

The Spatial Poetics and the "Murder of the Real" in Paul Auster's *City of Glass**

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Abstract

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* is here singled out as representative of the writer's *The New York Trilogy*. All throughout his novelistic career, Auster has been working on a pseudo-thesis that adheres to a certain aesthetic of disappearance. The study engages this Austerian aesthetic apropos of certain theoretical stretches such as the Emersonian "Not Me", the Thoreauvian "interval" or "nowhere", the Deleuzian "nomadic trajectory", the Derridian "grammè" or "specter", and the Baudrillardian "disappearance". The city of the novel's titling is here seen as the trope of all that which has already disappeared, and hence it is seen as the space (*mise en scène*) where the perfect crime of the murder of the real is to be thoroughly re-dramatized and re-thought. The writer's use of the assets of the detective genre in its postmodernist nuances is also seen as a genuine part of this endeavour.

Keywords: disappearance, spatiality, spectrality, flânerie, nomadism, simulacrum

جماليات الحيز وأطروحة "موت الواقع" في رواية "مدينة الزجاج" لبول أوستر**

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ملخص البحث

تعتمد هذه الدراسة رواية مدينة الزجاج بوصفها ممثلة لعمل بول أوستر ثلاثية نيويورك. لطالما انشغل أوستر على مدى مسيرته الروائية بما يمكن أن يصطلح عليه بأطروحة تتعلق بجماليات الاختفاء (الزوال). لذا تعتمد هذه الدراسة إلى ربط أطروحة الكاتب الجمالية بعدد من المقولات النظرية من قبيل مفهوم ال(أنا) لأمرسون، الحيز أو اللامكان لثرو، المسار البدوي لديلوز، و مفهوم الكون/اللا كون أو الطيف لدريدا، وأطروحة زوال أو موت الواقع لبودريارد. إن المدينة في نتاج أوستر تعد استعارة للبحث عن كل ما قد أخذ بالتلاشي سلفاً، وهي بذلك الحيز أو المسرح الذي يعاد فيه التفكير وتمثيل وقائع موت الواقع. إن هذا الأخير يتم عبر قراءة تبني الكاتب لمقومات الجنس الروائي الاستقصائي ببعده ما بعد الحداثي والتي تعد مكوناً أصيلاً لطرحه الجمالي.

Introduction

In his *America*, Jean Baudrillard musingly speculates the postmodernist space having the American polis for his paradigm:

All around, the tinted glass façades of the buildings are like faces: frosted surfaces. It is as though there were no one inside the buildings, as if there were no one behind the faces. And there *really* is no one. This is what the ideal city is like. (60)

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** بحث مستل من أطروحة دكتوراه بعنوان (الرواية و"موت الواقع": عوالم الواقع البديل في روايات مختارة لفترة ما بعد الحداثة المتأخرة).

These words seem to be summarizing up the patterning and the thematics of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*¹. They are haunted with the idea that in the very air of this American site of the desert of the real there lies a body deprived of its organs, and the remnants of both the murdered's and the murderer's faces are specter-like mirages glimmering behind the glassy spaces of this desert.

Earlier in his *White Spaces*, Auster registers the milieu of this desertification/ "Murder of the Real"² as he writes: "It is a journey through space, as if into many cities and out of them, as if across deserts" (159). Hence, it might be proposed here that the Austerian writerly formula would be: once upon a time in the desert of the real there was a story that began. This is the minimalist rendition of his story that has reduced the real to the temptations of the zero-degree of existence. The heralds of this narrative strategy, as it were, are seen coming with *City of Glass* in the "superimposition of the American desert over New York" (Salmela 132). That is why in Auster's texts "the displacement of desert onto city becomes a governing motif" (Cohen 101). Thus, in parallel to this Baudrillardian glassy haunted city, Auster creates his own analogous textual city of glass, his inferno of abstraction, where everybody and everything are nothing but reflections of reflections that turn their ontological certainty into a "hauntology"³ of sorts.

