The novels of Paul Auster.

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The Novels of Paul Auster

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M. Phil. 2001

University of Wales Swansea

Thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the Requirements
Of the University of Wales Swansea for the degree of
Master of philosophy

The Novels of Paul Auster 1982-1994

This thesis offers a critical study of Auster's novels, explicating individual novels from Auster's canon and draws out the core theme that runs throughout his work, which is given a sharper focus in that specific text.

Chapter 1, addresses The Invention of Solitude, Auster's most important work. I focus on how this novel serves as source material for the rest of Auster's literary career. Considerable time is devoted to looking at Auster's ideas concerning space for expression and ontological exploration. I address Auster's ideas concerning causality and the way in which he views linguistics as a paradigm for reality, causality and memory.

Chapter 2 focuses on The New York Trilogy and Auster's explorations of masculinity and self-identity. I also focus on the self-conscious and experimental aspects of the text.

In Chapter 3, I consider In the Country of Last Things, Auster's extended letter from a post-nuclear apocalypse society. I focus on the themes of hunger, isolation, disintegration and how Auster addresses his Jewish identity.

Moon Palace provides my focus for a discussion on Auster's critique of America in Chapter 4. I trace how he uses and subverts American history, politics and literature, asserting a personal particular narrative over them.

In Chapter 5, I address Auster's most political novel Leviathan. It includes Auster's core themes off doubling, space, ontology, causality and genealogy, but focuses more on political impotency, psychology, authentic representation and the culture of consumption.

In Chapter 6, I write about what I consider Auster's lesser novels- The Music of Chance and Mr. Vertigo. I consider in this chapter why these novels are comparative failures, place them in the context of Auster's career and consider their motivations. Finally, in my concluding Chapter "Meaning. No Meaning." I summarise all the conclusions from my chapters and draw together all my critical findings, interpret and anlalyse them.

The Novels of Paul Auster

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Chapter 1: The Invention of Solitude

The Invention of Solitude, published in 1982, launched Auster's career as prose writer. Critically acclaimed at the time, in retrospect it has proved to be Auster's finest work. It is also his most inventive, complex and personal work; it is as rewarding as it is problematic for casual reader and serious critic alike. Its total concept for Auster's themes and content is paradox, or rather the space of paradox, that place between two ideas, two poles, Auster is preoccupied, throughout, with the duality of existence and the binary nature of reality. Auster's conclusions and revelations in this work often stem from the examination of the neutral position between two oppositional forces. Auster cultivates this space in several ways. He achieves this primarily through his cerebral perambulations which involve the consideration of one line of thought and then its counter argument, or interpretation, immediately after. This creates a paralysis in the text as series of thoughts erase each other; this, to borrow a title from Barth, is a 'literature of exhaustion" in which ideas and prose are overworked creating a literary dustbowl of meaninglessness. Auster's text avoids this barren literary ground by cultivation the seed of an idea, which can be returned to at a later date, and then planting another idea. This causes the fragmentary structure and the constant subheadings and versions included in The Invention of Solitude. I believe Auster avoids the dead-end of meaning associated with post-modern texts and opens up imaginative passageways, chinks of light between thoughts and clauses, which allow the reader and the author to enter into the text and explore its meaning.

Though "Invention" is not a saturation bomb of meaning, which leads to subjectivity in the face of narrative overload, rather, it tempts with the possibility of an absolute objective meaning to the text and a clear resolution, without providing such satisfaction.

As Dennis Barone rightly points out "'Invention' may be read as Auster's chosen and invented mythology" (p.14). Barone realises that it is profoundly difficult for Auster critics not to confuse his autobiography and his fiction, as the events of his memoirs reappear in his novels. Barone does not realise the ramifications of his claim. "Invention" is mythic in that it tells how Auster has come to this stage of being realistic, but in a paradoxically fictional way. This mythology is "chosen"; Auster selects episodes in his past through the conduit of memory, and edits them in order to emphasise the self-significant parts. It is also "invented" because Auster has created fictitious contexts and situation in which these episodes can sit.

In "Invention", Auster insists it is not the issue of what is autobiography and what is fiction (a question that has preoccupied many critics) that is important, but where the book goes after such boundaries have been destroyed. Auster asks, "How does one write of one's self?" and realises that the self must be found before it can be written about. It is only through collecting what appears to be relevant evidence, and re-reading, re-appraising and re-interpreting those clues that progress can be made. Auster begins by returning to the source of his ontological itch; the sudden realisation of mortality, that has been triggered by his father's death. Auster knows that his father's identity is essentially bound to his own, and so begins his text as his genealogical source.

The title "Portrait of an Invisible Man", is an oxymoron, and encapsulates for Auster the problems he encounters in trying to write about his father. These problems are both emotional and literary. Auster wrestles with the feelings he has for his father (a man who did not engage with him), the more practical difficulties of how to approach this subject and the implications of writing a version of his father. The paradoxical nature of the title pre-empts a later admission by Auster that the essence of this project is failure (p.20), akin to S.'s endless symphony in The Book of Memory. The title presents Auster with a blank canvas for him to fill with a study of his father, but also

suggests that the text will explain how an invisible man is created. Auster's opening quote from Heraclitus: "In searching out the truth be ready for the unexpected, for it is difficult to find and puzzling when you find it", emphasises that he is engaged on a quest to discover his father's true self and suggests, as Auster discovers, that the truth is sometimes impossible to discover, let alone understand.

The first paragraph serves as a springboard or a catalyst for the following text. In very flat prose, Auster coldly states the facts of our mortality, and the frightening arbitrariness and suddenness that death can take. Auster claims that a sudden death creates nihilism:

> But for a man to die of no apparent cause, for a man to die simply because he is a man, brings us so close to the invisible boundary between life and death that we no longer know which side we are on. Life becomes death, and it is as if this death has owned this life all along. Death without warning, Which is to say life stops. (p.5)

Auster's depressed mood belies several important themes of his text: he contradicts his claim that death owns life by resurrecting in his prose his father's life after death. Auster's awareness of death gives immediacy and a pace to his prose and emphasises the remembering and recording of his father's life in order to understand it.

Auster succinctly describes the suddenness of his father's death and sets up the premise for his ensuing work, and he realises that he is more disturbed by his father's life than his death, the fact that, "even before his death he had been absent," (p.6) and how "he kept trying to find the father who was not there, now that he is dead I still feel as though I must go on looking for him. Death has not changed anything" (p.7). Death traditionally brings resolution, but Auster finds no such satisfaction.

Auster goes on to describe his father living like Miss Havisham, in cobwebbed, Gothic solitude, symbolic of his lack of ties to his home, "a tourist of his own life" (p.9). Auster is very bitter about his father and their relationship, even suggesting that his father willed himself to die as an alternative to moving house.

Whilst trawling through his father's things Auster discovers a blank photo album with the title "This is our Life: The Austers" which serves as an ironic prompt for Auster to write this text. He also discovers photos of his father, of which he notes: "as long as I kept these pictures before my eyes, as long as I continued to study them with my complete attention it was as though he were still alive, even in death." (p.14). Photos, like writing, serve to place his father in a space beyond life and death, in a suspended animation that allows Auster to study him. Auster realises that his parents' marriage was always doomed, because the sustained intimacy of marriage forces you to reveal your true self, and his father was "a man who finds life tolerable only by staying on the surface of himself, it is natural to be satisfied with offering no more than this surface to others" (p.15). His father is therefore seen as a master of evasion, "a puppeteer working the strings of his alter-ego from a dark, solitary place behind the curtain." (p.16).

Auster describes how his father showed no interest in his birth, and how he repeated this behaviour when his grandchild Daniel was born. He documents his father's failure to engage with his son, and his smothering of Paul's "Ophelia-like" sister and a denial of her mental illness. He is the paternal paradox; ignoring one child, yet suffocating the other with attention.

Auster is consciously writing about his father in an attempt to solidify his father's ethereal or opaque presence, articulation becoming for him a catalyst for understanding. Auster peppers his

prose with outpourings of anxiety and the problems he is encountering in the writing of this account, he claims that,

> . . .the farther I go the more certain I am that the path towards my object does not exist. . . I have begun to feel that the story I am trying to tell is somehow incompatible with language, that the degree to which it resists language is an exact measure of how closely I have come to saying something important . . . (p.32)

Auster is beginning to see linguistics as a paradigm for the discovery of his father's self and later his own self. He is also beginning to sense the cancelling effect language has on his pursuit of his father, which is confirmed as Auster and we progress deeper into the text.

Auster soon realises that the father he creates in print only doubles the contradictions and frustrations he has with the man in reality: "There has been a wound, and I realise now that it is very deep. Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept this wound open." (p.32). The tension between Auster's dead father and the father of ink and paper he has created, has entered his unconscious, as shown by his dream of his fathers hair and nails continuing to grow in his grave; he is dead but his appearance suggests otherwise. Auster believes he "must penetrate this image of darkness, that I must enter the absolute darkness of earth." (p.33). Auster feels like a grave-robber and he realises that the dark earth he must dig into is his father's genealogy and history.

Auster is drawn to the visual image, particularly the photograph, because it represents a collapsing of time and space and the solidifying of memory, a closure he is striving to achieve through writing. Auster uses the cliché that "the camera never lies" and adopts it as a philosophical premise. The visual image is a very important trope for Auster; in fact "Portrait" is inspired by two photographs that he discovers at key junctures in the writing of his text which lead him on different paths to his

father. The first is featured on the cover of the British, Faber, edition of the novel and is a trick photo of his father, which Auster describes and interprets within the text as:

> a seance, and it is as if he has come there only to make himself, to bring himself back from the dead, as if by multiplying himself, he had inadvertently made himself disappear. There are five of him there, and yet the nature of the trick photography denies the possibility of eye contact among the various selves. Each one is condemned to go on staring into space, as if under the gaze of the others, but seeing nothing, never able to see anything. It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man. (p.31)

This summarises Auster's attitude to his father in the first half of "Portrait". He is bitter about his father's non-engagement, shown by his repetition of the image of his father "seeing nothing", and is frustrated with his inability to write insightfully about his father. The photo also highlights the fact that Auster increasingly feels he is writing about several different men when he writes about his father.

The discovery of a second significant photo marks an important crossroads in the text, and sets Auster off on a new tangent. This is an adulterated family portrait in which Auster's paternal grandfather is missing. Through a chance meeting and some detective work, Auster pieces together his father's dark childhood. Auster discovers that his grandfather was murdered by his wife for a series of infidelities. He discovers the disintegration of the family as his great-uncle Sam tried to exact revenge on his grandmother. Through old newspapers he pieces together the details of the court-case and his grandmother's attempted suicide. Auster reflects that, "I read these articles as history. But also as a cave drawing discovered on the inner walls of my own skull." (p.37). Auster feels he has this incident buried deep in his unconscious, and treats these articles as revelatory texts: a fusion of his intuition and rational, general history. Auster's mood is buoyed as he feels closer to his father's psyche. This history offers Auster some semblance of psychological causality for this father's alienation. His grandmother was forced to move the family constantly due to debts, so that

"There were no enduring points of reference: no home, no town, no friends that could be counted on. Only the family itself. It was almost like living in quarantine." (p.48).

Auster traces how this coloured his father's workaholic lifestyle and his meanness with money. His father only bought the cheapest goods,

> This was bargain shopping as a way of life. Implicit in this attitude was a kind of perceptual primitivism. All distinctions were eliminated, everything was reduced to its least common denominator. Meat was meat, shoes were shoes, a pen was a pen. . . On a more general level, this translated itself into a permanent state of sensory deprivation: by closing his eyes to so much, he denied himself intimate contact with the shapes and textures of the world, cut himself off from the possibility of experiencing aesthetic pleasure. (p.53)

Auster highlights his father's working conditions and business failure as possible contributing factors to his obtuse character. Auster's attitude towards his father softens as he describes how his properties were vandalised constantly: "The only way to get rid of them was to abandon them and let the cities take over." (p.59). Auster recalls visiting his father's office and being affected by the degradation his father suffered every day. Thieves had stripped the office's contents, "It was not really a work place anymore, but a room in hell, I sat down and looked out at the bank across the street. No one came out, no one went in. The only living things were two stray dogs humping on the steps." (p.59). Even after being mugged and having his hearing permanently damaged in an attack, his father, at the age of sixty-five forged on.

Quoting Proust, Auster decides that he may not have appreciated his father in his text. He thinks of his own role as a father and decides that he was possibly a disappointment as a son to his father. Auster feels that his father found a surrogate son in his oldest nephew; he admits, "he was the real son, he was the son I could never bring myself to be." (p.63). Auster realises he is contradicting his earlier condemnation of his father

I understand now that each fact is nullified by the next fact, that each thought engenders an equal and opposite thought. . .At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men, each one distinct, each one a contradiction of all the others. Fragments. Or the anecdote as a form of knowledge.(p61)

Auster transforms his memories into revelatory texts about his father. Searching for a symbolic meaning to everyday incidents, anecdotes "as a form of knowledge" to expose his father's true character. Auster's lack of solid evidence concerning his father means that anecdotes, fictionalised snap-shots, are elevated to an importance unrelated to their substance.

Despite his frustration with this investigation, and the fact that language seems to fail him in this exorcism, Auster does find the creation of a textual father cathartic,

No matter how useless these words might seem to be, they have nevertheless stood between me and a silence that continues to terrify me. When I step into this silence, it will mean that my father has vanished forever. (p.65)

Auster finally seeks reconciliation with his father, recalling their mutual triumph as Paul gets paid a large amount of money for a ghost-writing job, which is ironic because that is in one sense what he is doing in this text. Auster wishes he had seen his father's death mask, so that he could remember him instead of having to imagine his image. Auster does find comfort in the idea that his father's body will become part of the organic process, "as the coffin disintegrated, his body would help to feed the same root I had seen. More than anything that had been said or done that day, this made sense to me" (p.66). Auster dreams of raising an illegitimate child of his father's; the son caring for his father's son. This prompts Auster to conclude that "once this story has ended, it will go on telling itself, even after the words have been used up" (p.67). Auster knows that his father will still haunt him and is intrinsically bound to his search for self in The Book of Memory.

Auster can only aspire to Kiekegaard's view that "he who is willing to work gives birth to his own father." (p.68). Auster has physically "struck out", as Dylan Thomas would say, exorcised rather than chosen, the words for this portrait and he has given birth to his father, all be it in an unsatisfactory literary form. He concludes with a vision of his son asleep in his crib, which reflects his own fatherhood, and contemplates how Daniel will interpret the only grandfather he will know- his textual one. "Portrait" has come full circle, as has Auster from his nihilistic viewpoint prompted by his fathers death, to hope in the form of his son, which is reflected in the overall structure of this first section of "Invention".

"Portrait of an Invisible Man", demonstrates that Paul Auster did not receive the engagement with his father that Freud would have deemed necessary to shape a stable self-identity. "The Book of Memory" is a response to that lack. Provoked by his recent separation and the deaths of his father and grandfather, Auster finds it a psychological necessity to explore his ontology, to locate his space of self-signification and reconcile himself to it. Tension is created by the fact that Auster feels his uncertainty of self may affect his relationship with his estranged son and repeat the unstable psychological genealogy.

The tension between the two sections of the book comes from Auster's father's essential misanthropy underneath his facade, or at least his natural existential distance from humanity documented in "Portrait of an Invisible Man" and Paul Auster's re-creation of existential existence in his self-enforced solitude and alienation from society as a context to search for his father's inner life in "The Book of Memory".

Inner life is conceived of in spatial terms, as an unclaimed space in the partially mapped wilderness of memory. "He did not seem to be a man occupying space, but rather a block of impenetrable

space in the form of man."(p.7). His father's space is bound intrinsically with Paul's own and this forms the crux of the book; Paul Auster must discover his father to discover himself or vice versa. Only through an understanding or connectedness with his father can he hope to become a father to his son Daniel. Lacan's idea of the mirror text symbolises this process; in the mirror the individual is reflected and subsequently reflects. A father needs his son and a son needs his father to objectify themselves and their roles. Freud would argue that the bond between father and son must be learned by both parties after the son has turned away from the mother.

"The Book of Memory" is a self-consciously significant work, it is ambitious, experimental. It addresses the big issues: life, death, genealogy, ethnicity, reality, humanity, writing. It is a flawed text; often confusing, self-indulgent, inconclusive, anticlimactic and its prose is occasionally stylised. Yet it is Auster's most important and personal work, introducing all of the major themes and techniques he explores in his subsequent works. This eschatological memoir/philosophical detritus/novella is the source material, the fuel that has fed his literary career.

"The Book of Memory" is a very complex and deceptive text; only by examining its paradoxical structure can we prise open its themes and ideas. In fact the text's structure serves as a metaphor for its overriding theme. On the surface it appears to be the product of Auster's stream of consciousness; thoughts, words, feelings, quotes, memories provoking further cerebral connections, which both reflect and refract previous and future connections. As with James Joyce's Ulysses this chaos of traced thought processes belies a very rigid skeletal structure. Auster presents us with fourteen possible versions of "The Book of Memory"; each appears to be unique and with its own conclusions, but simultaneously contributes to Auster's fluctuating ideas and philosophy. Auster also peppers the text with other subheadings, notably references to places and dates, such as

"Vienna 1919", "Possible epigraph(s) for the Book of Memory", "Mirror text" and, most prevalently, references to the whale's belly in "The Book of Jonah", which serve to kick-start past meditations or build on from his previous musings.

It benefits the reader to view the structure of the text in terms of one of Auster's systems of understanding reality, namely linguistics. The text seems to work as one long paragraph, with the subheadings acting as a form of punctuation, separating clauses and ideas, whilst progressing the whole exercise. Again this suggests a duality within Auster; just as his imagination seems to be overflowing, his authorial presence steps in, forcing him to meditate and consider the prose he has just written. There are even instances of the author re-reading and deconstructing his prose, or a particular anecdote in order to question his motivation or find a new course for his mind to follow.

An example of this is "First commentary on the nature of chance" on page 80, in which Auster relates to us an anecdote concerning his friend M. who went to Paris and ended up staying in the same room that his father had hidden in during the war. Auster then deconstructs this tale and documents the connections it triggers,

> It begins, therefore, with this room. And then it begins with that room. And then it begins with that room. And beyond that there is the father, there is the son, and there is the war. To speak of fear, and to remember that the man who hid in that little room was a Jew. To note as well: that the city was Paris, a place A. had just returned from (December fifteenth), and that for a whole year he once lived in a Paris chambre de bonne - where he wrote his first book of poems, and where his own father, on his only trip to Europe, once came to see him to remember his father's death. And beyond that, to understand-this most important of all-that M.'s story has no meaning. (p.80-81)

In the above passage, Auster is exposing his writing technique, showing us the connections triggered, and the themes he will return to; he is trying to write his consciousness. He highlights all the elements contained in the anecdote and relates them to his central theme, his relationship with his father. Auster then goes on to ponder "chance" and his obsession with it, that is explored

further in the text. Auster also uses the space on the page to delineate connected chunks of prose and new tangents he is exploring.

One technique that Auster draws on in order to provoke conclusions or further connections in his prose, is also essential to the philosophical premise of the text. Auster is extremely aware of the gap between the signifier and the signified, realising that the signified produces cerebral connections, but also that the signifier can be used to provoke a linguistic connection, for example, through rhyme:

> The words rhyme, and even if there is no real connection between them, he cannot help thinking of them together. Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room. Breath and death. Or the fact that the letters of the word live can be rearranged to spell out the word evil. (p.159-160)

Implicit in Auster's use of this technique to create further tangents, is his adoption of linguistics as a system to explain causality and reality, a theme I will consider later.

Auster finds the writing of this search for self problematic, in that the literary and linguistic terrain has been mapped by so many other writers and thinkers. He counters this by referencing and presenting the background material for his own quest, splicing together quotes and influences, studying the methods and conclusions of the ontological pioneers (those writers and thinkers who have questioned existence and the self). He may not be able to create a new language or space of ontological exploration, but he escapes constrictions through the inventive presentation and juxtaposition of ideas; re-igniting these texts and insisting on the reader's subjective interpretation. The presentation of quotes also serves as an equalising element in the text, so that author and reader begin their investigation on a similar level, debunking the accusations of elitism that plagues texts with numerous references to other works. These literary quotes serve as approximations of his feelings and the ontological questions he is exploring. For Auster they serve as primitive maps and

charts obliquely remembered of the terrain and subterrania of self, identity and consciousness that at best memory can suggest and at worst is ungraspable.

The context for "The Book of Memory" is that two months after his father's death Auster is separated from his wife and son after his marriage collapsed in January 1979, and is living alone in 6 Varick St., New York. It is Christmas Eve 1979 as he sits down to write "The Book of Memory. Book One". His father has died that year and Auster has tried to reconcile his troubled relationship with his father by writing "Portrait of an Invisible Man". This and his separation have sensitised him to his relationship with his estranged son, Daniel. Auster is depressed and has retreated to his room in order to contemplate the events of the past year and stabilise his life. The first three pages of this section describe Auster's immediate environment and his attitude to it. These pages serve as a decompression chamber, before we plunge with Auster into the depths of himself and his memory. His room is bleak, industrial, "meant for machines, cuspidors, and sweat" (p.77).

> 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.in the void between the moment he opens the door and the moment he begins to reconquer the emptiness, his mind flails in a wordless panic. It is as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole. (p.77)

All the variables are aligned for Auster to plunge into himself: The Pompino Bros. next door sound like machines, it is the winter solstice, "a hermetic season" (p.78), he feels like a ghost, the heating is extreme, and "The world has shrunk to the size of this room for him, and for as long as it takes him to understand he must stay where he is." (p.79). His motive is in the rhetorical question he then asks in reference to Pinnocchio, "Is it true that one must dive to the depths of the sea and save ones father to become a real boy?" (p.79).

