Invisible Selves between Narrative Spaces and Physical Places
in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*

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Abstract:
> *This paper focuses upon the way in which Paul Auster uses space in an attempt to redefine the relationship between the urban selves that populate the novellas included in The New York Trilogy, the spaces they inhabit, their language and identity. Using the image of the Tower of Babel as the perfect metaphor to suggest the intersection of space and language, Auster comments upon the impossibility of communication, the failure of language and the "ghostification" of the self unable to negotiate its identity and freedom between the confined spaces of rooms, houses, institutions and the open space of the metropolis.*

Key words:
> ghostification; heterotopias; metaphysical detective story; prelapsarian language;

Introduction

Acknowledged as one of the most remarkable iconoclasts of the American tradition, Paul Auster continues to surprise his readers with an interesting mixture of absurdism, existentialism and literary criticism that places his work in a space where modernism overlaps postmodernism. This extreme versatility and his innovative imagination make his work – including critical essays, novels and short fiction, translations and screenplays – embrace a wide range of topics generally focused upon a methodical search for truth and meaning that most often ends up in confusion, uncertainty and loss. Novels or collections of short stories such as *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), *The New York Trilogy* (1987), *Moon Palace* (1989), *The Music of Chance* (1990), *The Book of Illusions* (2002), *Man in the Dark* (2008), *Sunset Park* (2010) have consecrated Auster's favourite themes, mainly related to the overlapping spaces of life and fiction and the infinite possibilities engendered by this overlapping, generally translated in an obsessive attempt to solve mysteries and to disentangle intricate situations.

At the core of Auster's fictional universe, fragmentary and alienating, lies a continuous search for identity which primarily confronts the hero with the space he inhabits, the language that translates his thoughts and the most subtle feelings, and the truth he is always looking for. The manner in which all these diverse spaces coexist and influence each other and the strategies used by Auster to relate them to the fragile, sometimes ghostly, identities of his characters represent the main concerns of this article. By focusing upon the deceiving concreteness of the metropolis, the overlapping labyrinthine fictional and metafictional spaces the article analyses the subtle connections Auster establishes between identity, space and language. Identity always reveals its shifting and dislocated nature in his novels and is most often marred by a sense of incompleteness and failure. That is perhaps why there is always something that escapes the

reader's grasp in Auster's novels and short stories, something which is either left unsaid or is simply indefinitely deferred. The preference for everything that goes unsaid, untranslated, unuttered or unreadable made Auster acknowledge his reverence for Beckett: "Beckett compared himself to Joyce by saying: 'The more Joyce knew, the more he could. The more I know, the less I can.' As far as I'm concerned, there's an altogether different equation: The less I know, the more I can." (Mark Irwin 1994: 113).

The constant search for a truth that is always placed beyond our immediate grasp has made Paul Auster embrace a genre that offered him the possibility to play with opposites. He speaks about this playfulness referring to "this idea of contrasts, contradictions, paradoxes [that] gets very much to the heart of what novel writing is for me. It's a way for me to express my own contradictions" (Smith 2003: 24). The detective genre is what he found closer to his literary endeavour because it offered him the occasion to undergo a methodical approach of an enigma set forth by the novel, to rely upon a definite set of rules and relationships (governing the typical relations in a detective story between a detective and a evil doer, extended and applied to fiction and to the ensuing relations established between the author and his fictional hero or between the writer and his readers) and to stick to the conventional obligation not to withhold any piece of information from the readers. Auster's personal way of approaching the genre is to transform it into something more challenging on different levels. The *metaphysical detective story* he creates proceeds to a dislocation of the truth which ends up in a dizzying sense of circularity that takes the detective along the meandering paths of subjectivity and relativity. It is generally said that the metaphysical detective story relies upon a nonexistent objectivity which makes the authorial intent the real generative force behind the narration which is variously shaped by the author's relationship with his own text, his fictional detective and with his diegetic or nondiegetic reader. In the end, the search for truth becomes a desperate and, most of the time, useless search for a sense of self.