The novel features Quinn as its protagonist. From the onset, this Quinn, the used-to-be detective-novel writer, a hermit of sorts, shifts his writerly detective gear towards a real-world detection, and "It was a wrong number that started it" (*CG* 1). Ever since this phone call, Quinn assumes the second pseudonym, Paul Auster, which is the name of a real detective sought for by the anonymous stranger on the other side of the line. As a writer, Quinn once went by the pseudonym of William Wilson, a name borrowed from Poe's detective hero. Wilson has long become the only link between Quinn and his Kafka-esque hero Max Work: Work has become a full-fledged real-world persona, while Quinn has been reduced to anonymity and invisibility. This plethora of naming reveals one facet of the simulacral⁴ egos in the fiction:

Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude. (*CG* 6)

By the same token, and by reversing the meta-realistic detective equation, Quinn now assumes the role of Paul Auster -that happens to be the *real* Paul Auster- that makes him incarnate in the real here and now through the stranger's voice. Still, it remains dim as to who the real ventriloquist, who the murderer of all murderers of the real, is. This nexus of Quinn/Paul Auster is hired to detect a megalomaniac, a once-a-scholar, Peter Stillman senior. Henceforth, it becomes quite hectic and delirious as to who the detective, and who the detected, is in the nomadic hauntological mania of New York.

Auster's aesthetic/motif of disappearance in the white spaces of the non-referential desert is cogently related to Baudrillard's theorizing about the postmodern condition. What Baudrillard calls the perfect crime of the murder of the real, as "the body of the real was never recovered. ... [and] is forever unfindable" (*The Perfect Crime* 46), might here be hosted as one of the postmodernist norms of the detective genre. The genre that is being formed is that of "the metaphysical detective" or "anti-detective" fiction" (Holquist 135; Spanos 154). Other critics would prefer the term "metaphysical detection" to designate a postmodernist sub-genre

that uses "[Edgar Allen] Poe's ratiocinative process to address unfathomable epistemological and ontological questions: What, if anything, can we know? What, if anything, is real? How, if at all, can we rely on anything besides our own constructions of reality?" (Merivale and Sweeney 4). These are the very questions that are metaphysical in nature. Moreover, this genre has evolved in the modernist and the earlier postmodernist fiction with writers such Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, and Vladimir Nabakov, to name but a few. What Auster patently does is overwrite its norms and conventions to the extent that it verges upon being in affiliation with Baudrillard's pseudo-poetics of the death/disappearance of the real. Hence, the Austerian *detective* story dwells in/upon the text/city as this being a *mise en scène* or space of disappearance.

City of Glass and the Survival of the Real!

Enter ghost. In the delirium of the city of glass, hieroglyphics/signs become all that this city's subsistence/survival is about; in the very air, one can sense that the hieroglyphs have long substituted the real. The titling of *City of Glass* is replete with the thematics of infinite semiosis and spectral duplications. This is how Martin Brendan explicates the act of naming the city:

As Auster alludes to the façade of the skyscrapers found within New York City, his choice of title ostensibly appears to suggest a transparent terrain abundant with unlimited possibilities. As the novel progresses, however, Auster subverts this view of his hometown, and in Auster's New York City, individuals are reflected and duplicated. (104)

These are the very insinuations of titling that have already been seen disseminated in Baudrillard's discourse about "the tinted glass of the buildings" in his vision of the stereotypical American city. Moreover, the transparent glass, the eerie ghostly gown of the city, infuses the title with an air of the power of a metaphysical, floating, foamy, and provisional *event*.

When *City of Glass* opens, it is being more than insinuated that Quinn has already been emptied of his sense of selfhood or identity, which makes him *nominated* (with all the paradoxical implications of being named) to be a hauntological *habitué* of the textual transparent terrain/space so created in/by the city of glass. This terrain, this Baudrillardian *territory* (*Simulations* 2), allows him to reconfigure his textual past and future selves in the duplications of its infinite reflections and dubious cartographies. Hence, he is already presented to the reader as a ghost bereft of his ontologically defined world and made to rove the realms of nowhere:

He no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it. He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little begun to fascinate him—as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a posthumous life. (CG 5; italics mine)

The ghostliness of this posthumous life so reduced to the limits of anonymity/*sub*-sistence interacts with the inferno of the over-exposed metropolitan *ex*-sistence, so over-exposed to the limits of invisibility.

These limits of anonymity as well as invisibility do not shun the potential that this ghost, Quinn, does try his hand at putting on show his art of being, at going through the tribulations of the act of naming this disappearing being, and at acting as the misguided literary cartographer of it. He is now moving in the terrain of "pure becoming, the unlimited,

[which] is the matter of the simulacrum" (Deleuze 2). Hence, Quinn's simulacral-nomadic selves/worlds are haunted by the mysterious character of eventhood. This simulacral eventhood is thus phrased by Deleuze:

[T]he personal self requires God and the world in general. But when substantives and adjectives begin to dissolve, when the names of pause and rest are carried away by the language of events, all identity disappears from the self, the world, and God. (Deleuze 3)

This is to be endorsed by Quinn's avowal that "he had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real" (CG 9). To put it differently, Quinn (or Quinn's ghost at that) enters the floating realm of what Deleuze calls "the paradox of infinite identity" that is characterized by the latter by "the loss of the proper name" (3). Depending on his detective geo-literary assets, Quinn reverts to revolutionary becoming, or here "rebel becomings" (Deleuze 2), as signs become pure events and everything is conceived in the language of pure traveling, where *who* (the nomad-flâneur⁵ composite) is conceived in terms of *where*. This is paradoxically initiated when Quinn decides to act out the theoretical detection of his novels, and this is the first step toward spatializing the textual in *City of Glass*.