Auster is about to dive into the sea of memory to save his father's self and in doing so his own. Inner life is conceived of in spatial terms, as an unclaimed space in the partially mapped wilderness of memory. His father's space is bound intrinsically with Paul's own and this forms the crux of the book; Paul Auster must discover his father to discover himself or vice versa. Only through an understanding or connectedness with his father, can he hope to become a father to his son Daniel. On page 81 Auster tells us he has transcribed his stream of consciousness for three or four hours and finds one paragraph of interest:

> When the father dies, he writes, the son becomes his own father and his own son. He looks at his son and sees himself in the face of the boy. He imagines what the boy sees when he looks at him and finds himself becoming his own father. Inexplicably, he is moved by this. It is not just the sight of the boy that moves him, nor even the thought of standing inside his father, but what he sees in the boy of his own vanished past. It is a nostalgia for his own life that he feels perhaps, a memory of his own boyhood as a son to his father. (p.81)

Auster has mixed emotions when reading this passage, but implicit in it, is the idea that self discovery can reconcile his relationship with his father and his son and that it is in his childhood that he will find the answer to his ontological quest. The feelings this passage generates for Auster puts him in a very important position. He feels he is "going both forward and backward, into the future and into the past . . . his life no longer dwells in the present." (p.82). This neutrality puts Auster's consciousness in a place or space, of objectivity, out of time which allows him the freedom to explore memory - the terrain for his quest. This passage establishes a theme of generational interpenetration, adult as child, writer as child and the idea of the boundaries of time and space imploding into meaninglessness; themes that Auster consistently returns to in this text, so that even though the text was written between 1980 and 1981 and encompasses incidents from the whole of Auster's life, it is merely transcribing a few moments in a room in Varick Street. Potentially, through an examination of his own memory in this room, Auster can examine his whole life experience.

Throughout "The Book of Memory", Auster is preoccupied with his son. He is prompted by references to sons or the word "son" to think about fathers and sons in Book Four and Five of The Book of Memory. In Book Five, Auster writes that a six year old boy in his neighbourhood has been lost, and reflects how this triggers his own feelings of loss because he can only see Daniel on weekends. Every time he sees a photograph of the missing boy "he was made to think of his own son-and in precisely these terms: lost child." (p.101).

A. began to realise that the presence of this disaster-superimposed on his own and admittedly much smaller disaster-was inescapable. Each thing that fell before his eyes seemed to be no more than an image of what was inside him. (p.102)

Again Auster is constantly thinking of his relationship with his son and the boundaries between inside feelings and outside reality are breaking down.

In the summer of 1979, Auster's maternal grandfather was beginning to die. This gives Auster pause to contemplate his father's death; the potentially fatal illness that affects his son, only serves to reinforce genealogical connections for Auster. During this period, Auster recalls the fact that his grandfather performed magic tricks at his son's party the year before. By house-sitting his grandfather's apartment he is reminded of his own childhood and reflects that there is a slight chance that his marriage will be resurrected as his wife and son move back in with him. The way Auster constructs this passage of the book suggests a strange exchange: the grandfather dies, the marriage collapses, just as his son is saved. His grandfather's death is the antithesis of his father's death and the death bed love scene between his grandfather and Shirley, is the antithesis of the tension at his son's sick bed, between Auster and his wife, that symbolises the end of their marriage. Auster seems to be suggesting that reality is a balancing act, a system of exchange.

If A. had experienced one kind of death earlier in the year, a death so sudden that even as it gave him over to death it deprived him of the knowledge of that death, now he was experiencing death of another kind, and it was this slow mortal exhaustion, this letting go of life in the heart of life, that finally taught him the thing he had known all along. (p.104)

Auster is struck by the duality of existence and mortality - death can be arbitrary and sudden and it can be expected and a gradual disintegration. Auster returns to this theme of gradual disintegration in In the Country of Last Things, where every aspect of civilisation is portrayed as decaying. The image of his shrivelling grandfather is also the inspiration for Sol Barber's death in Moon Palace. This anecdote serves to contribute to Auster's ongoing philosophy of the duality of events and existence that underpins "Invention".

After his son has recovered from his bout of pneumonia, Auster reflects that, "Merely to have contemplated the possibility of the boy's death, to have had the thought of his death thrown in his face at the doctors office, was enough for him to treat the boy's recovery as a sort of resurrection, a miracle dealt to him by the cards of chance." (p.108). For Auster, God does not exist; it has been replaced by chance or the "modern nothingness", yet he still speaks of his son's recovery in religious terms - "miracle", "resurrection". This lack of faith as a system to order events and reality troubles Auster. This, coupled with his son's recovery leads him to his next subheading, "The modern nothingness. Interlude on the force of parallel lives." (p.109). Auster describes how he began working on some final translations of Mallarme's poems to his dying son Anatole, which were later published in The Paris Review. Auster realises,

> It was a way for him to relive his own moment of panic in the doctor's office that summer: it is too much for me, I cannot face it. For it was only at that moment, he later came to realize, that he had finally grasped the full scope of his own fatherhood: the boy's life meant more to him than his own; if dying were necessary to save his son, he would be willing to die. And it was therefore only in that moment of fear that he had become, once and for all, the father of his son. (p.109-110)

Auster notes that when he showed a picture of Daniel to his friend R., R. exclaimed that Daniel had "the same radiance as Titus" (p.113) and a year later believed the photo of Anatole accompanying Austers poems in The Paris Review to be Daniel. This episode obviously reflects Daniel's brush

with death and Auster's empathy with Mallarme, but the reference to Titus also suggests Auster's interpenetration of father and son, as he previously noted in The Book of Memory. Book Four.

In Book Four, an art critic noted that in Rembrandt's painting of his son in 1658, "'The artist has painted his son with the same sense of penetration usually reserved for his own features'" and that in the last surviving canvas of Titus, "'The face seems that of a weak old man ravaged with disease. Of course, we look at it with hindsight- we know that Titus will predecease his father. . .'" (p.97). Again genealogy has been reversed; the son becomes the father.

Auster is also drawn to paintings, because they satisfy the other aspect of his hunger a desire for uncertainty of meaning. They are an interpretation of reality, but demand interpretation themselves. Paintings are used by Auster as allegorical maps that have the ability to summarise an idea or a conclusion. Auster uses, for example, Vermeer's *Woman in Blue* and Van Gogh's *The Bedroom* to synthesise his oppositional feelings about rooms. For Auster, Vermeer's painting shows "the bright light of the real world pouring through a window" and "the fullness and self-sufficiency of the present moment," (p.140) and the intrusion of outside reality interrupting solitude. His interpretation of the room in Van Gogh's painting is "as a prison, an impossible space, an image not so much of a place to live, but of the mind that has been forced to live there." (p.143). These two responses summarise Auster's whole paradoxical philosophy on rooms: they are insular, yet can contain the outside world; they are the place of a singular solitude; they contain multitudes, the present moment can contain universal time, the room is memory. Wisenburger, writing on Moon Palace claims that that particular text derives its inspiration and underpinning philosophy from Auster's response to a specific painting, namely Blakelock's "Moonlight", which shows how important paintings are to Auster.

Under the subheading "Paintings. Or the collapse of time in images". Auster compares Maurice Denis's painting of his eighteen year old daughter to her ninety year old incarnation, and experiences an important revelation:

> For that one instant, he felt he had cut through the illusion of human time and had experienced it for what it was: as no more than a blink of the eyes. He had seen an entire life standing before him, and it had been collapsed into that one instant. (p.145)

The frozen representation of a moment holds a mirror up to the past and future and allows comparison and the garnering of knowledge. This in turn, emphasises the fact that he feels that time is irrelevant, that the boundaries between past, present and future are fluid, an idea that contributes to his conclusion/resolution at the end of the text. Auster is again using "the anecdote as a form of knowledge", because a painting is like an anecdote: a subjective, imagined account of reality.

In The Book of Memory. Book Eight, Auster discusses his three year old son's new found interest in the written story as opposed to just the pictures. Collodi's Pinnochio is Paul and Daniel's shared text, a symbol of their bond when they are apart. Auster is fascinated by his own and his son's reaction to the passage when Pinnochio the son saves Gepetto, the father, from the shark. Auster reflects upon a Freudian analysis of the paternal relationship and how the shark relates to the whale in "The Book of Jonah" and how both stories reflect his attempted rescue of his own father in this book:

> The son saves the father. This must be fully imagined from the perspective of the little boy. And this, in the mind of the father who was once a little boy, a son, that is, to his own father must be fully imagined. Puer aeternus. The son saves the father. (p.134)

Auster realises that this is a reversal of the traditional roles, because it is usually the father who protects his son from harm. What Pinnochio shows is that an "incompetent marionette" can become "a figure of redemption"; this story is a metaphor of what Auster is engaged in. He realises

he was a disappointment to his father, due to his lack of financial success, but this text offers a chance for redemption; he can resurrect his father and be reconciled, just as Pinnochio rescues Gepetto. Through Collodi, Auster makes the connection between the imagination and perception of a child and that of a writer.

> Pinnochio was Collodi's surrogate, and after the puppet had been created, Collodi saw himself as Pinnocchio. The puppet had become the image of himself as a child. To dip the puppet into the inkwell, therefore, was to use his creation to write the story of himself. (p.164)

Auster has adopted Collodi's example as a way of objectifying himself, creating a surrogate-self and forcing his inner-self into the outside world. In telling a bed-time story to his son in which his son is the hero "A. realises, as he sits in his room writing The Book of Memory, he speaks to himself as another in order to tell the story of himself. He must make himself absent in order to find himself there." (p.154). This echoes his father's habit of speaking of himself in the third person and the fact that The Book of Jonah is narrated in the third person. Ironically, his father uses this as a smokescreen tactic; whilst Paul Auster is using this technique to reach for the quick of his being. Auster's adoption of a cipher is a technique borrowed from Nadezhda Mandelstam, who he quotes at the end of this book.

Auster realises that Daniel, is his "Mirror text." (p.154), is a surrogate of his childhood self, and that their relationship is a mirror of his relationship with his father, which means that if he can resolve his relationship with his son, he can reconcile his relationship with his father. He sees how his son is an instrument for his own self-definition as a father, a son and a writer. Auster corroborates this reading by quoting Freud, "'that imaginative creation, like day dreaming, is a construction of and substitute for the play of childhood.'" (p.164)

Whilst watching his son at play, Auster concludes that in his son, all of the themes and techniques he draws on in this text coalesce, The Book of Memory is for and of his son. He notices that,

> Each time the boy picks up an object, or pushes a truck across the floor, or adds another block to the tower of blocks growing before him, he speaks of what he is doing in the same way a narrator in a film would speak, or else he makes up a story to accompany the actions he has set in motion. Each movement engenders a word, or a series of words; each word triggers off another movement: a reversal, a continuation, a new set of movement and words. There is no fixed centre to any of this (a universe in which the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere) except perhaps the child's consciousness, which is itself a constantly shifting field of perceptions, memories and utterances. (p.164)

This is Paul Auster's paradigm for this text; he knows that "his son's mental perambulations while at play are an exact image of his own progress through the labyrinth of his book." (p.165). Auster is almost admitting to the reader that his text is problematic, because like his son at play and like memory, "There is no fixed centre" and we are at the whim of his stream of consciousness prose, a "shifting field of perceptions, memories and utterances". Auster sympathises with the reader, because he is a reader of this text; he recognises that it is a "labyrinth" of dead ends, circularity and non-linear progression.

Auster employs several "Mirror texts" in "The Book of Memory"; The Book of Jonah, Pinnochio and The Thousand and One Nights. Auster treats these stories as if they contain some arcane knowledge to help his search for self. He subscribes to Jungian theory that posits that civilisations throughout time have told the same basic stories, in order to explain existence. He views stories and Biblical fables as transcending their context, and emphasises the potency of their fictionality as opposed to any religious overtones. In his discussion of The Thousand and One Nights, Auster forms several important conclusions about his own project. Auster notes, how Sherhzad,

> begins her story, and what she tells is a story about story telling, a story within which are several stories, each one, in itself, about story-telling-by means of which a man is saved from death. (p.150)

This is the mirror text that Auster adopts in order to keep his father alive in "Portrait"; he tells stories about his father, but is constantly reflecting on the implications of creating a textual father. In his further commentary, Auster concludes that, "this is the function of the story: to make a man see the thing before his eyes by holding up another thing to view." (p.151), which explains Auster's incessant use of quotes and rapid changes of subject. Auster acknowledges, the listening to and telling of stories, establishes a shared sense of community,

> in solitude. One sees nothing but ones own thoughts. A story, however, in that it is not a logical argument, breaks down those walls. For it posits the existence of others and allows the listener to come into contact with them- if only in his thoughts. (p.152)

Further analysis of Sherzad's stories provokes Auster to articulate his theory of the duality of existence, a key theme in all of his work,

> For what does it mean to look at something, a real object in the real world, an animal, for example, and say that it is something other than what it is? It is to say that each thing leads a double life, at once in the world and in our minds and that to deny either one of these lives is to kill the thing in both its lives at once . . . Both are enchantments, both the real and the imaginary, and each exists by virtue of the other. (p.153)

In his text Auster wants to be the filter; he wants to occupy a neutral space of interpenetration between fiction and reality because it is there that he hopes to find answers. This potential space is manifest in numerous dichotomies that Auster discusses in this text: fiction/autobiography, inner feelings/ outside world, reality as chaos/ reality as ordered, inspiration/the recording of it, father/son, nationality/ethnicity etc. These dichotomies are never self-contained, but reflect and refract other relationships and connections. This neutral space can also be the gap between perception and the recording of it; that inspiration and the creative act, which fuels Auster's "hunger" to write. This "hunger" is two-fold, a desire for the Truth, the discovery of his self or his father's true self and a need to preserve that hunger, that potential or space for self-discovery. This

inner space, or gap between its conception and our perception and understanding of it is liberating and at the same time frustrating for Auster.

The interface of the inner and outer world, like the more oblique interface of fiction and reality, is another technique that Auster uses to reach his conclusions and probe ontological questions. A pattern is established in "Invention", and maintained through subsequent works, of the self being discovered in a dichotomy, through the process of being geographically lost or physically lost in the rhythm of motion or at the most extreme depths of solitude in which the mind screens a chaotic slide show of memory from which grainy images of self can be prised.

Rooms are very important to Auster; they are the stages or spaces of solitude. They are the containers of the inner world and solitude in its traditional sense, yet paradoxically they are containers of the outside world, in that Auster conceives of solitude as a fact of our existence - a space where "you start to feel your connection with others" (p.107 The Red Notebook). The idea of a room as a conduit of self is inspired by his friend S., who he met in Paris in 1965. In the external realities of S's small room Auster finds "the representations of one man's inner world, even to the slightest detail. S. had literally managed to surrounded himself with the things that were inside him. This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of the imagination." (p.89). Auster's tone in his description of S's room is one of ecstasy, for him the room is "a shrine"- - "there was an entire universe in that room, a miniature cosmology that contained all that is most vast most distant, most unknowable." (p.89). This is an important episode in the shaping of Auster's attitude to space, signification and selfhood.

Rooms for Auster act simultaneously as containers and interfaces for interpenetrating concepts. They signify a space in which the outer world (reality) interpenetrates with the inner world, a

definite place where time can be reduced to spatial terms by the mind's projection of memory. As a space of solitude, they simultaneously signify multitudes or the singular self, contributing to the construction of self through their alterity and otherness or their ability to contain projected memory. A room is a place of maximum slippage, where planes of thought, fiction, reality, self, other, outer and inner interpenetrate.

Auster writes of

Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits. As in the image: "a man sat alone in his room."

"The power of memory is prodigious," observed Saint Augustine. "It is a vast, immeasurable sanctuary. Who can plumb its depths? And yet it is a faculty of my soul. Although it is part of my nature, I cannot understand all that I am. This means, then, that the mind is too narrow to contain itself entirely. But where is that part of it which it does not itself contain? Is it somewhere outside itself and within it? How, then can it be part of it, if it is not contained in it?" (p.88-89)

Memory is a place in the possession of a person, but it is bigger than itself and its container; it is part of the man, but is also the space or room that contains him. Auster sympathises with Augustine's confusion about memory. Augustine recognises that it is a space, a "sanctuary" and a product of his soul, yet he cannot fully comprehend it. It is the paradoxical nature of memory that attracts Auster. He sees in it possibility, but also relishes its incomprehensible nature. Auster uses the idea of a room both as an analogy for memory, but also as a reflective container of his memory. Like memory a room can reflect its singularity, but also multiplicity. Concurrently, it can contain personal or cerebral, inside images or/and outside influences. As an American writer, Auster is typical in his desire to map, write or interpret space (and the space of memory), in a bid to control it; yet its unknowability and voidal qualities offer potential and an unattainable goal that must be preserved. This attitude is at the heart of progressivism, the doctrine that constantly brings America into being. Auster's desire for a pure space, a white space, a clean slate on which to inscribe meaning, is typically American, but he reconciles himself to the fact that space is always second

hand and celebrates the historicising and the possibility to revise space through extensive quotes and references to other texts and their reinterpretation.

Auster uses the example of Holderlin to show the "dangers lurking inside" the solitude of a room, but concludes by actually arguing the positive aspects of this hermeticism. Auster notes how Holderlin became entrenched in his madness, enclosed in the tower built for him by Zimmer. Auster though goes on to argue that this solitude had a positive effect for Holderlin:

> More than likely, it is the room that restored Holderlin to life, that gave him back whatever life it was left for him to live. As Jerome commented on the Book of Jonah, glossing the passage that tells of Jonah in the belly of the whale: "You will note that where you would think should be the end of Jonah, there was his safety." (p.100)

Auster revels in this paradoxical space, this duality that his example rooms contain, where individual consciousness is open to definition and not prescribed.

On visiting Emily Dickinson's room, Auster concludes, "For if words are a way of being in the world, he thought, then even if there were no world to enter, the world was already there, in that room, which meant it was the room that was present in the poems and not the reverse,"(p.121). Auster realises that in this post-Lacanian post-modern world, words are floating signifiers, their ambivalence reflecting and creating the incomprehensible reality of existence; the room therefore is a potential space in which the mind creates a version of reality, a locus from which to orient self-hood. Auster quotes the tour brochure:

> In this bedroom-workroom, Emily announced that the soul could be content with its own society. But she discovered that consciousness was captivity as well as liberty, so that even here she was prey to her own self-imprisonment in despair or fear. . . For the sensitive visitor, then, Emily's room acquires an atmosphere encompassing the poet's several moods of superiority, anxiety, anguish, resignation or ecstasy. Perhaps more than any other concrete place in American literature, it symbolizes a native tradition, epitomised by Emily, of an assiduous study of the inner life. (p.123)

Auster finds solace in the duality. Dickinson is also an inspiration for Auster, because she felt suffocated by the stereotypical roles women were proscribed by the patriachal society she lived in and retreated to discover her own self, just as Auster has retreated from a world he finds alienating to pursue "an assiduous study of the inner life."

Rooms provide "captivity as well as liberty" in their negation of an absolute utility of space and gap for dissent, space then becomes a state of mind. Steven Alford notes that,

> Henri Lefebvre indicates that our contact with space as space 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 non-existent spatial ground, the consequences of our essentialist positing. (p.622 Alford)

In "Invention" Auster creates his spatial ground in rooms, as a catalyst to the discovery of his essential self, but paradoxically the rooms maintain a paucity which suggest the existence of the outside world and the transcription of self is constituted through the written and spoken word, our shared language. This paradox of space, neither outside or inside, solitary or communal, neither here nor there, accentuates the utopian element or neutrality of that space.

The Book of Jonah is the key mirror text for "The Book of Memory". Auster consistently uses Jonah's time spent in the belly of the whale as an analogy for his time spent in the solitude of his room. God's saving of Jonah from the whale, and Pinnochio's saving of Gepetto from the shark, relate to Auster's own attempt to rescue himself and his father through this book. He realises that the bellies of these creatures provide a neutral space for these protagonists, between land and sea, between life and death (they have been swallowed alive), a "Room, and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room" (p.160) for a rebirth of a discourse and a relationship with an other. Auster's preparatory description of his room and the context for his investigation of self, in the opening

pages of "The Book of Memory", uses the metaphor of drowning or sinking deeper which clearly reflects Jonah's description of plunging into the ocean, "'The waters compasse me about, even to the soul: the depth closed round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.'" (p.125). It is the whale that saves him from this suffocating death, just as it is the space of the room that saves Auster from dark depths of depression that threaten to overcome him.

Auster notes,

> when the fish then vomits Jonah onto dry land, Jonah is given back to life, as if the death he had found in the belly of the fish were a preparation for new life, a life that has passed through death, and therefore a life that can at last speak.. . . In the darkness of the solitude that is death, the tongue is finally loosened, and at the moment it begins to speak, there is an answer. And even if there is no answer, the man has begun to speak. (p.125-126)

By speaking, Jonah acknowledges his community with God and mankind. Auster too, escapes the "shipwreck of the singular" (p.126), by speaking or writing, an act that requires solitude, but simultaneously denies it. Jonah notes that when he falls into the sea, the water even encompasses his soul. It is through the soul that God's voice is heard. Jonah's silence is internal as well as external; in effect he has ceased his conversation with his inner voice, God's voice, the voice of consciousness and "who does not speak is alone; is alone, even unto death - Jonah encounters the darkness of death." (p.125). When Jonah speaks to God, he does so internally, re-establishing his relationship with God in/and his consciousness.

In his solitude Auster has re-established his relationship with his consciousness, or inner voice, and by transcribing this conversation he has found a community in his readership. Auster experiences this feeling of community through solitude, when he is translating the fragmentary poems Mallarme wrote to his dying son. In the act of translating he realises he is sharing another,s solitude, as solitude is the essential condition for writing.

"Our sense of self is formed by the pulse of consciousness within us - the endless monologue, the life-long conversation we have with ourselves. And this takes place in absolute solitude." Auster claimed in an interview with McCaffery and Gregory (The Red Notebook p.143). Auster dramatises this monologue very effectively in "The Book of Memory", by creating an ontological gap within himself and reproducing it textually through the use of a third person narrator. "What it came down to was creating a distance between myself and myself. If you're too close to the thing youre trying to write about, the perspective vanishes, and you begin to smother. I have to objectify myself in order to explore my own subjectivity . . . "(The Red Notebook p.147). Or as Auster confesses in the "mirror text" section, "He must make himself absent in order to find himself there. And so he says A., even as he means to say I." (p.154)

Auster taps into this "pulse of consciousness", but this inner narrative only serves to frustrate self-knowledge because it suggests an unconscious narrative space, which is constantly producing the self or inner voice whilst remaining wholly ungraspable. The shift in narrative perspective from the first person in "Portrait of an Invisible Man" to the third person, in "The Book of Memory", also marks a shift in the philosophical underpinnings of his text. In "Portrait of an Invisible Man", the defining philosophy of selfhood is Freudian, leading to individualism, whilst in "The Book of Memory", the underpinning philosophy is Lacanian and humanist collectivism. In "Portrait", Auster motivated by Freudian philosophy, is exploring his dysfunctional relationship with his father in order to gain insights into his psychological troubles and the end of his marriage.