Between self and selfhood
The search for identity and for a meaningful self presents the hero with a difficult task, that of operating a coherent disambiguation of the clues he is given and of extracting a possible set of valid significances out of the clash, recurrent in Auster's fiction, between selfhood and space, be it physical, metaphysical, textual or metatextual. This movement is visible in the three novellas that make up *The New York Trilogy*: *The City of Glass* (*CG*), *Ghosts* (G) and *The Locked Room* (*LR*), all subsumed to the metaphysical detective story genre. These three deceivingly "detective" (or anti-detective) stories introduce a number of common elements (the "glass" (as in *The City of Glass* and playing on the idea of transparency), the "notebook", the search for clues), recurrent motives (freedom versus captivity, solitude versus communion, reality vs. fiction) and narrative strategies. What is particular about them is the fact that even if centering on these opposites, Auster succeeds in stepping out of the system of binary oppositions and introduces many other variables that further complicate the process of mystery solving by infinitely postponing it. One of these variables is the arbitrariness of chance, which is the generator of all these stories, and the other is the interesting play with what Derrida theorized as "traces" and "*différence/ différance*". The frequent and confusing repetition of names and incidents, the intertextual references and the subtle recurrent elements present in all three stories give an overall sense of circularity. This is further emphasized by the fact that they all seem to be different representations of the postmodern world and its inhabitants characterized by fragmentation and alienation translated

into fragmented spaces, dislocated selves, split identities and a totally inadequate language. "These three stories," Auster himself confesses, "are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about" (Auster in Smith 28).

The vagaries of chance and the reversal of identities become the generators of the first novella and the key recurrent elements in the novel. *The City of Glass* tells the story of a detective stories writer who gets a phone call from somebody who wanted to hire a private detective to solve a difficult case. "It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of the night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not" (3). Out of curiosity the narrator assumes the detective's identity (Paul Auster) and starts working on the case. He has to prevent a man from killing his son. The man, Peter Stillman, is an old scholar recently released from prison where he was incarcerated for having kept his son isolated for nine years during a strange language experiment meant to revive a prolapsarian language. Not sure whether he was following the right Stillman, the writer, Daniel Quinn, tries to find a hidden meaning in the old man's chaotic walks in the city, in his gathering discarded objects, in a utopian attempt to rebuild the Tower of Babel and to reconstruct its original language. When Stillman disappears, Quinn goes to Auster for help but discovers that Auster is not a detective but a writer who is investigating the problem of authorship in Cervantes' Don Quixote. Not knowing that the old Stillman has committed suicide and Peter, the son, together with Virginia, his wife, have all left the city, Quinn decides to survey the Stillman residence, hidden in a blind alley. Homeless and broke, after losing his flat and all his possessions, he decides to enter the house and try to live there. His memories start to gradually falter and he spends his time sleeping, thinking and writing in his red notebook. As the light begins to dwindle in his chamber (the moments when daylight was allowed to enter his room being shorter and shorter) he approaches the end of his notebook and he tries to simplify his words down to the essential, to sublimate his language and bring it closer to the perfection of the original language.

Ghosts resumes the identity theme and offers an interesting play upon identities and colours. "First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black and before the beginning there is Brown. […] The place is New York, the time is present, and neither one will ever change" (137). "The case seems simple enough. White wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary" (137). The long period of surveillance reduces him to inactivity and opens up a world of hypotheses as his investigation leads to the strange possibility that he might also be watched. In the end, when he finds out he had been used as a sort of nemesis in a strange writing experiment, Blue kills Black, who turns out to be one and the same with White,.

The Locked Room picks up on another recurrent theme of the novel and analyses it from a different perspective: the ghostification of people. In this story the narrator receives a letter asking for help from the wife of a former childhood friend who has mysteriously disappeared. He kindly offers his help in the endeavour of editing his friend's unpublished work but falls in love with the woman and finally marries her when the prolonged absence of the husband entitles them to consider him dead. To be hired by a ghost gives the narrator a feeling of entrapment and false freedom. Things get even worse when he receives another letter in which Fanshaw, the allegedly dead friend, confesses that he has been alive all along and asks the narrator for one last meeting.

The problems related to the self, to its place within the postmodern urban setting and the auctorial issues get further complicated by the multiplication of physical, fictional and metafictional spaces and even by a multiplication of the selves and their final ghostification in all

three stories. In *The City of Glass* this proliferation of spaces is epitomized by the Tower of Babel and is paralleled by an interesting game of successive spatial inclusions and a proliferation of selves subsumed under the problem of authorship: in this case we are dealing with a triad of spaces (physical, fictional and metafictional) corresponding to a "triad of selves" (Auster 1987: 6). This triad comprises Daniel Quinn (the writer of mystery novels), who writes under the pseudonym of William Wilson (which gives him the illusion of a double and hints to the process of creative impersonality) and creates the fictional detective Max Work, the second fictional mask behind which he hides his bitterness and disappointment. He also assumes the identity of Paul Auster, referring both to the real writer and to the fictional writer and leading to a confusing multiplication of the auctorial selves. The entire volume comments upon the status of the writer most of the time making the identification between writer and detective. Their roles become interchangeable, both being perceived as "private eyes", once again understood in a triple sense: "I" as standing for an Investigator of the mysteries of reality, art and life, somehow placed at their intersection, "I" as standing for the self, always a problematic, protean and multiple entity and I/eye as the physical organ of perception.