First, Auster has his reader introduced to the milieu and character of this pure becoming/traveling as the trope/space of the city of glass becomes "itself a metaphor of the process of the unlimited semiosis" (Eco, *The Role* 70). This is how he presents his spatial odyssey/flanerie:

New York was *an inexhaustible space*, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he [Quinn] walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to *a seeing eye*, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and *the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. Motion was of the essence*, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal, and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. *New York was the nowhere he had built around himself*, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again. (CG 4; italics mine)

This is also how Auster's white spaces are now being materialized into New York's desert of the real and its ensuing nomadism. In this pure semiurgy⁶, moreover, Quinn's self/I is reduced to "a seeing eye," and "Motion was of the essence," which is the crux of flanerie. "To the flâneur," to consult Walter Benjamin's modernist explication of the term, "his city is ... no longer native ground. It represents for him a theatrical display, an arena" (347). In Michel Certeau's postmodernist reading of flanerie, one is met with a nuance of the walking-the-city motif in *City of Glass*. In his geo-literary view, the immense being of "the panorama-city" is figured as nothing more than a representation, a theoretical-visual simulacrum before one's eyes. What is more, this city's potential existence or eventuality is overwhelmed by oblivion and the waning of practices (250). This is how the opening passage presents Quinn's serendipities or zemblanities while roving the textual spectacle of his city of glass, "The world

was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long." Here, the waning of practices in Auster's city might form a counter-thesis to Hannah Arendt's theory of the polis as a space of appearance (198); that is, Quinn's action/praxis is far from being either a construction, a fabrication per se, or an actuality. Besides, his entanglement with the inexhaustible space deprives him of any teleology. Thus one might here suggest that the Austerian aesthetic would be: wherever Quinn goes he will become a polis, since "what he sees/ is all that he is not: a city" (Auster, *Disappearances* 77), the nowhere that he has built around himself.

The action/event in Auster's polis begins with a phone call that seemingly brings Quinn back to the real world, but the moment he claims to be the person being called he enters the realm of the hauntological (event)uality; here, the called and the caller brings to mind the classical Hamlet-Ghost topos. Quinn enters the ghost-trap territory as a pre-individual standing at the limits of truth. This is to be considered the demonic leap into New York's delirious space that is composed of a host of other pre-individuals and demonic intervals. This pre-individualistic status is the prerequisite of the posthumous life that Quinn is about to lead; he is a survivor, but a survivor of what? Maybe, he is the survivor of his creator, Paul Auster, in this case. Hence, this survival *takes place* in the space of literature, or the Derridian non-place of literature (Harvey 258), in which even Auster himself is a ghost or an arrivant, in which New York is nothing but an allegory of everything that has already disappeared. Thus, all that follows the moment of Quinn's simulacral-nomadic rebirth is the manifestation of the art of disappearance.

In the aftermath of Quinn's Austerhood, when he *virtually* adopts the identity/sign of a Paul Auster, the assumed detective, and at the peak of all his detections and virtual travel in the virtual landscape of the city of glass, the narrative reaches this tentative closure:

Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far from the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine. (CG 102)

This is quite expressive of the fact that Quinn is deterritorialized; he has been *unearthed* to find himself in the floating zone that shares of both the pre-individual and the posthumous. He is at loss "to remember who I am. To remember who I am supposed to be" (CG 40). His questioning lends itself particularly well to that stirred by the Derridian spectrality (Miller 135): Is all what Quinn is after the specter of his prints or the prints of his specter? Is he or is he not a ghost, a revenant of himself which he crosses on his path as the trace of the other? To all this questioning Quinn admits as he writes in his notebook that he has no answer. Furthermore, he comes to configure the issue of losing his proper name, "All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. That is not my real name" (CG 40). This offshoot of the Emersonian "Not Me" (*Nature* 8) –with all the transcendental nuances being muted– is nothing but a preliminary awareness that his *proper* self has been spatialized, fictionalized, or rather, simulated.