Against the concept of the autonomous individual, Lacan develops an account of the human subject as dialectically constituted in an interlocutory relationship. In "The Book of Memory", Auster creates "A", a manifestation of a version of himself, which offers a locus of alterity in relation to

which subjective utterance is necessarily oriented. From this objective self-analysis, Auster hopes to gain self-knowledge. Auster believes that the true self he seeks constitutes itself through the unconscious, which is bound intrinsically to memory and language.

By textualizing this search and particularly through the use of analogous textual quotes, anecdotes, and a scramble of inter-connected memories (pp.166-67), Auster places emphasis on the reader to decide upon who is the real Paul Auster, and what his true character might be. In his "Intervention on Transference" paper in 1951, Lacan said, "What happens in an analysis is that the subject, speaking properly, constitutes itself. . . There is no subject before speech." Lacan notes that the significatory excess of language is the unconscious. The subject is an effect of language, brought into being by enunciation of the "I", the subject is also subject to the signifier; the signifier is that which represents a subject (place) for another signifier, the unconscious. So as Auster attempts to transcribe his unconscious, the reader attempts to locate Auster's true self through his signifying language- his text. We try to discover the "full significance of meaning which far surpasses the signs"- Lacan (Dean p.20). Outside of these two planes of self-discovery is the omnipotent author, Auster, who is paradoxically implicit in and separated from each of these discoveries of self.

The character Peter Stillman Snr from "City of Glass" in The New York Trilogy, craves an essentialism of language, the autonomy of object and subject and the absolutism of God. For Lacan and Auster language signifies self, precisely because of its ambivalence, precisely because of its fall, because of the gap between signifier and signified; it is a potential space for individuality, open to diversity of interpretation, a dichotomy that allows the unconscious or other oppositional forces to communicate. Auster feels that there needs to be a space, an arena for the reconstitution of self and identity to occur.

The solitude needed for a reconstituting of self and a loss of consciousness is not exclusively found in enclosed space. All of Auster's protagonists experience a feeling of ecstasy or utopia, when they are lost in pedestrian space. In "Invention" Auster himself experiences a transcendental calm in the labyrinthine urban sprawl of Amsterdam.

It occurred to him that perhaps he was wandering in the circles of hell, that the city had been designed as a model of the underworld, based on some classical representation of the place. Then he remembered that various diagrams of hell had been used as memory systems by some of the sixteenth century writers on the subject. (Cosmas Rosellius, for example, in his Thesaurus Artificiosae Memoriae, Venice, 1579). And if Amsterdam was hell and if hell was memory, then he realised that perhaps there was some purpose to his being lost. Cut off from everything that was familiar to him, unable to discover even a single point of reference, he saw that his steps, by taking him nowhere, were taking him nowhere but into himself. He was wandering inside himself, and he was lost. Far from troubling him, this state of being lost became a source of happiness, of exhilaration. He breathed it in to his very bones. As if on the brink of some previously hidden knowledge, he breathed it into his very bones and said to himself, almost triumphantly: I am Lost. (Pp.86-87)

This passage is a perfect example of Auster making connections. He is following linear thought patterns. His endless wanderings remind him of a notion of hell, then he remembers that diagrams of hell had been used as memory systems and he forms the equation Amsterdam is memory and I am lost in it. Auster is geographically lost, but also ontologically lost, in that his hunger for self-signification is erased. Briefly he escapes the question inherent in the human condition: Who am I? Diagrams of hell are maps of a mythic space, versions of that place, just as they are themselves used to map another inconceivable space - memory. Lost in Amsterdam Auster is lost from consciousness and enters the utopian realm of nothingness.

Quinn in "City of Glass", also experiences a feeling of ecstasy in the wilderness of New York City or New Amsterdam, an Emersonian transcendence,

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. . . By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal and it not longer mattered where he was. On his bravest walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. (p.4)

This feeling is salutary for Quinn because his identity - like Auster's in "Invention"- is multiple; he is Quinn, himself, William Wilson, the author and Max Work his protagonist, whose detective mindset he adopts and later Paul Auster, the detective. Paul Auster's selves in "Invention" are the autobiographical Paul Auster, his "author self, that mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of book." (The Red Notebook p.137), and "A." his protagonist. Through the intersecting space between these identities, Auster's self is signified and erased concurrently, so that the reader's attempt to grasp a definitive identity for Paul Auster is thwarted.

Wandering through pedestrian space is not merely a means of self- revelation but also a paradigm for cerebral perambulations.

> But just as one step will inevitably lead to the next step, so it is that one thought inevitably follows from the previous thought, . . .if we were to try to make an image of this process in our minds, a net-work of paths begins to be drawn, as in the image of the human bloodstream (heart, arteries, veins, capillaries), or as in the image of a map (of city streets, for example, preferably a large city, or even 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 through the city is thinking, and the thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey, and this 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 dont know where it is. (p.122)

In this passage Auster is simultaneously demonstrating the process he is describing, exploring the paths his mind is taking; walking as thinking, body as a diagram for the mind, city as paradigm for the mind, roads (city and country). If we examine this passage, we immediately notice that this is one long sentence, with commas marking out his progressive thought processes. His syntax moves at breakneck speed, aping his train of thought. This passage relates directly to an earlier section, in which Auster conceives of memory in exactly the same terms,

> Memory as a place. . .The body inside the mind, as if we were moving around in there, going from one place to the next, and the sound of our footsteps as we walk, moving from one place to the next.

"One must consequently employ a large number of places," writes Cicero, "which must be well lighted, clearly set out in order, spaced out at moderate intervals; and images which are active, sharply defined, unusual, and which have the power of speedily encountering and penetrating the psyche. . . For the places are very much like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script, and the speaking like the reading." (p.82)

In Cicero's conception of memory, images are always wedded to space, which explains why Auster recalls a variety of locations (rooms, cities etc). Cicero's metaphor for memory, as a written scroll is highly significant for Auster. Auster realises that if "the speaking" is "like the reading.", then it is essential that he transcribes his memories in order to gain understanding from them. Auster is using writing as catharsis. This implicates the reader in the formation of Auster's selfhood, as we read and try and understand his books of memory. This also explains why he deconstructs so many of his prose sections.

The eschatological content of "Invention" belies a very definite philosophical progression. Gradual realisations, uncertain conclusions and epiphanic experiences, lead to a refinement of the author's state of "exhilaration. . . as if on the brink of some previously hidden knowledge". These initial realisations came from a probing of memory, that is conceived with the same delicate preparation, exaction and phraseology of an archaeological dig. "These tiniest of images: incorrigible, lodged in the mud of memory, neither burned nor wholly retrievable. And yet each one, in itself, a fleeting resurrection, a moment otherwise lost." (p.142). Auster's metaphor is an exact inversion of Seamus Heaney's in his "bog poems"; Heaney finds in the bogs of Jutland and the West of Ireland a metaphor for a personal, then a political and ultimately a universal consciousness. Memory for Auster is a ground rich with significant finds for the consciousness; the deeper he digs the more universal its significance. Initially he finds personal images of his father, a little deeper he finds racial memory - images of Anne Frank and the letters of Holocaust victims, and the biography of Daniel Auster, his son's namesake. On a deeper sedimentary level he finds a

chaos of images and texts - Van Gogh's paintings, juvenile poems, and a personal anthology of texts that have influenced him. Through deconstruction he deliberately plots his digs, and as Heaney does in his poem "Digging"; Auster reconciles the physicality and intensity of his father's work ethic with his approach to writing. Auster, like Heaney, is searching for a solution to present troubles in the past. Both are questioning the boundaries of racial and national make-up and allegiances.

Auster, by his own admission, grew up an all American boy, but he is haunted by his Jewish past and European thought and culture. He has seemingly found a fusion between his ethnicity and his nationality, summarised in an anecdote,

> In his Jewish childhood, A. can remember confusing the last words of the Passover Seder, Next year in Jerusalem, with the ever-hopeful refrain of disappointed fandom, Wait till next year, as if the one were a commentary on the other: to win the pennant was to enter the promised land. Baseball had somehow become entangled in his mind with the religious experience. (p.117)

"The Book of Memory"'s conception is a fusion of Jewish and American influences, Auster is prompted to begin "The Book of Memory" after a visit to Anne Frank's room in Amsterdam, and his quotations from the letters of holocaust victims and survivors, reiterate the essential need to remember for post-war Jews, that has influenced succeeding generations. Fittingly, it is America's national sport that provides him with an analogy for memory and an inspiration for several of his books, including Mr. Vertigo, and Squeeze Play , "he began to see that the power of baseball was for him the power of memory. Memory in both senses of the word: as a catalyst for remembering his own life and as an artificial structure for ordering the historical past." (p.116). Baseball provides him with a feeling of security during his grandfather's slow death, "As opposed to just about everything else in American life during this century baseball has remained constant." (p.116). Baseball symbolises a perfect memory system in which no fact or event goes unrecorded- "Professional baseball's past is intact. There is a record of every game played, a statistic for every

hit, error, and base on balls. One can measure performances against each other, compare players and teams, speak of the dead as if they were still alive." (p.116). It seems perfect to Auster because it denies age and collapses time, because a child can imagine himself playing like his adult hero and a professional is being paid to remain a child and live out their childhood dreams.

Auster sees the self-analysis that constitutes "The Book of Memory" as stemming from his American nationality as much as his Jewishness and its emphasis on guilt (a product of self-analysis). He agrees with the tour brochure of Emily Dickinson's house, when it comments that her room "symbolizes a native tradition, epitomised by Emily, of an assiduous study of the inner life." (p.123). In America, there seems to be a tension between this self-identity and America's myth of collectivist democracy, between unity and diversity. The myth of the individual is essential to America. He is a product or symbol of the general richness of the country, yet he must also have a distinguishing trait that separates him from other Americans. The component parts the country provides restrict the creation of self in America. It usually involves a public display of self-analysis, an exorcism to be validated by the people at large. The individual consciousness cannot escape the influence of the collective historical consciousness and general history.

Auster recognises this in Moon Palace, in which Fogg's turbulent personal history mirrors the tumultuous general history of the sixties. In The Invention of Solitude Auster places himself in a European existentialist tradition of self-analysis in a solitary context and firmly in the American tradition of a public display, to be consumed and representative of a national malaise. This dichotomy of the self-conscious and the national conscious, the inward and the outward merges into one in the realm of memory. Auster believes that

> Memory, therefore, not simply as the resurrection of ones private past but an immersion in the past of others, which is to say: history -which one both participates in and is a witness to, is a part of and apart from. (p.139)

Through his archaeology of memory, place, space, self and time interpenetrate, "Places and images as catalysts for remembering other places and images; things, events, the buried artifacts of ones own life . . . And therefore to conclude that everything, in some sense, is connected to everything else." (p.139). In "The Book of Memory", Auster finally finds a belief system that gives meaning to his search for his self and his father. Though it is far from satisfactory it does accommodate his paradoxical hunger. Auster trusts language as a concept and a system, which he believes is his only foil in the quest for self-signification.

Using linguistics as a paradigm, Auster tries to navigate the tumultuous seas of memory. Auster conceives of a connection between the outside world and memory; this bridge is signified by the coincidences that are so prominent in all his works.

> As in the meanings of words, things take on meaning only in relationship to each other. Two faces are alike, writes Pascal. Neither is funny by itself, but side by side their likeness makes us laugh. The faces rhyme for the eye, just as two words can rhyme as well. A young man rents a room in Paris and then discovers that his father had hid out in this same room during the war. If these two events were to be considered separately, there would be little to say about either one of them. The rhyme they create when looked at together alters the reality of each . . . so it is that two (or more) rhyming events set up a connection in the world, adding one more synapse to be routed through the vast plenum of experience. (p.161)

"Invention" (and the anecdotes in The Red Notebook), includes numerous coincidences, chance meetings, rhymes of reality and Auster frequently creates his own in his fictional prose. Auster argues that we experience epiphanies when we see rhymes in reality, but also that rhyme is merely part of how reality is structured. He believes all aspects of linguistics have their corollary in reality.

> It is only at those rare moments when one happens to glimpse a rhyme in the world that the mind can leap out of itself and serve as a bridge for things across time and space, across seeing and memory. But there is more to it than just rhyme. The grammar of existence includes all the figures of language itself: simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche- so that each thing encountered in the world is actually many things which in turn give way to many other things, depending on what these things are next to, contained by, or removed from. Often too, the second term of a

comparison is missing. It can be forgotten, or buried in the unconscious, or somehow made unavailable. (pp161-162)

Lacan famously concluded that "the unconscious is constructed like a language", Auster sees language as an allegory of the discourse he perceives between reality and memory or the unconscious. This contributes to his revelations of a universal consciousness; Auster claims that,

for some time now none of the terms has been missing for him. Wherever his eye or mind seems to stop, he discovers another connection, another bridge to carry him to yet another place, and even in the solitude of his room, the world has been rushing in on him at a dizzying speed, as if it were all suddenly converging in him and happening to him at once. Coincidence: to fall on with; to occupy the same place in time or space. The mind, therefore as that which contains more than itself. As in phrase from Augustine: But where is the part of it, which it does not itself contain? (p.162)

He sees the self as found in the essential state of solitude; the shell for the inner self, leading to individual tunnels, all of which feed into a cavern of universal consciousness. Auster arrives at this conclusion through a series of epiphanies and gradual realisations. His first Whitmanesque vision of a universal consciousness is stumbled upon in a state of depression and degradation, following his grandfather's funeral. Whilst ejaculating into a prostitute's mouth,

he had this vision, at just that second, which has continued to radiate inside him:
that each ejaculation contains several billion sperm cells- or roughly the same number as there are people into the world - which means that, in himself each man holds the potential of an entire world. . .Each man, therefore, is the entire world, bearing within his genes a memory of all mankind. Or as Leibniz put it: Every living substance is a perpetual living mirror of the universe. For the fact is, we are of the same stuff that came into being with the first explosion of the first spark in the infinite emptiness of space (p.114)

Auster's vision of universal connectedness, of each man as a synthesis of the memories of mankind, is clumsily revealed here and offers no new revelation to the reader. "Paul Auster, a kosmos, of Brooklyn the son," one may chide, and accuse Auster of being the false prophet his sub-title suggests. However, the profound joy Auster exudes in these "revelations" betrays his hunger for a true connectedness with only two members of mankind, namely his father and potentially estranged son. Great sympathy and pathos are generated by Auster in this book, when one realizes that

Auster's creation of this naive utopian dream of a universal connectedness is an attempt to connect with his withdrawn father. He is creating a universal connectedness to compensate for his disrupted spiritual and familial genealogy. The grandeur of this conscious self-delusion, only demonstrates the depth of Auster's loss.

Auster's conclusions are dismissible as a desperate act of reconciliation; what captivates the reader are the psychological and literary techniques and processes he employs to justify these revelations. It is arguable that The Invention of Solitude traces a progression of philosophical assumptions, which underpin the text. Auster has drawn on Freud and Lacan and now reconciles himself with Kant and Hertz in his attempt to constitute his self. Tim Dean, analysing Kant, points out that,

> The subjective faculty which provides for our judging an object in nature as sublime is the faculty which means sublimity is subjective, since our ability to think the sublime eventuates a judgement on the part of the reflective faculty whose conclusion is that we are sublime. The sublime is therefore a means by which subjecthood is reinforced, it can thus make subjects in a way that objects cannot and is therefore crucially a non-social means of effecting subjecthood. Hence the drive toward solitude- the absence of other persons or other consciousness- as a precondition for sublime experience. (p.160)

Auster's subjecthood is shaped in this way by his epiphanies in the wonder of nature, which Kant refers to as the dynamical sublime. The mathematical sublime also contributes to the formation of Auster's subjecthood, a process to which Neil Hertz has added clarity. Hertz focuses on the moment prior to sublime elevation when the mind's confusion at this point of blockage depends upon the plurality of the object; its seeming inability to be synthesised, which confirms subjective unity (the one unable to grasp the many precisely because of its unity). By identifying with the agent of blockage itself, a totalised subjective unity is registered whose consequence is sublime exaltation, the leap of overcoming the inability to think something, which cannot be measured. Dean notes that, "It should thus be apparent that perhaps the paramount significance of the sublime is its provision for the making of selfhood." (p.162)

Auster's attempt to conceive of memory follows this pattern. He finally identifies with the blockage itself, shown by his conception of it as being structured like a language, with all its ensuing complexities of form and construction; again he is reinforcing his subjecthood and simultaneously his self. As Steven Alford concludes, "Utopia is not so much projected by an intentional consciousness as it is that space of signification from which the possibility of intentionality arises." (p.630). What Fogg and Auster realise is that this self-signifying utopian space is not located in an unmapped Frontier territory or a wilderness; instead it is in that neutral space between here and there, home and away, Freud's *heimlich* (familiar) and *unheimlich* (uncanny) and Auster's philosophical mantra for life "Meaning. No meaning."

Auster uses Freud to explain his feeling of being haunted by meaning. Auster notes that, "Freud argues that each stage of our development co-exists with all the others. Even as adults, we have buried within us a memory of the way we perceived the world as children." (p.148). Auster concludes that,

> All the coincidences that seem to have been multiplying around him, then, are somehow connected with a memory of his childhood, as if by beginning to remember his childhood, the world were returning to a prior state of its being. This feels right to him. He is remembering his childhood, and it has appeared to him in the present in the form of these experiences, He is remembering his childhood and it is writing itself out for him in the present. . . There is no way to be sure of any of this. (p.149)

Auster believes he has discovered the process at work within him, that creates his feeling that there is causality to the coincidences in existence and it is "a memory of another, much earlier home of the mind." (p.149), his mind when he was a child. Auster realises this is the "afterglow" of childhood memory, and that his own son will experience this phenomenon, and will forget the specific details of first three years of his life. In "The Book of Memory. Book Thirteen." Auster produces a montage of childhood memories in a large block of stream of consciousness prose, in a

desperate attempt to find an image in memory that will provide the key to discovering his self and solutions to the problems he has encountered in this book and the meaning of life.

Auster dreams of his own death, which is wracked with Holocaust imagery. He gives The Book of Memory to his wife to finish and then pass on to his son. "Then he woke up for the last time." (pp.170-171). Auster's "death" and his use of The Book of Memory as his eulogy, suggests that he has escaped his ontological crisis and is reborn. It also finally confirms his Jewish identity which has been largely absent in the rest of the text.

Auster concludes this book with an extract from an unsent letter by Nadezhda Mandelstam to her missing husband Osip during the Holocaust. Apart from being a very moving, personal letter, it serves as a letter from the dead Auster to his son. It also functions as a letter to his former self - A. and his childhood self, and of course his father, "Where are you?" (p.172), he asks. Auster then writes the following passage;

> The sky is blue and black and gray and yellow. The sky is not there, and it is red. All this was yesterday. All this was a hundred years ago. The sky is white. It smells of the earth, and it is not there. The sky is white like the earth, and it smells of yesterday. All this was tomorrow. All this was a hundred years from now. The sky is lemon and rose and lavender. The sky is the earth. The sky is white and it is not there. (p.172)

This appears to be meaningless prose, but has a distinct purpose. Auster has focused on one of the first facts that a child is told, and gradually subverts in its first naive drawings - "The sky is blue?". In this passage Auster concludes as he has throughout this text that time is irrelevant, and that the world is open to construction by the imagination. He is asserting his authorial imperative to construct reality. He is demonstrating how language creates worlds and how reality is multifarious. It is an outburst of pure fiction, but through it we glimpse reality, it has meaning and it is meaningless and it is the job of the reader to decipher it. This could also be an expression of his

frustration with this text; that reality and fiction always overlap and that the world has meaning and no meaning. Auster then writes, "It was. It will never be again," the phrase with which he began The Book of Memory, which reflected his pessimistic mood and seemed to suggest that life consists of constant attritional loss. Now he adds the word "Remember", suggesting that there is a place where we can reconcile ourselves with our past and probe ontological questions, and that place is memory. This advice is directed at his son, the reader, and interestingly himself.

Even though his quest to discover his father in the sublime vastness of memory has been a failure, by associating with the blockage to his conception, Auster's self has been reborn. Auster has never again engaged with him self on such a deep level in his writing. He has become the controlling author of "The sky is blue" passage and as in that passage has installed an ambiguity in his writing, so that his themes and explorations lose their essentialism.

Chapter 2. "Who-Dun-it?":- Detective Fiction and The Mystery of Authorship in Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy

Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter 'i', standing for 'investigator', it was 'I' in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. (p.8-9)

This passage outlining a pun from "City of Glass" succinctly encapsulates all of Auster's thematic concerns in The New York Trilogy: Detective Fiction, ontological exploration, writing and authorship. This chapter explores these themes in order to expose the techniques Auster uses to convey them. The New York Trilogy has drawn more critical attention than any of his other works and it is easy to see why, with its foregrounding of critical theories of identity and space, its intertextuality, its use of multiple narration perspectives, its discourses on writing and the nature of authorship and its dichotomy of subscription to and negation of, the two leading strains of Detective Fiction- classic and hard-boiled.

Whilst Detective genre purists like Julian Symons, have dismissed The New York Trilogy and added it to the pile of blasphemous texts that includes Eco's The Name of the Rose and O'Brien' s The Third Policemen and other writers whom he refers to as "The Jokers", most other literary critics have hailed "the Trilogy" as Auster's greatest work, not least, one suspects, because of the critical mileage it gives them. For all its adventure and technical complexity and literary cleverness, when placed in the context of Auster's bibliography, it disappoints. The exorcism of his previous work The Invention of Solitude, has been replaced with exercise, the search for the self in the unconscious of "Invention" becomes self-conscious writing in "the Trilogy"; emotional work has become

economic work, an argument given more substance by the fleecing exercise that is Hand to Mouth, which insults the Austerphile with the inclusion of a card-game!

The warmth, the emotional commitment of "Invention" that author and reader share has been lost and replaced by the pure author of "The sky is blue". Perhaps this is being too harsh on Auster and it is merely unfortunate that of all the ideas and themes that Auster germinates in "Invention" and develops in his subsequent works, The New York Trilogy draws on his technical and structural inventiveness.

