lets her life with all its unexpected twists (which Auster would dramatically refer to as "fate") intrinsically overlap with her creative work. Not only do unexpected chance events, but also personal tragedies have the capacity to be skillfully turned into a new art project.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Griffin, "Watching the Detectives," 19.

¹¹³ Calle, "The Address Book," in Calle, *Double Game*, 186-187.

¹¹⁴ Auster, *Leviathan*, 74.

¹¹⁵ Projects like *Take Care of Yourself* and *Exquisite Pain* grew from Calle's relationship breakups, while *Lourdes*, *Coffin*, *Monique* and *North Pole* are related to the trauma caused by the death of her mother; another untitled video project depicts her mother dying. When the traumatic experience and the related emotions get staged, or captured and mediated by technology, or shared and distributed among other project participants, and then monotonously repeated, to the point where they become almost mechanical, Calle refers to the experience as having therapeutic value. As Calle explains in an interview – "[a]t first it was

Secondly, Calle refuses to seek for meaning for such “signs of fate,” and indeed refuses to interpret any situation she encounters. What matters for her is purely the process of performance – doppelgänger-ish, investigative, experimental, creative, or therapeutic – rather than the purposefulness of its result. As the ultimate doppelgänger, she is, to repeat Webber’s phrasing, the “inveterate performer” of the acts of detection, voyeurism, and exploration, for whom “fate” is but a game (hence also the title of her book, *Double Game*, and the explanation of “The Rules of the Game” in its beginning).

When Calle/Maria embarks on her self-imposed quest to follow a strange man in Venice/New Orleans, her intention, according to the narrator of *Leviathan*, is to “keep herself hidden, to resist all contact with him, to explore his outward behavior and make no effort to interpret what she saw.”¹¹⁶ In *City of Glass*, Quinn embarks on a never-fulfilling and destructive quest, and is driven to insanity because of his obsession and desire “to ascribe significance to every event or clue” and to always look for signs of fate and meaning, which he, however, is unable to interpret.¹¹⁷ In *Suite Vénitienne*, Calle purposefully throws herself into a seemingly meaningless ritual, where her subjective experience of the process is more important than any rational meaning or external value. For Calle, coincidence generates rules for a game, while Auster’s characters attempt to inscribe the will of fate in its occurrences. As opposed to Auster, Calle’s “quests” are hardly quests at all, since, as Baudrillard puts it, they “have *no* reason.”¹¹⁸ (his emphasis) Discussing Calle’s projects, Baudrillard points out that it is necessary, in fact, that her “overture make no sense, in order to have a chance of success in this sphere of

[my] therapy; then art took over.” See Calle in an interview with Angelique Chrisafis, “He Loves Me Not,” *The Guardian*, June 16, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jun/16/artnews.art>.

The therapeutic aspect of Calle’s creative work can be best seen in the two abovementioned projects that were not included in *Leviathan* or *Double Game*. The life-projects *Take Care of Yourself* and *Exquisite Pain* were started when Calle was dumped by her partners – in the first instance it happened by an e-mail, in the second – by a telephone call. As part of the *Take Care of Yourself* project, Calle gave the e-mail that her partner had written to her to 107 “women” of different backgrounds and specialties, including a parrot and a hand puppet. She asked these women to interpret the message, while filming and photographing their interpretations of it. In the project *Exquisite Pain*, Calle after the breakup, which happened over a phone, met with friends and also random people (altogether 90) and shared her story with them, at the same time asking these people to share their most painful experience. Calle writes: “I decided to continue ... until I had got over my pain by comparing it with other people’s, or had worn out my own story through sheer repetition. The method proved radically effective. In three months I had cured myself.” See Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2004), 203.

¹¹⁶ Auster, *Leviathan*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Griffin, “Watching the Detectives,” 19.

¹¹⁸ Baudrillard, “Please Follow Me,” 76.

strangeness, absurd complicity, fatal consent.”¹¹⁹ The purposeless, ritualized performances she carries out without questioning their meaning, and the voluntary self-subjection to the rules of self-imposed games makes Calle a puppet, a robotic doll, at the mercy of “fate,” coincidence, and the other – such as Auster, for example. As Calle writes in “The Rules of the Game,” about her collaboration with Auster:

I was ... inviting Paul Auster to do what he wanted with me, for a period of up to a year at most. Auster objected that he did not want to take responsibility for what might happen when I acted out the script he had created for me. Instead, he preferred to send me “Personal Instructions for SC on How to Improve Life in New York City (Because she asked...)”. I followed his directives.¹²⁰

And yet in her creative work, Calle manages to steer a chain of coincidental and chance situations “into a system of relationships” that she maintains “under her control.”¹²¹ In other words, although she may subject herself to arbitrariness and chance, and the “impetus of the other,” by giving up her authority and letting “other people decide,” it is an informed choice where she holds the final control.¹²² Auster, who fails to understand the principle of game, and the logics of doppelgänger (to lose oneself in the other’s traces rewards you by letting you steal its traces, as Baudrillard reminds us), loses authorial control. In the course of his narratives his characters lose all control over their identity, life, and decisions; they disappear and are swept away by what could be called Auster’s fatal coincidences. Auster’s writer-figures, unlike Calle and her doubles, seem unable to yield their experiences, emotions, and existential questions to the kind of mechanization, aestheticization, and ritualized repetition that the latter practice; instead, his writer-figures obsessively keep pursuing some kind of hidden meaning to their existential quests. Most of his characters are doomed to perish – Quinn goes mad and vanishes from the story, while Ben is literally blown up: “his body burst into dozens of small pieces.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Baudrillard, “Please Follow Me,” 76.

¹²⁰ Calle, “The Rules of the Game,” in Calle, *Double Game*, pages unnumbered.

¹²¹ Griffin, “Watching the Detectives,” 19.

¹²² Calle says in an interview with Griffin: “I still have control of it. Many things I don’t like to decide, although I keep control of it ... I feel control because I choose the rules of the game – I’m the one who has decided that I would obey my own rule.” See Calle interviewed by Griffin in “Watching the Detectives,” 19.

Calle expresses similar beliefs also in an interview with Christine Macel, where she says: “I like being in control and I like losing control. Obedience to a ritual is a way of making rules and then letting yourself go along with them. ... That’s the rule of the game, but I’m the one who chose the rule.” See Calle’s interview with Christine Macel, “Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle,” in Sophie Calle, *Sophie Calle: M’as-tu vue* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel Publishing, 2004), 80.

¹²³ Auster, *Leviathan*, 1.

Auster's characters, as some critics would see it, are forever doomed on their quest to find meaning and fight linguistic disintegration, what Schoell-Glass calls "the ultimate and fundamental punishment for human being," being doomed to always "misunderstand, misread and misconstrue each other and the world."¹²⁴ Hence their obsession to inscribe themselves in the urban space and in objects, to try to make meaning from those, and the futile attempts to re-construct the pristine relationship between language and the world, as staged by Stillman Sr. and Quinn (*City of Glass*), Ben Sachs (*Leviathan*), Anna Blume (*In the Country of Last Things*), or the nameless protagonist of the more recent novel *Travels in the Scriptorium*. It therefore seems that Auster's humanist side traps his characters into an eternal quest for unattainable meaning (existential, linguistic, meta-fictional), while Calle's life-art is liberated from such burden – it is acted out in a purely mechanical way. As I have stated earlier, there is not much difference between Calle, Hoffmann's Olympia, or Auster's Olympia typewriter – they are all tools of both inspiration and the mechanical generation of art (Calle makes art, while the automatic doll Olympia sings and plays harpsichord, and the typewriter produces writing). Missing in the cases of these "spiritual automatons" are the existential doubts that always manage to creep into Auster's writing.

Gotham Handbook

Sophie Calle as an automaton is best manifested in the final part of the collaborative project between her and Auster, "Gotham Handbook," where Auster uses a puppet-like Calle to address his humanist concerns. This project differs from other Auster texts with its absence of self-focus and explorations of identity. It marks a turn away from Calle and Auster's identity quests and stories of personal recovery and redemption, instead focusing on "the moral issue" and the man's responsibility towards the world and other people, resonances of which can be seen in Auster's films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* and in his 2005 novel *The Brooklyn Follies*. The specific instructions that Calle must observe are supplemented with Auster's personal moral explanations that justify these tasks. It is, in fact, Auster's call for exercising one's responsibility as a human being through small altruistic actions and emphatic gestures that could boost the city's morale and thus improve the life of the people living in the neighborhood. Auster becomes the dictating

¹²⁴ Schoell-Glass, "Fictions of the Art World," 116.

voice while Calle – his messenger – mechanically carries out his instructions by inscribing her acts on the city space.

The set of instructions to Calle consists of four parts, each of which contains a different task for her: *Smiling* (Calle must smile at strangers when the situation does not call for it), *Talking to Strangers* (as there will be people who talk to her after she smiles at them), *Beggars and Homeless People* (she must give out sandwiches and cigarettes to them), and *Cultivating a Spot* (she must choose a spot in New York and beautify it). Auster believes that “it’s our responsibility as human beings not to harden our hearts. Action is necessary, no matter how small or hopeless our gestures might seem to be.”¹²⁵ By following these instructions and carrying out small acts of charity, Calle is to improve life in the neighborhood. However, acts that are supposed to signify genuine kindness and generosity of humankind are rendered into experimental performances that are carried out and documented in an automated way. Calle’s notes on the project reveal her unconditional submission to the given orders (“I have a duty to obey. That was the agreement. I have no other choice but to submit”¹²⁶) and her commitment to achieving precise implementation, down to the smallest details (“The only problem is keeping track of the number of smiles received each day. Paul didn’t ask me to count the smiles I give. Unquestionably an oversight.”¹²⁷).

In his instructions to Calle, Auster repeats what his characters Anne Blume and Quinn had expressed more than 20 years ago in their anti-utopian urban visions: “People are not the only ones neglected in New York. Things are neglected as well. ... Look closely at the things around you and you’ll see that nearly everything is falling apart.”¹²⁸ Hence the last task for Calle – *Cultivating a Spot*. Auster asks her to pick one spot in the city – “a street corner, a subway entrance, a tree in the park” – and begin to think of it as hers.¹²⁹ Calle chooses a public telephone booth located on a street corner in the SoHo neighborhood. Auster gives her the instructions:

¹²⁵ Auster, “Gotham Handbook,” 3.

¹²⁶ Sophie Calle, “Gotham Handbook,” 246.

¹²⁷ Calle, “Gotham Handbook,” 246

¹²⁸ Auster “Gotham Handbook,” 4.

¹²⁹ Auster “Gotham Handbook,” 4.

Go to your spot every day at the same time. Spend an hour watching everything that happens to it, keeping track of everyone who passes by or stops or does anything there. Take notes, take photographs. Make a record of these daily observations and see if you learn anything about the people or the place or yourself.¹³⁰

Unlike the inward detections of one's selfhood and identity that are the basis of most Auster/Calle projects, the direction that "Gotham Handbook" takes is outward, towards acknowledging the larger social assemblages formed by people, spaces, and objects. This reminds one that collaborations, including those such as *Smoke* or *Blue in the Face* discussed earlier in this thesis, are rhizomatic in nature and more democratic because they imply (at least) double authorship with double perspectives and double voices. There seems to be a possibility for two-fold movement. On the one hand, the cross-medium collaboration wants to question itself – what happens when the notions of unique authorship get undermined, or one author is allowed to intervene in another author's work, like in the case of Auster-Calle collaboration? What happens to the texts, their generic boundaries, the ideas of authorship and origin, and the authors themselves? That is why in collaborative projects identity and authorship often becomes a central concern in a meta-fictional way, and often uses the figure of the double to address it. On the other hand, the nature of the collaboration rhizome liberates the collaborators from excessive egocentricity and self-consciousness; its democratic and open form likewise corresponds to its contents. As González says of another Auster collaboration, *Blue in the Face*, "[t]his experience of communal artistic production reproduces in fact the main theme of the film: the importance of communities and relationships versus individualism, cold capitalism, and globalization."¹³¹

When Maria Lind talks about collaboration and collectivism in contemporary art in her essay "The Collaborative Turn", she refers to Gregory Sholette and "art scientist" Blake Stimson, who represent two types of collaboration.¹³² The former's work reflects the growing Islamic desire for an anti-capitalistic, absolute, and idealistic collectivism, while the latter's turns against *all* ideology or, in Deleuzian terms, the fruit of arborescent thinking (be it the ideals of Christianity or Islam, nationalism, or communism, etc.).

¹³⁰ Auster "Gotham Handbook," 4.

¹³¹ González, "Words Versus Images," 32.

¹³² Lind referring to Bishop Claire's "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum*, February 2006, 179-185; here quoted in Lind, "Collaborative Turn," 18.

Deleuze and Guattari would consider this the “process of emancipation,” as collaborations that operate horizontally consist of and give voice to “agents from different fields.”¹³³ As Lind points out, in its structure a collaborative project “ends up looking very much like the rhizome as described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,” and “certainly shares some of the characteristics of Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s understanding of the ‘common’.”¹³⁴ Collaboration in its essence is unpredictable, hybrid-like; its authorship is distributed horizontally.

Collaboration is open and elastic; instead of prioritizing and honoring one author, its preference is the plurality of voices, where each voice has potential to be heard. Collaboration is rhizomatic – anti-idealistic, anti-rooted, and free. As Benjamin D. Carson points out (quoting Deleuze and Guattari), in contrast to arborescent, hierarchical systems, the rhizome appears as an acentered asignifying system with “finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbour to any other, the stems or channels,” unlike the predetermined paths within the arborescent system, “do not pre-exist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment—such that local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronized without a central agency.”¹³⁵ Carson also notes that in a rhizomatic, asignifying system (such as collaboration), where hierarchy has been displaced by multiplicity, the individual’s location or identity is, in fact, “indeterminate.”¹³⁶ The multiple takes over the singular.

Within “Gotham Handbook,” everyone has a potential to be heard – any and every stranger who interacts with Calle. Likewise, in “his” *The National Story Project*, Auster gives voice to the ordinary American people, “allowing the people to be heard.”¹³⁷ The hierarchy that exists in the writing of the nation’s narrative gets dismantled. After Auster announces the project on the radio, letters start pouring in from all corners of the country: “so many voices coming at [Auster] from so many different directions.”¹³⁸ As he

¹³³ Lind, “Collaborative Turn,” 27.

¹³⁴ Lind, “Collaborative Turn,” 16.

¹³⁵ Carson, quoting from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in Benjamin D. Carson, “Towards a Postmodern Political Art: Deleuze, Guattari, and the Anti-Culture Book,” *rhizomes* 07 (Fall 2003), <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue7/carson.htm>.

¹³⁶ Carson, “Towards a Postmodern Political Art.”

¹³⁷ Paul Auster, “Introduction” to *I Thought My Father Was God and Other True Tales from NPR’s National Story Project*, edited and introduced by Paul Auster (New York: Picador, 2002), xvii.

¹³⁸ Auster, *I Thought My Father Was God*, xvi.

acknowledges, *The National Story Project*'s "book has been written by people of all ages and from all walks of life."¹³⁹ Auster's attempt to "let people be heard" through the film *Smoke* resembles this, where nearly every character gets a chance to tell their story.

A film, such as *Blue in the Face*, not only further "expand[s] the issues from *Smoke*; it also corrects them to integrate groups and opinions that were excluded in the first film, specifically racial minorities and woman."¹⁴⁰ This requirement – that voice be given to the others, especially the abused or forgotten ones – goes hand in hand with one's moral obligations that Auster underlines in his letter to Calle, where he writes to her: "Don't ignore the miserable ones."¹⁴¹ To repeat González's observation, Auster's films are "all moral tales, stories of moral responsibility where the characters need to consider the ethical implications of their acts."¹⁴²

As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the notion of novelty is problematic in Auster's oeuvre. Even a "new" collaborative project keeps pointing back to other Auster's works. Likewise, the encounters with the strangers that Calle has to look for when obeying Auster's rules are not unfamiliar to her from her past projects. In *The Sleepers* (1979), Calle invited friends and strangers to sleep in her bed continuously for eight days; in *The Bronx* (1980) she talks to strangers on the streets of South Bronx and photographs them at their favorite local spots. It seems that Von Bellis Schneewein's description of Calle's works that each "stands by itself, yet echoes the presence of the other,"¹⁴³ can be equally attributed to Auster – they are two doppelgängers caught into a never-ending cycle of machinic multiplication, doubling, and repetition.

Doubling then can be seen functioning not only as a method for reading but also as a tool for writing. The mechanics of doubling in the process of reading and writing become visible in the following chapter where I try to trace the associations of Auster's New York. There, I attempt to read Auster's texts *in situ* by doubling his characters and literally retracing their routes inscribed in the space of New York the same way as

¹³⁹ Auster, *I Thought My Father Was God*, xix.

¹⁴⁰ González, "e

¹⁴¹ Auster, "Gotham Handbook," 3.

¹⁴² González, "Words Versus Images," 34.

¹⁴³ Von Bellis Schneewein, "You Exist Only in the Trace of the Other..." *Fiktionen mit Fantômas, Corpus: Internet Magazine für Tanz, Choreografie, Performance*, http://www.corpusweb.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=598&Itemid=35.

Auster's writer-detective characters follow their subjects in *City of Glass*, *Leviathan*, or *The Day I Disappeared* (and as Sophie Calle, Auster's female doppelgänger, follows what she interprets as instructions given by his work). In doing so I am aware of my own agency in this process of tracing the connections and work of other actors that constitute Auster's assemblages. If I double an Auster character, I myself become like a character, and the required intellectual distance becomes impossible to retain; it collapses the moment that this disruption in perspective occurs. Hence, the shift in the narrative voice in the next chapter, and the adoption of a different kind of methodology required by such performative reading. As a critical reader of Auster's texts and the writer of this thesis, I have become increasingly aware of my own agency of reconstituting and expanding Auster's intratext through the process of "reading" it and writing about it. I have become yet another actor that "does some work" with(in) Auster's intratext, and the addition of "such an ontological ingredient" modifies the network itself.¹⁴⁴ Through the performative process of my reading of Auster's intratext, and my tracing of the elements that act within it, I am simultaneously also re-writing these texts in a way that resembles Sophie Calle's doubling and re-writing of Paul Auster's life-work.

Latour warns us about this nature of tracing, because a network is not something that gets traced or inscribed by someone else; the actor-network itself is that "entity that does the tracing and the inscribing."¹⁴⁵ Tracing an actor, a "thing" along a network in which it acts and where it forms and re-forms its assemblages is what creates the network itself.¹⁴⁶ In other words, it is my tracing of the Auster-assemblage and its constituent elements across Auster's oeuvre that has allowed me to note the connections it has rendered, the functions it has assumed, and the different kinds of other assemblages, situations, networks that it has constituted. The Auster-assemblage is the node within the rhizome that this thesis has foregrounded.

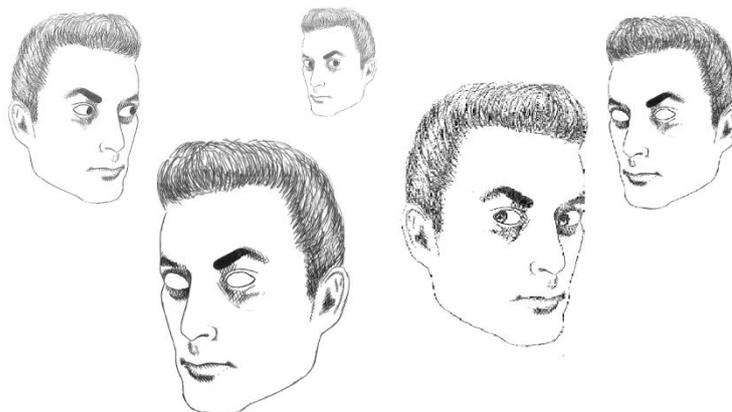
¹⁴⁴ Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory."

¹⁴⁵ Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More than a Few Complications," *Soziale Welt* 47.4 (1996): 369-381, <http://www.cours.fse.ulaval.ca/edc-65804/latour-clarifications.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ That is to say, a network, or an assemblage cannot be traced and explained "from outside" but the process of tracing and explaining itself adds to the creation of the network. As Latour explains, "One does not jump outside a network to add an explanation – a cause, a factor, a set of factors, a series of co-occurrences; one simply extends the network further. Every network surrounds itself with its own frame of reference, its own definition of growth, of referring, of framing, of explaining. ... There is no way to provide an explanation if the network does not extend itself." See Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory." In the end, this is not so dissimilar from the postmodern notion that it is the reader that creates the meaning of a text, reconstituting the text anew with each instance of reading.

For Deleuze and Guattari, writing about a rhizome itself creates a rhizome.¹⁴⁷ In tracing, describing, and reading a rhizomatic multiplicity of texts, such as Auster’s intratext, the process of doing so itself forms a rhizome. This thesis therefore, as stated before, is likewise rhizomatic – it lacks the symmetry, linearity, determination, arborescent structure, and conclusiveness characteristic of scholarly works that engage in more “traditional” criticism that tends to rely on fixed theoretical frameworks, prescribed assumptions, *a priori* set order and relations, often predicting the ways a text should be read and thus “keeping it under control.” (Both the concepts of the Latourian network and the Deleuzian rhizome are intended to liberate thinking from the tyranny and control of such predetermined, arborescent systems of ideas.)