Ghosts operates further identifications by means of colours and intertextual references. In fact each of these stories plays upon literary analogies bringing new connotations into the original text (*City of Glass* – The Tower of Babel biblical episode, E.A. Poe, John Milton and Walt Whitman, *Ghosts* – David Thoreau's *Walden* and *The Locked Room* – Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wakefield,* a story relating a similar incident). It represents a different illustration of what Derrida calls the science of "hauntology" as a blend of "ontology" and "haunt" in the attempt to explain the evolution of the self as a combination and assimilation of all possible traces left within us by all the encounters with other persons in our life. All Auster's characters, especially his writers, all the spaces upon which he constructs his novellas and all the texts and intertexts he uses become repositories of ghosts.

The Locked Room completely diminishes the distance between seeing and writing and closes the entire experience by coming back to the one element present in all these stories: the red notebook, the transitional space between a chaotic reality and the truth, a translational space between people's real identities and their social masks and finally a metaphorical space where the pieces of a metaphysical puzzle seem to come together in a coherent pattern, only to be paralleled by an infinite number of other such possibilities in an endless game of meaning deferral.

Overlapping spaces: physical loci and mental scapes
In his analysis of physical spaces in Auster's trilogy, Steven Alford made the distinction between pedestrian, utopian and mapped out spaces (Alford 1995: 613-632). Pedestrian spaces acquire particularly suggestive connotations in Auster's urban landscape. The advantage of identifying the writer/narrator with the investigator in each of the three stories is that it offers him the possibility to turn into a wanderer, a flâneur who tries to solve the mysteries by reading the city and its pedestrian spaces, its inhabitants and the interactions between them and the city as a text, thus equating walking and writing.

Space plays a vital role in detective stories through its main coordinates – order, coherence and logic – that help in the overall organization of the text and of the clues concurring to bring about the solution of the mystery. In this kind of story crimes most often occur in closed spaces that increase tension and intensify suspense so that the narrowing down of space

corresponds to a narrowing down of the possibilities of solving the enigma. From this perspective, the investigator's endeavor is a coherent attempt to make sense of the world around him, to offer a pertinent solution to the challenge he is faced with and to get to a true knowledge of self and the other. The attraction exercised by detective stories upon readers belonging to different background and generations comes mainly from the challenging task of disentangling the complicated threads of the text, identifying the appropriate clues and making all the pieces fall into the right place in the overall puzzle. Finding the solution of the enigma marks the detective's final victory and the fulfillment of the reader's expectations. Auster's writers/investigators fail in this endeavor as in their case the challenge is complicated by the acknowledgment of the general instability of the world, of the self and of language itself – a constant preoccupation in Auster's collection of short stories, leading to a general relativity of significance and the impossibility of locating a unique, absolute truth at the centre of the textual space. Critics have discovered several other disruptions of the classic detective story that justify the characterization of Auster's novellas as anti-detective. They include a total annihilation of the traditional boundaries between author, narrator and reader, a special treatment of the self envisaged as a textual construct, readable in a multiplicity of ways, and generally unlocatable in a fully reliable space, a breaking away with what is generally seen as the bourgeois segregation of space usually embraced by the mystery genre. Apart this conscious ignorance of social stratification there is also a "refusal to posit a unifying system" (Tani 1984: 39) and to wrap up everything with a logical solution. The coherent ontological and fictional spaces of the detective story are now destabilized and replaced by a polymorphous space that receives a poststructuralist treatment. The characters act as pedestrians in search of an elusive, never singular truth, when functioning as investigators, and "textual cartographers" who write space into existence when functioning as writers. "My true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable. This was the tiny hole between self and not-self, and for the first time in my life I saw this nowhere as the exact centre of the world" (*LR* 235).

"Our contact with space qua space," Alford considers, "is always second hand; it is always a representation. Like the attempt to find an "essential self", interiorized and below or prior to language, we are forever consigned to inventing a nonexistent spatial 'ground'" (Alford 622). The "spatial ground" Auster relies upon is the postmodern metropolis. It is an engulfing space that inspires alienation and disruption and where the self loses itself, an incoherent world prone to fragmentariness and disjunction, "a neverland of fragments, a place of wordless things and thingless words" (Auster 72), in need of a unifying system all characters prove unable to discover. Auster's favourite locus is New York and its labyrinthine streets and ghostlike inhabitants.