Hence, all Quinn's subsequent efforts are but disparate attempts at (re)-territorializing that self. Here Auster's geo-poetics seems to draw upon Italo Calvino's cosmography in which

the *interval* between the abstract model and the figurative model, between the constructed identity 'I' and its perceived universe is inherently spatial. ... Further, it is characterized by a *lack of place* which has a potential that could be either utopian and generative or nihilistic and destructive. (Roberts 143; italics mine)

This unsurprisingly concurs with one of the Thoreauvian experiences as sub-textualized in *The New York Trilogy* (G 137,160). Treating of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* apropos of the Deleuzian spatial poetics, Branka Arsic, in his "Thinking Leaving," strikes a note concerning the Thoreauvian instance of disappearance that is much in rapport with the Quintesque heterotopian traveling. Here the hard-edged questioning might be resumed: "Where did he disappear to and what does he do now that he is imperceptible? How can we track him down, identify him and call him by his name again?" (129). This, as it were, has to do with "the whole *politics of identification* (naming, appropriation and propriety), the whole *tactics of motion* (leaving, coming, departing, arriving)" (Arsic; italics mine). In *Ghosts*, the private eye Blue, and in the delirium of his detections about Black, reaches a preliminary conclusion inspired by his reading of *Walden*: "We are not where we are ... but in a false position. Through an infirmity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out" (G 165–66). And it follows then that "Every man has his double somewhere" (G 169). Given the geo-literary perspective of both instances, it is apt to say that very much like his Thoreauvian counterpart's, the Austerian hero's endless steps are "represented by a meandering dotted line, with wide intervals between the dots" (Thoreau, *Walden* 265). In these wide *intervals*, the lack of identity coincides with the lack of place.

In his explication about postmodernist human geography, Brian Jarvis posits that in Auster's fiction "the urban postmodern landscape is defined as an immense social experience of lacking a place" (86). In the trilogy, this non-place is theoretically situated "between the pedestrian and the mapper" (Alford 626). Hence, Auster's glassy cartography has resemblance to both Thoreau's and Emerson's crystallography in the spectrum of which one turns into a "transparent eyeball —becoming nothing, to see all" (Wilson 177-78). Moreover, translated into the terms of this crystallography, Auster's city of glass is but "the visible world [seen] as glassy template of an invisible one" (Wilson 180). In other words, this glassy sedentary template/space is criss-crossed by the postmodernist Thoreauvian nomad that is here best exemplified by Quinn and the other Austerian creations in the trilogy.

To consider the other demonic leaps in New York's delirium, one might as well begin with the other ghost that introduces Quinn to the spatial intervals/network of city. This would be a Peter Stillman junior, whose very existence and character is no more definite than the stranger's voice that he turns out to be. Peter might primarily be the revenant that Quinn crosses on his path as the trace of the other. In response to the phone call, Quinn pays a visit to the Stillmans, and there he meets Peter and his wife Virginia. Upon arriving, Quinn knows that the former's life is under imminent threat by the new released psychopathic father who kept Peter in seclusion for years. The description of the eerie machinery that Peter has become makes him alternatively the grotesque version of Quinn's posthumous condition:

It seemed to Quinn that [Peter] Stillman's body had not been used for a long time and that all its functions had been relearned, so that motion had become a conscious process, each movement broken down into its component sub-movements, with the result that all flow and spontaneity had been lost. It was like watching a marionette trying to walk without strings. (CG 15)

This marionette, or rather, this golem or humanoid, has been reduced to its zero-degree of existence.

Peter is further presented as a white-space creature; his misshaped form and ill-oriented kinetics are a telling example that what at stake here is the tribulations of another crystallography:

Everything about Peter Stillman was white. White shirt, open at the neck; white pants, white shoes, white socks. Against the pallor of his skin, the flaxen thinness of his hair, the effect was almost transparent, as though one could see through to the blue veins behind the skin of his face. This blue was almost the same as the blue of his eyes: a milky blue that seemed to dissolve into a mixture of sky and clouds. Quinn could not imagine himself addressing a word to this person. It was as though Stillman's presence was a command to be silent. (CG 15)

In a word, Peter is "swallowed up by the whiteness" (Auster, *White Spaces* 158), and this is very much so that he has turned almost transparent in the crystallography of New York. That is why "Quinn suddenly felt that Stillman had become invisible" (CG 15). Peter's apparition as such goes along with Derrida's designation of spectrality: "There is no ghost without at least an appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility. ... For there to be ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever" (*Specters* 157). The first words uttered by this revenant confirm the fact that Quinn and himself are but twinned crystals, "I am Peter Stillman. I say this of my own free will. Yes. That is not my real name" (CG 15). Moreover, this Peter, who has returned from the dead, can barely speak; Peter, or Mr. White, makes an indiscernible white noise, and like Hamlet, he "Makes mouths at the invisible event" (IV, iv, 50).