The last chapter of this thesis is therefore written against the academic convention that dictates the need for a certain critical distance to be kept from the subject and object of study. By doubling Paul Auster’s writer-detective characters by retracing their routes and their actions, and, consequently, the associations evoked in them by the city of New York in which their acting takes place, I have attempted to get rid of the tyranny of critical distance,” to paraphrase Latour.¹⁴⁸ In this way, by choosing an empirical method of reading that follows a set of “instructions” given by Auster’s texts themselves, I can explore the relationship between the conventional critical reading method and the text, or rather – between the author, his critic, and the reader in the process of producing meanings for texts.



¹⁴⁷ That is why also Deleuze and Guattari state in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: “We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs...” See Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

¹⁴⁸ Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory.”

Chapter 5: New York, Where All Quests Fail

Since, as Quinn learns in *City of Glass*, detection requires complete identification with the object of search, the work this thesis does in dissecting the things that assemble the writer-character and the ways they produce multiple, shifting and sometimes contradictory meanings, has likewise required the author of this study to identify with it.¹ Identification becomes copying, doubling – itself another element that is part of Auster’s writing machine. I, the author of this thesis, was therefore smoking cigarettes, cigarillos and cigars while writing about the role of smoking and tracing the actions and associations of “the cigarette.” I was touch-type-writing my chapter on typewriting, invoking memories of an early youth, when I myself was composing stories on an old typewriter that belonged to my father, but which I would occasionally borrow to awaken in the middle of the night and listen to its rhythmical clicking, always slightly amazed at the things it produced on the white paper in front of me. In a sense, this research has turned me into a smoking, touch-type-writing writer, and as such “connected” to Auster and his characters, although, eventually, like them, I have had to admit that the quest to capture the life-work of someone else is a struggle, because their identity and essence, and the meaning of their work, will always evade the writer-detective.² The required identification with the object of search means that, for the author of this study, reading Paul Auster’s texts has become a performance of them, myself and my work mimicking Auster and his work, and assuming the role of the double of both himself and his characters. Because the typing, chain-smoking writer-figure predominantly inhabits the spaces of New York, this conclusive chapter turns to an exploration of New York as

¹ To use the words of Quinn from *City of Glass*, “[a]nd yet, what is it that Dupin says in Poe? ‘An identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent’.” See Auster, *City of Glass*, 65.

² Auster writing about his father in *The Invention of Solitude*; the anonymous protagonist of *The Locked Room* writing about Fanshawe; Peter Aaron, the protagonist of *Leviathan*, writing about Benjamin Sachs, *et cetera*. The following passage from *The Locked Room* explains it best: “Every life is inexplicable, I kept telling myself. No matter how many facts are told, no matter how many details are given, the essential thing resists telling. To say that so and so was born here and went there, that he did this and did that, that he married this woman and had these children, that he lived, that he died, that he left behind these books or this battler or that bridge – none of that tells us very much. We all want to be told stories, and we listen to them in the same way we did when we were young. We imagine the real story inside the words, and to do this we substitute ourselves for the person in the story, pretending that we can understand him because we understand ourselves. This is a deception. We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. No one can cross the boundary into another – for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself.” See Auster, “The Locked Room,” in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 292.

another recurrent element in Auster's life-work. This study of the significance of New York also marks the final stage of my scholarly quest, whereby I myself travel to New York in search of both Paul Auster's New York and Paul Auster himself.

This chapter has something of the nature of the rhizome. It is entitled after Paul Auster's New York, whose associations and acting it attempts to follow, yet the chapter also becomes the site where finally "it all" comes together.³ This chapter therefore puts forward several objects of interest and several objectives that lead me in different directions but that are all, nevertheless, tied together in the rhizomatic conjunction of "and... and... and..." It starts with my attempt to approach the concept of New York in the same way as I approached those of the cigarette, the typewriter and the double, in terms of its cultural history, only to find such a task impossible. The city is simply too big, too dynamic, and too uncontainable; New York, under its public mask, quickly splits into a multiplicity of uncountable different personal New Yorks which are in conflict with each other. I question the concept of "Auster's New York" and the possibility for a reader to ever be able to relate to it. Conscious that my task is most likely impossible, I nevertheless set out to travel to New York in order to look for traces of that city as it appears in Auster's intratext. I try to double Auster characters by retracing their pathways inscribed in the city itself and by adopting their way of reasoning.

Simultaneously, this process of doubling Auster's writer-detectives, then, allows me to test out in practice the Austeresque proposition that makes the methodology and process of reading the equivalent of "detecting," or detective's work. As Auster warned, my attempts fail. Yet the New York that I talk about in this chapter is also very "real" – at the corner of Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, for example, one finds The New York Public Library, whose Berg Collection contains three archives of Paul Auster manuscripts and "papers." I visit the collection as an Auster scholar in order to test out the conventional approach, which presumes that studying an author's manuscripts, notes and letters can shed some light on understanding the meaning of the final texts. Because of the interest that my thesis has in the rhizomatic structure of Auster's oeuvre, I also want to see

³ That is to paraphrase the anonymous protagonist of *The Locked Room* who also says at the end of *The New York Trilogy* that "the entire story comes down to what happened at the end ... [All these] stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about. I don't claim to have solved any problems. ... The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle." See Auster, "The Locked Room," in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 346.

whether the early manuscript versions of Auster texts would confirm my thesis about the anti-genealogy and intratextuality of his work. New York is also the place where the empirical author, the “real” Paul Auster, lives, and smokes, and writes in his studio in Brooklyn’s Park Slope neighborhood. Since he is both the source and the epitome of Auster’s “writer-character assemblage,” finding and meeting him would also allow me to raise questions about authenticity, truth, the distinction between fact and fiction, and the importance of authorial intent in the interpretation of texts, among other questions.

Because the goal of the travel was to find both Paul Auster’s New York *and* Paul Auster in New York, I had to identify with his protagonists as well as with Paul Auster himself, whose experiences are manifested in his life-work. For myself, embarked on such a quest of doubling and detecting, that meant adopting, in certain situations, the use of the personal pronoun “I” and first-person narrative in reporting my performed readings of Auster’s New York. That explains the shift in tone and register from the neutral academic mode to a more informal and personal narrative, as I not only pretend to double an Auster character, but also become increasingly aware of my own agency in the project, which has come to mean not only reading Auster’s New York but, in fact, re-writing and re-constituting it. A schizophrenic split occurs at this point in my writing, producing research that extends itself in multiple directions like a rhizome, altering also the perspective and the critical distance as, in particular moments, I myself become immersed in Auster’s texts and start to operate from “within.” That corresponds, as I have suggested already, to Deleuze’s notion of the “in-difference” of production and product: writing about the rhizomatic text unavoidably generates a rhizomatic text itself, which becomes uncontainable, untamable, asymmetric, schizophrenic and inconclusive, such as this thesis, and, in particular, this final chapter on Paul Auster and New York. In the end, this chapter is not only about New York, or Paul Auster’s New York, or even my Paul Auster’s New York, but concerns the processes of critical reading and interpretation, writing and the production of meaning.

Introducing New York

Paul Auster’s writer-character would be unimaginable without New York. Sam Messer’s paintings most often depict Auster as a writer-character assemblage, with its trademark cigarillos and typewriters, set against a view of the Brooklyn Bridge, or Manhattan’s

skyline or its high-rise buildings. Jesús Ángel González opens his article “How I interviewed Paul Auster” with the following note: “Beware! Stop reading now if you don’t want to get hooked. Paul Auster is addictive. He smokes and writes. And lives in Brooklyn.”⁴ In the Sonic Memorial Soundwalk project that took place four years after the 9/11 events, Auster narrates a walking tour around the neighborhood of what is now Ground Zero, introducing himself as “Paul Auster; writer, New Yorker.” In an interview with Allon Reich in 1988, Auster declares that “New York is the most important place for me.”⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that Paul Auster is seen as the quintessential New York writer, his name so synonymous with the city that it recurrently gets included in literary travel guides.⁶ Exploring and experiencing New York has become synonymous with reading Paul Auster.

With a few exceptions (*The Music of Chance* novel and film, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* movie – although it, too, concludes with the protagonist’s return to his home in New York), most of Auster’s works are set predominantly in Brooklyn and/or Manhattan. These include *Smoke*, *Blue in the Face*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, *The New York Trilogy*, *Moon Palace*, *The Invention of Solitude*, *Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story*, *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, *Oracle Night*, *Lulu on the Bridge*, *Leviathan*, *The Red Notebook*, the most recent novel *Sunset Park*, and Sophie Calle/Paul Auster’s project “Gotham Handbook,” among others. Alternatively, a Paul Auster story is set in an unnamed big city that carries within itself the same characteristics that are often attributed to the metropolitan New York – its vastness and the overwhelming size of its architecture, its maze-like streets that can consume an individual and make one feel lost, the consequent sense of threat and confusion, and the illusion that the city is constantly changing, so that things and buildings are either disappearing or transforming themselves before one’s own eyes (as *In the Country of Last Things*). For Mark Brown, the critic who has most extensively explored the significance of a variety of spaces in these texts (rooms, streets, downtown, dystopian city), Auster has “consistently

⁴ Jesús Ángel González, “My Second Slice: How I Interviewed Paul Auster,” published on González’s personal page on *Issuu* digital publishing platform, January 12, 2011, http://issuu.com/jagonzal/docs/how_i_interviewed_paul_auster.

⁵ Auster quoted from Allon Reich’s “Interview with Paul Auster: Brooklyn 1988,” in Brown, *Paul Auster*, 1.

⁶ See, for example, Luisa Moncada and Scala Quin, *Reading on Location: Great Books Set in Top Travel Destinations* (London: New Holland, 2011); William Corbett, *New York Literary Lights: William Corbett* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1998); Steven Kurutz, “Literary New York,” *The New York Times*, May 14, 2006, <http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/travel/14going.html>, among many others.

taken the city of New York as a central feature in his work.”⁷ Brown notes that the city, which “inhabits [Auster’s] essays, novels and films,” is both “a backdrop against which the plots unfold,” as well as “*an active agent* in their outcomes.”⁸ (my emphasis) In other words, New York is not just a place of action for Auster’s characters – New York itself “acts” along with them.

The urban spaces that Paul Auster, his fictional surrogates and his other characters inhabit – the spaces that themselves are assemblages of people, objects and “things” – are distinctively “New York.” Although one recurrent space in Auster’s work – the writer’s bare study room, for example – could theoretically be located in any country, and even in the countryside, the street experience, a markedly urban locale, is undoubtedly infused with elements that would, among other big cities, firstly and foremostly be possible in New York. As Phillip Lopate points out, “New York’s essence – literary or otherwise, grows out of the street experience ... New York has from the start been an extroverted, not a covert, place” – in this sense, an opposite to the writer’s isolated studio, which more than any other space generates his solipsistic worldviews.⁹ Lopate lists some of the experiences that emerge from the streets of New York: random encounters, impressions of the city’s contradictory faces of glamour and squalor, sensations of being overwhelmed that derive from the man-made quality of the gigantic built environment, its labyrinthine streets with the threat (or the opportunity) of losing oneself, its crowds with their offer of anonymity to the many, its large, dense population that provides space for the immigrant and the nonconformist, *et cetera*.¹⁰ In *Paul Auster’s New York*, the writer’s city is expressed through Auster’s texts that are classified according to the following categories of experience, each of which become a separate “chapter”: Impressions, Encounters, Maze, Vanishing Points, Transformations, Babel.¹¹ Luc Sante, who wrote the preface to this compilation, has another list of “things” associated with the New York of Paul Auster: “coincidence, synchronicity, bilocation, and other matters that brush metaphysics,

⁷ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 1.

⁸ Brown, *Paul Auster*, 1.

⁹ Phillip Lopate, editor, *Writing New York: A Literary Anthology* (New York: The Library of America/Penguin Putnam Inc., 2008), xvii.

¹⁰ Lopate, *Writing New York*, xviii-xix.

¹¹ Paul Auster and Frieder Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, edited and compiled by Thomas Überhoff, preface by Luc Sante (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997). [A retracted publication]

as well as ciphers, games, displays, apparently impromptu sidewalk performances – the city’s inside jokes.”¹²

Yet, in spite of the fact that there are certain associations that in particular contexts one could identify as being evoked by the city, tracing the multiple meanings of the city in the same way one traces the associations of the cigarette, the typewriter, and the concept of the double, would be problematic. Although it is possible to perceive of New York as an anthropomorphized character that exerts a strong impact on other characters (in that sense – being a non-human actor, a “thing that things” or “acts”), New York is, above all, a spatial concept, and, as such, it is an assemblage in itself. To Bruno Latour, any spatial construct, such as, for example, a bank, would imply a whole network assembled by both human and non-human actors and “things” (tellers, bank clients, safes, cash machines, money, security, and so on); all these are components whose agency is required for the bank to function. As such a network New York is simply too big, too uncontainable, too multiple; it also has manifold faces, each of which are read in different terms. The name itself can denote many “things” – a geographic locale, a cultural venue, a socio-political space, *et cetera*. The concept gets further complicated when one realizes that New York is both a fictional realm and an actual geographical location.

How to even start a discussion on this ficto-factual New York? How to introduce this city? This place resists any introduction, quite apart from its physical skyline, which becomes visible as one approaches Manhattan from a distance. But even the physicality of the city is deceptive; like Colin Whitehead’s character in *The Colossus of New York*, one cannot help but question its authenticity: “Maybe you recognize it from the posters and television. Looks like a movie set, a false front of industry. Behind those gleaming *façades*, plywood and paint cans. Against it were all extras.”¹³ In the opening scene of *Manhattan*, Woody Allen’s impersonated narrator struggles to encapsulate his feelings towards the city: it is a place he adores, idolizes and romanticizes out of proportion, a place, that to him, still exists “in black and white, and pulsate[s] to the great tunes of George Gershwin,” yet it is also a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture and

¹² Luc Sante, “Preface,” in Auster and Blicke, *Auster’s New York*, 12-13.

¹³ Colin Whitehead, *The Colossus of New York: A City in Thirteen Parts* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 101.

society, “desensitized by drugs, loud music, television, crime, garbage.”¹⁴ Paul Auster, too, in one interview calls New York a city that he is both attached to and hates.¹⁵ As Woody Allen’s narrator reiterates variations of the first sentence to a “Chapter 1,” looking for the right words to introduce the city (New York in this case opening both the film and the *mise en abyme* book that the character is writing), all his descriptions, as he concludes, come across as either “too corny,” or “too angry,” or “profound enough,” or not “profound enough.”¹⁶ As he eventually proclaims his love for the city, combining both romantic and embittered attitudes, the accompanying music of *Rhapsody in Blue* reaches its culmination, and the camera captures fireworks exploding over the black-and-white Manhattan skyline. As a site of contradictions, and the tensions these produce, New York, perhaps, is always on the verge of exploding.

As Lopate notes in the introduction to his anthology of New York texts, “[f]ew cities have inspired as much great writing as New York, or indeed as much writing: the literature of the city is extraordinary for its variety and sheer volume.” The numbers of texts written by “legions of minor authors” and “countless distinguished visitors” are, indeed, uncountable.¹⁷ Yet New York as city simply resists being epitomized in the same way as, for example, James Joyce has encapsulated the essence of Dublin. Early on, from the beginning of the 19th century, New York started taking on its literary and cinematic qualities with the first notable texts devoted to the city (Washington Irving’s *A History of New York*, Charles Dickens’ *American Notes for General Circulation*, Henry David Thoreau’s *Letters from Staten Island*). Two centuries later, New York is still “too big, too complex to be served by one writer.”¹⁸ There is a certain “too-muchness” of everything that characterizes New York.¹⁹ At best, any writer can “only offer his little tribute to something he loves, but which is beyond him,” as the New York poet Robert Moses concludes.²⁰

¹⁴ Woody Allen, “Manhattan,” in *Four Films of Woody Allen* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 182.

¹⁵ Paul Auster in a comment subsequently edited from the published interview with McCaffery and Gregory, “Interview with Auster,” *Mississippi Review*. Here, referred to in Brown, Paul Auster, 1.

¹⁶ That is because New York is a multiplicity that has to be expressed through the conjunction of “AND.” For the quotes see Allen, “Manhattan,” 181-182.

¹⁷ Lopate, *Writing New York*, xvii.

¹⁸ Robert Moses, quoted by in Lopate, *Writing New York*, xvii.

¹⁹ Lopate, *Writing New York*, xx.

²⁰ Quoted Lopate in *Writing New York*, xvii.

In the end, perhaps, the only possible way for the narrator of Woody Allen's film to faithfully introduce the city is to present it as "his own" – "New York was his town and it always would be."²¹ To avoid the overwhelming, uncontainable too-muchness of this place, one has to select a more limited number of elements, from which one can then construct and assemble one's personal "town." Whitehead's New York, too, although expressed through the voices of anonymous others, becomes "his own" the moment he breaks the city down into thirteen specific "parts," each of which fills and also names a chapter: (City Limits,) The Port Authority, Morning, Central Park, Subway, Rain, Broadway, Coney Island, Brooklyn Bridge, Rush Hour, Downtown, Times Square, JFK. Yet his book also suggests that New York is a never-fully-readable and never containable colossal assemblage, weaved from an infinite thread of things as well as "things." Recall, for example, the assemblage of Brooklyn from Auster's *Blue in the Face*, as examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Brooklyn in Auster's film was made up not only of places and spaces, such as Chinatown and street corners, or sites, such as 1,500 churches, synagogues and mosques, but also of uncountable, intangible elements, such as Tahitian music and salsa dances, or measurements and statistics – 1,600 miles of streets, 50 miles of shoreline, and 39,973 robberies. It becomes apparent not only that this list could be infinite, but that each of the "things" that assemble the Brooklyn borough in themselves carry layers of meanings and associations.

Infinite quantity is one reason behind New York's uncontainability, but there are others: New York is a network of heterogeneous multiplicity, and this multiplicity is alive. In Latour's terms, to recognize the city as such a network helps us "to lift the tyranny of geographers in defining space," and offers us a notion which is "neither social, nor 'real' space, but associations."²² The network of "multiple and overlapping enactments that constitute urban life" in New York, then, derive from the work of tangible objects, abstract notions, human beings, and other things, all of which are agents in establishing connections, generating associations and proliferating meanings in a massive, ever-expanding network of urban assemblages; New York is an infinite site of such associations and relations between all actors.²³ *Actants*, after all, are not only people and objects, but also things and spaces, ideas and concepts, norms and practices, customs and

²¹ Allen, "Manhattan," 182.

²² Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory."

²³ See Ignacio Fariás and Thomas Bender, editors, *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies* (London: Routledge, 2010).

technologies, and so on. Therefore, as a rule, a city like New York becomes characterized by a particular complexity and openness to change, and is itself always contingent. The multiplicity of New York is a live organism, always changing, always makeshift, always “intermezzo” and in the state of “becoming.” MS Fogg in *Moon Palace* describes the dynamics of “things” that fill up and assemble his city:

A fire hydrant, a taxi cab, a rush of steam pouring up from the pavement – they were deeply familiar to me, and I felt I knew them by heart. But that did not take into account the mutability of those things, the way they changed according to the force and angle of the light, the way their aspect could be altered by what was happening around them: a person walking by, a sudden gust of wind, an odd reflection. Everything was constantly in flux, and though two bricks in a wall might strongly resemble each other, they could never be construed as identical. More to the point, the same brick was never really the same.²⁴

The sub-titles given to the “chapters” of *Paul Auster’s New York* acknowledge the dynamics, instability and the rhizome-like character of New York, which results in the impossibility of ascribing any sort of stable “reading” or interpretation to the city – New York there is associated with “maze,” “vanishing points,” “Babel,” “transformations.”

When compared to object-like things, such as a cigarette, or a typewriter, or the concept of the double, New York as a thing-like agent is not only uncontainable (can “New York” be restricted to its physical boundaries, and, if not, where does “New York” end?), but is also inexhaustible in its significance. That is why an early poem by Paul Auster, *Disappearances*, from his collection of the same title, describes New York as “a city / of the undeciphered event,” that “monstrous sum / of particulars.”²⁵ The only way to cope with this monstrous sum, as already suggested by Allen and Whitehead, is to try to “grasp” and “contain” bits of it by “constructing” one’s own city. This construction of one’s private New York starts the moment one lays one’s eyes on it for the first time.²⁶ Consequently, there is no single New York, but rather a multiplicity of private and shared New Yorks. Talking about fellow New Yorkers, Whitehead remarks that “[t] here are

²⁴ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 85. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 122.

²⁵ Here, Auster’s poem “Disappearances,” quoted in Brown, *Paul Auster*, 17. It is not only Auster’s early novels, which portray New York as an “inexhaustible space of endless steps.” As Brown points out, in this early collection of poetry, the city is constantly represented as both an “indecipherable” and an “overwhelming” domain. See Brown, *Paul Auster*, 18.