Marc Chenetier insists, "the Trilogy is not a detective story" (p.34 Barone) and that "New York and the detective novel are to this book, if you will, what the human face was to Arcimboldo: a pretext whereon to play with the carrots and cabbages." (p.35). This is true to a certain extent. However, to ignore the detective elements in the book is to clot a rich critical vein, because Auster uses the literary baggage and conventions that come with such a genre, but also the critical baggage of such an established genre. At the height of his pique with The New York Trilogy Symons explains,

"See how easy this stuff is to write, Auster says implicitly, and how silly it is. I could do it standing on my head, better still I'll stand the private eye story on its head to show its pointlessness." (p.327 Symons)

Symons correctly points out that Auster is writing anti-detective fiction with certain malice, but surely Auster is the dirty albatross flying away from his financially motivated genre-hugging Squeeze Play. Symons' stern view blinkers him to the fact that Auster is also subscribing to as many conventions of the genre, that he mocks, reasserting and reinvigorating those formulas as relevant to the quest for self and meaning in an

accelerated culture. As Linda Hutcheon points out, to parody is not to destroy the past; it is both to enshrine the past and question it (p.124). Auster is drawn to the detective genre for several reasons, which Quinn articulates,

> In a good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so - which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. (p.80)

Auster relishes the fact that everything can have meaning or have no meaning whatsoever; he revels in the ambiguity and freedom that implies. The community that is formed between writer, reader and detective also attracts Auster. Quinn again remarks,

> In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. The reader sees the world through the detective's eye, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings, to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. (p.8)

If the detective employs the first person narrative, which is common to the genre, then he is often relaying the case in retrospect so that he and the author share the same privileged knowledge; similarly the detective and the reader share a close relationship, particularly if the novel is written in the third person because the reader discovers clues simultaneously with the detective. Auster also loves the sensitising process that occurs when reading detective fiction, the fact that the semiotic regime of the text can affect our perception of reality.

As Ralph Willet concludes, "In the hard-boiled genre deconstructive procedures are especially relevant since the detective's quest is by analogy the attempted establishment of meaning and the re-ordering of the "real" world." (p.54). Quinn's attempt to deconstruct the reality of the Stillman case is frustrated by the fact that reality won't

succumb to his interpretation, and Auster's deconstruction of the genre is realistic in that life and the world are a paradox of "No meaning/meaning", his mantra from "Invention".

Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", published in 1841 is acknowledged as the first detective story and establishes the conventions of the "classical detective": the detective is the only one capable of success, is a brilliant individualist not dulled by society's conventions or constraints, is an amateur seeking intellectual stimulation or restoration of the moral order, is eccentric idiosyncratic, sheltered from reality; case and cast are isolated to reinforce construct.

Auster is attracted to the bookishness of Poe's protagonist Dupin, his romantic background and particularly his corporeal and essential existence, reflected in Max Klein and Quinn. Auster demonstrates his awareness of Poe in "City of Glass" by having Quinn use the pseudonym William Wilson, a name that is the title of a short story about doubles by Poe, a theme that Auster updates via Lacan in "Ghosts".

The "Hard-boiled" conventions that Auster draws on more frequently were established in the Black Mask stories of the 1920's and, most notably, in the novels by Hammet and Chandler. The European mysticism and intellectualism of Dupin and Holmes, is replaced by pragmatism. Cases are no longer closed puzzles solved by an amateur's deduction, but are city-wide, solved by a professional through documented hard-work: - phoning, recording, tailing etc. The hard-boiled detective is a populist, an uncommon common man.

Squeeze Play is the essential starting point for any discussion of detective fiction and its import to The New York Trilogy. It draws on all the conventions of the hard-boiled genre and some of the conventions of the classical detective and offers the perfect contrast to "City of Glass" and "Ghosts". Masculinity and self-identity in the hard-boiled genre are rigidly defined and protected by the protagonist and Auster's hero of Squeeze Play , knowingly named Max Klein or masculine, is typical. His first person narration of the case establishes his narrative authority; we are plugged into his consciousness and also his autonomy as we share his subjective view of reality. His conduit for self is language; he uses the wisecrack as a weapon of assertion and autonomy, suggesting potency and control of a given situation defiantly refusing to skirt around the issues; his colloquial street talk demonstrates that he possesses a privileged voice that can speak the language of the mainstream and the underworld. Klein adheres to all of these staples of self-expression. He refuses to be intimidated by Chapman's heavies, meeting their violence with acerbic wit; he fails to be intimidated by power-wielding industrialist Charles Light, or intellectually browbeaten by Dr. Briles. One of the most striking examples of Klein's mastery of language and assertion of power is when confronted by the redneck Captain Gorinski, who calls him "'A Jew-boy shamus from the big city" (p.94). Klein counters him, by replying-

'That's right I come from a long line of rabbis. All those people you see walking around in the funny hats and long beards are my cousins. At night I sprout horns and a tail, and every spring at Passover I kill a Christian baby to use its blood in a secret ritual. I'm a Wall Street millionaire and a Communist, and I was there when they nailed Christ to the cross.' (p.94)

By exhausting these racial myths Klein has stripped Gorinski of his mode of dialogue and the potency of his prevarication, belittled his unimaginative racism and asserted his

control on the exchange. Klein has exclaimed earlier that he is the "last of the hard-boiled Yids" (p.31), and Auster is obviously mirroring the Blaxploitation era practice of revaluing racist slurs.

If style and language are directly related to masculine definition, it is significant that Quinn in "City of Glass" is insecure in his use of language, because he is a character in flux, without a stable identity. He vicariously controls language through his literary creation, Max Work, but when he himself attempts to adopt Work's dialogue and masculine epistemology he waivers. "City of Glass" charts Quinn's attempt to use hard-boiled language in a different context - his textual reality and ultimately he realises that this language is irrelevant in this world. The verbal sparring inherent in the genre of detective fiction, cannot be provoked by Quinn; his conversations with Stillman Snr. never become competitive, because Stillman believes in the unreality of current linguistic epistemology, that the gap between signifier and signified has become too great. Therefore it is easy for him to accept that Quinn can claim to be his son and Paul Auster simultaneously.

In the hard-boiled genre, effeminacy, of which linguistic ambiguity is an indication, is to be avoided at all costs; criminals such as Joel Cairo in Hammett's The Maltese Falcon have to be defeated. Women also represent the dangers involved in acculturation, the greatest being "settling down". Femme fatales are another problem for the hero, because they challenge his sexual potency and superiority. Characters such as Sam Spade are an attempt to deny that masculinity is problematic. Spade has mastered his emotions. He

has a powerful sense of self, and doesn't fall for the same contaminations that his partner Archer does. Auster borrows the ending of The Maltese Falcon for his own Squeeze Play as Klein exposes Judy Chapman, his lover and George's widow as the master-plotter. He rejects her protestations of love and vision of marital bliss, realising that, "This was the face of death that had been stalking me from the very start, and it was beautiful beyond all imagining." (p.200). Just as Spade turns in Bridget O'Shonnessy because his code of honour and business sense tells him he cannot let Archer's killer escape justice, Klein refuses to "play the sap" for Judy Chapman or accept his fee and by doing so asserts his masculine authority and moral purity over the poisonous femme fatale.

Quinn's dealings with the femme fatale Virginia Stillman prove more problematic. Work's hard talking dialogue that Quinn adopts gives him confidence,

> Something told him that he had captured the right tone and a sudden sense of pleasure surged through him, as though he had just managed to cross some internal border within himself. (p.24)

Ultimately though, Quinn cannot adopt Work's epistemology for all his mimicry, as shown when Virginia Stillman takes control of the situation.

> Virginia Stillman suddenly threw her arms around Quinn, sought out his lips with her own, and kissed him passionately, driving her tongue deep inside his mouth. Quinn was so taken off guard that he almost failed to enjoy it. (p.32)

Virginia has usurped Quinn's authority, asserting her aggressive sexual potency over his and Quinn subsequently fails to conquer her as the case and characters gradually dissipate. Auster makes Virginia consciously stylised and hints at her fictionality, as the narrator notes that, she is "rehearsing in her mind the things she was about to say." (p.24-

25) and is "searching for an attitude of unshakeable honesty" (p.25). She is obviously an actress, playing the role as femme fatale, a mere prop to test Quinn's masculine self-identity and he is found wanting. In "Ghosts", Blue sacrifices his relationship with "the future Mrs. Blue" in order to pursue his case, as his animus Black does. Quinn's wife and son are both dead in "City of Glass", and Klein in Squeeze Play, has had his marriage collapse due to his dedication to his job. It is significant that in "The Locked Room" , as soon as the narrator begins searching for Fanshawe he leaves Sophie and his family and reverts to a more cynical, misogynist attitude to women during his time in Paris. Marriage and mystery remain in The New York Trilogy as in the detective genre as a whole, incompatible bedmates.

Fragmentation of the investigative narrative is often found in conjunction with a splitting of the hero. This means he is not longer the uniform hub of the narrative process and that suggests masculine frailty. Masculine subjectivity is questioned, as is the ability of the hero to regenerate the social order. Crime therefore becomes associated with a destabilisation of the male identity and patriarchy. In traditional detective fiction the first person narration establishes a stabilising position within the text. In "City of Glass", the narrator is extremely unreliable; he remains outside of the text until near the very end and even his self-revelation adds no security or linearity to the text. As an enigma his revelation creates more uncertainties for the reader.

Richard Dyer claims that film noir and hard-boiled fiction tend to be "characterised by a certain anxiety over existence and definition of masculinity and normality." (p.85

Krutnik). It is through the successful solving of the crime-related quest that the detective consolidates his masculine identity. Krutnik divides these quests into three different types: the investigative thriller, where the detective validates his own identity by exposing a conspiracy; the suspense thriller- in which the hero is in a position of inferiority regarding the criminals, police and conspirators and seeks to restore himself to a position of security by eradicating the enigma; and finally the crime-adventure thriller- when the hero becomes engaged in a transgression of the law and has to face the consequences of stepping out of line. Quinn, in "City of Glass" fits into all of these categories. He seeks to restore his true self by solving the case, he remains in a state of inferiority because the enigma he is attempting to fathom is Auster and the conspiracy of text, and he transgresses the law of the detective genre by subsuming his self to those of the characters of Work and the detective Auster, he faces the consequences of denying his true identity by being gradually stripped of any semblance of normal humanity in the darkest corner of the Stillmans' old apartment. The enigma remains, the case is still open, who is the being that leaves food for him? Who controls the light? Is there a pattern behind Stillman's wanderings? Is there a master-plotter controlling his "fate"?

In the classical detective genre the hero often had a sidekick who, in the case of Dupin and Holmes, would function as the recorder and narrator of the protagonist's exploits, in the hard-boiled genre, though, the detective is always alone. The hard-boiled detective complies with a rigidly self-enforced emotional isolation from anyone who might corrupt him. The alienated persona is protected by the deliberately unostentatious life-style, the neutral potentially hostile public manners and secret domestic pleasures like chess and

good coffee confirm the detective as the archetype of educated urban alien. Quinn, Blue and Klein all share a very sparse existence and this serves as a rejection of society and the artificiality of luxury possessions of the corrupt politicians and ruthless industrialists such as Charles Light in Squeeze Play As Klein remarks,

> I was a citizen of life on the ground, and in spite of the car exhaust, the overflowing garbage cans, and the smoke from greasy spoons, I was able to breathe there. To have lived in the upper reaches of the atmosphere as Light did would have meant wearing an oxygen mask, and that didn't interest me. Oxygen masks make you look like an insect. (p.161)

Light is clearly a parasite in Klein's eyes and this quote also exemplifies the social realism inherent in the genre. It is significant that when Quinn first diverts from the case in the red notebook, he describes the tramps and bums he observes during his wanderings, the irony being that he will soon become one of their number living in the alley opposite the Stillman's apartment.

Knight notes that Chandler uses physical surroundings to foreground Marlowe's feelings. At the end of "City of Glass" Auster uses the sparseness of Quinn's retreat as a symbol of his failure to locate his self. Whereas Marlowe and Klein are protagonists who protect themselves by rejecting others and their commodities, Quinn craves human contact, which is why he takes on the Stillman case, he has no friends and "no longer existed for anyone but himself" (p.4). He feels "as if he were somehow living a posthumous life." (p.5)

The idea of work and the moral quest are essential to the hard-boiled genre, whereas the classical detective solves cases through supernatural ratiocination; the hard-boiled

detective's foils are legwork and dogged determination- Max Work. Both Quinn and Blue adopt this methodology and the code of honour that dictates that they will pursue the case until it is solved, but become increasingly frustrated with their lack of results. Auster provides them with a lack of resolution, and cruelly stymies their attempts to adhere to the generic script. When Quinn wants to give a detailed description of the Stillman apartment, "he could feel himself going blank, as if his brain had suddenly shut off. He had wanted to take in the details of what he was seeing, but the task was somehow beyond him at that moment." (p.14). Auster is employing a technique that he uses extensively in his subsequent works, leaving apertures in the text so that the reader can glimpse his hands on the levers of the narrative. What is significant about "City of Glass" is that he allows the characters, particularly Quinn, to possess a niggling awareness of a presence controlling their lives, which is why the narrator's admonition of Auster at the end of the text has a doubling meaning referring as it does to the character Auster and the author. Quinn like Dupin, takes the Stillman case for intellectual stimulation, like Marlowe he seeks redemption, hoping to restore the moral and linguistic order by protecting Peter Stillman Jnr, the surrogate of his own dead son, and like Klein use the case as an escape from, "the desolation of my own thoughts." (p.196)

Part of the crime genre's lasting appeal is that it offers cogency and a resolution, however temporary or partial, to the chaotic, ambiguous nature of reality, and Auster takes great pleasure in debunking this aspect of the detective's role, Auster states,

He's the seeker after the truth, the problem-solver the one who tries to figure things out. But what if, in the course of trying to figure things out, you just unveil more mysteries? I suppose maybe that's what happens in the books. (Red Notebook p.109)

The mysteries that are unveiled for all the protagonists in The New York Trilogy are ontological.

The hero of a detective novel is always provided with a nemesis, a villain whose powers are only slightly less than the hero's own. In Squeeze Play Klein's pragmatism defeats the intellectualism of Prof. Briles, the criminal psychologist, Quinn though proves no match for Peter Stillman Snr., due to the fact that Stillman is not even engaging with Quinn. On his second meeting with Stillman Snr. Quinn introduces himself as Stillman's son to which Stillman replies, "You look just like him. Of course, Peter is blond and you are dark. Not Henry Dark, but dark of hair." (p.84) Stillman's speech is simultaneously paradoxical, unhinged, and illogical and suggests privileged knowledge. Quinn tries to provoke a reaction in the old man by making a reference to Stillman's past and his son, but Stillman seems oblivious, he appears to have no memory of their past meetings. When Stillman disappears, the narrator tells us that Quinn, "felt as though he had lost half of himself. For two weeks he had been tied by an invisible thread to the old man." (p.92). But what Quinn has lost temporarily is the possibility of self-signification- because you need an Other to act as a locus of alterity, to which self can be oriented.

In "Ghosts" Auster takes the idea of doubling and the animus as his overriding theme. "Ghosts" is the archetypal self-conscious novel. It contains nearly all of the factors that Brian Stonehill acknowledges in his seminal work, The Self-Conscious Novel. The names of the characters in "Ghosts" immediately draw attention to their fictionality, and Auster draws on the doppelganger "to render conspicuously symmetrical the actions of

characters" (p.28 Stonehill) White hires Blue to watch Black who is constantly writing away at his desk, and reading Walden. Blue soon realises that he is trapped in a paradox "The only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind, to see what he is thinking and that of course is impossible." (p.139) Again Auster is wrestling with the Lacanian paradox, that self is created in a dichotomy with the Other, but the self and the Other can never truly be known.

Blue is a character that has always existed on the surface of reality, whose inner life has been empty. Gradually his observation of Black has "thrown him back on himself, with nothing to grab hold of, nothing to distinguish one moment from the next. He has never given much thought to the world inside him, and though he always knew it was there, it has remained an unknown quantity, unexplained and therefore dark even to himself"(p.143). Blue articulates the stripping down process that pre-empts all of Auster's ontological explorations since "Invention" and whose metaphor of falling is given literal interpretation in Leviathan. For Blue, time becomes meaningless as the abyss of self is entered and ironically it is a "dark" place, as Black is the conduit. The metaphor of falling, as Knight points out is also a repeated motif in the work of Raymond Chandler, and signifies a loss of control and erectness with sexual and self-conscious connotations (p.157 Knight). I agree with Chenetier who notes that all the investigations in The New York Trilogy, "cannot possibly concern the world . . . can only refer the investigator to his own interiority, where the unconscious bubbles up." (p.37 Barone). Auster is constantly returning to the ontological quest and the essential condition of

solitude that it demands, exorcised in The Invention of Solitude, and fictionalised in the Trilogy.

Whilst pursuing the case Blue's relationships are severed: he loses contact with the future Mrs. Blue, his mentor Brown ignores his request for advice, White refuses to offer any critical comment on his reports, so that his relationship with Black becomes his sole focus. Auster draws on Lacan's theory that the self can only be discovered in relation to the Other or Freud's animus. Auster even uses the same metaphor as Lacan (the mirror) to describe this process, the narrator tells us, "in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself." (p.144) Blue's relationship with language is similarly anti-Lacanian and unambiguous; he adopts the objective philosophy of Peter Stillman Snr., and the policeman's adage -"Just the facts, Mame." as he writes his reports.

> His method is to stick to outward facts describing events as though each word tallied exactly with the thing described, and to question the matter no further. Words are transparent for him great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never seemed to be there. (p.146)

Black has made Blue aware of the gap between the signifier and the signified, "that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say." (p.147-148). Facts and words no longer add up to form a perfect case, and Blue's concern over the efficacy of language is again symptomatic of a self-conscious work.

Blue realises that Black has ignited his imagination, providing "a hole in the texture of things"(p.144), which he can fill with stories. Auster uses this image of a "hole" for imaginative freedom within representation as his philosophical premise in Moon Palace, as Fogg becomes transfixed by Blakelock's moonlight paintings and the possibility for alternative discourse and self-expression they come to represent for him and Auster. Blue's imaginative possible versions of Black/White's plot are an established Auster motif, suggesting the inexhaustible multiple narratives inherent in reality; negating a definitive text they reflect the versions of Auster's "The Book of Memory".

Blue is caught in a paradoxical relationship with Black: sometimes he feels as though he is in perfect harmony with him, so that "he need merely look into himself " in order to anticipate Black's actions, at other times he feels so cut off from Black "that he begins to lose the sense of who he is." (p.156). Blue reads Walden in the hope of gaining insight into Black, but becomes frustrated with its pace and complexity. He believes that he has not learnt anything from it, when the reality is it has changed his mindset, he has become sensitised to the natural world around him, his imagination has been stimulated and he has been prompted to take action to uncover White's plan. Blue is becoming increasingly paranoid that he is the focus of a Black/ White axis and begins developing various conspiracy theories to explain his situation.

> Blue begins to suspect that Black is no more than a ruse, another one of White's hirelings, paid by the week to sit in that room and do nothing. Perhaps all that writing is merely a sham . . . (p.170)

Gradually for a man who has always seen the world in terms of the binary Black and White, their relationship has produced a grey area for Blue, Auster's unspoken pun. He has begun to see the ambiguities inherent in reality as he quotes Thoreau, "We are not where we are, he finds, but in a false position."(p.168)

Once Blue has confirmation that Black and White are working together, Auster stages a confrontation, Blue assumes the identity of a life insurance salesman, whereas Black proceeds to articulate Blue's position as the private detective and exposes his motivation for hiring Blue, "He needs me, says Black, still looking away. He needs my eye looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive." (p.181). Black finally confesses to Blue that he needs him as his objective other. This scene of reflexivity appears more naturalistic than the reflexivity of Blue and Black throughout the rest of the text because the villain stages it in order to give insight into his motivation. It is only when Blue steps out of his reflective position, literally and metaphorically speaking, and takes action that he gets closer to the truth.

Blue's entrance into Black's room draws on Auster's epistemology concerning rooms as containers of another's solitude and self. Blue thinks, "Everything that happens will affect everything else. The door will open, and after that Black will be inside him forever." (p.184). As Blue enters, Black stops writing, "the door opens and suddenly there is no more distance, the thing and the thought of the thing are one and the same." (p.184). Blue has stepped outside of Black's controlling narrative, has entered the scene of the crime, because Black is both master plotter and author and has been controlling

Blue from the outset. He has created and written him, which is why he can articulate Blue's position precisely and which is why when Blue finally steals Black's manuscript he already knows the story, because he has lived it. Blue is gradually attaining self-knowledge, "For Blue at this point can no longer accept Black's existence and therefore denies it." (p.190). Blue feels he has replaced Black with his own inner self as the unknowable Other.

> Having penetrated Black's room and stood there alone, having been so to speak in the sanctum of Black's solitude, he cannot respond to the darkness of that moment except by replacing it with a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it. (p.190)

Blue, who at the start of the case did not interface with his inner self, consciousness and memory, "can no longer conceive of being anywhere else" but inside himself. Lacan notes that both the self and the other are unknowable. Though Blue locates the arena of the self inside himself he cannot know it. The statement that, "this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it", has a double meaning. Firstly, it refers to Black as the void, the unknowable self and the unknowable Other. Secondly, Black is inside Blue because as the author he is directing Blue, internally controlling his thoughts and actions.

In the final scene, Black has decided to kill off his protagonist Blue and himself because the story is finished. Blue clings to one last generic cliché as he says to Black, "'You're supposed to tell me the story. Isn't that how it's supposed to end? You tell me the story, and then we say goodbye.'" (p.193) But "Ghosts" has never been a detective story; it has been a discussion of autobiography, ontology and writing. Black tells his protagonist,

and textual self that he used him vicariously in order to write about himself, just as Auster created his ontological gap in the form of "A" in "Invention".

> You were the whole world to me; Blue, and I turned you into my death. You're the one thing that doesn't change, the one thing that turns everything inside out. (p.194)

Blue is the constant for Black, he allows him to turn everything inside out, and articulate himself, because the protagonist becomes a surrogate for the author; Auster discusses this in reference to Collodi's creation of Pinnochio as a surrogate for his boyhood self in "Invention".

Sorapure notes that the detective is successful only insofar as he is able to attain the position of the author, a metaphysical position, above or beyond the events in the text. (p.72). Whereas Quinn in "City of Glass" remains a puppet, completely frustrated in his pursuit of authorial knowledge, Blue obtains the most satisfying position for a post-modern protagonist in that he beats to death his creator, taking out all his frustration with the experiment he has been involved in and finally gaining authorial knowledge. Ultimately though, this knowledge disappoints, because Blue "knew it all by heart", because it is the story in which he has been the protagonist, it is "Ghosts".