The characterless identity/event of Peter is wrought out of the same matter of which language is made, "Here I am of the air" (CG 22). Whereas Quinn has stopped thinking of himself as being real, Peter has this to say: "I know that I am still the puppet boy. That cannot be helped. No, no. Anymore. But sometimes I think I will at last grow up and become real ... and when I die I will perhaps become God" (CG 21–2). It follows then that both Quinn and Peter are survivors of the death of God/father/author/Austerhood, who are now involved in another insidious thesis of the extermination of the real. Literally, Peter has survived the condition of existential destitution caused by his father, Peter Stillman senior. The father's deranged scholarship based on the "interpretations of the New World" (CG 26) leads him to subject his son to the experiment of a solitary confinement for nine years. Never given an outlet to communicate with the others, Peter is believed to have had the potential of "speak[ing] God's language" or "man's true 'natural language'" (CG 21, 34). This ends up with him turning into an abstract junk heap of signs that never refer; he finally becomes less than a human and more than a God in that he is rendered a simulacral God.

On the other hand, Quinn's survival is metaphorically conceived as he is the product of an Austerhood, a being that is less than a character and more than an author, a being –a Platonic "not-being" (Plato, *Sophist* 339)– that is there and not there. His condition is well put in the words of the Quinntesque narrator of *The Locked Room*: "No one wants to be part of a fiction, and even less so if that fiction is real" (221). Nevertheless, he takes so indulgently to practicing the "arbitrary otherness" (LR 267) of this *real* fiction. Hence, the question of survival is so hauntingly present. Auster here, and much more like his precursor Borges, is "the celebrator of things-in-their-farewell" (Bloom 131). The trilogy makes reference to other stories ("parables") of survival, of people whose fiction is real (LR 249). Mrs. Winchester's is a geo-literary parable that tells of a woman who builds a labyrinth of endless rooms to evade the ghosts of those who have been killed by her husband's rifles, and who ends up disappearing under the metropolitan junk heap caused by an earthquake. Other parable tells of the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who, during the German Invasion of Russia, smoked the papers of his study of German Fiction. This concurs with the story of Peter Freuchen, an Arctic explorer, who gets locked in the concrete white spaces of his igloo, "Breathing ... [himself] into a coffin of ice." Here, in this crystallography, "the man himself ... is the agent of his own destruction, and further, the instrument of that destruction [air] is the very thing he

needs to keep himself alive" (LR 250). This last Peter is more like the former Peter, Mr. White; they are both of the air. To sum up, these parables disseminate the arch-presence of simulacra, negative and/or positive, and the moral, if any, would be the indispensability of the simulacra in (un)making up the world.

The issue of survival becomes even more essential when it comes to walking through the shredded map that once used to be the territory. At the peak of all his detections and explorations in the white spaces of New York, Quinn "wondered what the map would look like of all the steps he had taken in his life and what word it would spell" (CG 127). This word might hypothetically be the simulacral construal of the Emersonian "Not Me" or the Thoreauvian Nowhere. This is how Quinn is trapped in Austerhood, in the non-self and the non-place of literature:

To be Auster meant being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts. And if there were no thoughts available to him, if his own inner life had been made inaccessible, then there was no place for him to retreat to. ... He consequently had to remain solely on his own surface, looking outward for sustenance. (CG 61)

Being on one's surface is part of Quinn's eventhood that entails the working out of a certain grammatics⁷ of being.

The very routes and cartography of this grammatics are here best materialized by the Austerian hauntological flaner. This grammatics, moreover, is an offshoot of such moments as when the Thoreauvian creature stands in need of sustenance, while experiencing the deferral of being:

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. *I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one . . . but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? . . . The solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?* (Thoreau, *The Maine* 5; italics original)

Reminding of Blue's preliminary conclusion in *Ghosts*, the shades of Not-Me/Nowhere here depict the spectral speaker as "having the capacity to stand as remote from himself as from another. *He is both actor and spectator.* He views himself . . . as if he were a kind of fiction" (Oates ix; italics mine). The unmistakably transcendental bearings in Thoreau's case notwithstanding, the hauntological corollary of these models is worth the comparison. Consequently, it is more than apt to talk of a Thoreauvian Auster/Quinn whose uneartheness or deterritorialisation has for its space the metropolis instead of the Maine Woods.