> New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but with himself as well (3) […] New York is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts (*CG*78).

Auster's approach to the metropolis also implies a high degree of social awareness which generally lacks in traditional detective stories. Instead of the conventional organization of space around the comforting stability of home versus the dangerous instability of the city, Auster

destabilizes the traditional spatial binary opposition of the detective stories and the recurrent centrifugal movement towards "home". He refuses the centrality of "home" and introduces a centripetal movement that takes the hero away from it, most often pushing him outwards, beyond the peripheries or downwards into the bowels of the city. There is a vertical (up/down) social organization of space in Auster's *City of Glass* that redefines the consecrated meaning of the term *flâneur* and broadens its scope so as to encompass social awareness. In fact this is the main aspect which has been considered one of the drawbacks of the consecrated definitions of flâneur. Beyond de Certeau's and Walter Benjamin's suggestive analyses of the term, critics have sensed the incapacity of the term to express the entire process of experiencing the city. For Auster the flâneur becomes "an archeologist inspecting a shard at some prehistoric ruin" (*CG*59), one who almost completely blends into the setting and is aware of his capacity of watching the others and of being watched.

The "city as a text" and its capacity to be mapped out is by now a classic statement reemphasized by Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau and Roland Barthes. Michel de Certeau saw the city as a set of representations and signifiers, a "universe of rented spaces", constantly "haunted by a nowhere".

> To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper place. The moving about the city… makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but is only a name, the City...a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places. (de Certeau 1984: 103)

It is precisely this nowhere that Auster tries to make his readers locate by placing it in relation to the postmodern elusive self and with a "negotiable truth". This attempt is doomed to fail since both modernity and postmodernity seem to be "haunted by the myth of transparency of building materials" (Vidler 1992: 217). This "transparency" is suggested by the title of the first story, *City of Glass*, where the symbol of the glass reaches not only for the idea of a truth that is permanently reflected back to the seeker in a constant "deferral of perspective" that makes transparency "the equivalent of opacity" (Lefebvre 1991: 185) but also for the idea of the panoptikon and of an incomplete solitude, of an eternal surveillance.

Even if there seems to be a critical consensus related to the "readability" of the city and the textual nature of space, theorists have different opinions when it comes to equating walking and writing. De Certeau sees the act of walking as an intellectual mapping of the city or as creating "a space of enunciation" (98). Lefebvre makes a clear disjunction between walking and writing: "The social space can in no way be compared to a blank page upon which a specific message has been inscribed… Both natural and urban spaces are if anything over-inscribed: everything remains therein resembles a rough draft, jumbled and self-contradictory" (Lefebvre 142). He also emphasizes the necessity of enlarging the understanding of "walking as writing space" so as to encompass all the possible variables of the act of walking, generally disregarded and generalized. Different rhythms and paces, different ways of gazing and internalizing space determine different reading of the city For Auster "walking and writing were not easily compatible activities" (62) susceptible of engendering palimpsests. The metaphor "city as a text" is literalized in *City of Glass* in Quinn's attempt to draw the map of Stillman's movements and

read the letters formed by his apparently random wanderings translated as a vain attempt to discover an ordering principle within a postmodern chaotic world. The apparently logical message inscribed in the urban space, TOWER OF BABEL, leads to one of Auster's constant preoccupations – language and its connection to space and identity. The fall from grace corresponds in Auster's opinion to a fall from language translated in a complete fragmentation of our self and of our discourse which have both ceased to signify: "Most people don't pay attention to such things. They think of words as stones, as great unmoveable objects with no life, as monads that never change" (*CG*75). Undoing the fall means reforming language whose words have become ossified entities with less and less power to designate, so that it could "embody the notion of change" (78) the essential feature of our being and words become transparent "stand[ing] between him and the world" (148). Alison Russell sees Auster's endeavour of coming back to an efficient language, constitutive of self and the world, as a "pilgrim searching for correspondences between signifier and signified" (Russell 1990: 72).