As the narrator who has been lurking in the wings throughout the story steps in to conclude the text, we realise that Blue has only gained a temporary position of authority, because the narrator/ Author maintains his privileged position. Auster himself has admitted that "Ghosts" "reads something like a fable" (p.145), and the narrator's intrusion at the end tends to belittle the emotional drama the reader has witnessed. The

narrator's tone is dismissive as he remarks, "Where he goes after that is not important.", and deconstructive -"But the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment, and that will not come until Blue leaves the room." (p.195) and sabotages the reader's engagement with the narrative. Auster is foregrounding the conventions of storytelling deliberately in order to shift the focus of the text, because alternatively "Ghosts" is merely a discussion about writing and authorship.

Auster is parodying the detective genre as he did in "City of Glass", initially "Ghosts" begins like a stylised hard-boiled pulp, with Blue noting that "Black's shoes have made a perfect set of tracks on the white pavement." (p.140), but quickly dissipates as Blue becomes increasingly frustrated with the case as it refuses to subscribe to convention, "it suddenly occurs to Blue that he can no longer depend on the old procedures. Clues legwork, investigative routine- none of this is going to matter anymore. But then, when he tries to imagine what will replace these things, he gets nowhere." (p.147). This revelation "occurs" to Blue because Auster or Black wants him to be aware of this fact.

In an ironic reference to Auster's own writing technique, most notable in "Invention", of mixing autobiography and fiction, Blue "thinks that perhaps a truthful account of the past week would include the various stories he had made up for himself concerning Black", but he concludes, "this isn't the story of my life, after all. . . I'm supposed to be writing about him, not myself." (p.147). As in "City of Glass", Auster's protagonist in "Ghosts" has a oblique awareness that he is being controlled by some outside force, Blue notes

that, "he cannot remember a time in his life when he has been so reluctant to do a thing he so clearly wants to do." (p.145)

Consistently throughout "Ghosts" we are allowed to glimpse Auster. The text is littered with familiar Austerian tropes, such as "truth is stranger than fiction" digressions, the lost father and the baseball diamond as pre-lapsarian Eden that has been established in "Invention" and recycled in his subsequent work. The opacity of the language and narrative, are barbs on which the reader catches himself/herself as he/she attempts the imaginative leap into the textual reality, reminding us that we are holding a self-conscious artifice. Auster exercises the obvious racial angle when writing about Black and White during a typically liberal scene, where Blue goes to watch Jackie Robinson play for the Dodgers, and the text is littered with Auster's puns and ironically naïve comments by Blue such as "I'm my own man accountable to no one but myself" (p.157) when the reader realises that Blue is a mere pawn.

Auster's introduction of intertextuality, with reference to the two characters reading Walden is essential to understanding his philosophical premise in this text and in all of his work after "Invention". Auster agrees with Black, when he concludes that, "there are ghosts all around us." (p.174), physical space is historicized, Orange St. and Plymouth Church are associated, Black tells us, with Whitman, Dickens, Lincoln and Henry Ward Beecher, and in the same way their ideas and texts haunt or influence the text we are presently engaged in. Blue begins to read Walden and

is bored by Thoreau's words and finds it difficult to concentrate. Whole chapters go by, and when he comes to the end of them he realises that he has not retained a thing . . . Blue

thought that he was going to get a story, or at least have something like a story, but this is no more of that blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all. (p.163)

The privileged narrator remarks,

What he does not know is that were he to find the patience to read the book in the spirit in which it asks to be read, his entire life would begin to change, and little by little he would come to a full understanding of his situation- that is to say, of Black, of White, of the case, of everything that concerns him. (p.163)

For Auster texts are our filter through which we understand the world. He wants to believe that the world is a text to be interpreted. This is why his books are full of chance meetings and absurd coincidences, the results of which are discussed in my first Chapter.

It is through texts; quotes and his own musings that Auster attempts to understand his self in The Invention of Solitude. The above quote suggests that Walden is a revelatory text, which provides the key to the case and life in general according to the narrator who may or may not be Auster. Again this shows Auster opening up another path for the reader/ detective to take in our quest to discover Auster's master narrative and intentions. Whether this is a red herring or the key to a full understanding of "Ghosts" is irrelevant, Auster is opening up alternative readings of his text and fragmenting and adding another sedimentary, literary plane to a work already riddled with fault lines and cracks. Of course the narrator's own critical reading of Walden is unknown to us, so the reader remains unsure of how Walden holds the key to the case.

Auster's literary references not only smack of the elitism inherent in the self-conscious novel, but the narrator's unknowable critique places him in such a privileged position that

Blue and the reader cannot hope to attain it and thus adds to the conspiratorial mystique that haunts Blue and the reader.

In "Ghosts" Auster is demonstrating how texts can unconsciously change our being. Blue, having discarded Walden, begins to have transcendentalist epiphanies, like Quinn he is suddenly sensitised to nature "Everything seems brown to him, as though the fall weather outside has penetrated the room," (p.166). He experiences a vision of universal connectedness, something that occurs regularly in Auster's work. Blue's vision of freedom in an imaginative utopia is Thoreauvian,

> He imagines himself somewhere else, far away from here, walking through the woods and swinging an axe over his shoulder. Alone and free, his own man at last.. . .But that is as far as he gets. For no sooner does he begin to walk through these woods in the middle of nowhere than he feels that Black is there too, hiding behind some tree, stalking invisibly through some thicket, waiting for Blue to lie down and close his eyes before sneaking up on him and slitting his throat. (p.186-187)

As Alford points out, Thoreau, believes in the transformative inner power of the imagination - "a change in our inner space will affect external space . . . the events narrated in Walden record the power of nature to transform the seer morally through affecting his imagination." (Alford p.620) Blue's imaginative leap into America's Puritan past tells him that he is intrinsically bound to Black, and historicizes this reflexivity, as Black takes up the position of the Indian, the malevolent dark force lurking in Edenic nature - the ultimate American Other for the pilgrim/pioneer. Blue recognises that he must confront his Other in order to attain freedom, which results in him beating Black unconscious.

After a year on the case, Blue

feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life, This is strange enough- to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. But if the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action- nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realises, and he no longer wants any part of it. 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? (169-170)

It is doubly ironic that Blue uses the metaphor of reading to evoke his entrapment and inertia, firstly because he is a character in "Ghosts", and secondly because of the fact that when he notes that Black is "the so-called writer of this book" it is cruelly ironic, because Black, on one level, is the writer of a text whose protagonist is Blue. Blue cannot lose himself in this book, because Black is constantly bringing Blue's selfhood into focus for Blue within their dichotomy. Blue cannot drop the case because Black is intrinsic to his identity, having been stripped of any other relationships. Auster is poking fun at the reader in this quote, because he realises that the reader, eager for some action and a quickening of the pace, is sharing Blue's frustrations.

Black's anecdotes concerning Hawthorne's "Wakefield", a text that is one of the obvious inspirations for "Ghosts", Whitman's brain and other references to writers and texts, are an example of Auster establishing an intertextuality that is ambiguous at bestand of course that is the point. Blue as he so often does, articulates his own and the reader's confusion with these anecdotes,

For even though the talk had nothing to do with the case, Blue cannot help feeling that Black was actually referring to it all along- talking in riddles, so to speak, as though trying to tell Blue something, but not daring to say it out loud. (p.177)

Auster is pointing the reader to the "ghost" texts that haunt, or have inspired "Ghosts", making the point that every text can influence or affect every other text to various degrees. Quinn experiences the same feelings as Blue in the above quote, when the character Auster launches into his theory concerning the authorship of Don Quixote, the first self-conscious novel. Auster notes "Cervantes, if you remember, goes to great lengths to convince the reader that he is not the author". This is exactly what Auster is doing here as he appears as a character in his own book. He continues

'Still, I've always suspected that Cervantes devoured those old romances. You can't hate something violently unless a part of you also loves it. In some sense, Don Quixote was just a stand-in for himself.' (p.98)

Just as Daniel Quinn is a "stand-in" for Paul Auster in a hard-boiled genre that Auster has devoured, but is also deconstructing, so Cervantes deconstructs the Romance. There is a sense too that Stillman could be the Don Quioxte character, the master-plotter, Auster notes that,

Don Quixote, in my view, was not really mad. He only pretended to be. In fact, he orchestrated the whole thing himself. Remember: throughout the book Don Quixote is preoccupied by the question of posterity. Again and again he wonders how accurately his chronicler will record his adventures. This implies knowledge on his part; he knows beforehand that this chronicler exists. And who else is it but Sancho Panza, the faithful squire whom Don Quixote has chosen for exactly this purpose? In the same way, he chose the three others to play the roles he destined for them. (p.99)

Stillman might have planned his suicide and wanted his life and language experiment recorded for posterity, Peter Stillman Jnr., Virginia and the character of Auster could all be pawns in his game. Black, in "Ghosts", certainly adopts this idea, as he had Blue chronicle his life as a way to confirm his self and his life. Auster goes on to defend his self-conscious and post-modern construction of The New York Trilogy, he claims Don Quixote was asking the question, just as he is in the Trilogy, "to what extent would

people tolerate blasphemies if they gave them amusement? The answer is obvious, isn't it? To any extent. For the proof is that we still read the book. It remains highly amusing to us. And that's finally all anyone wants out of a book- to be amused.'" (P.100). As he bids farewell to Quinn, Auster the author delivers the ultimate irony, as the character Auster asks Quinn, "Are you in the book?'" (p.102)

Sorapure's reading of "City of Glass" is equally relevant to "Ghosts", Sorapure claims that, "'Auster's elaborate reading of Don Quioxte suggests, in fact, that when one has discovered the true author of a work, one possesses the key to understanding the work."(Red Notebook p.84). But who is the author of "Ghosts", is it Black or Auster or the mysterious unnamed narrator? The text implies that it is Black who has constructed this text, but then at the end the narrator steps in and belittles the narrative and the authority of Black, which suggests that he has written this text. Even if we know who the author is, the truth or solution to the text is ungraspable suggesting that the work is, in fact, a sham as the characters fade into ellipsis, and the author obliquely reveals himself, but not his motivation or meaning of his text. Auster's self-conscious fiction draws on the ludic theory of art, in which art is conceived of as a game in which the truth or naturalism is irrelevant. Stonehill notes that, "By artfully displaying its own art, the self-conscious novel need not entirely cut itself off from the world, rather, it acknowledges that its relation to the world is imaginary, or metaphorical, or problematic at best." (p.188). It could be argued that it is unfair to expect a writer like Auster to create a purely mimetic or naturalistic work and that Auster is a product of post-modernist fiction and its attendant criticism and that he naturally adopts a "wised-up" or knowing style of

writing. Stonehill, concludes that, "At its best, a self-conscious novel may be both ethically effective and aesthetically reflexive." (p.17 Stonehill) The Invention of Solitude, is a prime example of a novel that is both self-conscious and deals with the essential aspects of life and the enduring problems faced by man and attempts to understand them. "Ghosts", is an impressive and oppressive display of intelligence, but fails because it is a game with little at stake, in which parody is piled on parody, irony on irony, played by a writer who never passes the ball, but pops it rather than giving up the ghost.

"City of Glass" contains many self-conscious aspects, but its main focus is the ontological questions explored in The Invention of Solitude. In Invention Auster creates his surrogate "A" to write about himself, and of course Squeeze Play was written under the pseudonym Paul Benjamin, Auster frequently refers to his "mysterious author self" in interviews and in "Glass" he pushes the implications of pseudonymity and multiple selves to their absurd conclusion. Quinn is introduced to us, in a state of self-dissipation, he has no friends, his family are dead, he has lost any ambition to write more weighty literature and the only symbol of his existence is the detective novels starring Max Work that he produces under the pseudonym William Wilson. It is as "if he were living a posthumous life." (p.3). Quinn's lack of self-identity and existential withdrawal means that he has formed an unhealthy association with his protagonist Work, who is his conduit with reality. The narrator tells us that Quinn "had of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real. If he lived now in the world at all, it was only at one remove, through the imaginary person of Max Work." (p.9). Whereas in "Ghosts", Blue acts as

the Other for Black, the objective confirmation of his existence; in "City of Glass"- "the more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work's presence in the world became." (p.9). Quinn is confusing the hyper-reality of his detective stories with actual reality, Work gives solace to Quinn because he is a master of his textual reality, whereas Quinn cannot cope with reality himself and chooses hermetic non-engagement.

The phone call for the detective Paul Auster, allows Quinn a lifeline into reality, but further removes himself from his true self as he adopts name of Paul Auster and tries to co-opt the personality of Max Work. When Quinn sits down to make his first entry in the red notebook, he is naked and in the dark. He has literally gone through the stripping process, which Auster sees as fundamental to articulating the essential self, he then, we are told, "picked up his pen and wrote his initials, DQ (for Daniel Quinn) on the first page. It was the first time in more than five years that he had put his own name in one of his notebooks." (p.39), Quinn ponders this and dismisses it as "irrelevant"; rejecting his essential self, he concludes the entry with "My name is Paul Auster . That is not my real name." (p.40)

The salutary effects of being Auster, are

> he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. . . 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, and he could return to being Quinn whenever he wished. (p.50)

The irony is of course that at the end of the story, Quinn does lose himself or rather his self. Gradually, Quinn begins to use Auster as a way of focusing his attention on Stillman, but in doing so strips him of his inner feelings and his self-hood,

> Auster was no more than a name to him, a husk without content. 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. As Auster he could not summon up any memories or fears, any dreams or joys, for all these things, as they pertained to Auster, were a blank to him. He consequently had to remain solely on his own surface, looking outward for sustenance. (p.61)

Quinn as Auster escapes the existential pain that lies inside him, of course "he knew it was all an illusion" (p.50), but it gives him temporary satisfaction and intensely focusses his attention on the external clues that sustain him. Quinn begins taking detailed notes of Stillman's collecting and cataloguing of broken objects, "seeing the thing and writing about it in the same fluid gesture" (p.63), another example of the doubling inherent in the detective and self-conscious genres, but this practice has ontological significance. This stems from Auster's meetings with the poet Ponge. Auster claims in "Invention" that

> for Ponge there was no division between the work of writing and the work of seeing. For no word can be written without first having been seen, and before it finds its way to the page it must first have been part of the body, a physical presence that one has lived with in the same way one lives with one's heart, one's stomach and one's brain . . .If a man is to be truly present among his surroundings, he must be thinking not of himself, but of what he sees. He must forget himself in order to be there. And from that forgetfulness arises the power of memory. It is a way of living one's life so that nothing is ever lost. (p.138)

Auster explores the more disturbing aspects of this loss, in relation to Quinn. Quinn does not have the self-possession of Ponge, so once he has filled himself with external reality and transcribed it, he is the empty husk, devoid of inner self. In City of Glass, the textual self undermines essentialist notions of selfhood, so that when Quinn uses up the red notebook, he ceases to exist because he no longer has an alterity to reflect his selfhood. It is ironic that Quinn, who wants to lose himself in space, meticulously observes space and

the Other by tracking Stillman, an act which should bring his self into focus but makes him even less introspective.

Auster adopts the ontological precedent from The Invention of Solitude, in that the self is discovered in a dichotomy, often between the binary poles of solitariness-community, existential alienation-human connectedness, the interfacing of the inner and outer world or the more oblique interfacing of fiction and reality. This is the space of possible signification. Auster demands a losing of one's subjective self, a reduction of self to a Zen-like nothing - in Quinn's case Emerson's "transparent" eye-ball"; only after this process can the rebirth of the self begin. At the end of the novel, Quinn has attained this state, but this is where the text ends and we are not allowed to see whether his self is reconstructed, rather it is suggested that the text has replaced Quinn, as it is the only evidence of his existence remaining in the Stillmans' apartment, just as Auster replaces his father with a textual one in "Portrait of an Invisible Man".

Quinn has attained the utopic state of being nowhere, of losing himself. This feeling of nothingness is achieved in a dichotomy; through the process of being geographically lost or physically lost in the rhythm of motion or in the depths of solitude, often in a room where the mind screens a chaotic slide show of memory. Which places the protagonist in an unconscious state, because he is no longer thinking about self-constitution.

All of Auster's protagonists experience a feeling of ecstasy or utopia, when they are lost in pedestrian space. The streets of New Amsterdam function for Quinn in the same way that Amsterdam's twisting paths function for Auster in "Invention".

> 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 neighbour hoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within him 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 . . . 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. (p.4)

Quinn, like Auster in Amsterdam is geographically lost, but also ontologically lost, in that his hunger for self-signification is erased, briefly he escapes the question inherent in the human condition: "Who am I?" or in Quinn's case, because his identity like Auster's in "Invention" is multiple, "Which of my selves am I?"

Steven Alford notes that, "the space of The New York Trilogy is intimately involved in the significatory acts of self-constitution, acts that *somehow* involve the intersection of self and other, space and language." (p.622-623 my italics) Alford goes on to make some valid points concerning space and self- constitution, but doesn't make the connection between these and language. I would argue that there is an important philosophical tussle at the very heart of "City of Glass", in which Quinn and Stillman snr. represent the conflicting arguments.

Stillman is an absolutist; he wants a dogmatic, objective meaning to space and a return to the definitive nature of pre-lapsarian language. He wants to create a universal uniformity as set out in his fictive text - Henry Dark's 1690 pamphlet The New Babel . Dark conceives of utopia as a physical place being built by man. To him it is a new Tower of Babel in America, "large enough to hold every inhabitant of the New World. There would be a room for each person and once he entered that room, he would forget everything he knew. After forty days and forty nights, he would emerge a new man, speaking God's language, prepared to inhabit the second, everlasting paradise." (p.49). These rooms are devoid of the paradoxical space that Auster demands, they contain absolute space, provoking a de-humanising, brainwashing effect that destroys the possibility of individuality. Rooms are very important to Auster, they are the stages or spaces of solitude. They are the containers of the inner world and solitude in its traditional sense, yet paradoxically they are containers of the outside world, in that Auster conceives of solitude as a fact of our existence- a space where "you start to feel your connection with others."(Red Notebook p.107)

Stillman's name suggests paralysis, a lack of spontaneity and immobility. He walks, "as though each step had to be weighed and measured before it could take its place among the sum total of steps." (p.58). Stillman is anti-Lacan, he wants an objective, literal correlation between words and things and he is attempting to create a new language that denotes the state of every object. He wants complete authority over language with no slippage or ambiguity in understanding. Mastery of the meaning of words denotes power according to Stillman's prophet, Humpty Dumpty. Stillman maintains a literal attitude to

language, as shown by his adoption of the cliché as epistemology, he imbues phrases like "Life is not a bowl of cherries", "You can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs", with religious reverence. The negativity of his dogmatic pursuit of pure language finds its expression, in his son's lack of expression due to years of physical and mental abuse. Conversely, Quinn's relationship with language and self-expression is deeply troubled, he has always felt no attachment to the novels he has written under the pseudonym, William Wilson.

Having lost Stillman Snr., and unable to contact Virginia, Quinn is thrown back on himself, the case is temporarily closed, but he still has the urge to write. He begins describing the bums and street people of New York, subscribing to the social-realist impulse of the detective genre, seemingly reaffirming his connection with humanity and reality, however in his conclusion he quotes Baudelaire, "Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself." (p.110), which suggest that he yearns for a utopic space outside of time and the world, where he can be himself. The irony is of course, the reader knows that Quinn cannot exist outside of this text; Quinn is becoming increasingly aware that something is controlling his actions and if this is the case then everything has semiotic significance. Quinn notes that, "He had tried to contact Virginia Stillman in order to tell her that he was through, but the fates had not allowed it." (p.111). Quinn accepts that he cannot escape fate. Again Auster is drawing on a theme prevalent in detective fiction, particularly in the work of James M. Cain in novels such as The Postman Always Rings Twice and Double Indemnity, which assume a determinist universe in which individuals become enmeshed in a situation and cannot escape their destiny. In The Postman Always

Rings Twice, Frank Chambers is lured into committing murder by the femme fatale Cora Papadakis. He attempts to leave Cora to avoid his destiny, but this is quashed because his death is irreversible as denoted by the title of the book. The postman, by definition knocks at the door, and if you are not at home he will return and knock again, just as Quinn receives several phone calls for the Detective Auster, before he accepts his role. However, whereas Cain's work is naturalistic, Auster's is self-conscious. This has profound epistemological implications. Quinn assumes that fate is controlling causality and his actions. However, as Lavender points out, he is being "semically overcoded" (Lavender p.234) by Auster, who is consistently displaying the textuality of "City of Glass". Auster is using Quinn' s position as an allegory for the human desire to see causality in reality, whilst accepting its arbitrariness, which returns us to Auster's conclusion in Invention-"Meaning. No Meaning."- life as a paradox.

One of the most interesting examples of Auster displaying textuality, is the character of Peter Stillman Jnr. Quinn describes him as "almost transparent, as though one could see through to the blue veins behind the skin of his face." (p.15) he is literally textual, a character cut from his author - "It was like watching a marionette trying to walk without strings." (p.15). His language is a combination of lucidity and meaningless garble, as he describes the torture his father put him through in search of "God's language". It is because his author is not feeding him his speech, Lavender suggests, that Peter "sent for Auster, his author, to save his life. Without his author, he must remain in darkness, unknown, off the page; his name cannot be "real". But Quinn is only a character; he

cannot save him. Peter Stillman walks off page 28 and never returns." (p.226-227 Lavender)

Now that his employer has disappeared, the case becomes a moral quest for Quinn, he puts his faith in the fact that, "If there were any misunderstandings, surely they could be cleared up once the case was settled." (p.112). Unfortunately, Quinn places his faith in a causality that does not exist in modern reality and a resolution that Auster, the author never provides. Quinn then begins an entropic process akin to the one that Auster himself goes through at the beginning of "The Book of Memory", before he plunges into the abyss of self. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Auster believes that a stripping down process is needed before self-knowledge can be gained, he recognises that,

> The whole process Quinn undergoes in that book and the character in the other two, as well is one of stripping away to some barer condition in which we have to face up to who we are. Or who we aren't. It finally comes to the same thing." (The Red Notebook p.108)

Quinn begins starving himself, "in order to leave himself free to think of the things that truly concerned him." (p.114) and practices sleep deprivation, in order to maintain non-stop surveillance of the Stillman's apartment. Quinn had,

> . . . nothing to fall back on anymore but himself . And of all the things he discovered during the days he was there, this was the one he did not doubt: that he was falling. What he did not understand, however, was this: in that he was falling, how could he be expected to catch himself as well? Was it possible to be at the top and the bottom at the same time? It did not seem to make sense. (p.117)

In place of Quinn's inner self is a void, which is why he feels he is falling when he is forced into introspection, and which is why he focuses his attention on outside reality becoming the detective of nature, which "had to be investigated, measured, and deciphered." (p.117). Quinn experiences an Emersonian epiphany in Central Park, which

mirrors the one Fogg experiences in Central Park in Moon Palace. Quinn's dissipation of self continues at a rapid rate when the character of Auster tells him that Stillman has committed suicide, thereby ending the threat to his son. Quinn subsequently returns to his apartment and finds someone else living there and all of his possessions gone, his past and his home; two self-signifiers have been destroyed. Quinn "had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him. There was nothing left." (p.125)

Quinn returns to a cell-like room in the Stillman's apartment and strips naked, he cannot see the outside world and his memory is eroding, his past life "seemed so remote to him now." (p.127). Quinn begins "considering marginal questions concerning the Stillman case." (p.129) which only indicate more permutations and versions of the case and possible connections that deny a definitive text and linearity of narrative that Peter Stillman Snr., desires. The text of which Quinn is a part is gradually shutting down, the dark is winning an additional battle with light, and "This period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook." (p.130). Quinn dismisses the importance of the Stillman case: "It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost." (p.130). Quinn's signifiers, his words are becoming more objective and solid as he becomes more opaque, "He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower." (p.130). If language is severed from him he has no authority over it and it begins asserting authority over him. His textual self has gradually replaced his essential self, so that the end of the red notebook means death.