To further follow the sequential narrative doublings in the trilogy, it is central to delve into the meta-realistic anti-detective equation that has for its twined ends Quinn and, this time, Peter Stillman senior. While Quinn looks for the future-to-come/the arrivant, Stillman is haunted with the ghosts of the past that, in a way, has to do with Quinn's philosophy of the event. Hence, both Quinn and Stillman are look-alikes forming a nexus that resembles the relationship holding between Hamlet and the Ghost; they are "awaiting (one another at) 'the limits of truth' " (Derrida, *Aporias* 62). The meta-realistic thesis/equation has for its ends, in addition to the "nomos-polis" complex, other polarities of the "logos-nomos", of the word-map, that necessarily imply the politics of identity and the tactics of motion. This creates an intensity or the potential of the desert that calls for a geo-literary perspective and a cartography in which the

radicality of *nomos*, and of nomadic distribution, is that it proposes the dissolution of the imposed structures of *logos* as lawful structure, and a creation of smooth space in which encounters outside of the ordered conception of existence can become possible. (Parr "Monos")

An instance of this "nomadic trajectory" (Deleuze and Guattari 380) of such encounters in *City of Glass* might be detected in the moment in the Grand Central Station when Quinn is about to identify the person he is meant to tail. The time the train arrives Quinn is stormed by a human mass of myriad races, genders, colors, shapes, and ages, flowing out of the train into an as-of-yet *striated* space of the station. As of now, *logos* prevails in Quinn's view of, or entanglement with, the stratified/structured space, as he gazes at diverse "people, each one different from all the others, each one irreducibly himself" (CG 54). But the moment Quinn spots *the* Stillman, he finds, to his bewilderment, that there is another Stillman, or at least, his look-alike. This is when delirium takes over, whereupon Quinn slips into pure becoming; this is where neither he nor Stillman are irreducibly themselves. Utterly lost, "Quinn craved an amoeba's body, wanting to cut himself in half and run off in two directions at once" (CG 56). This moment/spatium/amoeba is so infused with the character of eventhood (the language of event) and the simulacral pure becoming/traveling, where both Quinn and Stillman "are pure potential, an example of the not-yet-arrived" (CG 80).

This amoeba's body/not-yet-arrived hammers home the idea of the Deleuzian egg and/or *Body without Organs* that is "the milieu of pure intensity, spatium not extension, Zero intensity as principle of production" (Deleuze and Guattari 164). In *City of Glass*, this egg could be better illustrated in comparison with its literary next in kin. This would be nothing else but another city of glass, or here, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, in the very characterlessness of Humpty Dumpty, "the purest embodiment of the human condition" (CG 80). In their first staged-up meeting, Quinn tells Stillman about the essence of this Humpty-Dumptiness:

In his little speech to Alice, Humpty Dumpty sketches the future of human hopes and gives the clue to our *salvation: to become masters of the words we speak, to make language answer our needs*. Humpty Dumpty was a prophet, a man who spoke truths the world was not ready for. (CG 80; italics mine)

The question of humpty-dumptiness is also the question of doubling-up; it is rather a geo-poetic/linguistic question. Sitting on the wall implies running off in two directions spatialized in the wall. The "double direction" as such is a vector in the "personal uncertainty" that is "an objective structure of the event itself" (Deleuze 3). Moreover, in Carroll's work, the diatribe triggered by Humpty Dumpty about adjectives and verbs (of his and Alice's existence) has to do with the issue of identity and eventhood inasmuch as the former is liquidated in the verbs of pure becoming and the language of event.

Quite afar from the comic milieu of this Humpty-Humptiness –but not without its delirious implications– Baudrillard posits that "it's possible in places like New York people can remain in a kind of positive, happy fluidity, a state of trans-peering," and still, "most people experience it as a kind of liquid terror" (*Forget Foucault* 79). This liquid terror marks as much as Alice's and Humpty Dumpty's being as it does that of Quinn and Stillman who strive to be the masters of the words they speak. For Quinn this liquid terror persists as he still goes "from one form to another without passing through a system of meaning" (*Forget Foucault*). This passing/traveling, that entails the word and the map, the *logos* and the *nomos*,

disturbs the order of the model and the copy, of the territory and the map, and, consequently, of the detective and the detected.