²⁶ Whitehead, *Colossus of New York*, 4.

eight million naked cities in this naked city,” which, furthermore, “dispute and disagree” between themselves.²⁷ “The New York City you live in is not my New York City; how could it be?” he asks rhetorically, and explains:

This place multiplies when you’re not looking. We move over here, we move over there. Over a lifetime, that adds up to a lot of neighborhoods, the motley construction material of your jerry-built metropolis. Your favorite newsstands, restaurants, movie theatres, subway stations and barbershops are replaced by your next neighborhood’s favorite. It gets to be quite a sum. Before you know it, you have your own personal skyline.²⁸

Besides, the city, whose land territory alone spreads over nearly eight hundred square kilometers, accumulates not only vast numbers of “things,” located in its geographical space, and over eight million personal impressions of these, but also transcends temporal boundaries, accumulating experiences from both past and present that all overlap. After his return to New York from Florida, Miles Heller from Auster’s latest novel *Sunset Park* is unable to recognize the city anymore; what he encounters is a different New York, and “even if he is home again, this New York is not his New York, not the New York of his memory.”²⁹ So Heller finds himself in the city that is both his home but also someplace else, a place he fails to recognize. Unlike the cigarette, which marks its moment in time when it is being lit up, as well as the time it requires to be smoked, one remembers New York both as it was and is, its past and present simultaneously coexisting, in the same way that New York carries in its places and spaces memories of one’s old selves.³⁰ Whitehead explains:

Go back to your old haunts in your old neighborhoods and what do you find: they remain and have disappeared. The greasy spoon, the deli, the dry cleaner you scouted out when you first arrived and tried to make those new streets yours: they are gone. But look past the windows of the travel agency that replaced your pizza parlor. Beyond the desks and computers and promo posters for tropical adventure, you can still see Neapolitan slices cooling,

²⁷ Whitehead, *Colossus of New York*, 6.

²⁸ Whitehead, *Colossus of New York*, 6.

²⁹ Paul Auster, *Sunset Park* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 132.

³⁰ An apartment in that New York neighbourhood, where one used to live 10 years ago, would carry memories of that old self as long as the building stands there, Whitehead suggests. Paul Auster, likewise, explores the memory of old, abandoned things in his memoir *The Invention of Solitude*, as well as in his recent *Sunset Park*, asking: what happens to a thing once its owner dies?

the pizza cutter lying next to half a pie, the map of Sicily on the wall. It is all still there, I assure you.³¹

New York, then, not only contains millions of different personal “New Yorks” – a multiplicity in itself – but also layers and layers of its own past: “thousands of people pass that storefront [or that tobacco shop, or that beggar sitting on the sidewalk, or...] every day, each one haunting the streets of his or her own New York, not one of them seeing the same thing.”³² These traits of New York – that it is “indefinable,” that its essence behind its façades remain, indeed, deceptive and impenetrable, and that everyone is only able to see their own skyline of the city – are, perhaps, best summed up by Auster himself in an early handwritten and unpublished draft to a story called “Invasions”:

New York, a city of impenetrable facades. ... Everywhere it eludes the grasp, sealing itself off from the mind, forbidding the secret knowledge that would allow it to be defined. The redundancy of its parallels and intersections. ... I move through it like an somnambulist. Faces might appear, large crowds might grow, but they cannot alter or penetrate the facades that surround them. The city... reduces its inhabitants to objects. Each person, entitled to just a single perspective, creates a city which is merely a function of his imagination. Properly speaking, New York does not exist.”³³

The word “façade” itself has come to denote in English the superficial or artificial appearance of a thing, its false “frontage.”³⁴ What one first sees in New York is the dominating physicality of urban layout, the skyline of skyscrapers, and the façades of towering buildings – those are the city’s many faces, all of which are potentially deceptive. In other words, there is the “public” New York, with its simple physicality, visible surfaces, geometries, shared cultural codes and signs, and many common conceptions that have become associated with the city. Yet, beyond these façades and the surface of simple exteriors and myths lies something that resists defining and that for every individual has its own meaning. Perhaps that which Auster refers to as “imagined” corresponds to his solipsistic worldview, but, in the words of Colson, could be described as “private” or “personal.” Either way, New York is multidimensional and mixes the public with the personal, the actual with the imagined, the physical with the

³¹ Whitehead, *Colossus of New York*, 6.

³² Whitehead, *Colossus of New York*, 7.

³³ Here quoted in Brown, *Paul Auster*, 35-36.

³⁴ Brought into English from French, through Italian “*facciata*” and “*faccia*,” comes from Latin, “*facia*,” which means “face.”

psychological. Like the other things whose associations were traced in this thesis, it may be as much characterized as a psychological state, a process, or an event, as by its own tangible physicality. One could also describe New York as “a complex,” both an architectural and a psychological concept.

Furthermore, because of its frequent representation in literature, film and the arts, New York seems to be both cinematic and literary *and* “real,” the fictional suffusing the voracious physicality of the city, and *vice versa*, so that in New York, one is always somehow also in a book, or a film. More than any other place New York lends itself to the idea that the fictional and the factual have always belonged to the same realm – allegedly two sides of a Möbius strip that are embedded, in fact, in the same surface. In other words, New York becomes that territory in which the fictional overlaps with the factual, and which is inhabited both by Paul Auster and “Paul Auster.” Because Paul Auster constantly interweaves fact and fiction, reading his life-work, which is predominantly set in this city, requires one to both read the fictional as well as the factual dimensions of New York. Tracing the associations of Auster’s texts set in New York requires the reader to go to the city and do the reading *in situ*, a reading that takes on performative elements on the reader’s part. As the passage from Whitehead’s book, quoted above, implies, one’s physical presence and immersion in the city is required to be able to see the many layers of spatial narratives that its façades hide; one has to actually be there to be able to look past the windows of the travel agency that stands in the place of the old pizza parlor, and, beyond its office interior, see those “Neapolitan slices cooling, the pizza cutter lying next to half a pie.”³⁵

In spite of my preceding awareness of the futility of this task, in order to trace and read the associations of Auster’s New York, I have no choice but to identify with his characters and to try to catch glimpses, however brief, of what Luc Sante has named “Austeralia,” which, as he puts it, occupies “the same geographical coordinates as New York City in the same way that the nervous system occupies the space of the body.”³⁶ This chapter, based on a visit to this city, can therefore only aim to uncover fragments of Paul Auster’s personal “New York.”

³⁵ Whitehead, *Colossus of New York*, 6.

³⁶ Luc Sante, “Preface,” in Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 12.

In Search of Auster's City

To assist on the scholarly quest of discovering Paul Auster's New York, I took with me *Paul Auster's New York*, to serve as a sort of travel guide to Austerland.³⁷ Compiled and classified in titled sections by editor Thomas Überhoff,³⁸ with a preface by Luc Sante, the "book" consists of fragments recounting various experiences of New York from Auster's prose writings, both fictional and nonfictional, that were published up to 1997, and is complemented by photographs of New York scenes by German photographer Frieder Blickle.³⁹ Since the compilation is incomplete – it not only excludes Auster's texts written in later periods, but also his films and collaborations (an exception is *Auggie Wren's Christmas Story*) – whenever additional travel directions and information were necessary, I had to consult the respective filmic and literary texts by Auster, as well as the knowledge about his life that I had acquired over time.

But the "book" *Paul Auster's New York* deserves some attention not only because, as an anthology of fragments of his texts associated with the city, it can serve the purpose of a handy travel guide to Austerland, outlining the major locations, routes and urban experiences featured in and expressed through Paul Auster's texts. An ambiguous "non-book" itself, for a critic this hybrid text also prompts questions about its status, genre, and, most importantly, its authorship. Who is the author of *Paul Auster's New York*? Were it officially published, could it be seen as part of Auster's oeuvre? This "book," after all, consists of fragments from copyrighted Auster's texts that were, nevertheless, selected, classified and arranged in a particular order under new titles by Überhoff. Simultaneously "a part of" and "yet a multiplicity," it contains excerpts from selected works by Auster, while assembling together a larger narrative, a story of Paul Auster's city, which has now become visible and foregrounded, its associations traced horizontally

³⁷ As I later found out, this book, which was acquired for a symbolic payment from a flea market, strictly speaking cannot be even considered "a book" as its publication was retracted due to a disagreement between Auster's current and former publishers. I shall, therefore, use quotation marks when referring to it as a "book." Originally, *Paul Auster's New York* first came out in German under the Rowohlt Verlag publishing house as *Mein New York*. See Paul Auster, *Mein New York*, ed. by Thomas Überhoff, transl. by Joachim A. Frank, Werner Schmitz (Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag, 2000).

³⁸ Thomas Überhoff was Auster's publisher at Rowohlt in Germany, and later became his American publisher at Henry Holt and Company.

³⁹ The texts included in *Paul Auster's New York* are (in the order of appearance): the nonfiction collections *Why Write?* and *The Invention of Solitude*, the novels *Ghosts*, *Moon Palace*, *Leviathan*, *The Music of Chance*, and *Mr. Vertigo*, the picture book *Auggie Wren's Christmas Story*, the collections of essays *The Art of Hunger* and *Hand to Mouth*, the novel *City of Glass*, the collection of essays, prefaces and interviews, *The Red Notebook*, and the novel *In the Country of Last Things*.

throughout Auster's body of work. It contains both fictional and "real" encounters that Auster or his fictional surrogates have taken from the city; they are reflections on New York as well as on "New York." It can also be seen as a quadripartite collaboration between Auster, Überhoff, Sante and Blickle whose black-and-white photos of the city complement Auster's texts, adding another layer of significance to the (re)constructed Paul Auster's New York, and reminding us, in Foucault's terms, of the impossibility of ever comprehending one author's oeuvre as a complete whole.

Paul Auster's New York, then, illustrates the rhizomatic approach to reading texts and the tracing of particular recurrent motifs and elements across one author's body of work. It is similar to Rheindorf's suggested methodology of choosing, as quoted earlier in the thesis, "a given element in Auster's work and trac[ing] its development over ... years of writing," offering a reading of New York that, furthermore, does not necessarily have to start from the beginning and move on chronologically, but that, characteristically of the rhizome, can start "somewhere in the middle" and uncover "that particular strand extending in both directions across time."⁴⁰ Sante who, like Rheindorf, recognizes the interconnectedness and mutual associations that have formed within Auster's rhizomatic network of texts, speaks of Auster's New York experiences as "seemingly random elements" linked "as if by tunnels or alleys." Auster's work, in other words, is like the city itself, and *vice versa* – a network of crossing paths, a rhizome. Hence the parallels between the map of the city and the mapping of the rhizome, and the analogy between "reading" the city and reading a literary text.

But this also reminds us of another association that Auster himself often invokes in his texts: the correspondence between the "inner" and "outer" terrains, the inside of a mind and the outside surrounding it, or the way that one's thoughts rhizomatically move as one traverses, or so one imagines, the rhizome-like city:

But just as one step will inevitably lead to the next step, so it is that one thought inevitably follows from the previous thought, and in the event that a thought should engender more than a single thought (say two or three thoughts, equal to each other in all their consequences), it will be necessary not only to follow the first thought to its conclusion, but also to backtrack to the original

⁴⁰ Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 4.

position of that thought in order to follow the second thought to its conclusion, and then the third thought, and so on, and in this way, if we were to try to make an image of this process in our minds, a network of paths begins to be drawn, as in the image of the human blood-stream (heart, arteries, veins, capillaries), or as in the image of a map (of city streets, for example, preferably a large city, or even of roads, as in the gas station maps of roads that stretch, bisect, and meander across a continent), so that what we are really doing when we walk though the city is thinking, and thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey, and this journey is no more or less than the steps we have taken, so that, in the end, we might safely say that we have been on a journey, and even if we do not leave our room, it has been a journey, and we might safely say that we have been somewhere, even if we don't know where it is.⁴¹

There are two types of travel then, it seems – the movement of thoughts, the interior journey, which happens to the writer in his bare room, and the exterior movement, the travel through the streets of the city – the streets, which, as Rheindorf points out, alongside objects and things, are sites where the exterior merges with the interior through association.⁴² In other words, it is exactly the experience of walking through the city that, because of its associations with the ways that thoughts travel, “acts” to encourage thinking, and *vice versa*. In this sense, the role of “acting” that a city like New York plays for the writer-character is equal to smoking cigarettes or typing on a manual typewriter, which both encourage thinking and writing, open up that other dimension of the imaginary, and allow the writer to feel “connected” with whichever other smoking and typewriting writers he might find inspiring. New York then is more than its physicality reveals – it is always also somehow a state “within,” and the “within” is that personal platform from which one starts to build one's own New York. That might be, as I had come to fear, the main obstacle in my task of locating Paul Auster's New York. I knew, since the beginning, that this project was going to fail.

In Austeralia

On the night of June 1, 2011, I stepped off the plane at the JFK Airport and set my foot in what I hoped would turn out to be Austeralia. I had no exact plan as to where to begin,

⁴¹ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 16-17. /Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 122. Hereafter, when citing from *Paul Auster's New York*, a reference will be given both to this “book” as well as the source in which the particular fragment of text originally appears.

⁴² See Rheindorf, “Where Everything is Connected.”

although I felt I was well-prepared, and could start my exploration from any point, tracing its sites and routes rhizomatically, and letting chance determine my choice. I had gathered every single important fragment from Auster's literary and visual texts that had anything to do with the places and spaces of New York, and compiled them in several large documents, with additional descriptions and my commentary attached, so as to distinguish actual places from fictional ones in order, in the case of the former, to expand my knowledge. I had marked down all the major locations, both existing and invented, from Auster's books, films, collaborations and his life, on detailed colorful maps of Brooklyn and Manhattan that I had bought specifically for this purpose. On some other maps, I had traced the routes made by Auster's writer-characters in a similar fashion as Quinn from *City of Glass* outlined on paper the Manhattan walks of his suspect Peter Stillman Sr. A week before leaving I had acquired a used Olympus dictaphone to record my impressions, experiences and findings as I would follow in the footsteps of Auster's characters; and I was delighted with the idea that the name of this voice-recording machine resembled the name of Auster's recorder, the Olympia typewriter. I bought a fountain pen and a good-quality pink notebook (Emilio Braga, hand-made in Portugal), hoping that, coincidentally, it might turn out to be the same brand of notebooks that Paul Auster himself favored.⁴³ I also had secured two cameras for my trip, a semi-professional Minolta DiMAGE and a pocket-size Panasonic for taking impressionistic snapshots. From Auster's body of work, I had taken with me only a select few books to read on location, but I planned to buy more once I got to Brooklyn's Park Slope, in a shop that would resemble "Brightman's Attic," the crammed, badly-organized second-hand bookstore that one finds in *The Brooklyn Follies*. With regards to Auster's manuscripts, which I had also intended to study, the night before I left for New York, I received an email from the New York Public Library, informing me that the boxes with the requested "Auster papers" had all been delivered, and were waiting for my arrival at the Berg Collection.

⁴³ Although most of Paul Auster's characters famously use notebooks for writing, none of his texts ever mentions the particular brand of these notebooks. The closest detailed description of a writer's notebook can be found in *Oracle Night*, where the protagonist talks about his discovery of a certain make of Portuguese notebooks that he becomes addicted to. As I later discovered from the archives of the Berg Collection, the notebook brand that Paul Auster prefers is not at all Portuguese, but the French-made Clairefontaine. See Paul Auster, *Oracle Night* (New York: Picador/Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 5-6.

The next two weeks after my arrival in New York I spent trying, as much as I could, to duplicate the actions of Auster characters, reading about their experiences on location – I walked the same routes they did, I visited the locations where they lived, ate, worked and rested, and I was always on the move, reminding myself that, in Auster’s New York, the journey itself often was the destination. At times when I wanted to rest, I would sit down in a park or a cafe, smoke a cigarillo, and scribble in my notebook, knowing that, perhaps, at that very same moment, Paul Auster was doing the same in his Park Slope studio.

“When I left my [hotel at the corner of 7th Avenue and 33rd Street] on the first morning, I simply started walking, going wherever my steps decided to take me. If I had any thought at all, it was to let chance determine what happened, to follow the path of impulse and arbitrary events.”⁴⁴ There, within the giant walls of towering skyscrapers, that engulfed every block, I felt that New York, indeed, was “an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps,” and “no matter how far [I] walked, no matter how well [I] came to know its neighborhoods and streets [in the next few days], it always left [me] with the feeling of being lost.”⁴⁵ Yet, unlike Quinn, I failed to feel lost “not only in the city, but within [myself] as well;” New York for me did not become “the nowhere [that Quinn] had built around himself.”⁴⁶ No matter how hard I tried to “lose myself,” to catch that moment of transformation into inwardness that walking the streets seems to initiate, the city kept interrupting, reminding me of its overwhelming presence through oncoming crowds and noise, and heat, all of which were too distracting. One day, I wandered down to Chinatown, to see how the city alienates itself, its façades even more impenetrable and its face, all of a sudden, transformed into something unrecognizable. There,

I was overwhelmed by a sense of dislocation and confusion. This was America, but I could not understand what anyone said, could not penetrate the meaning of the things I saw. ... I could not gain entrance past the mute surfaces of things, and there were times when this exclusion made me feel as though I were living in a dream world, moving through crowds of spectral people who all wore masks on their faces.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 50. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 50-51.

⁴⁵ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 47. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 8.

⁴⁶ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 47. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 9.

⁴⁷ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 87. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 230.

For days, I walked up and down Broadway, always starting from Times Square and moving up past Columbus Circle, as far as Upper West Side. I was on the lookout for chance encounters with strangers whose incomprehensible, bizarre actions would resemble those that MS Fogg and the young Paul Auster witnessed along this particular route – the story of the man with the broken umbrella (*Moon Palace*), or the story of Effing, and, in another case, H.L. Humes or “Doc”, handing out dollar bills to passers-by, a “spectacular show” on Broadway (*Moon Palace* and *Hand to Mouth*). I visited several apartment buildings on West 107th Street, looking for that “run-down, nine-story affair,” in which Auster used to live for a while and which, as he claims, like most places on the Upper West Side, “housed a motley collection of people,”⁴⁸ among which was a rabbi, and a homeless man, from whom Auster received a strange proposal one night, recounted later in *Hand to Mouth*. Near Broadway, at 262 West 107th Street, I found a brown brick 9-story building, and, then, further eastwards on the same block, at 203 West 107th Street – a more pleasant-looking white brick tower of the same height. But the gray building that was the site for Auster’s encounters, remained hidden from me, and so I never found it.

I spent another day wandering through the streets of Manhattan, to observe, “as never before: the tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping bag ladies, the drifters and drunks,” that supposedly inhabited both “good neighborhoods and bad.”⁴⁹ But I failed to record any “wretched brokenness,” and nothing of interest ever happened to me. So far, my records of the city were dull – report-like lists of facts, numbers, addresses and descriptions, and uninspired, static photographs of the same. I soon came to realize that, as Auster probably already knew, one cannot walk out into the street with the expectation of experiencing what Henri Cartier-Bresson calls “the decisive moment” – that unexpected encounter, or an instant of inspiration and revelation that allows an artist to transform the street experience into a poem or photograph. Yet, as Auster reminds us in *The Art of Hunger*, one must be prepared to embrace that moment “whenever the opportunity presents itself.”⁵⁰ And as I thought of the ways I could weigh the probability of unexpected things ever happening to me in this city, I wondered how many weeks, if

⁴⁸ Auster and Blicke, *Auster’s New York*, 40-41. / Paul Auster, *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure* (New York: Picador, 2003), 83.

⁴⁹ Auster and Blicke, *Auster’s New York*, 36. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 165.

⁵⁰ See Auster, “The Decisive Moment,” in *Art of Hunger*, 42.

not years, or even lives, one must spend here, to ever experience the unusual chance encounters and coincidences that abound in Auster's life-work.

When eventually I felt worn out by the city, I took the subway Nr 6 from Midtown up to 86th Street station, got off, "continued uptown for several more blocks, then turned left, crossed Fifth Avenue, and walked along the wall of Central Park. At 96th Street [I] entered the park and found [myself] glad to be among the grass and trees."⁵¹ Unlike Quinn, I did not find the park's environment "miraculous and beautiful;" the surroundings were green, but its greenness was of dull and grayish shade, and overlooking all the dirty undergrowth around, I could not imagine myself, like Quinn, lying down under an oak tree, using the notebook as my pillow. I cut my way through the thicket back to the street and kept walking down the 5th Avenue towards the Metropolitan Museum. I was now looking for the spot where MS Fogg "entered the park ... trekked out toward the interior for several minutes, and then crawled under a bush."⁵² I hoped to find that place that could become "a sanctuary for me, a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands of the streets," but as I approached the museum, I saw that a part of the park around it had been fenced off.

Another day, I became Quinn who had himself become "Paul Auster, the detective." I visited Quinn's house at West 107th Street (I presumed it to be the same nine-story building, where Auster himself lived for a while), as well as that of Virginia Stillman, which was likewise located in upper Manhattan, but at the east side of Central Park, between Madison Avenue and Park Ave. As I stood there, head tilted up, looking at Virginia Stillman's six-story residence, Number 25 at East 69th Street, which is the same house where Auster worked for eight months after his return back to New York from Paris in 1974, I could not help but feel disappointed at its modest simplicity in size and decor, and the lack of enigma and faded grandeur I had come to associate with the home of the noir-like femme fatale Virginia Stillman and her Kaspar Hauser-like husband, Peter Stillman Jr. On my way back to the subway station, at the corner of East 69th Street and Park Avenue, I encountered what I believed to be the real house of the Stillmans – a massive white *art nouveau* style building with a Roman number MCMXXXII inscribed at

⁵¹ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 72. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 183.