In his last reverie he replaces the depression and pessimism that has haunted his character throughout with an optimistic vision of the "infinite kindness of the world and all the people he had ever loved.", in lonely death he confirms his essential humanity and connection with others, but it is too late, "The last sentence of the red notebook reads: 'What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?'" (p.131). Quinn wonders whether he could "write without a pen" and speak the words, but as Alford points out, "significance in the world must emerge as the consequence of the relation between one's self and another(even if sometimes that other is oneself)." (Alford p.617) Quinn's Other is his textual self, contained in the red notebook.

Auster, like Quinn, has dissipated through the text, Sorapure notes that "Narrative authority is displaced, undermining the privileged path of access for the critic who attempts like the detective to follow the author's intention and design, who finds Auster/Quinn fragmented within the text. . . 'Auster's elaborate reading of Don Quixote suggests, in fact, that when one has discovered the true author of a work, one possesses the key to understanding the work" (p.84), but there is no truth or solution to the Stillman case, one can only conclude that the notion that this detective novel is a sham and that Paul Auster(the author)'s motivation is to ask questions rather than answer them. A case could be made to suggest that Stillman is the true author, he could have had Virginia employ Quinn under false pretences so that he could continue the research he began with his son, remember Quinn "thought about Peter Stillman and wondered if he had ever slept in the room he was in now." (p.129). It could be Stillman who leaves the food for Quinn and who controls the light, or is it Auster who has turned Quinn into a naked

wretch searching for a language? This would explain Auster's guilt about the case and Quinn, which the narrator describes to us. Auster's son is called Daniel, which is Quinn's name and Auster has conducted the same kind of language experiment that Stillman Snr' has subjected his son to, with the same uncertain conclusions.

The title of the last novel in the Trilogy tempts us with a closure absent from the previous two. "The Locked Room" suggest an enigmatic place which, when broached, will reveal unifying secrets and truths. The title smacks of the classical detective genre, in which the essential clue such as "The Purloined Letter" and "The Gold Bug", lends their name to the title. It also suggests that this will be a more conventional story. One of the first tenets of classical detective fiction is the locked room, in which all of the characters are assembled and the detective finally unmasks the villain.

Certainly "The Locked Room" has less of the self-conscious content and intertextuality of the preceding texts and its first person narrator makes it seem a naturalistic work. However, the enigma, the motivation for Fanshawe's disappearance, is never revealed at the end of the novel and the text does not contain the closure inherent in its title. Instead, it engages with the themes Auster has established in the Trilogy, namely subjectivity, writing, authorship, linguistics, causality and reality.

Again, as in the two previous texts, Auster is exploring the theme of doubling and how one character can author, or plot the course of action for another. In "City of Glass", Quinn tails Stillman and copies his descriptions of objects, when Stillman's death frees

him from this dialectical relationship he feels lost. Similarly Black tailors Blue's actions and thoughts until he confronts his creator in a bid for a freedom that is never confirmed by the narrator. These dialectical relationships seem to plug directly into the story of the narrator and his controlling nemesis, Fanshawe, in "The Locked Room". The narrator tells us, however, that actually the reverse is true, that the previous parts of the trilogy are products of The Locked Room, another set of parables for this, the real investigation. The narrator tells us,

> The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that came before it, "City of Glass" and "Ghosts". These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about . . . If words followed, it was only because I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. But that does not necessarily make the words important. I have been struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle. (p.294)

But of course there is no closure at the end only deferral. As with the other two texts in the trilogy, nothing happens in the end to explain the significance of these texts, the enigma is never revealed and the narrator simply discards Fanshawe's red notebook and walks off the page into the great unknown.

Fanshawe tells the narrator that he is already in the process of dying from poison as they confront each other for the first and last time since the story began. The red notebook stands then as the last expression of self-hood; again, as in "City of Glass", the textual self has usurped the essential self. The narrator destroys the text as he finally tries to destroy Fanshawe's hold on him, but what he doesn't understand is that he cannot escape Fanshawe because Fanshawe has come to represent death itself for him.

The narrator begins his tale with the lines, "It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I hardly know who I am." (p.199) Fanshawe is the omnipotent presence that hangs over the narrator, he inhabits his consciousness, he is also a metaphorical place for the narrator. It is clear that the narrator even resembles Fanshawe. Fanshawe's former lover and Fanshawe's mother both admit they have confused him with Fanshawe- he is Fanshawe's ghost, Fanshawe's surrogate.

The narrator is constantly suffering existential angst, articulating the arbitrary nature of reality - life's meaninglessness. The irony though is that the narrator is being controlled by Fanshawe throughout and is the lead actor in Fanshawe's plan. In their concluding scene, Fanshawe tells the narrator that he only called him in to execute his literary legacy in order to find his deserted wife "a new husband" (p.308). His letter to the narrator proving he is still alive, gives the narrator strict instructions to marry Sophie. Instead of the narrator controlling Fanshawe's literary output, Fanshawe's literature is controlling him. Stephen Bernstein notes that, "Fanshawe's writings - his manuscripts and letters- become a meta-writing that scripts the course of the narrator's existence" (p.91 Barone)

After Fanshawe's work has been published, the narrator is persuaded to write a biography of Fanshawe, though his real motivation is to discover where Fanshawe is and why he disappeared. The narrator confesses that his relationship with Fanshawe has always been subordinate and how Fanshawe has always been an enigma to him - "You felt there was a

secret core to him that could never be penetrated, a mysterious centre of hiddenness." (p.210). The narrator explains that Fanshawe's awareness of the world developed at an early age and was quickly followed by his hunger to experience it and his subsequent existential world weariness. The narrator sees himself as, "a befuddled witness," of Fanshawe's tasting of life's extremes, rejecting suburban mundanity and seeking out the fringes of society, "sharing in the quest but not part of it, an adolescent Sancho astride my donkey, watching my friend do battle with himself." (p.215)

Fanshawe's difficult relationship with his father mirrors Auster's own as articulated in "Invention", and Fanshawe's troubled sister is a textual version of Auster's own. The narrator's writing of "The Locked Room" is motivated by the same need for catharsis and as an attempt at understanding his situation as "Invention" is for Auster.

> If courage is needed to write about it, I also know that writing about it is the one chance I have to escape. But I doubt this will happen, not even if I manage to tell the truth. Stories without endings can do nothing but go on forever, and to be caught in one means that you must die before your part in it is played out. My only hope is that there is an end to what I am about to say, that somewhere I will find a break in the darkness. This hope is what I define as courage, but whether there is reason to hope is another question entirely. (p.235)

The narrator is using writing as catharsis. In transcribing his memories of Fanshawe and their relationship, he suggests then that he is analysing his text in the same way that Auster does in "Invention", teasing out meaning and sifting for nuggets of truth. However the narrator, like Quinn and Blue, is caught in a never-ending story and fades to ellipsis, "dies" as the text ends without the satisfaction of any resolution.

Much of Fanshawe's biography, his education, job on a freighter, time in France, early literary career, stems from Auster's own autobiography, sketched in Hand to Mouth. This self-referencing serves to divorce Auster from association with the narrator of "The Locked Room", the self-confessed author of the rest of the trilogy, in the same way that his inclusion of himself as a character in "City of Glass" dissipates his authorship through the text, so that it is always questionable.

The narrator eventually realises that as literary executor he is "no more than an invisible instrument" for Fanshawe. He also realises how Fanshawe's texts have replaced the man, once he has disappeared, presumed dead. He notes that the suitcases of manuscripts "were as heavy as a man." (p.207) and initially feels that

> There was no difference in my mind between giving the order to destroy Fanshawe's work and killing him with my own hands. I had been given the power to obliterate, to steal a body from its grave and tear it to pieces. It was an intolerable position to be in and I wanted no part of it. (p.222)

Of course as Fanshawe continues to haunt his life, the narrator experiences an urge to kill Fanshawe to be free from his influence and the oblique sense that Fanshawe is authoring his destiny. Fanshawe too, has experienced the desire to kill the narrator to destroy his surrogate and unite with his family. The narrator tells us "that sexual desire can also be the desire to kill" (p.267), after a Freudian-inspired scene of Oedipal doubling.

Throughout the text, Auster is foregrounding the fact that the narrator is Fanshawe's sexual substitute and suggesting a homoerotic relationship between the two men that emphasises the doubling theme. Researching Fanshawe, the narrator visits Jane,

Fanshawe's mother, and ends up having sex with her. Jane emphasises the doubling relationship -"You're the father of my grandson, do you realise that? You're married to my son's wife." And remembers how jealous she was of the loving relationship that the narrator had with his mother and that Fanshawe denied her. The narrator too, remembers seeing Jane half-naked and masturbating about her as a youth; both seem to be exorcising long held desires. More importantly, during intercourse they are using each other as substitutes for Fanshawe. The narrator claims that for Jane, "fucking me would be like fucking her own son - and in the darkness of this sin, she would have him again- but only in order to destroy him. A terrible revenge . . .If anything I was her accomplice." (p.266). Also the narrator, in indulging Jane's incestuous masochism, is working out his oedipal complex, because if Fanshawe has authored him and is creating his life, metaphorically speaking he has fathered him. By turning Jane into "no more than a shadow," of Fanshawe he is simultaneously killing the father and having intercourse with the mother- "I was using her to attack Fanshawe." (p.267). This scene is the climax of the narrator's role as a body double for Fanshawe. Bernstein traces this vaginal trail as an expression of the homosexual undercurrent that has been a constant in Fanshawe and the narrator's relationship. Obviously the narrator's marriage to Fanshawe's ex-wife seethes with interpenetration in every sense, particularly as he has remarked that Fanshawe is constantly inside him, and that "Fanshawe was speaking through her" (p.207). Bernstein's focus, though, is the scene in the New York brothel where the two friends lose their virginity; Fanshawe goes first with the prostitute and the narrator remembers that,

I could think of one thing that my dick was about to go into the same place that Fanshawe's was now . . . things might have gone well for me if I hadn't been distracted

by Fanshawe's shoes . . . but it was a long struggle, and even at the end I felt no real pleasure. (p.216)

Bernstein's analysis of this scene is excellent; he claims "Fanshawe's interference with the achievement of closure is notable here. On one level the intense homoeroticism causes near impotence in the narrator; at the same time the scene becomes a metaphor for the problematic of closure that will haunt the narrator as he continues to follow in Fanshawe's tracks." (p.92 Barone) This lack of closure has important implications for The New York Trilogy and Auster's philosophical premise.

As I have stated earlier, resolution or the solving of the case is essential to the detective in that it confirms his masculinity and more importantly his identity, whereas a fragmented case leads to self-doubt and insecurity, which is why so many cases become moral quests for the protagonist after the client has withdrawn.

All of the detectives' nemeses in the Trilogy act as Others for the protagonist; what Auster is exploring though is what occurs when the nemesis has a superiority or a privileged knowledge that the protagonist does not possess. Logically, if self is defined by the Other and that Other is superior, the self must experience deflation. This is the motivation for "Invention", Auster's father possesses an unknowability that is over coded, it is not merely the given unknown of the Other, but something greater. Similarly Fanshawe possesses the same intense detachment for the narrator, often described as "darkness". In "City of Glass", Stillman Snr., appears to be on another literary plane than Quinn, accepting the world as chaotic intercede where signs and ideas penetrate at will; whilst Quinn is still trying to walk the straight line through the maze, his attempt to plot

the pedestrian space of the malevolent jungle of New York is typical in his desire to inscribe meaning. Blue seems to find resolution in "Ghosts" by beating up Black, but is disappointed because when he discovers the enigma he "knew it all by heart." (p.195) as the story is "Ghosts" . Again closure is frustrated because the narrator steps in and closes the text with an imaginative conceit- "In my secret dreams, I like to think of Blue booking passage on some ship and sailing to China, Let it be China, then, and we'll leave it at that." (p.196). This sentence opens up the text once again, but also over codes its fictionality, denying any essentialism the story may have with the glib "we'll leave it at that.", highlighting that this is an indulgent exercise. The narrator of "The Locked Room" does not gain any closure, security or real self-knowledge; at the end of the text he is given the red notebook; like Fanshawe's sister Ellen who also takes her self-definition from Fanshawe's literary works, namely his wilfully obscure poems, the narrator comments, "I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me." (p.314). Whereas Auster gains self-knowledge, at the end of the "Book of Memory" as he accepts the paradoxical nature of reality, the characters in the Trilogy are still searching for the plot. If as he claims, the narrator of "The Locked Room" wrote the preceding texts, then they represent little more than fantasies of escape from the mortal coil and the question of identity, as Quinn subsumes himself to the outside, thus voiding his self and Blue is placed between two fantasies of western rebirth and eastern Zen, that place him in the nowhere between the two.

Death is thematically essential to Auster, particularly in the trilogy. The deferment of closure in the texts means that the characters die at the end of the text, but paradoxically live on as ghosts in an ubertext of future possibilities. Actual death is seen as an escape by characters such as Fanshawe and Black who have seemingly prepared themselves for death by giving their lives to their respective others whose destiny they plot and control. Ironically the narrator believes that he will have to ignore Fanshawe's letter in his biography, because "Fanshawe had to be dead, or the book would make no sense" (p.246), he has "to take a living man and put him in his grave." (p.250) As Bernstein points out,

> The narrator likens the possibility of declining his role as literary executor to issuing "a death sentence", an enunciation he chooses not to make. But the pun is an important one since in evading the death sentence at this early stage of the narrative he actually motivates the remainder of his quest, his search for a way to write the sentence of death that will interrogate and enter Fanshawe. (p.102)

The narrator needs to find the definitive sentence that reveals the enigma of Fanshawe and his motivations in order to give his text closure and escape his debilitating obsession with Fanshawe.

Death is the ultimate darkness and state of unknowability, the chaos of life, entrenched firmly in the sublime, which is why Fanshawe represents death for the narrator,

> To the degree that Fanshawe became inevitable that was the degree to which he was no longer there. I learned to accept this. I learned to live with him in the same way I lived with the thought of my own death. Fanshawe himself was not death - but he was like death, and he functioned as a trope for death inside me. (p.301)

The narrator has gained some acceptance that he will always be bound to Fanshawe and that Fanshawe will always be an enigma to him, just as Auster's father and memory

represent the unknowable for Auster in "Invention". Auster accepts the paradox "Meaning. No Meaning" as the sublime in life, yet the fact that Fanshawe is still alive and offers the possibility of understanding and meaning mean that the narrator cannot escape the atmospherical pull of Fanshawe, and the possibility of a narrative closure that only comes with death. Bernstein claims,

> For Lyotard the modern presents "the fact that the unpresentable exists", while the postmodern "puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself". Such a formulation would appear to offer excellent descriptive possibilities for Auster's sublime and its obsession with the impossibility of naming the posthumous, the unpresentable. (p.101Barone)

The narrator's image of Fanshawe's unknowability is discovered after his Henry Milleresque debauchery and degradation in Paris, which of course mirrors Auster's degrading scene with a prostitute in "The Book of Memory". Just before he experiences his unifying image, the narrator's abiding thought is, "one impoverished image: the door of a locked room . . . Fanshawe alone in that room . . . This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull". As I have discussed in Chapter One, Auster's relationships with rooms is very important and complex, they are conduits for self, paradoxical spaces which are insular but also contain the outside world. Auster has used this metaphor of a room inside a skull in "Invention" to discuss the paradoxical sublime nature of memory, a space that man contains but cannot fully comprehend: -"Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits. As in the image: 'a man sat alone in his room.'" (p.88 Invention).

Fanshawe seems to occupy the same paradoxical space as memory does for Auster, the narrator consistently tells us that he contains Fanshawe, but that he cannot access him,

paradoxically Fanshawe is outside of the narrator controlling his actions, he is insular to the narrator but also a larger outside force whose designs control the narrator. Returning to the first part of the narrator's vision, that of "The Locked Room"; again we are directed back to "Invention", this time to Auster's analysis of van Gogh's painting *The Bedroom,*

> as he tried to inhabit the room presented on the canvas, he began to experience it as a prison, an impossible space, an image not so much of a place to live, but of the mind that has been forced to live there.. . The man in this painting (and this is a self-portrait, no different from a picture of a man's face, with eyes, nose, lips, and jaw) has been alone too much, has struggled too much in the depths of solitude. The world ends at that barricaded door. For the room is not a representation of solitude, it is the substance of solitude itself. (p.143 Invention)

This room is the locked room that Fanshawe is in at the end of the text; it is an impenetrable space for the narrator inside his skull, an ethereal presence-"solitude itself", but also in the outside world as Fanshawe threatens him with death. Is Fanshawe an Auster/Black figure who is writing the text for his protagonist behind this closed door? This is certainly possible as rooms have always been containers for liquid imagination for Fanshawe and Auster alike - Fanshawe communes with his dead father in the open grave, and as a boy has a large appliance box,

> It was his secret place, he told me, and when he sat inside and closed it up around him, he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good . . . Nothing interested me so much as what was happening to Fanshawe inside the box, and I would spend those minutes desperately trying to imagine the adventures he was having. But I never learned what they were, since it was also against the rules for Fanshawe to talk about them after he climbed out. (p.220)

Memory, the locked room, the box are all sublime spaces, places where the imagination and the unconscious can be accessed, the place where inspiration comes from. Auster has given us access to his box of solitude, imagination and inspiration in The Invention of

Solitude, and it is, as he has said in interview The New York Trilogy , is a reaction to that text. In "the Trilogy" he is clawing back his authorial power, this text is a deconstructed one like "Invention", but unlike "Invention" it is not a deconstruction of Paul Auster, rather, it obscures him. If, as Auster claims, "Invention" is a democratic ontological exercise; "the Trilogy" is an authoritarian one. The narrator never discovers Fanshawe's enigma, we never receive the key to the mysteries, and we never attain the author's privileged knowledge and position beyond the text. Just as characters die when the text ends, the reader is left in limbo with no closure, no solution, merely a feeling of emptiness. The narrator concludes The New York Trilogy with an account of the contents of Fanshawe's red notebook. This mimics the reader's frustrations with the whole of the trilogy,

> Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook, is one of great lucidity. It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it. These were not the words of a man who regretted anything. He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again. I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail- even to the point of failing himself. (p.314)

Fanshawe's red notebook is Auster's ideal model for The New York Trilogy, because it is a diminishing zero, where statements, sentences, ideas cancel each other out, a text which is both confusing and lucid, writhing in possibilities for narrative routes, yet suggesting meaning and construction, where meaning and text are so over coded that the result is the same as leaving a blank page. Auster deliberately fails to live up to this ideal of the ultimate post-modern text but, by leaving his text open to possibilities, he has

followed the example of his mentor S. whose deliberately, unfinished symphony is "a way of gauging his own insignificance in relation to God." (p.91 Invention).

The atheist Auster offers his text as a prayer to the "modern nothingness"(p.109 Invention) the only omnipotent presence in his life, whose mantra he recites with The New York Trilogy -"Meaning. No Meaning.", as his text collapses in on itself and disappears like a ghost into the unknowable darkness beyond the text.

Chapter 3: Paul Auster's In The Country of Last Things: Thoughts on a Dystopia

In the Country of Last Things is an apocalyptic science fiction, Auster's 1984. Its protagonist Anna Blume is marooned in a city that is part New York, part Gotham, part 1940 Warsaw, part Delhi, riven with poverty and violence. She is searching for her lost brother, a journalist sent from the outside world. The novel is a letter sent home by Anna to the narrator, but also implicitly to any person who dare take up the text. Austerphiles will note that in Moon Palace we are told that Fogg's best friend Zimmer, named after the saviour of Holderlin, is involved with a certain Anna Blume,

> He had been in love with the same person for the past two or three years, a girl by the name of Anna Bloom or Blume, I was never sure of the spelling, she had grown up across the street from Zimmer in the New Jersey suburbs. . . Earlier in the summer, she had suddenly taken off to join her older brother, William, who worked as a journalist in some foreign country, and since then Zimmer had not received a word from her- not a letter, not a postcard, nothing. As the weeks went by, he grew more and more desperate over this silence.(pp.88-89)

Apart from being an intertextual detail, this passage is interesting because it shows that Auster conceived of The Country of Last Things as a place sharing the same earth and contemporaty time. Whereas Moon Palace is set firmly in the first world- America, Last Things evokes the perceived harshness, mundanity and drabness of the communist bloc, but also the scarcity, poverty and cannibalisation of objects of the third world. Even though it was published before Moon Palace and Leviathan, Last Things appears to sketch the post-nuclear apocalypse world that haunts the psyches of many of the characters in those two novels.