Paul Auster's characters proceed to an assessment of space in their desperate need to find a coherent ordering principle. Auster constructs his space according to its mappable or unmappable coordinates around a series of dichotomies: in/out (the private sphere of "home" versus the public domain), up/down (the cozy space of bourgeois comfort versus the slums of the homeless and the bums) and open/closed dialectics (the closed space of private rooms versus the open exterior space of the city). The perpetual oscillation between open and closed spaces determines a gradual shrinking of the physical space (accompanied by a gradual narrowing of the lists of suspects in traditional detective stories) and a corresponding enlargement of interior spaces, and occasions an analysis of freedom/confinement, solitude/communion dichotomies. Auster is particularly fond of closed spaces as they offer his characters the possibility of introspection, of reflecting upon "the world inside" (Auster 145).

> There's a curious paradox embedded in all this: when the characters in my books are most confined, they seem to be most free. And when they are free to wander they are most lost and confused… Everyday I set off on a journey into the unknown and yet the whole time I'm just sitting there in my room. The door is locked, I never budge, and yet the confinement offers me absolute freedom. (Irwin in Smith 28)

Closed spaces or spaces closing upon themselves and confinement (sometimes associated to temporal restrictions when the narrated events occurring during one single day) seem to bring a particular kind of spiritual freedom and perceptiveness. Solitude itself becomes "a passage into the self, an instrument of discovery" (*LR*286), a means of self-knowledge and a space Auster generally places at the intersection of writing and self-discovery. Personal spaces thus become unbridgeable gaps between individual solitudes which are no longer able to find the proper means of communication. No matter how closed and claustrophobic they might seem his spaces have the capacity to open up towards infinite dimensions created by fictional and artistic (mostly cinematographic) representations of space that reverberate in a never ending game of mirrors.

As imagined and mapped out by Auster, physical spaces acquire metaphorical and symbolical dimensions; they are constantly defined by the stories, legends and anecdotes attached to them, by the way in which people experience them and in which they shape and define the identity of their inhabitants. They way in which Auster maps his spaces resembles the old method of drawing the portolano maps as described by Georges Perec in his work *Species of spaces and other pieces*. Similarly, Auster likes to define his spaces not necessarily by establishing exact geographical coordinates or by extremely detailed descriptions but by

attaching stories, anecdotes and literary references to each place and by reemphasizing the connection he making in his work between self, space and language.

> This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page. To describe space; to name it, to trace it, like those portolano-makers who saturated the coastlines with the names of harbours, the names of capes, the names of inlets, until in the end the land was only separated from the sea by a continuous ribbon of text. Is the aleph, that place in Borges, from which the entire world is visible simultaneously, anything other than an alphabet?" (Georges Perec 1997: 13)

Fictional and metafictional spaces

Paul Auster's various means of playing with fictional spaces bring into discussion problems of authorship which he complicates by blurring the delimitations between author, narrator and reader and sometimes even by playing with their identification. The attempt to find out the truth and the solution of the enigma in the classic detective story becomes in Auster's metaphysical mysteries a profound epistemological interrogation of the means we use in order to understand the world around us, to map the spaces that define us and to know ourselves. It also means reading the author's intent and negotiating between multiple subjective truths. Writing is almost always treated in association with the idea of confinement and limited space (usually circumscribed to the physical space of a room) as a creator of large fictional and mental spaces and interior freedom. His recurrent method of engendering this freedom is the palimpsestic superposition of a multitude of physical, fictional, metafictional and critical spaces that creates infinite possibilities of combination and of mapping out of the text.

> The idea of contrasts, contradictions, paradoxes, I think, gets very much to the heart of what novel writing is for me. It's a way for me to express my own contradictions… Writing isn't mathematics, after all. This doesn't equal that, one thing can't be substituted for another. A book is composed of irreducible elements, and I would almost say that to the degree that the writer does not understand them, that is the degree to which the book is allowed to become itself, to become a human being and not just a literary exercise. (Irwin 1994: 119)

In *The City of Glass* the narrator's identity and the general problem of authorship and false objectivity are discussed by means of the same superposition of spaces: biographical (opposing Quinn and Auster), textual (bringing together Auster, the real writer, and Auster, the fictional writer, a comment upon the overlapping of biographical, social and authorial selves) and intertextual (Cervantes/Auster). *Ghosts* plays a game of mirrors, of multiple identifications and closed spaces that comment upon problems of authorial control and the attempt to break it (Black= White, Blue = Black) whereas *The Locked Room* offers a means of looking for the truth in fiction, once again using the device of the "locked room" as both a physical locus and a mental entrapment.