⁵² Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 65. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 55.

the bottom. I took a photo and recorded a note that Paul Auster had, obviously, made a factual mistake in the novel. I also realized, for the first time, that I had unwittingly started to create my own New York/Australia, with no clue as to how far or close its borders stood to those of Auster's New York.

I then moved on to Grand Central Terminal – that awful, dirty and crowded place where “a man determined to disappear could do so without much trouble,” and where one is likewise likely to run into someone's doppelgänger.⁵³ Quinn “wandered through the station ... as if inside the body of Paul Auster, waiting for Stillman to appear;” a move I tried to imitate, but the unrecognizable interior, which looked so different from *City of Glass*, made it difficult to retain the connection with the text, and with its protagonist, narrator, author.⁵⁴ The giant Kodak Colorama photos that used to occupy the station's east wall, reminding Quinn of his visit to Nantucket with his pregnant wife, were gone, and there was nothing much I could relate to the book, nothing I could use to extract memories from; no gateways for tracing those old associations that appear in Auster's early texts. I failed to find the waiting room, that “generally ... grim place, filled with dust and people with nowhere to go” where Quinn had spotted someone reading a book by him, only to learn that she did not really like it; that place had disappeared for good during the station's renovation at the end of last century, and has been replaced by what is now known as Vanderbilt Hall, a new kind of space, that like other renovated parts of the station, adds a feel of grandeur, *luxury*, and opulence to the Grand Central.⁵⁵ Back in the years when *The New York Trilogy* was written, more than thirty years ago, perhaps the station, like the whole city, was a dark labyrinth, a maze in which to lose yourself and others, or, reversely, encounter one's doubles – to lose your way, come to dead-ends and crossroads, and, from then on, to encounter uncertainty, as Quinn does when confronted with two Stillman Seniors, each walking into the opposite direction:

Quinn froze. There was nothing he could do that would not be a mistake. Whatever choice he made ... would be arbitrary, a submission to chance. Uncertainty would haunt him to the end.⁵⁶

⁵³ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 77. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 81.

⁵⁴ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 78. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 82.

⁵⁵ Auster, *City of Glass*, 84.

⁵⁶ Auster, *City of Glass*, 90.

What I encountered was a different New York to Auster's – cleaner, safer and brighter, and it made Austerland an even more inaccessible realm – too hard to relate to, and too hard to imagine.

The same sense of failure in attempts to connect to someone else's experience and memories, and through those to gain access to particular spaces and places that carry some significance in their narration, overtook me when, walking up Broadway near Columbus Circle one day, I noticed the house in which Auster's grandfather lived, and which Auster himself used to visit as a child, "that tall, squat, oddly shaped building that stands on the corner of Central Park South and Columbus Circle."⁵⁷ In "The Book of Memory," the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, A. retells his return to the grandfather's house as an adult, to look after the place for a few weeks while his grandfather stays in the hospital. For Auster, the place had not changed – "[i]t was the same place he had been visiting since earliest childhood," with its "Chinese telephone table, his grandmother's glass menagerie, and the old humidifier," and, "surrounded by this place again," he felt he had "walked straight back into his childhood."⁵⁸ Auster connects with the New York of his past, when, looking through "those same sixth floor windows," he sees the statue of Christopher Columbus, and wonders how many hours he had spent as a boy watching "the traffic as it wove around [it]." The memories are triggered by recognizable objects, but other associations with the past derive not from what is familiar, but rather from what has changed. Beyond the urban scenery that he sees, A. evokes the New York of the past, and how he had "watched the Thanksgiving Day parades," and "seen the construction of the Colosseum." As I was standing on the street in front of that house, at the south-west entrance to Central Park, I tried to imagine not only how this place had looked in Auster's childhood, but also how it was when Auster reminisced about it 30 years ago. The building itself had vanished: the New York Coliseum that was built from 1954 to 1956 was demolished in 2000 to give way to the Time Warner Centre. Columbus Circle was changing, but I could not note the change because its former looks evaded me. The city never showed more than its façades to me, the surface of its visible geometry, its buildings, and things, and streets. They all seemed blank and indifferent, and very soon, I realized again, the only New York I could talk about was my personal

⁵⁷ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 61. / Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 99.

⁵⁸ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 61. / Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 100.

New York and my personal Auster's New York, which I had slowly started building from scratch. That place I was constructing lay somewhere in-between all those other related New Yorks – it was both real and imaginary, private, personal, and yet shared (with Auster and the audiences of texts), both historic and literary, not entirely a city of the present, but neither one of the past, not mine, really, yet neither his.

The same day I visited Grand Central Terminal, I went on following Quinn following Peter Stillman Sr., from the platform No 24 of the station to the Times Square Shuttle that brought me to the West Side, where I changed to the Broadway express and travelled up to 96th Street, after which I walked up Broadway to 99th Street, turned left and there, halfway up the block, supposedly found “a small fleabag for down-and-outs, the Hotel Harmony,” in which Stillman had settled.⁵⁹ For the next few days – or weeks maybe – Quinn, who had posted himself on the traffic island at the intersection of 99th Street and Broadway, would watch Stillman leave the hotel every morning, and follow him on his walks as he was scavenging for old discarded objects and things on his way:

What Stillman did on these walks remained something of a mystery to Quinn. He could, of course, see with his own eyes what happened, and all these things he dutifully recorded in his red notebook. But the meaning of these things continued to elude him. Stillman never seemed to be going anywhere in particular, nor did he seem to know where he was. And yet, as if by conscious design, he kept to a narrowly circumscribed area, bounded on the north by 110th Street, on the south by 72nd Street, on the west by Riverside Park, and on the east by Amsterdam Avenue.⁶⁰

I spent half a day wandering around the west side of Upper West Side, taking photographs of places that seemed suitable for the novel, dutifully recording everything in my voice recorder, or else in my pink notebook. But, like Quinn, I soon became “deeply disillusioned” with the results of my efforts:

He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behaviour could be understood, that beneath the infinite facade ... there was finally a coherence, an order ... But after struggling to

⁵⁹ Auster and Blicke, *Auster's New York*, 53. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 92.

⁶⁰ Auster and Blicke, *Auster's New York*, 54. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 94.

take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman than when he first started following him. He had lived Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability. Instead of narrowing the distance that lay between him and Stillman, he had seen the old man slip away from him, even as he remained before his eyes.⁶¹

At times, I told myself that I had to try harder and actually follow someone; I randomly picked people on the streets, as Maria Turner/Sophie Calle had done in her "detective projects," and, within a distance of some thirty feet, I started following them. More often than not, people would almost immediately notice me – loaded with a big backpack, and cameras, notebooks, and voice recorders, I instantly drew attention to myself; the streets were also wide and empty, with hardly anything else to take note of. I did not dare take any pictures of them.

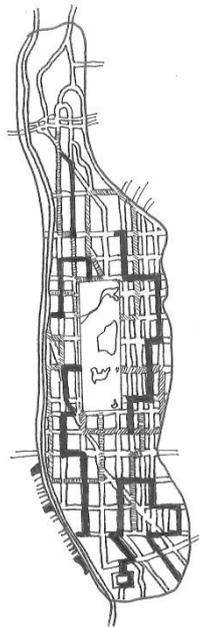
Having failed as a detective, I decided to retrace Quinn's famous walk from Upper Manhattan to its bottom, and back – after all, that is what Quinn did when he felt he had lost his case. The route that resembles a big "V," as in "victory," comes all the way down from the Upper West Side, through the heart of the city to the bottom of Manhattan, and then up again, ending in the Upper East Side. The distance of the walk was intolerably long for the hot, humid summer weather of June, and the original intention of focusing on Quinn's walking experience soon gave way to the feelings of thirst, hunger, tiredness, and the never-ending search for even the smallest spots of shade that, with the sun high in the zenith, the skyscrapers were reluctant to provide. The movement along the streets of Midtown were dominated by crowds, whose flow was, in turn, determined by the traffic lights and the rows of honking cars that constantly jammed the way. Everywhere around me were loud people and billboards, and, as a stranger in New York, I could not help but let them distract me. I failed to reach the state of "inwardness" that so many of Auster's characters achieve among the crowded streets. As my sense of loss of belief in ever achieving this task grew, I started to question the motive and value behind what I was trying to achieve here. Could it ever be possible to understand the significance of someone else's place? "The essential thing is to stay involved," I reminded myself.⁶² Yet, "little by little [I] began to feel cut off from my original intentions, and [I] wondered

⁶¹ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 94-95. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 105.

⁶² Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 56. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 96.

[again] if [I] had not embarked on a meaningless project.”⁶³ Perhaps, I was slowly going insane, like Quinn himself, or like Peter Stillman.

From all the Manhattan-based Auster texts I had deliberately chosen to focus on *City of Glass*, as it was the most abundant in naming specific locations, visiting which, I had hoped, would bring me closer to understanding Paul Auster and life-work. Yet it started to appear to me that the map of Manhattan that Auster draws in his texts is indeed but a string of streets and numbers, devoid of any particular significance, or else their significance is too personal for an outsider to be able to see behind their façades. Perhaps, as one reviewer suggests, Auster’s Manhattan is indeed empty of signification other than its function for meta-fictional purposes. The grid-like structure of the streets allows Stillman in *City of Glass* to spell out the words like “THE TOWER OF BABEL,” while Auster’s choice of Orange Street as one location in *Ghosts* is simply “in line with the rest of the novella’s use of colors.”⁶⁴ Manhattan appeared to me distant, empty and flat, without any specific signification. Nothing of interest ever happened to me there, no “unexpected things” that seem “almost impossible” – it was as if Auster’s city was simply refusing to open up for me.⁶⁵ Auster and Paul Auster were both evading me.



⁶³ Auster and Blicke, *Auster’s New York*, 56. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 96.

⁶⁴ See Helene Golav, “Books: The New York Trilogy, The Brooklyn Follies & Sunset Park,” in *Realcity: An Online Magazine*, <http://realcityny.com/books-paul-auster/>.

⁶⁵ Auster and Blicke, *Auster’s New York*, 70. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 58.

Yet there were rare moments when my own experience in the city seemed to cut into the fictional realm of Auster's texts, my own personal New York overlapping with Austerland, and in those instances I could not help but feel that I was inhabiting Auster's texts, that, somehow, these places have been invented by Auster, and that whatever was happening to me right then was the result of what one chain-smoking writer in Brooklyn was jotting down in his notebook. Luc Sante, who, like me, upon arriving to New York found himself in Austerland, years before any of Auster's books were published, has a slightly different explanation:

These incidents [that happened to me], variously amusing or puzzling, or oddly lyrical, appeared bereft of context... Now, however, I recognize them as lying within Paul Auster's imaginative territory, as being his productions. It is worth noting that all of them occurred before any of Auster's works in prose had been written. But then, if Borges could submit that Kafka ... was the predecessor of Hawthorne, it is equally possible for Auster's signature to appear on events that took place when his novelistic oeuvre was barely a glint in his eye.⁶⁶

I had got my first taste of Auster's New York on the night I arrived in the city; Manhattan was as hostile to me as it was to both MS Fogg from *Moon Palace* and the young Paul Auster himself (*The Invention of Solitude*). I was taken from the airport straight to "Hotel Pennsylvania" at 7th Avenue between 32nd and 33rd Streets, a dingy and derelict monster of a hotel with twenty-two floors of nightmare. This historic landmark, once a grandiose hotel, one of the largest in New York, for more than two decades has been facing the threat of demolition, while slowly disintegrating, falling apart, and soaking up all the misery that the city produces.

At night, the place was eerily empty, with never-ending labyrinths of long, dark and sad corridors that bled through leaking ceilings and over-flooded floors, and with heavy steel doors (that looked like they belonged to prison cells or safe boxes) leading to each of its thousands of compartments. The only sounds apart from one's own breathing came from air conditioning ducts and turbines, and were overtaken occasionally by the sirens of late-night emergency vehicles and the distant noises the city was making outside these massive walls. Everywhere, it reeked of gloomy foreboding.

⁶⁶ Sante, "Preface," in Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 11 and 12.

With a lounge surrounded by gambling and vending machines, and with its neon lights and a tacky Las Vegas-style poster spread across the wall behind the reception, the place acquired the cinematic qualities of films set in grotesque or horrible hotel environments (*Four Rooms*, *The Shining*, *Barton Fink*). During the day, the lounge was flooded with masses of unsuspecting tourists who had just arrived and were still excited, still keen to claim their share of New York's glamour. With the crowds of loud people and the constant draught caused by the hotel's many rotating entrance doors, the place transformed into something that more resembled a busy, filthy train terminal than one's "home away from home," as the hotel's slogan advertised. One could not help but feel lost, insignificant, consumed by the anonymous crowd among whom no one seemed to care about anyone else.

Room Nr 1693 on the 16th Floor, the room that I felt myself trapped in for the next five days, was hidden behind a massive steel lid that was covered with personal safety warnings and decorated with multiple chain locks. It was a tiny pigeonhole, "a small fleabag for down-and-outs."⁶⁷ Formally, a non-smoker's room, "[t]he place stank of cockroach repellent and dead cigarettes."⁶⁸ Its Spartan setup consisted of a bed, a chair, a pair of bedside cabinets, a desk and a large mirror, all in the same pale color of what once used to be light green, or gray, or, perhaps, even blue. It all made the room look bare, "[t]he place seemed blank, a hell of stale thoughts."⁶⁹

That first night, I could not sleep because the horror evoked by the place was too overwhelming; the next day I fell sick, and the following few days I spent in a sort of delirium that alternated between sudden attacks of fever and long hours of insomnia, too weak to go outside, too scared to stay where I was. I had nightmares, and the brief moments I managed to fall asleep never brought much rest. The feeling of abandonment and misery increased every minute and every thought.

Yet, as I was lying there, sinking in despair and depression, I realized that I was, in fact, reliving an Auster experience, and the possibility of seeing myself as someone else, a

⁶⁷ Auster and Blickle, *Auster's New York*, 53. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 92.

⁶⁸ Auster, *City of Glass*, 136.

⁶⁹ Auster, *City of Glass*, 136.

fictional character living life authored by someone else, for the first time made me feel safe and calm, giving me the same sense of comfort as inhabiting “Paul Auster” gave to Quinn:

Although he still had the same body, the same mind, the same thoughts, he felt as though he had somehow been taken out of himself, as if he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. By a simple trick of intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer. At the same time he knew it was all an illusion. But there was a certain comfort in that. He had not really lost himself he was merely pretending ...⁷⁰

I was, at that point, becoming Marco Stanley Fogg, as much as I was becoming A., Auster’s facto-fictional surrogate. The “blankness” and bleakness of the place, and its “hell of stale thoughts” not only characterize the hotel room in which Peter Stillman Sr. stays (*City of Glass*) – it is the same shabby, filthy, but bare-looking room in which the young struggling writer is forced to live, both as MS Fogg in *Moon Palace*, and A. in *The Invention of Solitude*.

When MS Fogg moves into the small, dim apartment on West 112th Street above Central Park, he feels “some pangs at first, small thumps of fear” about inhabiting that horrible space on his own, but then he makes a discovery that helps him “to warm up to the place and settle in.”⁷¹ That is a neon sign visible from his window, “a vivid torch of pink and blue letters” that spells out the words “MOON PALACE,” advertising a Chinese restaurant. Fogg invests these letters with his own meaning, the associations varying from his Uncle Victor, and his uncle’s jazz band, to the sign of good fate and purpose, even for his being there.⁷² “They were magic letters,” he says, and that imaginary realm that helps to fill the place with positive thoughts.⁷³ It is not only fear that he loses as a result, but “[a] bare and grubby room had been transformed into a site of inwardness, and intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 77-78. / Auster, *City of Glass*, 82.

⁷¹ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 80. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 16.

⁷² Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 80. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 17.

⁷³ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 80. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 17.

⁷⁴ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 81. / Auster, *Moon Palace*, 17.

A. meanwhile is left alone in his apartment at 6 Varick Street in Lower West side of Manhattan. It is Christmas Eve, 1979, and he has recently divorced his first wife Lydia. The place he lives in on his own is grim,

[h]e cannot call it a home, but for the past nine months it is all he has had. A few dozen books, a mattress on the floor, a table, three chairs, a hot plate, and a corroded cold water sink. The toilet is down the hall, but he uses it only when he has to shit. ... For the past three days the elevator has been out of service, and since this is the top floor, it has made him reluctant to go out.⁷⁵

By staying in his room for longer stretches of at a time, A. has nothing to use but his own thoughts to fill and transform the place,

and this in turn seems to dispel the dreariness, or at least make him unaware of it. Each time he goes out, he takes his thoughts with him, and during his absence the room gradually empties of his efforts to inhabit it. When he returns, he has to begin the process all over again, and that takes work, real spiritual work.⁷⁶

So the last days that I spent at “Hotel Pennsylvania,” lying in bed in that dreary room, I too was not there anymore – I was someplace between my own life and the life that comes from Auster’s books, not entirely myself anymore, but playing, pretending to be someone else, and, above all, I knew it was not my bad luck, but, somehow, it all meant to be this way, that this experience came directly from Auster’s books and my only task was to live it through to the end. On the fifth day, as soon as I felt better, I gathered my strength to get up and move. I went out into the streets, found the nearest internet cafe, and booked myself into a new hotel. I came back, packed my bags and left, never to return again. The new hotel, as it turned out, happened to be located in Park Slope, the neighborhood where Paul Auster lives. That was the first coincidence that came to me directly from Auster’s universe.

Discovering Diagrams

Having failed to reach beyond the façades of Austerland after a week-long quest of following the footsteps of Auster and his characters, having failed to access those points of convergence where the exterior meets the interior and where the streets of the city

⁷⁵ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 81. / Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 73.

⁷⁶ Auster and Blickle, *Auster’s New York*, 81-82. / Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 73.

merge into the pathways of thought and imagination that belong to the subject of my search, I felt I needed to find a different approach to get closer to the author's mind. In the words of Ian Hamilton, who once embarked on a similar quest in his search for J.D. Salinger, "missing from our search for [the subject] was any vivid sense of presence. What we needed was the first person, off-the-record voice of [the author] himself."⁷⁷ I needed somehow to get into the "locked room" – that writer's studio in which Paul Auster and his fictional stand-ins (in texts, such as *The Locked Room*, *Ghosts*, *Moon Palace*, *The Invention of Solitude*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, etc.) generate their texts while "perfect[ing] [their] narrative[s] of solipsism,"⁷⁸ a room that is the place where life and writing meets – that is, in a way, also "the room of the book."⁷⁹ It is in the solitary room that the smoking, typewriting writer's mind generates the world of its own; it is the site where the entire world "rush[es] in on him at a dizzying speed"⁸⁰ – whole worlds, in fact, "a plenitude of worlds within worlds," as *Moon Palace* informs.⁸¹

On my first day in Brooklyn, I therefore found Paul Auster's studio apartment, which is situated on a quiet street in a beautiful Park Slope neighborhood. This is where he spends his days, writing down stories in notebooks and typing them up on his Olympia. I walked past the building a few times, not even daring to stop and take a proper look at it, not to speak of knocking at its door, which I felt would anyway remain locked for me – too scared to be seen by the writer himself, and too ashamed of my sudden realization that I might have just crossed that thin borderline that separates a scholar from stalker. I returned back to my hotel, and on the same day, having changed my plans, visited the New York Public Library in Manhattan, at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. My rationale for this move was simple: I needed to get as close to the writer's mind as possible. The closest one can get to that – the closest expression of that mind – should be found in the writer's notes, sketches and drafts, and manuscripts, in this case all held at a special collection in the New York Public Library. As Marco Stanley Fogg says in *Moon Palace*, "Libraries aren't in the real world, after all. They're places apart, sanctuaries of pure

⁷⁷ To emphasize the self-awareness of the schizophrenic split that occurs to scholars, critics and biographers, whereby the latter represent a darker and morally more ambiguous side of the individual, Hamilton throughout the book refers to himself as "we" – "me" and "my sleuthing companion." Hamilton, *In Search of Salinger*, 51.

⁷⁸ Rheindorf, "Where Everything is Connected," 28-29.

⁷⁹ See Auster, "Ghosts," in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 201-202.

⁸⁰ Auster, *Invention of Solitude*, 162.

⁸¹ Auster, *Moon Palace*, 219.

thought.”⁸² A sanctuary like that might even contain materials that would allow me to make conclusions about the arborescent notions of origins and order in Auster’s work, and the rhizomatic evolution of his texts.