There is a sense that in "Last Things" progress and history have run their course and regression and reversal have set in. Industry and commodity production have ceased, social institutions and even signifying practices, education, socio-cultural conventions have evaporated. Reality is arbitrary, past experience and knowledge of conventions offer no help in finding one's bearings. As Elisabeth Wesseling perceptively notes, even Anna's name, a palindrome pointed out to her by Otto (another palindronme), "serves to articulate the 'history- in reverse' motif." Wesseling claims that,

> Auster clearly alludes to the love poem "An Anna Blume" (1919) by the Swiss Dadaist Kurt Schwitters. . . He collected newspaper cuttings, graffiti, scraps of converstions verbal cliches and the like, and susequently reorganised them into poems. "An Anna Blume" was composed in this manner. . . There is a striking resemblance between Schwitter's compostion method and one of the few remaining ways of making a living in the world of Auster's novel: scavenging (p.499)

Auster's Anna also resembles the Anna in the poem in that at the end of her letter she writes that she and her friends are planning to tour as a variety show, whereas Schwitters' Anna is a variety artist, who lives in a topsy-turvy world. Wesseling adds that, "There is no distinction between forwards and backwards in the world in which Anna Blume lives, Schwitters pointed out."(p.499). In "Last Things" history and space have no linear progress, phases and different periods of history are simultaneously present. So we have Ferdinand and Isabella of the 15th Century appearing next to Holocaust imagery, and government officers whose uniforms are taken from the British Raj; also, faeces as fuel as practised in numerous third world countries and popularised in the post-apocayptic setting of Mad Max 3: Here history becomes an intertext. Auster has admitted that,

> There are specific references to the Warsaw ghetto and the siege of Leningrad, but also to events taking place in the Third World today- not to speak of New York, which is rapidly turning into a Third World city before our eyes. The garbage system, which I describe at such great length in the novel. Is loosely based on the present-day garbage system in

Cairo. All in all, there's very little invented material in the book. . .Even the pivotal event in the story-when Anna, hoping to buy a pair of shoes, is lured into a human slaughterhouse- even that scene is based on historical fact. Precisely that kind of thing happened in Leningrad in World War II. (Red Notebook p.149)

The fact that the book is haunted by Holocaust imagery suggests that Auster has drawn on the idea that the Holocaust for many Jews will always be known as the end of history. Conversely he is also using the authoritarian idea of the end of history, Pol Pot's Year Zero, in that each day in the city of "Last Things", the past; be it a day ago, a year, an object, a name, a government is erased by what appears to be an entropic virus produced by the city itself. Anna describes the city as a predator, tracking down its human prey and ready to pounce on the slightest mistake or sign of weakness. Anna sketches for the reader the method of survival.

The essential thing is not to become inured. For habits are deadly. Even if it is for the hundredth time, you must encounter each thing as if you have never known it before. No matter how many times, it must always be the first time. This is next to impossible, I realise, but it is an absolute rule. (p.70)

Auster imagines an apocalyptic reversal of the deluge of production, capitalism's filling of space and imagines what occurs when the system breaks down and atrophy sets in. In effect he speeds up the pluralistic, anarchistic and recycled ontological and literal landscapes of advanced industrial cultures, creating a future-primitive apocalyptic city- Hawthorne's "City of Destruction", made more insidious, implosive rather than explosive, through a process of disintegration.

The third- person narrator who relates the writings of Anna Blume has reached the same conclusion as Anna and Auster; that in the ominous "city" Anna inhabits, ephemeral and

cerebral creations are objectified, occupy physical space and are therefore subject to the same weathering that the brutality of existence in this environment generates. The narrator begins, "These are the last things, she wrote" - words become things in this dystopia, objects to construct reality and memory, to be salvaged, preserved and wrestled with. Frick wrestles with words like stones in his mouth, whilst Anna physically struggles with the act of writing, the need to fill the blankness of metaphorical and literal landscape; and starving people consume imaginary banquets, consisting of words. The most ambitious example is Sam Farr's book which strives to be the definitive statement and revelatory expose of this society's degradation, a project similar to the one described in Israel Lichenstein's Last Testament, in which the Society Oneg Shabbat compiled and hid Jewish archives, and from which Auster quotes wholesale on pages 83 and 84 of "The Book of Memory".

As in all Auster's books, discourse is the essential self-signifier, each protagonist is driven to produce a self-justifying text oriented to an Other. This need, or hunger, is heightened in an environment where self is so unstable. This hunger to write, Ellmann argues in her fascinating The Hunger Artists, stems from physical hunger. After studying the 1981 Hunger Strike by prisoners in the H-Block, Ellmann concludes that the less they ate, the more they seemed to write. Ellmann states that,

> Simone Weil argues that to starve is to renounce the past, "the first of all renunciations," because it is to rid the body of its larded history. In the Kesh, writing and starving both contribute to this disremembering, emptying the mind and body of the burden of the past. In this sense, the autobiographer consumes himself alive, because his flesh is deconstructed by the very words that constitute his afterlife. (p.88)

For the hunger strikers then, starvation becomes a form of literary release, a positive cerebral freedom from the past. In "Last Things" Anna is forced to live on the threshold of hunger, so that she is brutally stripped of the past, of memory which constitutes a freedom from the harsh reality of her present. Anna begins to write the letter, when Woburn House, her sanctuary of humanity has been officially closed, due to dwindling resources and Willie's massacre of the patients, she must again move onward into the unknown and the letter serves as testimony, epitaph and bookend to her experience.

Hunger and its relationship with writing is a consistent theme in Auster's writing. Many of his protagonists experience a period of fasting or scarcity of food, which alters their self-perception and acts as a ressurrection process. One thinks of Fogg's abnegation of the responsibility to feed himself after his Uncle Victor's death in Moon Palace, the scarcity of food that pervades the city in In the Country of Last Things, Farr sacrificing meals in order to pay his interviewees, so that, "The strength was being sapped out of him, and there were times when he became so dizzy that he no longer saw the words he was writing." (p.104), and similarly Quinn's prioritising of writing over food in "City of Glass".

In his staking out of the Stillman's apartment, Quinn, like the protagonist in Hamsun's Hunger, becomes the subject and object of his own experiment. Quinn tries to reduce his daily need for sleep and more significantly food. Quinn argues that the more one eats the more one's stomach expands and the greater one's desire for food. Anna agrees that, "By wanting less, you are content with less, and the less you need, the better off you are." (p.2), but Anna is forced into this position by circumstance, Quinn chooses it.

By eating less and less Quinn hopes to reduce his need for food, his goal is to reach a point of perfection in which he would no longer need food to sustain his life. This, of course, is an impossible condition, because the conclusion of a fast is inevitably death. Quinn skips meals "in order to devote himself to the red notebook" (NYT p.130). Everything begins to shut down, light, paper, Auster's text in which Quinn is a character:- "This period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook. Little by little Quinn was coming to the end." Quinn reaches a state in which, "He felt that his world had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large , as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower." Through starvation Quinn has nullified his body and self, he has subsumed himself to the text, the word. Ellmann writing on the Long Kesh hunger strikers concludes that, "The more the body's flesh decayed, the more its rhetoriticity appeared, until its being was extinguished in meaning." (p.72). As the men starved their message became more significant.

Yet the hunger strikers have to persuade the people against whom they fast to take responsibility for their starvation. Ellmann notes that, "In this way hunger strikers reveal the interdependency in which all subjects are enmeshed, because they force their antagonists to recognise that they are implicated in the hunger of their fellow beings." (p.54). Unfortunately for strikers, interdependency was not part of Thatcher's ethics and she chose to abdicate responsibility for their plight. Fogg finds himself in the same predicament in Moon Palace, he claims that by becoming a vagrant he is a walking indictment of America. The problem is that America is not interested. Willy Loman

could have told him that the dark side of the American Dream dictates that if you are unsuccessful you have only yourself to blame, because America is a land of opportunity in which every man has an equal chance of making it.

Auster sees individuals as being mutually dependent and is encouraging America to do likewise. In Auster's view we all need to recognise our relationship with others and the Other. He would agree with Ellmann that,

> Food like language, is originally vested in the other, and traces of that otherness remains in every mouthful that one speaks- or chews. From the beginning one eats for the other, from the other, with the other: and for this reason eating comes to represent the prototype of all transaction with the other, and food the prototype of every object of exchange. (p.53 Ellmann)

Having lost the Stillmans, Quinn has lost touch with his self-defining other, his rejection of food (as exchange with the other) only disintegrates his self. Quinn's starvation, produces the effect that he only lives on the pages of his notebook, he has subsumed himself to his text so that when the notebook is finished, so too is he. Whilst the hunger strikers have an audience, who by their presence lend the fast political weight and meaning, Quinn has no audience and his fast is a pathological one. Like Kafka's "Hunger Artist", who loses his audience, abandons the restrictions imposed on him by his manager, the hunger artist goes too far. Quinn illustrates Auster's belief that, "that is the risk, the danger inherent in any act of art: you must be willing to give your life." ("The Art of Hunger" p.114)

Auster's relationship with this art of hunger is an important one for several reasons.

Ostensibly, Auster buys into the Romantic mythology of the starving artist. In The Invention of Solitude, Auster sets his precedent, he starves himself of the food of life, by cutting himself off from human contact, starving his eyes by moving into his drab, sparse apartment and "diving into the wreck", to borrow a phrase from Adrienne Rich.

Subsequent protagonists in his novels also have to go through this attritional degradation process, whose analogy (and often, expression) is hunger. Like Rimbaud, Auster believes that "it is only through a diet of stone crop that the poet can accede to the inhuman solitude of art."(Ellmann p.13). In reference to Byron, Ellmann notes that the starving-poet, "myth arose as a response to the decline of patronage, which meant that poets had to live off their own work, while their work in turn consumed their lives, locked in a vampiric symbiosis." (p.25). This is especially significant in relation to Auster, because Auster had patronage. Auster was only able to write The Invention of Solitude, the book that made him, because his father's death left him a significant legacy, but as we know Auster did not understand his father and could not reconcile himself with this invisible man or his inheritance.

Auster holds to the myth of the starving artist, and so he brings to all of his works a terrible guilt, namely that he did not make the sacrifices for his art and career. That is why the fortunes given to many of Auster's characters are sabotaged. Auster is still questioning if he could have made it without his father's money: Fogg has his legacy stolen, Nashe in The Music of Chance gambles his away, Sachs uses his for a political bombing campaign and ends up destroying himself. This is the reason why Hand to

Mouth (1997), Auster's latest offering, is so problematic. Apart from being opportunistic and an attempt to cash- in on Auster's growing reputation, the title alone tells one that this is Auster's attempt to prove to his readership that he did suffer for his art. It documents the period before Squeeze Play was published, and we see the young writer hanging our with bums, a director with suggested mob links, whilst struggling to make a living in a vain attempt at authentic beat-hood . This is Auster's attempt to write his own mythology, he concludes with the lines "So much for writing books to make money. So much for selling out." (p.125), a statement cast in such an absurd light with this book's release that Auster seems even to have deluded himself.

In concluding his essay "The Art of Hunger", Auster states,

> In the end, the art of hunger can be described as an existential art. It is a way of looking death in the face, and by death I mean death as we live it today: without God, without hope of salvation. Death as the abrupt and absurd end of life. I do not believe that we have come any farther than this. It is even possible that we have been here much longer than we are willing to admit. In all this time, however, only a few artists have been able to recognise it. It takes courage, and not many of us would be willing to risk everything for nothing. But that is what happens in Hunger, a novel written in 1890. Hamsun's character systematically unburdens himself of every belief in every system, and in the end, by means of the hunger he has inflicted upon himself, he arrives at nothing. There is nothing to keep him going - and yet he keeps going. He walks straight into the twentieth century.("The Art of Hunger" pp.114-115)

Auster has derived much of his inspiration from Hamsun's text. In an interview he admitted that his working title for "Last Things" was "Anna Blume Walks Through the 20th Century", and in "Last Things" he has created a world in which people face death on a daily basis, where knowledge, belief systems and linguistics are always in flux, disintegrating, or need to be questioned. Anna writes into the abyss, she too confronts the

nothing, she writes "I don't believe there is any way this letter can reach you. It's like calling out into the blankness, like screaming into a vast and terrible blankness." (p.183). Like the artists he admires, Auster feels he must confront the void created by progress, the death of God and the chaos of technology, so he creates a post-apocalyptic world in which progress has been reversed and degradation has set in. Auster is implying that this will be the course of our culture of consumption and fuses some of the darkest periods of humanity to illustrate his point, none more horrific than the Holocaust.

The obvious inspiration for Anna's extended letter is Anne Frank's diary, the single narrative reflecting multitudes. Anna experiences an existential need to write words down, to record the flux of reality - "I feel there is something to say, and if I don't quickly write it down, my head will burst." (p.3). She has seen how short the lag-time is between the disintegration of the signified and the signifier, the gradual obsolescence of language and entropy of reference which causes isolation and the collapse of social interaction. She also realises how potentially insurrectionary language can be, as demonstrated by the reprimand given her by the guard for her use of the word "aeroplane". This hegemonic control of language that the guard represents is another echo of the totalitarian Nazi regime that haunts the book.

Language and discourse are intrinsically linked to self. Isabel's gradual "collapse" or what she herself refers to as "the Disintegration" manifests itself most dramatically in her loss of language, "It began with a certain sloppiness or articulation - her words slurred around the edges, the consonants getting softer and less distinct, gradually beginning to

sound like vowels. (p.78). As Anna perceptively states, "A disintegrating body is one thing, but when the voice goes too, it feels as if the person is no longer there."(p.78).

Again, Auster is emphasising the importance of the reader to this text; by reading Anna's text we are implicit in her self-signification and the historicizing of her experience. Auster creates a textual reality which is in "constant flux", changing so rapidly that its inhabitants find it increasingly difficult to establish any epistemology, ontology or relationships between location, language and self. As Fredric Jameson has stated, "Space is for us an existential and cultural dominant." (Barone p.107), our dependence on space resulting from a depletion of history and exaggeration of the present within the postmodern condition. Auster takes this premise and pushes it to its literal and metaphorical extremes in In the Country of Last Things. He strips his protagonist from the shackles of cultural and historical definition, and tries to grasp the cusp of humanity. His vision is essentially optimistic though, because even in this brutal environment, stripped of all but the smallest amount of sustenance, an individual can still signify self-hood, dignity and brotherhood. Auster notes,

> Anna Blume survives, at least to the extent that her words survive. Even in the midst of the most brutal realities, the most terrible social conditions, she struggles to remain a human being, to keep her humanity intact, I can't imagine anything more noble and courageous than that. (The Red Notebook p.149)

Auster is interested in the idea of the unsanctioned history, those narratives that have been oppressed or occluded and the importance of the creation of such narratives for political, social and historical purposes. Anna, like Auster himself and so many of his characters, experiences an existential need to write words down, to preserve the flux of reality. Anna

has seen how short the lag-time is between the disintegration of the signified and the signifier, that the gradual obsolescence of language and entropy of reference causes isolation and the collapse of social interaction and how potentially insurrectionary language can be, as shown her by the reprimand given her by the guard for using the word "aeroplane". This censorship is another echo of Nazi Germany.

Writing is a very physical act for Anna; words must be wrenched into existence, "Each day brings the same struggle, the same blankness, the same desire to forget and then not to forget. When it begins, it is never anywhere but here, never anywhere but at this limit that the pencil begins to write." (p.38). She is constantly worried about issues of representation and how the environment shapes narrative; the page is a frontier for Anna to fill, and one feels that simultaneously she is spatially filling in the landscape of the city, the blankness she had observed on her arrival. Narrative brings release, the act of speaking or writing is a cathartic one for people, in his confessor role Sam notes, "The salutary effect of speaking words of releasing words that tell the story of what has happened to them." (p.167). Boris Stepanovich uses the ambivalence inherent in language to "float above his circumstances. Starvation, murder, the worst forms of cruelty-he walked right by them, even through them and yet always appeared unscathed." (p.146). Language is his salvation and he uses it to create a reality he can exist in. He imbues inanimate objects with experience, for example, his selling technique and his use of hats to escape into other characters. Yet, unlike Ferdinand, he knows the reality of existence and recognises his deviation from it.

As Tim Woods points out, this "novel is a spatial cartography that explores the manner in which human history is subject to various structures and forms of power that traverse the body and the world, break it down, shape it, and rearrange it - yet always fail to conquer it." (Barone p.109). Auster subscribes to Michel Foucault's belief that the body is an artifact of culture, constructed by the moral, medical, and scientific knowledge of its times. Ellmann notes that, "According to Foucault, cultural practices 'inscribe' themselves upon the body, predetermining its 'forces, energies, sensations, pleasures'" (p.4). The city's inhabitants mirror the destruction, and resurrection of the city's identity. They are forced to be chameleon-like, the past and memory must be shed like dead skin "killing off all those things that once made you think of yourself as human. . . In order to live, you must make yourself die." (p.20)

Blume is forced to desex herself, by feigning masculinity, in order to avoid danger, which is ironic in itself because part of her quest is to prove a point to the male patriarchy as represented by the newspaper editor Bogat. One feels that part of Auster's quest in "Last Things" is to create a full, believable female character, something he has never achieved before or since this work. Anna represents the new American Adam, the new Every-man, the new Leopold Bloom, it is fitting then that she becomes almost androgynous; gender is lost to brutality of existence and famine, people paradoxically disguise themselves and their needs by fleshing themselves out with newspapers whose words carry no meaning (another example of the materiality of words).

This androgynizing of the populace also echoes the processes that occurred in Hitler's

concentration camps. This desexing is also a de-culturing process, when necessity no longer affords space for expression. Anna challenges the totalitarian domination of spatiality in "Last Things", through the creative and imaginative space of her body. It is a symbol of Anna's resurrection of self in the library with Farr, that she re-establishes her gender again, through sexual intercourse and the simple act of shaving her legs. The creation of her child is a negation of the assumption that reproduction is impossible in this environment, an act that is analogous with the creation of her letter, which is a dissenting discourse reclaiming and re-historicising space against an oppressive state. She re-establishes her cultural links through reading, her discussions with the rabbi and her reminiscing with Sam. She has retracted her "common sense and hard calculation" and has been restored to the imaginer of "worlds"- -The Castle of No Return, the Land of Sadness, the Forest of Forgotten Words." (p.10), the irony being that she is existing in a conglomerate of these worlds and is dreaming of the mundanity of her native land outside the ominous city.

Anna's adoption of the traditional feminine support role with Farr, is counter-balanced by her homosexual relations with Victoria and the non-specific masturbation fantasies earlier in the book. However, the relationships among women in the book have a more important amative base, the women are the strongest characters in every sense; Victoria in her dignity and selfless dedication to the edenic Woburn House project, Isabel in her killing of Ferdinand, transcending her surrogate mother role and honing true gender solidarity which Anna repays by re-establishing Isabel's sexuality, purity and humanity in her choice of death shroud.

Her self gains further stability, through her relationship with Victoria in Woburn House. Her homosexual relationship with Victoria is important, because it establishes an amativeness and a solidarity. They also share a language and common culture, a rare attachment in this world of disintegrating language and history, "we shared a certain language and when she talked to me about the past, I understood without having to ask for any explanations." (p.135)

Once self and memory have been objectified or materialised they possesses an "it-ness", a physicality, an occupancy of space that can be affected by contact with other space or locations. Memories disintegrate, through the necessity to avoid delusion and constantly adapt and recognise an ever-changing reality. An example of the relations between the ephemeral and the local and language is Anna's crudity of description in recalling a childhood memory, she refers to her "little baby's cunt". The brutality of her current existence in the apocalyptic city has tainted her inner space and the language of her narrative.

Just as the library restores for a short period Anna's heterosexuality, it also restores her memory and subsequently her identity, not least of all her racial identity. The book bristles with suggestion of the Holocaust and the iconography and atrocity married to it; for example, the crematoria belching out the smoke from human remains which is sustaining the economy, the stripping of gold teeth from the mouths of corpses by scavengers as practised by the Nazis in the Concentration camps, the utter depravity of

existence for the populace, the public works project to protect the port against enemy attack- akin to Hitler's *werk* programs, the totalitarianism of the various governments, their persecution of the Jews and ghetto-isation of the intelligensia and the Vichy government personified by Henri Dujardin and his involvement in the human slaughterhouse.

Anna announces her Jewish identity during her meeting with the rabbis in the library. As Woods points out, "Blume's ontological, epistemological and ethnic position coalesce in her Judaic roots and culture."(p.110). She is a member of a persistently exiled consciousness, and her meeting with the rabbi re-establishes her former identity at the point where Anna has reached her ultimate displacement of self, "The more I talked to him, the more I sounded like a child." (p.96). Anna confesses. This is an ambiguous statement, because it could signify a re-establishment of the patriarchy Anna has been denying or taken in the light of future developments it could be seen as giving her back the memories she has denied by necessity.

In "Last Things" Auster is constantly confronting the intersection of private and public space. Woods points out how Blume's journeys across the city assume epistemological importance, as walking becomes analogous to travelling from one thought to another.(Barone p.111). Conversely, the city is created by the thoughts of its inhabitants and their routes. Due to the impermanence and transience of streets, buildings and material reality in the city, every different city is ghosted in the streets of the temporal city at any fleeting fixed point. The city therefore is a place and a non-place, McHale's zone,

with no causality or logic, merely an arena in which Auster dramatises the psyche, explores and observes certain states.

Invention and The New York Trilogy, demonstrate the need for a point of opposition that self can reflect from. Last Things shows what occurs in a zone where any two binary poles are always unstable. The oppressive state is no longer a monolith of spatial control, but a phenomenon of plurality provoking and maintaining an anarchic chaos of space. As Anna observes on arrival, "it felt as though we were entering an invisible world, a place where only blind people lived." (p.18). The world is invisible, or rather an opaque space, suggesting a meaning behind its garb of invisibility, it is there and not there, the people are blind because they share no intersubjectivity regarding their realities. The two outsiders Anna and Farr, attempt to get behind this invisibility by their textual projects which serve as loci for human connectedness. On another textual plane, the city is invisible, because the dramatisation of Anna's ontological quest has yet to unfold. Its inhabitants are paradoxically blind, in that they are hyper-aware of their environment and perform a paranoid, visual scouring of the scatological surface of city reality. This landscape is a living breathing entity, a chaos subject to textual interpretation.

Self-signification stems from the spatial landscape and the objects it holds, survival depends upon sustaining oneself physically and psychologically from the chaos of the city - "The job is to zero in on these little islands of intactness, to imagine them joined to other such islands, and those islands to still others, and thus to create new archipelagos of matter." (p.35). In a landscape where blank space dangerously proliferates, reality is

sought through the connection of arbitrary signs that retain some signification or at least can have some meaning ascribed to them. They provide an essential other in a fluctuating voidal reality.