The suggested hauntological flânerie proper in the trilogy is thus set rolling. The entanglement of the logos (word) and the nomos (nomadism) in Quinn's and Stillman's detections in New York might here be assumed under what Baudrillard dubs "the Babel syndrome" (*The Perfect Crime* 91), and what Eco terms as "the linguistic theme" (*Serendipities* 24). In *City of Glass*, this syndrome/theme is echoed in Stillman's linguistic lunacy that produces a thesis that ponders a semiurgy of the New World after the fall of man and language. This implies speculating "a new Babel-like disaster, so that a remedy for linguistic confusion needed to be sought ... to rediscover the lost language spoken by Adam" (*Serendipities* 29). Stillman's thesis is, moreover, given weight in "the quickening impulse of utopian thought" that takes shape in the idea of America being a New Babel, "a veritable City of God" (*CG* 42). Part of Stillman's theorizing about the world's semiurgy (and the trilogy's at that) might be thus summarized:

Adam's one task in the Garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In that state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language. (*CG* 43)

There is a family resemblance here, so it seems, between this sort of theorizing and Baudrillard's that goes through the repercussions of the horrendously mediated after-utopia America.

Thus renewed, the debate of the fall of language is prone to be read in sync with what Baudrillard takes to be the perfect crime and Deleuze sees as the paradox of the infinite identity. In either case, this calls for a full engagement with arbitrary otherness. Hence, though Quinn's and Stillman's detections are anti-detective by far, yet there is still a tenacious method in their madness or ritual game. On his part, Quinn pretends to be somebody else trespassing untrodden territories of otherness with "a deft little twist of naming" (*CG* 50). He believes this to be an utter illusion and that he will be able to regain his Quinn-ness whenever he wishes. On the other hand, Stillman, though not taken to such *as-if-ness* himself, is the ghost-potential that breaks the permanent scenarios of the city and helps create the demonic intervals into which both Quinn and himself irrevocably disappear.

Both Quinn and Stillman set themselves the task of rescuing the world from its semiotic nihilism or fragmentation: they rather seem like "archeologist[s] investigating a shard at some prehistoric ruin" (*CG* 59). But it is hard to say who is detecting whom in this Babel of sorts. Occasionally, their wanderings come to a halt when Quinn's curiosity drives him to stage up a meeting. In the first meeting, it becomes quite unimportant as to who is who and whose job is being described. Here the job of the detective writer (or the real-world detective) is introduced in terms of the linguistic lunatic and vice versa. Here is how Stillman in the guise of Quinn sees that "the world is in fragments" and that it is his "job to put it back together again" (*CG* 75). He goes on saying that he is "in the process of inventing a new language" that will replace the chaotic and babbling condition of the world in which "our words no longer correspond to the world" for these "have not adopted themselves to the new reality" (*CG* 77, 76). On his part, Quinn in the guise of Stillman avows that he has "come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject," it is the place where

"brokenness is everywhere" and "disarray is universal" (CG 77). It follows then that his job is nothing else but to give new names to the world's shards. Hence, for these twined flâneurs-detectives, "the whole city is junk heap"; they are now roving a city whose streets is "an endless source of material, an inexhaustible storehouse of shattered things" (CG 77). In their "scavenging haul" (CG 60), these detective-linguistic lunatics, these prophetic Humpty-Dumpties, are bent on gathering the oddments of New York's existence to finally form the outspoken austral language, or the language of God.

Quinn's detections fall finally into the habit of drawing "the disquieting maps that formed letters of the alphabet" (CG 94). He is now "looking for a sign ... ransacking the chaos of Stillman's movements for some glimmer of cogency" (CG 68). Here it seems that the commingling of the logos and the nomos is at its hardest. The dotted line of Stillman's travels in New York appears to be the typography, the hieroglyphs that constitute the name of "The Tower of Babel" (CG 70). But this seems "like drawing a picture in the air with your finger. The image vanishes as you are making it" (CG 70). The intervals between these dots is where Quinn stops in order to write/draw his cartography, and thus to try to reconstruct the world. He is faced with the dilemma of walking and writing at the same time. Still, "mapping, as opposed to representation or interpretation, disjoins and erases any simple opposition such as walking/writing or observing /remembering. Such disjoining movement is clearly *spectral*" (Wolfreys 187; italics mine). The seeing-walking-writing nexus is, moreover, the spatialization of his disarrayed self that is haunted by other abiding selves. For this Quinn/Auster, Stillman (the spectacle/specter) has now "become part of the city ... a speck, a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks" (CG 90). He even comes to remind himself of that Derridian ghost, Robinson Crusoe, whose existence floats between the footprints of his specter and the specter of his footprints. In his notebook, Quinn thus writes pondering the question of his spatiality/spectrality, drawing upon Baudelaire's prototypical example of flânerie:

It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place were I am not. Or, more bluntly: Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bulls by horns: Anywhere out of the world. (CG 108)

Following Stillman's suite, he himself seems to have "melted into the walls of the city" (CG 114). Here it is apt to say that they both end up floating in the Baudrillardian liquid terror, in "the relentless waves of the real" (Auster, *White Spaces* 159), or just doing existential acrobatics on the edge of some Humpty Dumpty's wall.