I was also determined to find the red notebook there – the “real” red notebook, which through Auster’s fictional and nonfictional texts has acquired almost mythical dimensions, the promise of some sort of key or clue for understanding the meaning of his texts. From the beginning, of course, I was skeptical about the allegations regarding the contents of the notebook, yet I had to find it and read it, because that would be what an Auster character would do. Although I kept reminding myself that scholars often study manuscripts in order to better situate the given text in the cultural and documentary context in which it was produced, and thus to move closer to finding, for example, the author’s intended meaning, I could not help but disbelieve such a prospect. That would be too simple. Still, it was worth trying, and I also did not have any other choice but to follow all the possible leads to the end in this quest for meaning.

The New York Public Library’s Berg Collection contains three separate archives with “Paul Auster papers” – holographic and typed manuscripts, notes, and correspondences, altogether several hundreds of boxes of materials, dated from 1963 to 2005. As I sat there, waiting for the librarian to bring in the boxes with the contents I had requested, I must admit I did feel a growing sense of excitement and privilege to be able to witness if not the very genesis, then the evolution of Auster’s stories. There is something special about the manuscript – not only the alleged intimacy of the author with which it is invested, but also the supposed truthfulness of its contents – as if it was somehow more “authentic,” more sincere than the final product. As Brandon Hopkins puts it,

[t]he modern manuscript, especially since the Romantic era, has about it what Walter Benjamin calls an “aura” – a numinous quality of “authenticity.” [Manuscripts] seem to reveal the workings of the author’s mind, taking us as it were behind the scenes of literary creation. Perhaps because it is marked as the beginning of a process of mechanical reproduction, we perceive the modern manuscript as carrying greater ontological weight than its copies.⁸³

⁸² Auster, *Moon Palace*, 217.

⁸³ Brandon Hopkins, “Manuscript,” *The Chicago School of Media Theory: Theorizing Media since 2003*,

These associations of the manuscript with truthfulness and authenticity partly derive from the modern understanding of the process of publishing, whereby the creation of the original text is believed to be “corrupted” by the intervention of other “authors” – editors, proofreaders and publishers. A manuscript, on the other hand, gives the most direct access to the writer’s mind, or such is the allegation. At the same time, this presumption does not eliminate the tension that can be observed in the sometimes contradictory perception of the manuscript versus the published version of a text, the original versus the refined. This paradox is questioned also by Hopkins, who points out that while sometimes the manuscript is viewed as the closest reflection of the author’s intent, at other times it is the final version that is prioritized as the ultimate expression of that same mind:

A modern manuscript often seems to us to be the individual and relatively unmediated expression of its author. Yet we always wrestle with a contradiction between regarding a manuscript as “the genuine article” (next to which certain printed versions may be corruptions) and the final work as the authority (of which the manuscript was a mere prototype).⁸⁴

But manuscripts also have value as objects that are then turned into artifacts; Auster uses these associations in *The Brooklyn Follies* to create a subplot that deals with the sale of a counterfeited manuscript of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. Manuscript, by definition – “written by hand” (from Latin “*manu*” and “*scriptus*”), is almost always “the original” and therefore the most valuable, while printed sets of the same text are viewed as merely “copies.”⁸⁵ This gap of separation and difference in value between the original text and its copies was further increased by the advent of mass-produced books, which, in Hopkin’s words, “are not themselves seen as individual objects.” It is their manuscripts that are unique.⁸⁶

Winter 2003, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/manuscript/>.

⁸⁴ Hopkins, “Manuscript.”

⁸⁵ It must be noted, though, that there is difference between the term’s original and modern meanings. While etymologically, “manuscript,” a term introduced in the 1590s from Latin, denoted writing by hand with pencil or ink on some form of paper (thus, by “a manuscript” is often meant a handwritten “publication” of a text, such as illuminated manuscripts, scrolls, journals, etc.), a more contemporary use of the term includes any form of writing (handwriting, typewriting, or computer-writing) that is not printed yet, but, by implication, is expected or intended to be published in print form. Hopkins distinguishes three “stages” of the manuscript that became distinguished after the invention of the typewriter – the author would first “pen” or outline his work, then produce “a fair copy,” still written by hand, which would then be followed by a “typescript” version – usually the final version of the manuscript. These three stages are also present in Auster’s manuscripts – at least two holographic drafts (notebooks featuring outlines and notebooks featuring more “solid” writing) followed by a typewritten manuscript.

⁸⁶ Hopkins, “Manuscript.”

It was these sorts of associations that I felt resided in Auster's holographic and typewritten manuscripts, and as such, these materials seemed to hold the promise of letting me discover some more authentic meaning in his texts as well as getting closer to "the writer's mind." As I went through the contents of the boxes of Auster papers, I discovered the famous notebooks that Auster favors, which came in a variety of sizes, types and colors, and some of which fitted the description given by the protagonist of *Oracle Night* (except that – Paul Auster, as I found out, uses a different brand, the French Clairefontaine):

The Portuguese notebooks were especially attractive to me, and with their hard covers, quadrille lines, and stitched-in signatures of sturdy, unblottable paper, I knew I was going to buy one the moment I picked it up and held it in my hands. There was nothing fancy or ostentatious about it. It was a practical piece of equipment – stolid, homely, serviceable, not at all the kind of blank book you'd think of offering someone as a gift. But I liked the fact that it was cloth-bound, and I also liked the shape: nine and a quarter by seven and a quarter inches, which made it slightly shorter and wider than most notebooks. I can't explain why it should have been so, but I found those dimensions deeply satisfying ... There were ... for notebooks left on the pile, and each one came in a different color: black, red, brown and blue. I chose the blue, which happened to be the one lying on the top."⁸⁷

I picked from one of the boxes a blue holograph notebook containing the draft to *Oracle Night*, and "when I held the notebook in my hands for the first time, I felt something akin to physical pleasure, a rush of sudden, incomprehensible well-being."⁸⁸ It also felt eerie, as if again I was inside of an Auster text; I was holding in my hands a blue notebook, that mysterious object, which for Sidney Orr from *Oracle Night* sets in motion a chain of unexpected, strange events. Characteristic of Auster's oeuvre, I soon found myself trapped in a loop of self-referentiality whereby one thing or object points to another, and yet another, *ad infinitum*, without ever disclosing their actual meaning. As Anne Garner, the archivist of the Auster papers at the New York Public Library, points out, "Looking at the manuscript creates a kind of Russian doll effect where the viewer opens one blue notebook only to read about another, where a miraculous story involving yet another

⁸⁷ Sidney Orr in Auster, *Oracle Night*, 5-6.

⁸⁸ See Paul Auster, "Oracle Night," Drafts, Box 23, Folder 1: Blue holograph notebook "Oracle Night," Draft 1, *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*, processed by Anne Garner, August 2008. The Paul Auster Archive, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

manuscript unfolds.”⁸⁹ The sensation of discovering this significant artifact was overwhelming to me, but it was not helpful for my investigation. Like Sidney Orr, who does not know how to begin writing in his yet blank notebook, “I had no idea how to begin” my reading of the text and the thing I saw before my eyes.⁹⁰ I closed the blue notebook, put it aside and turned to inspect other notebooks.

While in some of these notebooks the paper was held together by a spiral, most of them were sewn-bound; with an exception of a few lined ones, most had a grid of pink or blue squares that appeared to better control Auster’s tiny handwriting, produced in black ink from a fountain pen. At times his handwriting was so unintelligible that I had difficulty deciphering the text, and had to ask for the librarian’s help. And as I was sitting there, moments later, bent over the notebooks with a magnifying glass, I felt, like so many times before, that I was following the author’s deceptive guidance, which suggests that the truth and meaning are discoverable if only the reader agrees to assume the role of detective.

From the large collection of the Auster “papers” that the archives contain, I was mostly interested in the author’s preliminary drafts because I believed them to be most intimate and personal, the rawest and purest expression of thoughts, and, therefore, the closest link to his mind, and the “locked” space within which it works. In most of these notebooks with the first drafts of Auster texts, pages were often divided in sections, often separated by a line break, sometimes numbered, at other times not, and there would be several repetitions of the same sentence, or of a whole paragraph, with slight variations introduced with each repeated version. These non-linearly arranged fragments more resembled brief sketches and notes than a coherent narrative in development. In some cases, a few sentences or words, or a whole section would be crossed out or amended, corrections done with a fountain pen, or, alternatively with a pencil. In other cases, the repeated bits of text would be left untouched on the pages of the notebook – three, five, or even more repetitions of seemingly the same idea.

⁸⁹ Anne Garner, “Paul Auster Papers in the Berg,” *The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature*, March 31, 2011, <http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/03/31/paul-auster-papers-berg>.

⁹⁰ See Auster, “Oracle Night,” Drafts, Box 23, Folder 1: Blue holograph notebook “Oracle Night,” Draft 1, *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

Auster's writing on those pages appeared untamed, as if the thoughts of his mind were directly channeled on paper through the handwriting fountain pen – the hand inextricable from the word, and the word from the hand, as Heidegger has put it, and the pen as the writing tool that acts to make this channeling of the writer's thoughts possible. Brandon Hopkins suggests that it is “[t]he speed with which words flow from the pen at the behest of the hand” that has given rise to metaphors that “reveal a sense of streaming and flowing associated with the generative act.”⁹¹ Daniel Chandler in “The Phenomenology of Writing by Hand” talks about writing as an act that fuses physical and intellectual processes, where writing by hand in particular implies “bodily thinking” and is a pure expression of thought that comes straight from one's body (Roland Barthes once declared that “the pleasure of the text is that moment when [his] body pursues its own ideas”).⁹² That is exactly how Auster describes his own act of writing when he is talking about his writing tools in an interview: “I can say this, I've never been able to compose on a keyboard. I need a pen or a pencil in my hand, feel that it's a very physical activity. When I write, words are literally coming out of my body.”⁹³

Looking at Auster's handwritten manuscripts, it seemed to me that through this process of repetition Auster was comparing the sound and looks of words, trying them out for their rhythm and rhyme, and all the other aspects that create his style of writing. His way of writing more resembled building a brick wall or putting together a jigsaw puzzle; it was a process of assembling a text from fragments selected through repetition. For instance, the first draft to *The Book of Illusion*, which starts with the section on “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” (one of the “written films” in the novel),⁹⁴ contains reiterations of the same thought, repeated several times with slight variation; these would be either listed in succession, or, separated out by a line break or a number, would reappear later on in the draft. This is how they looked:

⁹¹ Hopkins, “Manuscript.”

⁹² Daniel Chandler, “The Phenomenology of Writing by Hand,” *Intelligent Tutoring Media* 3(2/3) (May/August 1992): 65-74, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/phenom.html>.

⁹³ See Bethanne Patrick, “Interview with Paul Auster,” *Goodreads*, November, 2010, http://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/556.Paul_Auster.

⁹⁴ The fact that the first draft to the novel starts with the opening of the film-within-the-book, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, which is, after all, only a small subplot to the book's story, again points to the rhizomatic nature of Auster's oeuvre, where one story gives birth to the other, often transcending generic and media boundaries. The example of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* with its many textual variations is discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The Inner Life of Martin Frost runs a little over eighty minutes. It is the shortest and most [?]⁹⁵ of Hector's late films.

The Inner Life of Martin Frost was a little over eighty minutes. It was the shortest of the films and [?]....

The Inner Life of Martin Frost runs a little over eighty minutes...⁹⁶

Other similar passages attempt to introduce Martin Frost, the protagonist of this film-within-the-novel:

Martin Frost is a writer. A smallish [?] man in his early thirties, he is entering the home [house?] as the film begins.

Martin Frost is a writer in his early thirties...⁹⁷

This same introduction of the writer-character later reappears in more variations in the subsequent Part 5 of Draft 1 to the novel, which is laid out in a different notebook:

Martin Frost is a writer. A smallish man in his early thirties, he is seen entering the home as the film begins, carrying a suitcase in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other. The home belongs to his friends, Josh and Ruth McRemult, he explains, and he has been offered the use of it while [ends abruptly]

Martin Frost is a writer. A smallish man in his early thirties, he is seen entering the home as the film begins, carrying a suitcase in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other. The home, he tells us, belongs to his friends, Josh and Ruth McRemult, who are travelling/they⁹⁸ are travelling abroad until the end of the year and have offered him the use of their place for as long as he would care to stay there. Martin has just spent [ends abruptly]

Martin Frost is a writer. A smallish man in his early thirties, he is seen entering the home [house?] as the film begins, carrying a suitcase in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other. The

⁹⁵ At this point, I failed to decipher Auster's handwriting. In cases like these where Auster's handwriting appears intelligible I have used a question mark, or the suggested possible word followed by a question mark, placed in square brackets.

⁹⁶ See Paul Auster, "Book of Illusions," Drafts, Box 1, Folder 1: Holograph notebook "The Book of Illusions. 1," Part 1 of Draft 1, *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*, processed by Anne Garner, August 2008. The Paul Auster Archive, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

⁹⁷ See Auster, "Book of Illusions," Drafts, Box 1, Folder 1: Holograph notebook "The Book of Illusions. 1," Part 1 of Draft 1. *Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

⁹⁸ As appears in the notebook.

home, he tells us, belongs to his friends, Josh and Ruth McRemult, who are travelling around. Martin has been invited to stay there while they are gone. He has just spent three [?] years working on a novel, and because he is feeling exhausted and in need of a rest [ends abruptly]

Martin Frost is a writer. ...⁹⁹

The resulting image is of a writer composing a text in a back-and-forth movement that is marked by a re-iteration, or stuttering, of thought, until he finds, even if in an entirely different notebook, the “right” segment of text that eventually makes its way to the typewriting stage. This is how one fragment containing the description of the silent “Martin Frost” film from the draft to *The Book of Illusions* appeared:

The picture fades to black. We are approximately ninety [?] seconds into the film at this point...

The picture fades to black. When we see Martin again, it is morning [?] and he is fast asleep in bed.

The picture

The picture fades to black. We are approximately ninety [?] seconds into the film at this point...

The picture fades to black. When the [?] resumes, it is morning [?].¹⁰⁰

Notebook-writing is a more direct and chaotic expression of thought than typewriting (recall Auster’s description of the process of thinking as quoted earlier in this chapter – thoughts resemble “a network of paths” and form “the image of a map”); the typewriter imposes some order and linearity and works to “tame” this chaos. That is exactly why notebook-writing is still as much a suitable means for mapping out thoughts as computer-writing. In spite of its strong associations with non-linear, rhizomatic text production (to production of an interconnected hypertext) and the ease with which it allows manipulation of text, the computer, according to Chandler, fails to register the degree of

⁹⁹ See Paul Auster, “Book of Illusions,” Drafts, Box 1, Folder 5: Holograph notebook. “The Book of Illusions. 5,” Part 5 of Draft 1, *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*, processed by Anne Garner, August 2008. The Paul Auster Archive, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

¹⁰⁰ See Auster, “Book of Illusions,” Drafts, Box 1, Folder 1: Holograph notebook “The Book of Illusions. 1,” Part 1 of Draft 1. *Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

change and the spontaneity of every thought during the creative process to an extent that the notebook allows it. As Chandler points out,

Many writers choose to annotate their printouts by hand – though this is seldom as complete a record of changes as that of the completely handwritten draft. Apologists who point to the existence of facilities and techniques which cater for preserving changes with the word processor fail to recognize the deliberateness such strategies require in contrast to a rapid slash of the pen – which can preserve every change (even with subtle and unpremeditated degrees of unwantedness). The handwritten text maps paths not taken in a way that enables them to be re-explored if necessary.¹⁰¹

Auster always writes his texts in longhand, and then types them up on his typewriter. Yet it does not mean that the work of the typewriter has not been present since the beginning of the process. The typewriter acts on the writer's thoughts through associations, as discussed in Chapter 3, and its work is invisible yet intense. That is why – as I discovered in the archives – although the first draft to *The Story of My Typewriter* was written by hand on a few squared pages torn out from a small-format notebook, Auster still claims that the text was produced by his Olympia typewriter, while he himself was sitting there, his hands on its keyboard, watching it “[l]etter by letter ... write these words.”¹⁰²

Yet, when looking at these early drafts (I was inspecting in particular detail the ones pertaining to *The Book of Illusions* and *The Brooklyn Follies*, among others), it is hard to follow the development of his thought. There are no remarks or explanations as to why within this rhizomatic map of thoughts one path is chosen over the others and the text gets shaped in one particular way. Among all the repetitions of textual fragments that are laid out in the notebooks, there is no way to tell the “original” one. In the “original” manuscripts, then, there is no single point of origin, which is why these texts resist genealogical readings. Instead, there is a multiplicity of text, a pool of countless possibilities for each word, and, consequently, each sentence and story, to develop further. It fits the explanation of the multiplicity of the book, as explained by the Jewish writer and poet Edmond Jabès in a conversation with Auster:

¹⁰¹ Chandler, “Writing by Hand.”

¹⁰² See Paul Auster, “The Story of My Typewriter,” Drafts, Box 62, Folder 1: Early holograph draft, “The Story of My Typewriter,” Draft 1, *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*, processed by Anne Garner, August 2008. The Paul Auster Archive, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

When I say there are many books in the book, it is because there are many words in the word. Obviously, if you change the word, the context of the sentence changes completely. In this way another sentence is born from this word, and a completely different book begins. ... I think of this in terms of the sea, in the image of the sea as it breaks upon the shore. It is not the wave that comes, it is the whole sea that comes each time and the whole sea that draws back. It is never just a wave, it is always everything that comes and everything that goes. This is really the fundamental movement in all my books. Everything is connected to everything else. ... At each moment, in the least question, it is the whole book which returns and the whole book which draws back.¹⁰³

Apart from these repetitions of textual fragments that recur throughout the notebooks, these early holographs also contain something that resembles outlines, or indexes for the ways a text could be assembled, sketching out possible developments for a story, naming its parts and sub-parts, and arranging those in particular order. The first draft to *The Brooklyn Follies* starts with an outline that Auster has named “The Ten Lives of Otto Gutmann”; it is followed by several other versions of the outline, with initial chapter titles and their numbers in mixed order. Likewise, the first pages of the notebook containing what is identified as Draft 2 of *The Brooklyn Follies*, are all filled out with similar outlines – 29 possible sections for the novel with some preliminary titles, or 30 sections, or 28, or 32, as in yet another page. Notes providing details of characters, listing their possible names, age, occupation, background and the role in the story, likewise recur throughout the notebooks. The notebook containing the holograph outline and early draft entitled *Dream Days at the Hotel Existence*,¹⁰⁴ is, again, symptomatic of this kind of writing; an assemblage of short sketches, ideas, lists and outlines, it diagrams all the possibilities for a book, including character details, that later would become his novel *The Brooklyn Follies*. What I was looking at, I realized, were diagrams of Auster’s texts.

In his book on the 20th-century figurative painter Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze introduces the concept of “the diagram” which, although lacking a precise definition, gets

¹⁰³ Auster’s 1978 interview with Jabès is published, in Auster’s own translation from French, in his *Art of Hunger*, 144-169. For the respective quote see Auster, “Providence: A Conversation with Edmond Jabès,” in *Art of Hunger*, 168.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Auster, “Brooklyn Follies,” Drafts, Miscellaneous fragments, Box 20, Folder 1: Holograph outline and early draft of “Dream Days at the Hotel Existence” [early version of *The Brooklyn Follies*], *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*, processed by Anne Garner, August 2008. The Paul Auster Archive, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

associated with the artist's thoughts, ideas and emotions, imagination and the creative impulse, and all that which precedes the painting, initiates and guides the process of its creation, and is present, even if in an invisible form, in the finished artwork.¹⁰⁵ In other words, it is all that preparatory work which, although it "precedes the act of painting," still "belongs to painting fully."¹⁰⁶ That preparatory work, as Deleuze explains, can be done "in sketches, though it need not be, and in any case sketches do not replace it"; it is "invisible and silent, yet extremely intense."¹⁰⁷ It is both those "already figurative givens on the canvas," but also that which is "in the painter's head," data that are "more or less virtual, more or less actual."¹⁰⁸ These raw data then get "precisely demarcated, cleaned, swept, and wiped, or covered over by the act of painting," or, one might also say – by the act of writing. Either way, the human act of creating resembles different artistic ways of ordering the "data" – as in painting, but also molding, carving, or sculpting the given material that originates in the artist's mind.

An important characteristic that Deleuze sees in the diagram comes from Bacon's own description of the process of marking the canvas with his thoughts and ideas:

... very often the involuntary marks are much more deeply suggestive than others, and those are the moments when you feel that anything can happen. ... the marks are made, and you survey the thing like you would a sort of graph. And you see within this graph *the possibilities of all types of fact being planted.*¹⁰⁹ (my emphasis)

In other words, the function of the diagram is to "suggest" the possible ways the text (literary, visual, audiovisual) could develop; as a marker of the initial stages of the creative act, it "ends the preparatory work and begins the act of painting," or, in this case – writing.¹¹⁰ Elsewhere, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari note that "the diagrammatic ... machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ See the chapter "The Diagram" in Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Deleuze, "Diagram," 99.

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze, "Diagram," 99.

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze, "Diagram," 100.

¹⁰⁹ Taken from *Francis Bacon. Interviewed by David Sylvester*; quoted in Deleuze, "Diagram," 184.

¹¹⁰ Deleuze, "Diagram," 102.

¹¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 142.

That is what Auster's holographs contained – diagrams showing the possibilities of all types of fact being planted.