The metafictional spaces used in Auster's texts make his narrators and readers aware of being inside the text and of being under auctorial control. They constantly fight this type of control, and they further reinforce the relationship between fiction and reality. This is particularly visible in *Ghosts* where the investigator gets a very sedentary job, that of watching

and making a report about a man who does little else besides sitting at his desk, writing and reading Thoreau. This situation, though static and predictable, becomes a self-reflecting game of mirrors, emblematic for the status of the writer who finds himself reduced to the condition of being "half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others" (*G*172). The story in *Ghosts* mirrors our situations as readers: Blue watches a man reading and he becomes aware of being trapped inside a book about a man reading a book. This mise en abîme creates fictional within fictional worlds and each of them bears traces of the other as in a game of infinite reflections and hypotheses. In the same way, the characters step out of their own lives and identities and embrace others in a perpetual exchange that transforms them into palimpsestic beings like the narrator in *The Locked Room* who admits to have become one with Fanshawe, the ghost: "He was a ghost I carried around inside me, a prehistoric figment, a thing that was no longer real (202)[...] That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude… This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull" (292-293).

The authorial "I" as well as the authorial "eye", one of Auster's favourite puns in the volume, are playfully at work both revealing themselves in the acts of weaving the fictional threads of the text and of exposing the metafictional manipulating strings. The search for truth takes the narrator/detective and the reader along meandering paths of intertextual references that create a complicated pattern of relations between texts, selves, spaces and significances. In Auster's fictional world "everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, [and] nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book reaches its end" (*CG*9).

The search for truth finally becomes in Auster's novellas a search for oneself, for a narrator, an attempt, rather impossible, to disentangle the complicated matter of authorship suggested by the discussion related to *Don Quixote*, regarded not only "an attack on the dangers of make believe" (98) but also as a comment on "the question of posterity" (99). Defining authorship or establishing the exact nature of truth or of the relationship between self and space become utopian endeavors. "No one can say where a book comes from, least of all the person who writes it. Books are born out of ignorance, and if they go on living after they are written, it's only to the degree that they cannot be understood" (Interview – *Paris Review*). What can in fact be understood at the end of Auster's trilogy is the fact that the plurality of texts and spaces, of selves and identities find a common denominator that acknowledges the openness of any written text as constellation of significances and at the same time its concrete, finite dimensions as a palpable object. This common denominator is the red notebook, a strange palimpsestic space, witness and proof of an auctorial mind's endeavor to get down to the articulations of reality and by telling fictional lies and playing with the "unpredictability of experience" to "tell the truth about the world" (*Paris Review*).

> I suppose I think of the notebook as a house for words, as a secret place for thought and self-examination. I'm not just interested in the results of writing, but in the process, the act of putting words on a page… I was always drawn to books that doubled back on themselves that brought you into the world of the book, even as the book was taking you into the world. The manuscript as hero, so to speak (Interview, *The Paris Review*)

Conclusions

Considered a touchstone for his later fiction, the trilogy initiates an epistemological investigation into the very heart of the metropolis and inaugurates what is generally called the "anti-detective" genre. The result is a paradoxical inquiry into the nature of the "negotiable truth" of the experience of living in the city, of building identities, realities and texts. Auster's text also ends up in a general process of ghostification of people, spaces and texts, to a game of inclusions and identifications between different selves, between selves and spaces or even between selves and texts. One of the main concerns in the *Trilogy* is the "notion of change" and the importance of inscribing it into our writing of space, self and identity. The changes we are constantly undergoing, consciously or unconsciously, transform us into walking stories, waiting to be properly uttered or written, repositories of ghosts and palimpsestic identities.

What Michel Foucault theorized as heterotopias seen as heterogeneous spaces of sites and relations could also be applied upon Auster's *Trilogy* which offers a multitude of spaces that makes us aware of the constant simultaneity that defines ourselves and the world we inhabit, where we become a point in "an infinite number of lines, as the centre of a star of lines," inside "the simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities" (Berger 1974: 40). Space, knowledge and power and their relationship can be taken to characterize Auster's short stories in *The New York Trilogy*: space is plenty represented by the multitude of overlapping mental, physical, fictional and metafictional spaces, knowledge becomes the general awareness induced by Auster's narrative strategies of being inside the text and under strict authorial control whereas power is translated by this very authorial power of manipulation and interference inside the text which only pushes the reader towards a meaningful assimilation of all these elements and a coherent search for the possible truths.

> The one thing I try to do in all my books is to leave enough room in the prose for the reader to inhabit it because I finally believe it's the reader who writes the book and not the writer… In the end, you don't only write the books you need to write, you write the books you would like to read yourself." (Mallia 263)

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