In the aftermath of his and Stillman's disappearance, Quinn is now (al)located in an "alley, wedged in between the bin and the wall" in a state of an utter destitution, "tak[ing] pleasure in the world overhead" (CG 115). But what interests him now is another kind of cartography: clouds. Quinn investigates, measures, and tries to decipher the clouds, these white spaces, which are, he seems to vaguely believe, part of New York's liquid terror. They are the embodiment of his aesthetic economy of disappearance and of what he conceives of eventhood. The constellation, coloring, and movements of the clouds as such come to constitute glimpses of the shredded map of his world. It is here that one can say that Quinn's instance is best understood in terms of Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of the event as approached by the latter through the clouds metaphor. Lyotard is of the opinion that the narrative of one's life and thought might best be conceived in the kinetics and the formations of the clouds (Sim "*Clouds*"). What is more, with the clouds, the potential of mediating the face of the body-without-organs, of which Quinn is a part, becomes the sole possibility to any narrative/world to hold on. Hence, the clouds stand, for him, for the potentiality of pure traveling/becoming. This is how the nomadic Quinn ends up as a *still man* who comes to a

full stop while watching the world's signs/hieroglyphs, seeing the world's cartography writing and un-writing itself.

Conclusion

In Auster's *City of Glass*, the death of the real has been seen catalyzed through the art of disappearance in the non-place of literature. Therefore, everything and everybody in Auster's-Quinn's world has been delineated in terms of the hauntological posthumous eventuality. That is why Quinn's act of disappearance/becoming is so prone to be conceived otherwise: as an artificial act of survival. This brings Auster's *techné* of story closer to the realm where Derrida's ghost is aesthetically worked out as substitute for the praxis in the trilogy's *mundo operandi*, where mouths are made at the invisible event, and nothing seems to (have) actually happen(ed).

In this novel, as well as in the trilogy as a whole, disappearance or death of the real involves seeing the world in the light of its potential non-being. What is thus being disseminated is the impersonal experience of dying as best articulated in the infinitive verb *to die* or the "trope for death," (LR 295) which is infinitely deferred without the transcendental signifier of Death.

Notes

¹*City of Glass* (1985) –hereafter referred to as (CG) for short– is the first novel in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, the other two are *Ghosts* (G) and *The Locked Room* (LR). References to *City of Glass* will be to the 1990 edition of the trilogy.

²Of this desertification/murder Jean Baudrillard writes: "[I]t sounds like Nietzsche proclaiming the death of God. But this murder of God was a symbolic one, and it was going to change our destiny. We are still living, metaphysically living off this original crime, as survivors of God. But the Perfect Crime no longer involves God, but Reality, and it is not a symbolic murder but an extermination" (*The Vital Illusion* 61).

³Hauntology (*hantologie*) is a term first introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his *Specters of Marx*. The spectral law, the logic of ghost, or "the spectre in Derrida is to be thought in terms of deconstruction's thinking of a non-present remainder at work in every text, entity, being or 'presence'. A remainder ... that is neither spiritually transcendent nor fully embodied, but which is instead, like the ghost, a sort of non-present being there" (Wortham "Spectre").

⁴In Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations*, simulation, or what he terms as the third-order simulacrum, "is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2). With the third-order simulacra, he comes then to define the condition of virtuality that characterizes postmodernity. Here the dominant simulacra are related to the utter conceptualization of the media and information (mass-mediated reality) that results in a simulated hyperreality that is more real than reality itself, and totally cut off from referentiality. In his apocalyptic vision, Baudrillard goes so far as to claim that the *Real* has been murdered.

⁵Flâneur is a city stroller and an urban observer. In his *The Arcades Projects*, Walter Benjamin designates and identifies this cultural type/character apropos of the nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire's character-sketches of the Parisian figures. Hence, according to Benjamin, the flâneur is he who is immersed in "the phantasmagoria of space" (905).

⁶"*Sémiurgie* (semiurgy) is a French neologism which came into use in the early 1970s in discourses concerned with mass mediated environments. Part sign (semi[o]-) and part work (-urgy), the concept often appears today alongside other identifying features of postmodernity, especially its purported depthlessness and nihilistic tendencies" (Genosko).

⁷In Derrida's deconstruction, grammatology or grammatics is the "science of the effacement of the trace" (Spivak xlvi), as the gram (or *grammè*) is conceived to be neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation.

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