And yet, these outlines failed to reveal any significant information that would help me to deepen my understanding of Auster's work; like his published texts (novelistic works, such as *The New York Trilogy* or *Travels in the Scriptorium*, and various filmic and collaborative projects), so also Auster's notebooks seemed to suggest almost a state of entrapment of his texts in cycles of their own intra- and self-referentiality.¹¹² The same holograph notebooks containing early drafts to Auster's novels (e.g., Draft 1 of *The Book of Illusions*, or the first drafts to *The Brooklyn Follies*) expose the rhizomatic structure of his oeuvre through the mutual intertextual references that connect his texts together. Character names and titles are especially telling of this connectivity. For instance, in the draft to *The Book of Illusions*, the following films are attributed to its director-character Hector Mann, all of which are titles of other Auster texts:

The Inner Life of Martin Frost (1947) (filmed at ranch)

Travels in the Scriptorium (ranch – NY - KC)

Oracle Night (1971) (ranch – SF)¹¹³

Within the same draft, a list of something marked as “Stories” appears:

Oracle Night

Travels in the Scriptorium

The Brooklyn Follies¹¹⁴

In the first draft of “Dream Days at the Hotel Existence,”¹¹⁵ which is an early version of *The Brooklyn Follies*, Auster has listed the possible titles, among which are “The Further

¹¹² A comprehensive report on the interconnectivity of Auster's prose works can also be found in a section “On Earlier Versions” of Springer's *Auster Sourcebook*, 63-72.

¹¹³ As appears in the holograph. See Auster, “Book of Illusions,” Drafts, Box 1, Folder 1: Holograph notebook “The Book of Illusions. 1,” Part 1 of Draft 1, *Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

¹¹⁴ See Auster, “Book of Illusions,” Drafts, Box 1, Folder 1: Holograph notebook “The Book of Illusions. 1,” Part 1 of Draft 1, *Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

¹¹⁵ See Auster, “Brooklyn Follies,” Drafts, Miscellaneous fragments, Box 20, Folder 1: Holograph outline and early draft of “Dream Days at the Hotel Existence,” *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

Adventures of Martin Frost” and “Report from the Anti-World”; Martin Frost is one of Auster’s writer-characters, while the latter is mentioned in *The Book of Illusions* as one of Hector Mann’s films. An untitled holograph notebook that features another outline for “Dream Days at the Hotel Existence” likewise features among its section titles already familiar names,

Mr Vertigo

Pret-falls [?]: Scenes from the Life of Hector Mann

The Red Notebook,

as well as – noted separately – “True Stories,” followed by a list of story titles. Further on in the draft, other recognizable titles and names from Auster texts reappear:

Timbuktu

The Brooklyn Follies

Hector Mann

Meanwhile, the character list for the planned novel include “Fogg” (as in *Moon Palace* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*), “Nashe and Juliette” (Nashe appears in *The Music of Chance*), “Quinn (?)” (*City of Glass*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*) and – unsurprisingly – “Auster.”

These are but a few examples of the kind of intertextuality and repetition I found symptomatic of Auster’s unpublished texts. Later, in the draft to *The Red Notebook*, Auster himself confesses – “Some stories won’t let go of you,” a sentence separated out and written on the top corner of an otherwise half-filled page. An Auster text, it seems, can never be entirely finished – like MS Fogg’s life (his name itself a reference to “manuscript”), it is always in development, writing itself as long as Paul Auster/“Paul Auster” writes. I suddenly felt like the character Blue from Auster’s novel *Ghosts*,

like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life. ... But how to get out?

How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?¹¹⁶

Perhaps, as Stephen Fredman suggests, for a writer whose writing explores the process of writing (or for a reader who attempts to read such writing), to walk out of the room of the book would be simply impossible – “it would mean to stop writing,” or, as in my case, to stop reading entirely.¹¹⁷ I felt my quest was about to end where it had begun – somewhere inside the maze of Auster’s texts – cyclical, repetitive and self-referential, without an identifiable beginning, centre, or end, and without it being possible to assign any kind of stable meaning.

Yet before I was ready to give up with my investigation of “Auster papers,” I had to examine one final item – the holographic notebook that I believed to be the often-referenced “red notebook.” After all, in Auster’s texts, the reader is never given a chance to glimpse its contents, while constantly being tempted to do so, as in this fragment from *The Locked Room*:

“Behind you. ... A red notebook.”

I turned around, opened the closet door, and picked up the notebook. It was a standard spiral affair with two hundred ruled pages. I gave a quick glance at the contents and saw that all the pages had been filled: the same familiar writing, the same black ink, the same small letters. ...

“What now?” I asked.

“Take it home with you. Read it. ... It was written for you. ... It’s all in the notebook. Whatever I managed to say now would only distort the truth.”

“Is there anything else?”

“No, I don’t think so. We’ve probably come to the end.”¹¹⁸

And as I located the “red notebook,” squeezed in among other notebooks in an archival folder named “Notebooks,” I became “enormously excited by this discovery,”¹¹⁹ not

¹¹⁶ Auster, “Ghosts,” in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 201-202.

¹¹⁷ Fredman, “How to Get Out...”

¹¹⁸ Auster, “The Locked Room,” in Auster, *New York Trilogy*, 368.

¹¹⁹ See Paul Auster, “Notebooks,” Box 67, Folder 2: Holograph notebook, “Stories”[Contains material later published in “The Red Notebook,” including “The Red Notebook,” and “Why Write”; “Lulu on the Bridge” interview, “Reflections of a Cardboard Box,” and a preface to a translation of Pierre Clastres], *The Paul*

unlike Sidney Orr, who discovers in *Oracle Night* that the subject of his search, John Trause (note the anagram of the surname), uses the same kind of notebook as himself. Yet the hard-cover A4 Clairefontaine notebook with 192 pages/96 sheets and a red fabric pattern cover turned out to be as deceptive as it appears in Auster's texts themselves. Entitled by Auster "Stories," it listed the following material as its contents:

Translations – preface
Meditations on a Cardboard Box
Clastres –Translator's note¹²⁰
Lulu on the Bridge – interview
Why Write?
The Red Notebook

The first 50 pages or so of the notebook, which amount to approximately 1/4 of the entire notebook, were left blank. The handwritten material that appears in the next few pages are all crossed out. Among other bits and pieces, the following ink-filled pages in which the text had not been struck through, contains references to Philippe Petit and his sky-walking, a random telephone number, and notes on translations, essays and stories, including what one would recognize as draft versions of the "true stories" from *The Red Notebook*.

In the end, it was the question of truth that was the basis of my only revelation at the library archives. The discovery came in the form of some subversive material that the red notebook contained, which seemed to suggest that, for Auster, truth and invention indeed are inseparable, and suffused with each other. Paul Auster, as the holograph revealed, had invented an interview with himself. The pages filled with his tiny handwriting in black ink contained what appeared to be the first draft to both questions and answers of a conversation that later was published together with the film's script as the interview on

Auster Papers 1999-2005, processed by Anne Garner, August 2008. The Paul Auster Archive, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

¹²⁰ This is a reference to a translation of "Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians" by Pierre Clastres that Auster has done. See Pierre Clastres, "Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians," translated and with a foreword by Paul Auster (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

“The Making of Lulu on the Bridge,” and that became generally known among scholars as “the interview with Rebecca Prime.”¹²¹

Yet if notions of truth and fiction get destabilized to such an extent, then statements, facts and details that one would otherwise presume to be “truthful” also lose their credibility. In the context of my discovery I started questioning how one is supposed to read the following sentence written by Auster, a sentence that opens one of the “true stories” of *The Red Notebook* and that appears in a draft version within the same red notebook as the invented interview: “... If anyone should think I’m making it up; think again. Stories like this one are solely the promise of the truth.”¹²²

When scholars, critics and a general readership seek to increase their knowledge and understanding of a writer’s work, the established practice is to turn to additional reading material, such as the available criticism or the author’s other published and unpublished texts, such as manuscripts and notes, or to study the author’s life, or to look for more direct expression from the author in the form of his personal letters, public interviews and statements. Yet what happens when one finds out that facts are infused with fiction, and *vice versa*, so that fictional details not only point back to facts, but that what one takes to be a reliable fact itself turns out to be fictionalized, invented? To refer back to Ian Hamilton, the data and bits of information that I had managed to accumulate from Auster’s unpublished materials did not reveal to me anything meaningful about “the subject of [my] study,” or else, they turned out to be, “in the main, performances,” and as such were unreliable material.¹²³ I closed the red notebook and placed it back where it belonged, among the hundreds of boxes with Auster materials that are held in the archives of the library. I had no choice now but to find Paul Auster himself and talk to him directly.

¹²¹ See Auster, “Notebooks,” Box 67, Folder 2: Holograph notebook, “Stories,” *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*. The interview is published both in Paul Auster, *Lulu on the Bridge: A Film By Paul Auster* (New York: Henry Holt and company, 1998), 141-168; and Paul Auster, *Three Films: Smoke, Blue in the Face, and Lulu on the Bridge* (New York: Picador, 2003), 221-244.

¹²² See Auster, “Notebooks,” Box 67, Folder 2: Holograph notebook, “Stories,” *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*.

¹²³ Ian Hamilton, *In Search of JD Salinger* (London, Heinemann, 1988), 68.

Encountering the Writer

Having settled in the new hotel in Park Slope, I decided to stay in Brooklyn and look for Paul Auster there. Brooklyn felt more accessible, more open and somehow also more “real” than the distanced, sterile and geometrical spaces of Manhattan, and its anonymous crowds. With “a hundred potential scenes to capture, vivid colors all around,” it seemed to invite exploration and engagement, an invitation that both I myself and Auster characters (Milles Heller, Ellen and Bing Nathan from *Sunset Park*, Nathan Glass and Lucy from *The Brooklyn Follies*, etc.) responded to after settling in. Both the borough and its people had a certain “character” that one could not only observe from a distance but also engage with on a personal level.

The sense that Brooklyn is more colorful, more accessible, more open and more “real” is also suggested by the particular details attributed to it through specific and often tangible “things” that gather together its Austerian neighborhoods – namely, Park Slope, Prospect Park and Sunset Park. That is how Auster’s Brooklyn-assemblages differ from those of Manhattan, which are characterized largely by emotions and sensations, a certain level of abstraction and something that could be best described as a lack of solid substance (maze, deception, vanishing points, impenetrable façades, street names and house numbers, the feeling of being lost). Things in Brooklyn, on the other hand, seem to encourage their naming – recall, for instance, the list of a Brooklyn assemblage from Auster’s film *Blue in the Face*, quoted earlier in this chapter and also in Chapter 2 on smoking. In Brooklyn, one notices “things.” The architecture and urban planning of Brooklyn draw attention to the heterogeneity of elements scattered along its long, wide avenues, so that what one sees when walking down 7th Avenue, from Grand Army Plaza to Prospect Park, as I did after my arrival, are “hybrid chains of actants”¹²⁴ – its many cafes and restaurants, the bookshops and barber shops, the laundromats and repair shops, the old people and young people, and people with children in strollers, or people with dogs on a leash, ice creams and pizzas, and music, and kids playing basketball, and so on and so forth, until these strings of things disappear in perspective *into* the vanishing point.

¹²⁴ Farías, “Introduction: Decentering the Object of Urban Studies,” in Farías and Bender, eds., *Urban Assemblages*, 3.

For the first few days after my arrival, I acted like Nathan Glass from *The Brooklyn Follies*, and “filled my time by exploring the neighborhood,” mainly Park Slope and Prospect Park, while, later on, following Bing and Ellen from Auster’s most recent novel *Sunset Park*, I walked down to Sunset Park, “to explore the territory between Fifteenth and Sixty-fifth streets in western Brooklyn.”¹²⁵ That “extensive hodgepodge of an area that runs from Upper New York Bay to Ninth Avenue” was a “home to more than a hundred thousand people, including Mexicans, Dominicans, Poles, Chinese, Jordanians, Vietnamese, American whites, American blacks, and a settlement of Christians from Gujarat, India.”¹²⁶ It consisted of

[w]arehouses, factories, abandoned waterfront facilities, a view of the Statue of Liberty, the shut-down Army Terminal where ten thousand people once worked, a basilica named Our Lady of Perpetual Help, biker cars, check-cashing places, Hispanic restaurants, the third-largest Chinatown in New York, and the four hundred and seventy-eight acres of Green-Wood Cemetery, where six hundred thousand bodies are buried, including those of [the famous historical figures] Boss Tweed, Lola Montez, Currier and Ives, Henry Ward Beecher, F.A.O. Schwarz, Lorenzo Da Ponte, Horace Greeley, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Samuel F. B. Morse, Albert Anastasia, Joey Gallo, and Frank Morgan – the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*.¹²⁷

In Brooklyn, everything and everyone seems to be given a voice of their own, or else they themselves get voiced, acknowledged and named, as in the case of the dead people and the things they have come to be associated with.¹²⁸

Auster’s Brooklyn, which seems to be a communal space, is made up of smaller and larger communities, and as such it encourages participation and engagement, and expression of its polyphony, all of which becomes manifested also in Auster’s later texts that are set in this borough. It is the acting of the place, then, that to a large extent is

¹²⁵ Auster, *Sunset Park*, 80.

¹²⁶ Auster, *Sunset Park*, 80.

¹²⁷ Auster, *Sunset Park*, 80.

¹²⁸ The Green-Wood Cemetery itself later in the novel is portrayed as assembled not only of “thousands of trees and plantings,” but also of dead people, their tombs and things of the past that are associated with the deceased; of tombs “of gangsters and poets, generals and industrialists, murder victims and newspaper publishers, children dead before their time, a woman who lived seventeen years beyond her hundredth birthday, and Theodore Roosevelt’s wife and mother, who were buried next to each other on the same day. There is Elias Howe, inventor of the sewing machine, the Kampfe brothers, inventors of the safety razor, Henry Steinway, founder of the Steinway Piano Company, John Underwood, founder of the Underwood Typewriter Company, Henry Chadwick, inventor of the baseball scoring system, Elmer Sperry, inventor of the gyroscope...” See Auster, *Sunset Park*, 135.

responsible for the shift that occurs in Auster's texts from a singular focus on one isolated individual and his writer's identity quest (*City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, *The Locked Room*, *Leviathan*, *The Day I Disappeared*, *Moon Palace*, etc.) to a larger group of characters that are all assembled by the space they inhabit (*Man in the Dark*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, *Smoke*, *Blue in the Face*, *Sunset Park*...). Auster's most recent novel, *Sunset Park*, for example, includes multiple narrative voices – and, like in the film *Smoke*, each chapter there is assigned to and named after a different character.

Recall the work of the cigarette as a “thinging thing” that gathers people together, encouraging the act of sharing and mutual tolerance. Brooklyn, itself a network of assemblages, acts in a similar way; it somehow seems less likely that a place like Manhattan could exert the same effect. Brooklyn, the largest and most populous of New York boroughs, paradoxically feels like a small place, a community and a home – even if to a “hundred thousand people.” Brooklyn, in Nathan Glass's words, is both “New York and yet not New York,” it is the “ancient kingdom of ... New York,” a home that one returns to (*Sunset Park*) and a place where one comes “to die” (*The Brooklyn Follies*). As the place of “home” and “end”, then, I thought it also could become a perfect site to find some closure to my scholarly quest.

More things happened to me in Brooklyn than ever did in Manhattan, more encounters and more coincidences, and I felt that, wherever I turned, there were signs marking Paul Auster's presence, reassuring me that I was on the right track. The first time I travelled from Brooklyn to the New York Public Library's Berg Collection, I was told upon arrival that the previous day Auster's wife Siri Hustvedt had visited them; the next time I returned there, after just a few days, I was told that Auster himself had come just the day before. Later, in Park Slope, I had lunch in one of the Italian restaurants that are scattered along the 7th Avenue – after I told them about my quest for Paul Auster, and showed them his photograph from the back cover of his book, they told me that he had dined there just the previous night.

Then, one day I visited the Prospect Park neighborhood, to see what stands in the location of the Auggie Wren's Tobacco Shop (The Brooklyn Cigar Co.) from Auster's films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*. I found there a New Zealand pie shop selling pies, Anzac biscuits and New Zealand Breakfast Tea, and the fact that I had travelled all the way from

that country at the other end of the world, only to encounter a reflection of my home, appeared to me as a promising sign that I was simply meant to be there.¹²⁹

In Brooklyn I also realized that, perhaps, it was time to update *Paul Auster's New York*, since the book that was published – and immediately retracted – in 1997, excludes not only fragments from his films but also from books published after this date – such as *Man in the Dark*, *Sunset Park*, *Invisible*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, *The Book of Illusions*, and *Oracle Night*. I decided to spend my evenings back in the Park Slope hotel, going through these texts, looking for fragments that were related to the city, and working to update Überhoff's original compilation. Tracing the associations of Auster's New York, finding their expressions and aligning them would allow a new narrative of its own to emerge, which would expose, I believed, the transformation of the alienated and often menacing Australasian city, epitomized predominantly by Manhattan, into something more familiar and nameable, mainly manifested by Brooklyn (that forms and defines itself through an abundance of details rather than abstract sensations). An updated version of *Paul Auster's New York* would mean an updated travel guide and map of Auster's city that has become more concrete and graphic, in such a way making the task of following this development inarguably easier. However, as soon as I had started my work on assembling Auster's Brooklyn and "more recent" Manhattan, something happened that interrupted this project and that marked the end of my exploration of New York.

I was contacted one day to be informed that Mr Auster had agreed to meet with me.¹³⁰ We arranged a date – he picked the time and venue – and on June 10, 2011, I finally came face to face with the object of my search (or was it the subject of my search?). What I encountered was a tangible version of an idea of "Paul Auster" that was now

¹²⁹ "The Brooklyn Cigar Co." is a fictional place, constructed for the film's purposes in vacant former post office premises on the corner of Prospect Park West and 16th Street. There are no real tobacco shops left in Brooklyn, especially since the New York City mayor passed the ban on smoking in public places in 2011 and since the 80% tax increase on tobacco products that came in force in 2010. But I came across a good-looking tobacco shop in Manhattan. Since the smoking ban and the tax increase, many small tobacco companies have gone out of business. Every time I passed through that neighborhood, I stopped at Khalid's store, and we sat outside on the bench under a tree and shared a few cigars together. It felt like we were in an Auster movie. It felt like, by engaging in an Austeresque conversation about the role of cigarettes and by playing out an episode that could as well have originated in an Auster text, I had, in a way, compensated for the lack of tobacco shops in Brooklyn.

¹³⁰ I had sent through my request for a meeting and/or interview with Paul Auster weeks before I had left Auckland for New York, but it was never certain whether such a meeting could possibly take place until it actually happened. At the time I sent out my request, Auster had been away on a tour outside the country, and was supposed to return and be approachable around the same time as my last week in New York.

materializing before my eyes – his recognizable posture in a physical presence, the low voice that I had heard before and that was now emerging from this figure standing in front of me, the Schimmelpenninck cigars that were continually lit, consumed and extinguished, and whose aroma and smoke soon surrounded us, his trademark writer’s tool – a fountain pen (which he later pulled out of the chest pocket of his shirt to demonstrate on a page in my notebook the kind of imprint of ink it leaves), and other things that assemble a general impression of what “Paul Auster” is. And so, on a hot but peaceful Friday afternoon, we found ourselves sitting in the back yard of a French patisserie on the 7th Avenue in Park Slope, undisturbed by any other visitors, drinking white wine, conversing and laughing, and, in spite of the new smoking ban, enjoying our cigarillos. The smoke of tobacco was slowly rising from our hands and mouths, or at times from the ashtray in the middle of the table, curling in the air into a variety of shapes, incessantly reinventing and transforming itself until it vanished altogether. I recalled then that human thoughts often had the same structure and shape as smoke, and I felt that our smoking, too, perhaps, was a bit like our conversation, which, although generally tamed by my questions that I had prepared for Auster, at times took unexpected turns and wandered off in other directions.

The occasion also evoked associations of smoking with ancient rites, where tobacco served as the unifying thread of communication between humans and spiritual powers. The act of sharing a cigar with Auster seemed as meaningful to me as the opportunity to talk to the author in person, and the entire experience of meeting him acquired a sort of transcendental value. I felt that, whatever there was to be known about Auster’s life-work would be illuminated to me by the end of our conversation, and I remember thinking to myself – “this is it, we have finally come to the conclusion, and nothing could ever be more meaningful than this.”

Inconclusion

The sense of euphoria and epiphany that struck me momentarily during my meeting with Paul Auster vanished as quickly as tobacco smoke disperses in the open air. In retrospect, I never felt any strong sense of achievement when I finally found him and got to meet him; likewise, it was obvious that the significance of the event and its details, such as the time spent smoking together or discussing the role of cigarettes in film, resided solely in my perception and/or imagination. If there had been anything in that situation suggesting a sort of climactic conclusion, transcendental revelation, or a solution to an interpretative quest, then it had been there only because I myself had wanted it to be there from the very start.

Paul Auster himself, too, did not turn out to be entirely what I had hoped him to be, and the answers he gave to my questions seemed to complicate rather than support the argumentative work of my thesis. Generous with his time and attention, polite and friendly to me, he nevertheless rejected almost every claim about his work that I have proposed in this thesis, which is the product of years of research and thought. His responses did not so much refute or argue against my propositions as simply dismiss them as wrong or absurd with a single wave of his hand.

Auster does not believe that his writing tools and machines, such as fountain pens and typewriters, would play any meaningful role for him in his process of writing; likewise, he rejected my proposed idea about the work carried out by other “things” (such as cigarettes, doubles, and notebooks) in the creative process. No, his Olympia never “talked” to him; it only “talked” to Sam Messer. For Auster, the typewriter was just a tool that he used without ever thinking about it. He told me that technology, whether used to produce a film, a photograph, or a literary text, would have no significant impact on the result – while some technologies could make things go faster, they did not make them any better, he said. Equally swiftly he dismissed my suggestions about the overlooked functions and meanings of objects in forming social networks with humans, assembling specific settings for action, or stimulating particular actions. No, although objects sometimes *seemed* to act, they never actually *did*; and one did not require a thing, like a lit cigarette in hand, in order to tell a story. To my question about the importance of New

York in his life and writing he responded succinctly – “no significance.” It was simply where he happened to live and a place he knew best; he could easily live and write anywhere else, it was just that he did not want to. When I asked him about the projects he had co-authored, and whether he would see them as a part of his oeuvre, to be read and interpreted in the light of his other texts, he responded that he had simply stumbled into most of these projects and that, in fact, he had nothing much to do with them.

Auster did not like the idea that one could question the authenticity of his non-fiction, and, conversely, the fictionality of his fiction, and that perhaps, as some suggest, the borderlines between the two were essentially like a false façade. As soon as I mentioned the theme of identity, which for the majority of his critics (Carsten Springer, Aliko Varvogli, Mark Brown, Brendan Martin, James Peacock, Madeleine Sorapure, etc.) would appear central to his narratives, he cut me short and interjected that he did not understand what they meant by that, and what the concept of “identity” itself was supposed to mean. None of his characters had an identity crisis, and they all knew who they were, he said. Even if occasionally someone like Quinn (in *City of Glass*) took over someone else’s identity, that was “just a game” and an act of self-conscious pretense. And when I pointed to the similarities that many critics note between Auster and his characters, especially the smoking writer-figure that is customarily read as his fictional surrogate, he reminded me that his characters were never really him – ever.

At that point, I was overcome with a sinking feeling that Auster would most certainly disapprove of the thesis I was writing about him, and that I had indeed failed in my task to say anything meaningful or truthful about his work. I felt I had arrived at a dead end; my detection had not resulted in getting closer to the object of my search and instead, as in Auster’s early texts, had been flipped around and turned against me, turned inwards, so that, in the end, as in Hamilton’s case, this study does not say as much about the intended subject as it does about my struggle to comprehend it, to interpret what resists interpretation.

Because of Auster’s blunt rejections of everything that I had taken to be true for his work, I started questioning the validity, strength, and soundness of my arguments. Perhaps, my conviction that there is a particular set of things which through their own synergy constitute what we recognize as “Paul Auster” and his facto-fictional universe, with all its

inclusive texts, both literary and audio-visual, is the product of my imagination. Perhaps, there really is no need for cigarettes, New York, bare study rooms, spiral notebooks, or typewriters, in order to, along with other things, create “a Paul Auster story.” It is possible, after all, that the image associated with a writer that I share with Sam Messer, and the description of him by Jesús Ángel González that he is “addictive,” that he “smokes and writes,” and “lives in Brooklyn” are only to be taken as a commentary on Auster’s “public persona.”¹ It could be merely a set of associations and aspirations that critics along with the public have projected onto him, and which, furthermore, have nothing to do with the underlying structures and deeper meanings of his work. Hamilton experienced similar doubts during his search for Salinger, and recurrently felt he had to stop to question the connections he had established between Salinger’s life and work, the public and the private, the real and the fictional:

And what about the life/work line of scrutiny? We had been able to dig up a few “real-life models,” and there was some interest in seeing young Salinger foreshadowing young Caulfield. Or was it that this was what we wanted to find? We wanted there to be, from the start, some near-intolerable strain between the “anxious to be loved” side of Salinger and the other, darker side, the need to be untouchable superior. This was our reading of him as he had become, but was it really there...?²

Perhaps then, the significance of the objects and things whose associative and connective work this thesis explores has been overrated and imagined, made possible only by my desire to see them in every text I came across. Hamilton’s self-reflective observations on this matter are as harsh as they are acute:

My [alter-ego] companion was looking shrewdly diagnostic. Indeed, for days now there had been something distasteful in the smug, scientific way he’d set about rearranging his file cards. It was as if, having located the malignant source, he could simply sit back and watch the poison spread. *All would be “symptomatic” from now on.* It didn’t seem to matter to him that we hadn’t, even in his terms, proved anything that ought to have surprised us. After all, *we had to some extent created* a brash young Salinger who, if he went to war, would almost certainly crack up. But just as *we liked the idea of casting our man* as an undercover agent, so we warmed to the notion that he might, if only for a moment, have been mad. *We liked the idea of him* as a mysterious

¹ González, “How I Interviewed Auster.”

² Hamilton, *In Search of Salinger*, 33.

controller of his fate, but *we also wanted to see him* as maimed by some glamorously dreadful trauma.³ (my emphasis)

Could it be then that in the end the only result of this whole project of reading Auster's texts rhizomatically is a creation of my own alternative version of "Paul Auster" and his work?

Hamilton describes the deceptive sense of triumph that overwhelms biographers or scholars as they come across what they believe to be a major discovery in their research – data, facts, and opinions which often get extracted from direct or indirect expression of the author's thoughts: "We felt, I suppose, just for a moment, rather as police-men do, or torturers, when the confession finally gets signed."⁴ This remark rather bluntly suggests that what critics and scholars are truly interested in when given an opportunity to hear the author's voice, whether in a form of a written text (such as publications, manuscripts, letters, and notes) or the spoken word (such as public and private interviews and speeches), is essentially the author's confession that critics had been correct about their interpretation of his work.⁵ Was it not the reason why I had, after all, wanted to meet with Paul Auster – to receive an approval for what I was doing, to confront him with questions that already sounded more like statements? Quite possibly, that was the true source of the constant discomfort that I felt throughout the process of my research and the reason why I had to adopt a critical persona in order to distance myself from it.

And yet, I cannot help but mistrust the author himself. There seems to be a tension, an underlying contradiction that Auster might be unaware of, in his attitude towards criticism of his work, an observation I also made during our interview. Auster's thoughts about the importance of the reader's personal experience in creating the meaning of a text he or she is reading are in agreement with the poststructuralist discourse of "the death of the author" established by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. But it is not easy to

³ Hamilton, *In Search of Salinger*, 96.

⁴ Hamilton, *In Search of Salinger*, 66.

⁵ Yet, is it not how literary theory works? In her *Introduction to Critical Theory*, Lois Tyson associates each school of thought with a pair of lenses – "Think of each theory as a new pair of eyeglasses through which certain elements of our world are brought into focus while others, of course, fade into the background. ... [b]ecause they are ways of seeing the world, critical theories compete with one another for dominance in educational and cultural communities. Each theory offers itself as the most (and the only) accurate means of understanding human experience." That would be, in Deleuzian understanding, the entrapment of arborescent thinking. See Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

pronounce an author dead, especially if that author is sitting in front of you, discussing with you his own work. As Auster admitted during our interview, books, once they have been published, belong to the reader's minds. Being primarily a writer and not a literary theorist, he rather conventionally either displays a light resentment towards what critics have to say about his work, or remains altogether indifferent to it.

At the same time, Auster, who once sold three archives of his manuscripts and "papers" to the New York Public Library's Berg Collection, expressed his support for the availability of such materials for research. Most of what critics were doing, he said, was uninteresting, but once in a while there was "some brilliant person" who managed to discover something "really illuminating," and the materials at the library were there to aid in this task. Auster's categorical denial of what the majority of his critics have said about his work (in particular, those who portray his works as examples of the tenets of postmodernism) together with his apparent anticipation of a "better" and more understanding critic recreated him in my eyes as the traditional and "innocent" writer figure, who spends his days at his desk in the solitary room, writing in longhand (with a fountain pen!), pounding away on the keys of his typewriter and chain-smoking cigarettes, and producing texts infused with sentiment, nostalgia, and humanist values.

What am I to think of my conversation with the author? After I had confronted him about my discovery of the invented interview, Auster confessed to me that the interviewer's original questions had not seemed particularly interesting to him, and since he had known exactly what he wanted to say, he came up with his own version for it. Interviews, he told me, were a whole different art form. Writing interviews was like writing a play – one made them up, while trying to make them sound as natural conversations. Never once during our interview did Auster remove his dark sunglasses. Somehow, I am still not entirely sure whether I got to meet Paul Auster or "Paul Auster," and whether, after the scholarly quest that this thesis embodies, I have managed to get any closer to understanding his texts.

Perhaps this smoking typing writer *has been*, in the end, truthful to his life-long project. Whether something is "true" or "false" is irrelevant as long as it makes a "good" story. As we were sitting there, puffing away at our cigars, engulfed in a tranquil, light cloud of smoke that slowly rose from our hands, or mouths, or ashtrays, vanishing into the summer

air, I remembered that final scene from *Smoke*. As Auggie Wren and Paul Benjamin are sharing a smoke together, and Auggie is also sharing with Paul his “true” Christmas story, the writer-figure responds: “Bullshit is a real talent, Auggie. ... it’s a good story.”⁶ Perhaps, then, that is all that mattered – a shared cigar and a story, smoking that means “fictioning” that means storytelling. And, as long as the writer keeps on smoking, his writing machine will keep producing stories – stories that are born from other stories, and stories whose meanings are never fixed but are constantly changing shape – unsubstantial, ephemeral, and transient as the smoke itself.

That was, after all, also proved by our meeting. To Auster, stories, either “true” and “false,” are about being human and sharing human values (freedom, equality, mutual tolerance and respect) and “the unpredictable, utterly bewildering nature of human experience.”⁷ Yet stories are also about gathering and sharing, and they function like the things themselves, whose acting makes these stories possible in the first place. That is something that Auster remains oblivious to. The conversation we shared that afternoon would not have been possible without the “thinging” of “things” that surrounded us and interacted with us, such as cigars, wine, a café, my notepad, Auster’s fountain pen, a book on New York, and New York.

At this point, I do not think it is possible to produce any finite conclusions. But there are many questions that my researching of Auster’s work has opened up – questions, for example, to do with the significance of concepts such as “truth,” “originality,” or “authenticity”; or questions about the relationship between the author, his critic, and the reader in producing meanings for texts, or questions about the relationship between contemporary fiction and its criticism, and the efficiency of conventional methods of critical reading – ones that rely on, for example, consulting the author’s manuscripts, notes, and personal correspondences, or even the historical author himself. In the end, what one is left with is just that: things and spaces, and concepts and ideas, bundles of values and functions and associations that all work together to assemble a story. In between all that, there is a smoking, typewriting writer, whose cigarette emits a cloud of smoke, and what lies behind that smoke screen – that I can only try to imagine.

⁶ Auster, “Smoke,” in *Smoke & Blue*, 149.

⁷ Auster in conversation with McCaffery and Gregory, “Interview with Auster,” *Mississippi Review*, 52.



Bibliography

Primary sources

Cross-media / collaborative projects

Auster, Paul and Frieder Blickle. *Paul Auster's New York*. Edited and compiled by Thomas Überhoff, preface by Luc Sante. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997. [A retracted publication] (Contains excerpts from different Paul Auster texts.)

Auster, Paul and Isol. *Auggie Wren's Christmas Story*. New York: Henry Holt, 2004.

Auster, Paul and Jacques de Loustal. "The Day I Disappeared." In *Strange Stories for Strange Kids (Little Lit, Book 2)*, edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, 55-62. New York: RAW Junior/ HarperCollins Children's Books, 2001.

Auster, Paul and Sam Messer. *The Story of My Typewriter*. New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2002.

Auster, Paul and Thomas Glenn. *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. New York and London: Mark Batty Publisher, Thames & Hudson (distributor), 2008.

Auster, Paul, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli. *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*. New York: Picador, 2004. (Contains excerpts from Paul Auster's *City of Glass*.)

Sophie Calle. *Double Game*. London: Violette Editions, 1999. (Includes a collaborative project between Auster and Calle, "Gotham Handbook" and fragments from Auster's *Leviathan*.)

Edited collections

Auster, Paul, ed. *I Thought My Father Was God and Other True Tales from NPR's National Story Project*. New York: Picador, 2002.

_____. *The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry*. New York: Random House, 1982.

Essays, memoirs and autobiographies

Auster, Paul. *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970–1979*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.

____. *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure*. New York: Picador, 2003.

____. *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

____. *The Invention of Solitude*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

____. *The Red Notebook*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996.

____. *Why Write?* New York: Burning Deck Books, 1996.

Films

Auster, Paul, Wayne Wang et. al. *Blue in the Face*. VHS. Directed by Wayne Wang, Paul Auster and Harvey Wang (video segments), New York: Miramax Films, 1995.

Auster, Paul. *Lulu on the Bridge*. DVD. Directed by Paul Auster, Santa Monica: Trimark Home Video/Lions Gate Entertainment, 1999.

____. *Smoke*. VHS. Directed by Wayne Wang and Paul Auster (uncredited), New York: Miramax Films, 1995.

____. *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. DVD. Directed by Paul Auster, New York: New Yorker Video, 2007.

Manuscripts and papers

Auster, Paul. *The Paul Auster Papers 1963-1995*. The Paul Auster Archive. The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

____. *The Paul Auster Papers 1999-2005*. The Paul Auster Archive. The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

Novels

Auster, Paul. *City of Glass*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.

_____. *In the Country of Last Things*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

_____. *Invisible*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

_____. *Leviathan*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

_____. *Man in the Dark*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008.

_____. *Moon Palace*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

_____. *Mr Vertigo*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.

_____. *Oracle Night*. New York: Picador / Henry Holt and Company, 2009.

_____. *Sunset Park*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010.

_____. *The Book of Illusions*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002.

_____. *The Brooklyn Follies*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005.

_____. *The Locked Room*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1986.

_____. *The Music of Chance*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.

_____. *The New York Trilogy*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990. (Incorporates the previously published novels *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*.)

_____. *Timbuktu*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.

_____. *Travels in the Scriptorium*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007.

Benjamin, Paul. *Squeeze Play*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992. (Written by Auster under pseudonym)

Screenplays

Auster, Paul. *Lulu on the Bridge: A Film by Paul Auster*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

____. *Smoke & Blue in the Face: Two Films*. New York: Miramax Books / Hyperion, 1995. (Includes “Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story.”)

____. *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. New York: Picador, 2007.

____. *The Music of Chance*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991.

____. *Three Films: Smoke, Blue in the Face, and Lulu on the Bridge*. New York: Picador, 2003.

Major secondary sources

Books and Chapters

Aczel Richard, et al. “Reflections on a Table.” In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Germany: Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005.

Allen, Woody. *Four Films of Woody Allen*. London: Faber and Faber, 1983.

Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham. London: Continuum, 2005.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee, edited by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

Banks, Michelle. “The Connection Exists: Hermeneutics and Authority in Paul Auster’s Fictional Worlds.” In *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster*, edited by Stefania Cioca and Jesús Ángel González, 149-171. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

Barone, Dennis, ed. *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: An Essay*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "Please Follow Me." In *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*. Edited by Steve Redhead. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. Translated by James Benedict. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Murphy*. New York: Grove Press, 1994.
- Bernstein, Stephen. "Auster's Sublime Closure: The Locked Room." In *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, edited by Dennis Barone, 88-106. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.
- Bernstein, Stephen. "The Question is the Story Itself: Postmodernism and Intertextuality in Auster's 'New York Trilogy'." In *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, edited by Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, 134-153. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
- Birkerts, Sven. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2006.
- Blakemore, Colin, and Shelia Jenett, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Body*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Paul Auster*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Garden of Forking Paths." In *Labyrinths*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, with an invitation by William Gibson. New York: A New Directions Book, 2007. First published in English translation by Donald A. Yates as "The Garden of Forking Paths." *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* (Spring, 1958).

- Brown, Mark. *Paul Auster*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Calle, Sophie and Fabio Balducci, *En finir*. Arles: Actes Sud, 2005.
- Calle, Sophie. *Exquisite Pain*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.
- Calle, Sophie. *Sophie Calle: M'as-tu vue*. Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel Publishing, 2004.
- Calle, Sophie. *Suite vénitienne / Jean Baudrillard. Please follow me*. Translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.
- Candlin, Fiona, and Raiford Guins, eds. *The Object Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Ciocia, Stefania, and Jesús Ángel González, eds. *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.
- Copjec, Joan. *Shades of Noir: A Reader*. London and New York: Verso, 1993.
- Corbett, William. *New York Literary Lights: William Corbett*. St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1998.
- Corti, Egon C. *A History of Smoking*. London: George Harrap, 1931.
- de Landa, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London and New York: Continuum, 2007.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana Polan. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Translated by Daniel W. Smith. London: Continuum, 2003.

Drenttel, William, ed. *Paul Auster: A Comprehensive Bibliographic Checklist of Published Works 1968-1994*. New York: W. Drenttel in association with Delos Press, 1994.

Dvorak, August. *Typewriting Behavior: Psychology Applied to Teaching and Learning Typewriting*. New York: American Book Company, 1936.

Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Eco, Umberto. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose: Including the Author's Postscript*. Translated by William Weaver. New York: Harvest Books, 1994.

Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Eco, Umberto. *Rozes vārds*. Translated by Dace Meiere. Riga: J. Rozes apgāds, 1998.

Farías, Ignacio and Thomas Bender, eds. *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Federman, Raymond. *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Fluck, Winfried. "Surface and Depth: Postmodernism and Neo-Realist Fiction." In *Neo-Realism in Contemporary American Fiction*, edited by Kristiaan Versluys, 65-85. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" In *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, edited by Josue V. Harari, 147 - 174. London: Methuen, 1979.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. New York: Vintage, 1982.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." In *The Uncanny (Penguin Modern Classics)*. Translated by David McLintock, introduced by Hugh Haughton, 121-162. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Originally published as "Das Unheimliche." *Imago* 5 (5/6) (1919): 297-324.

Gilman, Sander L., and Zhou Xun, eds. *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "The Thing." In *The Object Reader*. Edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, 124-138. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

Hamilton, Ian. *In Search of JD Salinger*. London: Heinemann, 1988.

Harris, Jan. "Cinema and Its Doubles: Kittler v. Deleuze." In *Cinema and Technology: Cultures, Theories, Practices*, edited by Bruce Bennett, Marc Furstenau and Adrian Mackenzie, 88-104. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Heidegger, Martin. "Martin Heidegger on the Hand and the Typewriter (1942-43)." In Friedrich A. Kittler, ("Typewriter") *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated and introduced by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, 198-200. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Thing." In *The Object Reader*. Edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, 113-123. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

Heinze, Rüdiger. *Ethics of Literary Forms in Contemporary American Literature*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005.

Herzogenrath, Bernd. *An Art of Desire. Reading Paul Auster*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999.

Hill, John and P. C. Gibson. *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Hoffmann, E. T. A. "The Sand-Man." Translated by J.Y. Bealby. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885. Published online at <http://manybooks.net/titles/hoffmannetother06sand-man.html>.

Holquist, Michael. "Introduction." In Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee, edited by Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson, ix-xxiii. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

Holzappel, Anne M. "*The New York Trilogy*": *Whodunit?: Tracking the Structure of Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Novels*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996.

Jameson, Fredrick. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1990.

Kittler, Friedrich A. "Romanticism – Psychoanalysis – Film: A History of the Double." In Friedrich A. Kittler, *Literature. Media. Information Systems: Essays (Critical Voices in Art, Theory, and Culture)*, edited and introduced by John Johnston, 85-100. Amsterdam: OPA (Overseas Publishers Association), 1997.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated and introduced by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Klein, Richard. *Cigarettes Are Sublime*. London: Picador, 1995.

Krogh, David. *Smoking: The Artificial Passion*. New York and Oxford: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1997.

Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel, eds. *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Germany: Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Lind, Maria "The Collaborative Turn." In *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*. Edited by Johanna Billing et.al., 15-31. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007).

Lodge, David. *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

Lopate, Phillippe, ed. *Writing New York: A Literary Anthology*. New York: The Library of America/Penguin Putnam Inc., 2008.

Louÿs, Pierre. *Œuvres complètes: Contes*. Paris: Montaigne, 1930.

Lucy, Niall. *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1997.

Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

Marlan, Dawn. "Emblems of Emptiness: Smoking as a Way of Life in Jean Eustache's 'La Maman et la Putain'." In *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, 256-264. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.

Martin, Brendan. *Paul Auster's Postmodernity*. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.

Mérimée, Prosper. *Carmen*. Translated by Lady Mary Loyd. The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2006. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2465/2465-h/2465-h.htm>.

Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Translated by Michael Taylor. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Meurer, Ulrich, "Life Transmission: Paul Auster's Merging Worlds, Media and Authors," in *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster*, edited by Stefania Ciocia and Jesús Ángel González, 173-192. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

Millard, Kenneth. *Contemporary American Fiction: An Introduction to American Fiction since 1970*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Mitry, Jean. *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Monaco, James. *How to Read A Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia* (3rd edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

- Moncada, Luisa and Scala Quin. *Reading on Location: Great Books Set in Top Travel Destinations*. London: New Holland, 2011.
- Patton, Paul. *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.
- Plato. *Symposium*. Translated, with introduction and notes by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.
- Rank, Otto. *Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Translated and edited by Harry Tucker Jr. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971. Originally published (the earliest version) as "Der Doppelgänger." *Imago* 3 (1914): 97-164.
- Remarque, Erich Maria. *Im Westen nichts Neues*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer un Witsch, 1990.
- Ross, Harris. *Film as Literature, Literature as Film: An Introduction to and Bibliography of Film's Relationship to Literature*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.
- Saltzman, Arthur M. "Post Hoc Harmonies: Paul Auster's *Leviathan*." In *This Mad Instead: Governing Metaphors in Contemporary American Fiction*, 63-73. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000.
- Sante, Luc. *Kill All Your Darlings: Pieces, 1990-2005*. Introduced by Greil Marcus. Portland: Yeti, 2007.
- Sante, Luc. *No Smoking*. New York: Assouline, 2004.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being And Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. New York: Citadel, 2001.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'Être et le néant*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. "Tobacco: The Dry Inebriant." In *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Schoell-Glass, Charlotte. "Fictions of the Art World: Art, Art History and the Art Historian in Literary Space." In *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*, edited by Rui Carvalho Homem and Maria de Fátima Lambert, 107-118. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.

Shiloh, Ilana. *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: On the Road to Nowhere*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

Slethaug, Gordon E. *The Play of the Double in Postmodern American Fictions*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.

Sontag Susan. "A Note on Novels and Films." In Sontag Susan, *Against Interpretation*, 242-248. New York: Picador, 2001.

Springer, Carsten (Carl). *A Paul Auster Sourcebook*. Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang, 2001.

Springer, Carsten (Carl). *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster*. Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang, 2001.

Svevo, Italo. *La coscienza di Zeno*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1988.

Svevo, Italo. *Zeno's Conscience: A Novel*. Translated by William Weaver. New York: Vintage International, 2003.

Tempel, Benno. "Symbol and Image: Smoking in Art since the Seventeenth Century." In *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*. Edited by Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, 206-217. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.

Varvogli, Aliko. *The World That Is the Book*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001.

Webber, Andrew J. *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Wershler-Henry, Darren. *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Whitehead, Colin. *The Colossus of New York: A City in Thirteen Parts*. New York: Anchor Books, 2003.

Worton, Michael and Judith Still, eds. *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*.
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.

Journal articles

Alford, Steven E. "Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's 'The New York Trilogy'."
Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction 37.1 (1995): 17-33.

Alford, Steven E. "Spaced-Out: Signification and Space in Paul Auster's 'The New York
Trilogy'." *Contemporary Literature* 36.4 (1995): 613-632.

Asselin, Olivier and Johanne Lamoureux. "Autofictions, or Elective identities."
Parachute 105 (2002): 11-18.

Azevedo, Carlos. "A Portrait of the Indian Woman as Ghost Dancer: Mother Sioux in
Paul Auster's 'Mr. Vertigo'." *Estudos/Studien/Studies* 1 (2001): 117-126.

Barone, Dennis. "Auster's Memory." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (Spring
1994): 32-34.

Barone, Dennis. "Paul Auster as the Wizard of Odds: 'Moon Palace'." *The Review of
Contemporary Fiction* 17.2 (1997): 296-297.

Baxter, Charles. "The Bureau of Missing Persons: Notes on Paul Auster's Fiction." *The
Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 40-43.

Berry, Ellen E. and Carol Siegel. "Rhizomes, Newness, and the Condition of Our
Postmodernity: Editorial and a Dialogue." *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging
Knowledge* 01 (2000), <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue1/newness1.html>.

Bewes, Timothy. "Against the Ontology of the Present: Paul Auster's Cinematographic
Fictions." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 273-297.

Birkerts, Sven. "Reality, Fiction and 'In the Country of Last Things'." *The Review of
Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 66-69.

Briggs, Robert. "Wrong numbers: the endless fiction of Auster and Deleuze and Guattari and ..." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 44.2 (2003): 213-224,
http://curtin.academia.edu/documents/0028/6447/Briggs--Wrong_Numbers.pdf.

Carson, Benjamin D. "Towards a Postmodern Political Art: Deleuze, Guattari, and the Anti-Culture Book." *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 07 (Fall 2003),
<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue7/carson.htm>.

Chandler, Daniel. "The Phenomenology of Writing by Hand." *Intelligent Tutoring Media* 3(2/3) (May/August 1992): 65-74,
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/phenom.html>.

Creeley, Robert. "Austerities." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 35-39.

Fredman, Stephen. "'How to Get Out of the Room that is the Book?' Paul Auster and the Consequences of Confinement." *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 6.3 (May 1996),
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v006/6.3fredman.html.

Golden, Cameron. "From Punishment to Possibility: Re-Imagining Hitchcockian Paradigms in 'The New York Trilogy'." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 37.3 (2004): 93-108.

González, Jesús Á. "Words Versus Images: Paul Auster's Films from 'Smoke' to 'The Book of Illusions'." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 37.1 (2009): 28-48.

Griffin, Jeanine. "Sophie Calle and Paul Auster: Watching the Detectives." *Creative Camera* 354 (Oct/Nov 1998): 16-19.

Gurganus, Allan. "How Do You Introduce Paul Auster in Three Minutes?" *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (Spring 1994): 7-8.

Hand, Janet. "Art-Write." *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 1.1 (2007): 47-52.

Jahshan, Paul. "Paul Auster's Specters." *Journal of American Studies* 37.3 (2003): 389-405.

Jentsch, Ernst. "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," translated by Roy Sellars. Available from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/22868433/On-the-Psychology-of-the-Uncanny>.

Originally published as "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen." *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8.22 (25 August 1906): 195-98 and 8.23 (1 September 1906): 203-05.

Khimasia, Anna. "Authorial Turns: Sophie Calle, Paul Auster and the Quest for Identity." *Image [&] Narrative* 19 (2007).

<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/autofiction/khimasia.htm>.

Latour, Bruno. "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More than a Few Complications," *Soziale Welt* 47.4 (1996): 369-381. Available from <http://www.cours.fse.ulaval.ca/edc-65804/latour-clarifications.pdf>.

Lavender, William. "The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass'." *Contemporary Literature* 34.2 (1993): 219-39.

Lavin, Maud. "Imitation of Life" (review of "Double Game"). *Art in America* 88.7 (July 2000): 33-34.

Lewis, Barry. "The Strange Case of Paul Auster." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 53-61.

Little, William G. and Paul Auster. "Nothing to Go On: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass'." *Contemporary Literature* 38.1 (1997): 133-163.

McHale, Brian. "Poetry as Prosthesis." *Poetics Today* 21.1 (Spring 2000): 1-32.

Merlob, Maya "Textuality, Self, and World: The Postmodern Narrative in Paul Auster's 'In the Country of Last Things'." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 49.1 (Fall 2007): 25-35.

Miller, Debora. "Double Game." *Library Journal* 125.16 (October 2000): 86.

Morson, Gary Saul. "The Baxtin Industry." *The Slavic and East European Journal* 30.1 (Spring 1986): 81-90.

- Nealon, Jeffrey T. "Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass'." *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.1 (1996): 91-110.
- Nichols, Hayden Bixby. "Smoke." *Film Quarterly* 51.3 (1998): 45-51.
- Oberman, Warren. "Existentialism Meets Postmodernism in Paul Auster's 'The Music of Chance'." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 45.2 (Winter 2004): 191-116.
- Orr, Stanley. "Postmodernism, Noir, and the Usual Suspects." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 27.1 (1999): 65-73.
- Patton, Paul. "Utopian Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Rawls." *Deleuze Studies* 1 (2007): 41-59.
- Peacock, Jim. "Carrying the Burden of Representation: Paul Auster's 'The Book of Illusions'." *Journal of American Studies* 40.1 (April 2006): 53-69.
- Rheindorf, Markus. "Processes of Embodiment and Spatialization in the Writings of Paul Auster." *Reconstruction* 2.3 (2002), <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/023/rheindorf.htm>.
- Rowen, Norma. "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster's 'City of Glass'." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 32.4 (Summer 1991): 224-234.
- Rubenstein, Roberta. "Doubling, Intertextuality, and the Postmodern Uncanny: Paul Auster's 'New York Trilogy'." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 9.3 (1998): 245-262.
- Russell, Alison. "Deconstructing 'The New York Trilogy': Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 31.2 (Winter 1990): 71-84.
- Tysh, Chris. "From One Mirror to Another: The Rhetoric of Disaffiliation in 'City of Glass'." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 46-72.
- White, Curtis. "The Auster Instance: A Ficto-Biography." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.1 (1994): 26-29.
- Zilcosky, John. "The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 39.3 (1998): 195-206.

Theses or dissertations

Al Umari, Kifah (Moh'd Khair). "Intertextuality, Language, and Rationality in the Detective Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Auster." PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 2006.

Bartlett, Lexey Anne. "The Double Redux: Multiplying Identity in Postmodern Fiction." PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 2005.

Nikolic, Dragana. "Paul Auster's Postmodernist Fiction: Deconstructing Aristotle's 'Poetics'." MA diss., The Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1998, <http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/articles/aristotle.html>.

Plékan, Alexis. "Confinement in Paul Auster's Moon Palace and The New York Trilogy." MA diss., University of Caen Lower Normandy, 2001.

Rheindorf, Markus. "'Where Everything is Connected to Everything Else': Interior and Exterior Landscape in the Poetry, Essays, and fiction of Paul Auster." MA diss., University of Vienna, 2001.

Salmela, Marku. "Two Subtexts of Paul Auster's 'Ghosts'." MA diss., University of Tampere, 2001.

Traisnel, Antoine. "Storytelling in Paul Auster's Movies". BA diss., Université Charles de Gaulle - Lille 3, 2002, http://angellier.biblio.univ-lille3.fr/etudes_recherches/memoire_antoine_traisnel.html.

Varner, Gary Matthew. "Paul Auster's Rhizomatic Fictions." MA diss., Mississippi State University, 2010.

Interviews

Allen, Austin. "When Literary Games Get Personal." *Big Think*, November 5, 2009, <http://bigthink.com/ideas/17290>.

Chanko, Kenneth M. "'Smoke' Gets in Their Eyes." *Entertainment Weekly*, June 30, 1995, 281-282, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,297840,00.html>.

Chénétier, Marc. "Around Moon Palace. A conversation with Paul Auster." *Revue d'Études Anglophones* 1 (1996): 5-35.

Chrisafis, Angelique. "He Loves Me Not" (an interview with Sophie Calle). *The Guardian*, June 16, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jun/16/artnews.art>.

de Cortanze, Gérard. "Le monde est dans ma tête, mon corps est dans le monde." *Magazine Littéraire* 338 (Décembre 1995): 18-25. Translated by Carl-Carsten Springer as "The World Is in My Head; My Body Is in the World," <http://www.stuartpilkington.co.uk/paulauster/gerarddecortanze.htm>.

Dziemianowicz, Joe. "Lights, Camera, Cigars!" *Cigar Aficionado* (Summer 1995), http://www.cigaraficionado.com/Cigar/CA_Archives/CA_Show_Article/0,2322,719,00.html.

Esquivada, Gabriel. "Interview Paul Auster Writer: 'I want to reinvent myself in every new novel.'" *Cuba now.net*, Cuban Art and Culture, <http://www.cubanow.net/pages/loader.php?sec=7&t=2&item=1077>.

Freitag, Michael. "The Novelist out of Control: An Interview with Paul Auster." *New York Times Book Review* March 19 (1989): 9.

González, Jesús Ángel. "'Happy Accidents': An Interview with Paul Auster." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 37.1 (2009): 18-27, <http://portaleducativo.educantabria.es/binary/877/LFQHappy%20Accidents.pdf>.

González, Jesús Ángel. "Smoke and Illusions: An Interview with Paul Auster". *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* 12 (2007): 57-67, <http://www.institucional.us.es/revistas/revistas/estudios/pdf/12/09%20Gonzalez%20definitivo.pdf>.

Graieb, Carlos. "Auster Creates His Universe in a Brooklyn Apartment" / "Auster cria seu universo em sobrado do Brooklyn", trans. Carl-Carsten Springer and Ricardo Miranda. *Paul Auster: The Definitive Website*, <http://www.paulauster.co.uk/carlosgraieb.htm>.

Insdorf, Annette. "The Making of 'Smoke'." In Paul Auster, *Smoke & Blue in the Face: Two Films*, 3-16. New York: Miramax Books / Hyperion, 1995.

Kirschling, Gregory. "Happy Accidents." *Entertainment Weekly / EW.com* 858, January 6, 2006, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1146025,00.html>.

Kurutz, Steven. "Literary New York." *The New York Times*. May 14, 2006, <http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/travel/14going.html>.

Lethem, Jonathan. "Jonathan Lethem [Writer] Talks with Paul Auster [Writer]." *The Believer* (February 2005), http://www.believmag.com/issues/200502/?read=interview_auster.

Linderman, Juliet. "A Connoisseur of Clouds, a Meteorologist of Whims: The Rumpus Interview with Paul Auster." *The Rumpus*, November 16, 2009, <http://therumpus.net/2009/11/a-connoisseur-of-clouds-a-meteorologist-of-whims-the-rumpus-interview-with-paul-auster/>.

Macel, Christine. "Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle." In Sophie Calle, *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me?* Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel Publishing, 2004.

Mallia, Joseph. "Paul Auster Interview." *BOMB* 23 (1998): 24, <http://www.bombsite.com/issues/23/articles/1062>.

McCaffery, Larry and Sinda Gregory. "An Interview with Paul Auster." *Contemporary Literature* 33.1 (1992): 1-23.

McCaffery, Larry and Sinda Gregory. "An Interview with Paul Auster." *Mississippi Review* 20.1-2 (1991): 49-62.

O'Hagan, Sean. "Abstract Expressionist." *The Observer / guardian.co.uk*, February 8, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/feb/08/fiction.paulauster1>.

Owens, Jill. "Author Interviews: The Book of Paul Auster." *Powell's Books*, <http://www.powells.com/authors/auster.html>.

Patrick, Bethanne. "Interview with Paul Auster." *Goodreads*, November, 2010, http://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/556.Paul_Auster.

Peachment, Chris. "Give the Man a Cigar." *The Independent*, March 7, 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/give-the-man-a-cigar-1340694.html>.

Prime, Rebecca. "The Making of 'Lulu on the Bridge': An Interview with Paul Auster." In Paul Auster, *Lulu on the Bridge*, 141-168. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

Saffian, Sarah. "Where There's Smoke, There's Paul Auster: Author Reveals How His Yule Story Lit the Way for Nicotine-Fiend Friendly Film." *NYDailyNews.com*, June 26, 1995, http://articles.nydailynews.com/1995-06-26/entertainment/17970344_1_auggie-wren-paul-auster-auster-and-wang.

Teodoro, José. "Parallel Worlds (Unabridged): In The Scriptorium with Paul Auster." *Stop Smiling* magazine, March 23, 2009, http://www.stopsmilingonline.com/story_detail.php?id=1216. The interview originally appeared in *Stop Smiling*, Issue 38: 20 Interviews.

Wood, Michael. "Paul Auster, The Art of Fiction No 178" *The Paris Review*, 167 (2003), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/121/the-art-of-fiction-no-178-paul-auster>.

Magazine articles

Carr, Nicholas. "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *Atlantic Monthly* July/August (2008), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/6868/>.

Chanko, Kenneth M. "Smoke Gets in Their Eyes." *Entertainment Weekly*, June 30, 1995, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,297840,00.html>.

Corliss, Richard. "That Old Feeling: The Great American Smoke," *Time*, Saturday, November 22, 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,548824,00.html>.

Shenk, Joshua Wolf. "The Things We Carry: Seeking appraisal at the Antiques Roadshow" *Harper's Magazine* (June 2001): 46-56. Available online from <http://www.shenk.net/things.htm>.

Newspaper publications

Auster, Paul. "I Want to Tell You a Story." *The Observer*, November 5, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/nov/05/fiction.paulauster>.

Glueck, Grace. "Art in Review: Sophie Calle – 'Double Game'." *The New York Times*, March 9, 2001, section E page 36, New York edition, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/09/arts/art-in-review-sophie-calle-double-game.html>.

Jones, Jonathan. "It's About Knowing You'll Die." *The Guardian*, Monday 14, May 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2007/may/14/art>.

Messenger, Robert. "Typing Writers: An Endangered Species (But Not Yet Extinct)." *The Canberra Times*, Panorama, February 14, 2009. Available online from <http://site.xavier.edu/politypewriters/typingwriters.pdf>.

Newman, Charles. "What's Left out of Literature." *New York Times*, July 12, 1987, section 7 page 1, New York edition, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/12/books/what-s-left-out-of-literature.html>.

Peachment, Chris. "Give the Man a Cigar". *The Independent*, 7 March 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/give-the-man-a-cigar-1340694.html>.

Website and blog entries

Avnskog, Sverre. "Friedrich Nietzsche and His Typewriter – A Malling-Hansen Writing Ball," *The International Rasmus Malling-Hansen Society*, February 2, 2008, <http://www.malling-hansen.org/friedrich-nietzsche-and-his-typewriter-a-malling-hansen-writing-ball.html>.

Borio, Gene. "The Seventeenth Century – 'The Great Age of the Pipe'," in *Tobacco History Timeline*, 1993-2003. Tobacco.org Tobacco News and Information, http://www.tobacco.org/resources/history/Tobacco_History17.html.

Breebart, Rino. "Typewriter Love." *Typewriter Tributes*, The Classic Typewriter Page, <http://site.xavier.edu/politypewriters/breebaart.html>.

Coule, Zachary. "Rebuilding the Shattered City of Glass." Review of *The Brooklyn Follies*, by Paul Auster, *PopMatters.com*, February 20, 2006, <http://www.popmatters.com/books/reviews/b/brooklyn-follies.shtml>.

Gargett, Adrian. "Cruel Universe." *Spike Magazine* (online magazine/weblog), posted on November 1, 2002, <http://www.spikemagazine.com/1102paulauster.php>.

Garner, Anne. "Paul Auster Papers in the Berg." *The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature*, March 31, 2011, <http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/03/31/paul-auster-papers-berg>.

Golav, Helene. "Books: The New York Trilogy, The Brooklyn Follies & Sunset Park," *Reality: An Online Magazine* (online magazine/weblog), <http://realityny.com/books-paul-auster/>.

González, Jesús Ángel. "My Second Slice: How I Interviewed Paul Auster," published on González's personal page on *Issuu* digital publishing platform, January 12, 2011, http://issuu.com/jagonzal/docs/how_i_interviewed_paul_auster.

Holmes, Dan. "Paul Auster's Deconstruction of the Traditional Hard-Boiled Detective Narrative in 'The New York Trilogy'." *Crimeculture* (2006), <http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Articles-Summer05/DanHolmes.html>.

Hopkins, Brandon. "Manuscript." *The Chicago School of Media Theory: Theorizing Media since 2003*, Winter 2003, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/manuscript/>.

Jeff Ignatious, "RIFF: Reading Is Fucking Formidable," *culture snob*, February 9, 2007, <http://www.culturesnob.net/2007/02/riff-reading-is-fucking-formid/>.

Kamoliņš, Ainārs. "Par Polu Osteru un nejaušību: 'Orākulu nakts' un 'Ilūziju grāmata'." *¼ Satori: Literatūras un filozofijas portāls*, May 1, 2006, <http://www.satori.lv/raksts/1139>.

Kincaid, Paul. "'Travels in the Scriptorium' by Paul Auster." Review of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, by Paul Auster. *Strange Horizons*, December 19, 2006, http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2006/12/travels_in_the_.shtml.

Merkin, Daphne and Navad Kander. "I Think Therefore I'm Art." *The New York Times Style Magazine*, October 19, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/style/tmagazine/19calle.html>.

Rice, Martin A. "Amor me Jubit Mechanoscribere (Love Bids me Type)." *Typewriter Tributes*, The Classic Typewriter Page, <http://site.xavier.edu/polt/typewriters/rice.pdf>.

Schneewein, Von Bellis. "You Exist Only in the Trace of the Other..." *Fiktionen mit Fantômas, Corpus: Internet Magazine für Tanz, Choreografie. Performance*, http://www.corpusweb.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=598&Itemid=35.

Shibata, Motoyuki. "On the Impossibility of Not Being a Ghost." *Ghosts Catalogue* (2003): 3-5, <http://www.jonkessler.com/articles/shibata.htm>.

Springer, Carsten (Carl). "Paul Auster and the Crisis of the Individual." *The Definite Website*. <http://www.stuartpilkington.co.uk/paulauster/carlcarstenspringer1.htm>.

Dictionary and encyclopedia entries

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>.

Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Raleigh.