Yet not all the topographical space in the book is negative. Hope for Anna comes in the form of the opalescent world outside of the city. Auster's inspiration for this scene and his optimistic humanist message at the end of the text stems from a quote by Anne Frank which he relates in The Invention of Solitude,

"It's really a wonder," she wrote, just three weeks before her arrest, "that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. . . I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens , I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end. . ." (p.157)

From the rooftop of Ferdinand's staged suicide, she glimpses the ocean - "I had proof that the city was not everywhere, that something existed, beyond it, that there were other worlds beside this one." (p.74). Hope lies in the uncharted nothingness (as it did when she arrived in the city), the blankness, the unknown, any possibility of the existence of other worlds outside the boundaries often associated with the ocean. Anna's epiphanies are conceived in transcendental and spatial terms and possess a zen-like quality. They are provoked by a loss of self to motion or a physical act - her childhood train journey, or her strangling of Ferdinand. As she strangles Ferdinand during his attempted rape of her she exclaims, "I shut my eyes, and then it began to feel as if I were flying through empty space, moving through an enormous night of blackness and stars." (p.65). This is a void of inhumanity with which landscape is always tempting Anna. It wants her to relinquish

her human ties and responsibility and allegiance to causality and unite with the emptiness of phenomenological space.

The ocean is a very important trope in "Last Things". Ferdinand conceives of the streets as an ocean, constantly moving, unpredictable and full of sharks, the scavengers and hardened killers surviving in a ruthless urban sea. Typically Auster gives the most insightful revelation to this delusionary figure, "Hug to the shore is my advice, hug to the shore and send up as many smoke signals as you can." (p.55). Ultimately Anna clings to the edge of reality as opposed to the chaotic sea of meaning and writes her smoke signal.

Ferdinand and Isabella are part of the coalescing of historical periods I referred to earlier. Their names seem to refer to the names of the founders of the Spanish Empire, who commissioned Columbus's expeditions. Ferdinand's torturing of mice, Wesseling points out, could refer to Ferdinand of Aragon's cruel Inquisition. Ferdinand's ships, a model/mirror of Aragon's fleet are his most important contribution to the text's underlining philosophy. He chooses to play the role of the maroon and adopts the language of a buccaneer as a way of asserting control over his deluded environment. His ships are an attempt by him to control reality like Stone's model in The Music of Chance, the shrinking scale of his work is directly proportionate to his grasp of reality. His ambition is to build a ship, which will be so small that it will be invisible.

His reductionist experiment is mirrored by Anna's writing becoming smaller and smaller as she nears the end of her notebook. As Isabella wastes away her messages to Anna get

shorter, yet when Anna rereads them after Isabella has died, "those simple messages no longer seemed very simple at all. A thousand things came rushing back to me at once." (p.182). Isabella like other hunger artists, finds that the scarcity of words reflects the deprivations of the body. As Ellmann notes,

> Yet this diminishment of words, like that of flesh, is experienced as distillation rather than reduction, because it fosters the enlargement of the spirit. Soyinka writes, 'My body dwindles but . . .my mind expands' Other hunger artists, too, emaciate their language in order to intensify their vision. Emily Dickinson, for instance, creates a "banquet of abstemiousness" in her verse, a kind of cornucopia of reticence. (p.107)

Anna subsequently realises the power of words and embarks on the writing of her letter. Although the environment has been stripped of all diverting objects, luxuries, there is a sense that the things that are left are imbued with significance that compensates for the losses. Just as Fogg, describing Effing's death-bed environment to the dying man concludes that he "mined that space until it became inexhaustible, a plenitude of worlds within worlds."(Moon Palace p.219). Auster suggests in Last Things that the nature of humanity and human traits such as friendship and love, mean that we will always create enough for us to survive, that no matter how degraded or barren our environment is our imagination makes it infinitesimally divisible. The end is always an illusion, Anna knows that,

> The closer you come to the end, the more there is to say. The end is only imaginary, a destination you invent to keep yourself going, but a point comes when you realise you will never get there. You might have to stop, but that does not mean you have come to the end. (p.183)

Auster is obsessed by this lack of closure, as I discussed in reference to The Locked Room in Chapter 2. Moon Palace, In the Country of Last Things, Ghosts, The Invention

of Solitude all end with the promise of a new beginning, a continuation. Remember Peter Aaron, foresees his "Leviathan" project continuing forever, until an outside force steps in and stops him writing. Similarly, Farr's endless chronicle is stopped by the fire in the library which destroys his work. Of course, this fits in with Auster's overriding philosophy of connectedness and the multifarious nature of reality.

Auster returns to the favoured postmodern image of the "double" and the use of paradox to create an oppressive sense of helplessness summed up by the cult of the runners -"By the time a member is ready to make his death run, he has simultaneously reached a point of ultimate strength and ultimate weakness." (p.12). Jean Baudrillard notes that,

> Nothing evokes the end of the world more than a man running straight ahead on a beach, swathed in the sounds of his walkman, cocooned in the solitary sacrifice of his energy . . .in a sense, he spews himself out. . .He has to attain the ecstasy of fatigue, the 'high' of mechanical annihilation.(p.10 Ellmann)

Auster merely pushes this idea to its obvious conclusion. The running is no longer aimless, or gives literal expression to the fear that the universe is running down, the members of the runners' cult have recognised that the world is rapidly entrophying and so they train so that the ecstatic burn they feel is death. Auster's inspiration for the runners' cult is once again taken from Hamsun's Hunger, in which the protagonist tortures himself by running - "I began running so as to punish myself, left street after street behind me, pushed myself on with inward jeers, and screeched silently and furiously at myself whenever I felt like stopping."(The Art of Hunger p.107).

Every action and thought has its binary opposite almost simultaneously, therefore it is

debased and becomes another transient entity in the motion of the city. For example, memory is both negative and positive. Nostalgic recall creates both happiness and delusion, imagination is an escape but also a hindrance to survival. The only true escape is provided by death, "It is our art form, the only way we can express ourselves." (p.12). Death provides fleeting restorations of humanity, self-authorship and dignity and beauty - in the spectacle of the leapers, Isabel's white death gown, Frick's funeral.

What is borne out in In the Country of Last Things is that the fragmentations, discontinuities, maverick spatiality do not have to be weaknesses, but can be transformed into a political strength and opportunity for social resistance. Auster is fascinated by the experience of loneliness and isolation, how a detachment from one's social environment relates to the disembodied psychological effect produced in the individual. In In the Country of Last Things he foregrounds this idea, creating a landscape of brutality and uncertainty to push his protagonist to the edge of existence and the end of the psychological landscape, which result in an assertion of humanity and its survival after the apocalypse.

Chapter 4: Paul Auster's Moon Palace: Subverting "America"

"At times I felt that he was trying to pass on some mysterious and arcane knowledge to me, acting as a self-appointed mentor to my inner progress," (p.108)

"He would cast out intentionally ambiguous signals and then revel in the uncertainty they caused, adamantly refusing to divulge the facts." (p.109)

These quotations from Moon Palace are the words of Marco Fogg contemplating the motives of the enigmatic Effing, but they also articulate the reader's response to Moon Palace. Auster sets out to frustrate interpretation of this text; this is his Crying of Lot 49 , a quest narrative in which the protagonist dramatises the reader's pursuit of the truth or, at least, the single narrative meaning. As Pynchon does in "Lot 49", Auster is reflecting on the American Century, particularly those crisis points in American identity, the 50's and 60's.

Moon Palace appears to be Auster's most conventional work up to this point, it lacks the more obvious experimentation of The Invention of Solitude and The New York Trilogy and seems more of a self-styled American epic. It is told in retrospect in the first person and the narrative is backlit by the general history of the twentieth Century; it contains tragedy, romance, Faulknerian genealogical twists and circularity, manly pursuits and manifest destiny. Auster takes the complete American experience as his context and twists it to his design; in so doing he ends up writing his most subversive work to date. He is hyper-aware of his position in the American Studies canon and

seeks to implode that critical, literary and historical discourse from within. He does this by drawing on the core themes, subjects and ideas of American Studies and devaluing them, through parody, absurdity and self-conscious juxtaposition. He devalues these texts or subjects by asserting a personal particular narrative over them, thus obscuring them and their worth. He has recognised American culture's need for linear history, myth, inheritance, capitalism and genealogy to support the country's psychological, political and social imperialism and institutions. Auster is asking the question, "How does America explain itself?", and offering alternative interpretations of its traditional answers.

Then Auster, is presenting us with a typically self-conscious yarn; but is he also showing the same exercise over exorcism that I have accused him of in Chapter 2? His protagonist Fogg seems closer to Auster himself than previous characters:- his biography borrows more from Auster's own, he displays the same existential angst as the Auster of "Invention", but most importantly he is haunted by his unknown father and the fissures of his genealogy that reflect Auster's own life. This, then, is a very personal work for Auster, but, for another more important reason, in Moon Palace Auster is addressing a more universal ontological crisis in America, felt hardest by novelists and poets but shared by the populace, namely the reconfiguration of the American sublime.

In his book The American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre, Rob Wilson argues that, "As a poetic genre, the American sublime helped to produce the subject and site of American subjection as sublime." (p.3), and that "The genre of the sublime helped to consolidate an American wildness ('power') open to multiple identifications ('use')." (p.5). Wilson goes on to argue that the American sublime as a genre posits vastness as distinctly American and sacrilizes this force of

immense nature. He claims that Americans, haunted by a sense of social insignificance are desperate for grandeur and quotes de Tocqueville's claim of the American people that their "imagination shrinks at the thought of themselves as individuals and expands beyond all limits at the thought of the state" (p.203).

Wilson then traces the history of representation of the American sublime from Andrew Jackson's 1830 Indian Removal Act as a move to cleanse and create an uninhabited emptiness or vastness that "the self might still - displacing God and indigenous mythologies - believe in" (p.4), to "the light-drenched empowerment in Emerson, the language claims of sublime afflatus in Whitman, painterly movement of sublime tropes into American luminism." (p.6).

The vastness and unknowability of these sites of the American sublime, continually provokes a dual reaction in the subject: one of dread/ awe, exhilaration/ desperation. The fact that force is sacrilized has profound implications in a modern or post-modern American environment, once manifest destiny has been inscribed upon writ-large Nature, conquering its power. Post-Hiroshima, the vast force is a nuclear one that can wipe out the planet-

> The American sublime has been effectively taken out of the heavens, out of the moon and stars, out of mountains and volcanoes, only to be installed in Apollo rocketry, into the computerised cockpit per se, where national power circulates and 'satellites' us in a project we trust is idealistic research and not a 'Star Wars' narrative written banally into history. (p.219)

The writer, who was previously the social representative and translator of America to the people, cannot cope with commodity infinitude, atomic figurations of energy and formlessness. How to

contain it, how to explain it? Wilson notes that,

The conversion scene of the postmodern poet - overcoming known boundaries and humbled to belief in some saving *telos* - is likely to occur not in Peacham, Vermont nor the petunia-ridden enclave of *The New Yorker* poem, but 'under the Pyramid' of the TransAmerica Building in San Francisco or drifting within the cybernetic forests and high-finance transactions of Wall Street. Or the postmodern sublime can occur, finally in worrying, mind-quelling forces release at Los Alamos and Hiroshima, the Apollo 11 moonlanding, nuclear winter, or superpower explorations of black holes and the ozone layer on Mars. (p200-201)

Through his protagonist Fogg, Auster is trying to examining the sublime throughout the American century and what ontological influence it has over the self. This is the meta-narrative of Moon Palace. Fogg's interpretation of Blakelock's "Moonlight" lies at the central point of the text and shapes the text on either side of it.

Weisenburger, in "Inside Moon Palace", rightly points out that Blakelock's 1885 canvas "Moonlight", and Auster's interpretation of it, establishes the standards of moral and ideological values in the novel. Fogg's own interpretation of the painting, is the same as the one Auster published in a 1987 *Art News*; Auster sees the painting as an anti-representational piece, whose mimetic detail is deliberately undone by Blakelock's painterly brushstrokes and unrealistic colour (Barone p.138). Auster feels that the painting is symbolic, as well as being a memorial, an idyll, for a vanished world. Weisenburger believes that what troubles Auster is the loss of a unique chance for innovative cultural contact, a chance seen as having been destroyed under wheels of an obsessively lineal narrative of progress and destiny.

I believe that Auster is also mourning the death of the American other, the natural world symbolized

by the Indian, the mystical and mythical space - the Natural sublime - that outside manifestation of the self from which identity is created. Moloch (as Ginsberg would put it) has destroyed the vast lunar western landscape, which gave Effing ne Barber an opportunity for rebirth and renaming and Moon Palace is questioning where Marco Fogg will find his defining Other or version of the sublime which will bestow on him ontological unity.

Auster also takes his aesthetic lead from Blakelock's "Moonlight". Like Blakelock he is nostalgic for the Natural sublime, and naturalistic representation, but cannot deny literary progress. That is why he deconstructs his American epic through self-conscious techniques, just as Blakelock deconstructs his moonlit utopia by crude application. Auster also holds up Blakelock's life as an example. Auster twists Blakelock's known biography to emphasise his anti-establishment bent and subversion of representational values with the official genealogy; he is a "midget" with "the eyes of a madman" , poverty stricken unable to support his wife and eight children; he is the lunatic offspring of American art, largely omitted from the canon. Effing notes that Blakelock, driven mad, took to dressing up in full Indian regalia and walking through the streets of New Jersey. But what led to his being institutionalised is that he "Hand-painted thousand dollar bills with his own picture on them right in the middle like the portrait of some founding father" (p.132) then attempts to change them in a bank. So, posing as the American Other, he attempts to subvert capitalism and genealogy by becoming his own founding father. Ironically, once he is in the "nuthouse" his paintings start to sell - "Some goddamned senator from Montana shelled out fourteen thousand dollars for *Moonlight* - the highest price ever paid for the work of a living American artist."(p.132). Auster presents us with the cash nexus of artistic production and consumption, and the cruel irony that Blakelock the rebel has been accepted by the mainstream government, yet he does not receive a

penny from his sales. Auster's Blakelock, the true rebel, serves as a critique of the naively nativistic self-fashionings of sixties radicals, whose claims of authentic self- hood led to an alternative uniformity and amount to style over substance.

Mainstream America during the 60's finds its defining Other in the form of communism, its binary opposite, and the counterculture's defining Other is the mainstream establishment, but Fogg views the counterculture as part of the mainstream and feels they are both "outside" his experience and frame of reference. Fogg is suffering a crisis of identity with the loss of his known family and the destruction of the trope for his unknown father and origins, the moon.

The novel begins, "It was the summer that men first walked on the moon. I was very young back then, but I did not believe there would ever be a future." (p.1). This encroachment on the moon haunts Fogg throughout the novel, he hallucinates the "Moon Palace" sign, replacing the actual moon- the ultimate victory for progress and crass commercialism. The technology of the moon landing is of course infused with the paranoia provoking energy of nuclear physics, which is another key strain in the psychological makeup of the characters in the book. Typically Auster lets a minor character at the bottom of the social scale articulate in layman's terms his own philosophy and feelings of cultural crisis, Fernandez the janitor exclaims,

'Sometimes it's like everybody's gone crazy. If you wanna know what I think, it's those things they're shooting into space. All that weird shit, those satellites and rockets. You send people to the moon, something's gotta give. You know what I mean? It makes people do strange things. You can't fuck with the sky and expect nothing to happen.' (p.46)

Just as Fernandez articulates a nation's paranoia, the drip down effect of technological domination

and the cold war is even affecting the drink-crazed margins of society as the bum in Central Park shouts at Fogg, "'Fucking commie agitator! You should go back to Russia where you belong!'" (p.64)

The Cold War, nuclear bombs, progress, Vietnam are all linked in the paranoid mind of Mrs. Hume's brother Charlie Bacon, another fool who speaks truth; he is the human side of Dr. Strangelove's redneck nuclear bombing crew. Bacon believes there are dozens of H-bombs stored under New York, whose locations are decipherable through baseball scores, yet there is morality to his madness as he tells Fogg and Kitty,

'I was scheduled to be in the crew of the next plane three days later, the one that went to Nagasaki. There was no way they were going to get me to do that. Destruction on that scale is God's business . . .as far as they're concerned, yellow people are no better than dogs. What do you think we're doing over there in Southeast Asia now? The same stuff, killing yellow people wherever we can find them, It's like slaughtering the Indians all over again. . .The generals are still making new weapons out in Utah, far away from everything, where no one can see them. . . Yellow people, white people, what difference does it make? We're all the same, aren't we?' (p.224)

Auster is clearly making the point that American imperialism is justified by an ingrained racism, and he consistently reflects on the fact that Columbus thought America was China when he discovered it. This also emphasises the circularity of the text, in that the failure of cultural cross-pollenation between whites and Native Americans that Weisenburger emphasised and the resultant violence is being re-enacted in Vietnam and also finds its analogy in the abortion of Marco and Kitty's half-caste child.

Throughout Moon Palace we are shown the natural sublime destroyed or bastardised by technology and progress, and the effect this has on individuals. Fogg becomes a caricature transcendentalist in

Central Park, a bastardised Whitman in a "man -made natural world," (p.62):

> The grass and the trees were democratic, and as I loafed in the sunshine of a late afternoon, or climbed among the rocks in the early evening to look for a place to sleep, I felt that I was blending into the environment, (p.57)

Of course Auster is being ironic in this passage, but is also making two very important points. Firstly, that our response to nature is forever second-hand, that Americans borrow the language of the transcendentalists and the romantics to describe nature. Our space for original representation is limited; a modern writer faced with another progressive sublime - the vast intertext, counterpunches with parody. Secondly, Auster makes the point that the park offers hope that the man-made sublime need not be techno-metropoli. Certainly, for Fogg, the park is a sanctuary from the city: "In the park, I did not have to carry around this burden of self-consciousness." (p.58), and "a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands of the streets." (p.56). The city is oppressive, outside of indifference, with the promise of violence for those who don't adhere to its capitalist principals and conformity. Auster uses the well-worn metaphor of the human stream to illustrate this. Fogg remarks that you cannot enter the streets "without adhering to a rigid protocol of behaviour. To walk among the crowd means never going faster than anyone else, never lagging behind your neighbour, never doing anything to disrupt the flow of human traffic." (p.56) In contrast the park is a humanist utopia, "It was live and let live" (p.57), full of a generosity of human spirit.

Starving, soaked and feverish, Fogg hallucinates the Moon Palace sign, its neon letters dominating the sky: "The two *o*s had tuned into eyes, gigantic human eyes that were looking down at me with scorn and impatience . . . I became convinced that they were the eyes of God." (p.70). The new God- capitalism disapproves of Fogg's folly. Fogg is saved as he hallucinates an aboriginal

epiphany, which serves as a rebirth of sorts:

> I suddenly began to dream of Indians. It was 350 years ago, and I saw myself following a group of half-naked men through the forests of Manhattan. It was a strangely vibrant dream, relentless and exact, filled with bodies darting among the light-dappled leaves and branches. A soft wind poured through the foliage, muffling the footsteps of the men, and I went on following them in silence, moving as nimble as they did, with each step feeling that I was closer to understanding the spirit of the forest. (p.70)

It is significant that Fogg mistakes Kitty Wu for Pocahontas because it further established the fact that Fogg is associating himself with the supreme Euramerican other - the Indian, who in the 60's is recast as the South-east Asian. It also reflects one of the most famous examples of Native Americans being betrayed - their trade of Manhattan to white settlers.

It is also telling that when Fogg visits Utah in search of the cave in which Effing was re-born, the whole of that desert area has been flooded and, as Effing notes, "That's where they shoot all those cowboy-and-Indian movies, the goddamned Marlboro man gallops through there on television every night." (p.157). Wilson notes that, "The desert remains the ground of any American sublime"(p.202), yet modern technology can alter its aridity and vastness at will. This whole episode is rife with tragic irony, Fogg drives there in a Pontiac, the Indian chief having been transformed by progress into the name of a car. He questions Kit Carson's granddaughter, who runs the Navaho trading post, about the cave. Carson was one of the most famous Mountain Men, rejecting society for solitude and freedom, a man "who knew Indians"; two generations on his kin are selling Indian necessities as tourist fodder. Even such unreconstructed characters as the Grisham Brothers, outlaws on the fringes of society, have succumbed to the intricacies of capitalism: Effing finds "bearer bonds, representing another ten thousand dollars worth of

investments in such things as Colorado silver mine, the Westinghouse utility company, and Ford Motors." (p.181), obviously they were planning to trade in their horses for model T's. Consistently Auster shows technology, capitalism and progress in a negative light, highlighting their destructive tendencies. In a prime example of ruthless individualism, Effing kills the outlaws and becomes a millionaire.

Whilst dictating his obituary Effing launches into a long rambling history of Tesla, the inventor of the alternating current and electrical genius. This passage makes no clear contribution to narrative progression and allows Auster to attack Edison who sacked Auster's father because he was a Jew (as documented in "Invention") and serves as a parable. Effing bears testament to Tesla's inventions at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and notes, "He was like some prophet of the future age, and no one could resist him. The total conquest of nature!" (p.144). Effing is so overawed by Tesla's vast intelligence, that he notes, "I realised that I was nothing, absolutely nothing . . .I felt invigorated by it as if I had managed to survive my own death" (p.146), this gives Effing the freedom to become a painter and revolt against his stock-broker father. By the World's Trade Fair in 1939, Effing claims, "It was all a sham. Progress was going to blow us up, any jackass could tell you that" (p.147). That year he sees a broken Tesla feeding pigeons in the park; the "one time genius from outer space" has renounced progress and capitalism and has returned to nature.

The text continually brings the reader back to its centrepiece, the moon and representations of it. When Fogg studies other paintings by Blakelock he is struck by the moons in them, ". . . I was no longer able to see them as moons. They became holes in the canvas, apertures of whiteness looking out onto another world." (p.141). It is important that the moons become holes, literally gaps in the

representational canon, fragments or tunnels to other possibilities outside the dominant discourse. Once technological explorations have shorn the moon of animistic aura, it becomes a floating signifier with no definite signified and therefore open to projected representation.

What Auster presents us with in Moon Palace is the fragmented non-linear genealogy and history, governed by chance and coincidence, this offers a counterpoint to mainstream time, space and discourse. M.S. Fogg's disrupted family tree is the analogy and limbs on which Auster hangs his subversive philosophy and assorted other themes which he seeks to explore. The American nuclear family ideal is exploded, literally, by Auster, he is deliberately undercutting lineal genealogy as a way of attacking the American establishment.

Fogg's mother is killed by another representation of technology, a speeding bus. He is reared by his Uncle Victor, and eventually takes a job as aid to Thomas Effing, who in 1916 embarks on a painting expedition to Utah that goes wrong, which gives him an opportunity to abandon his frigid wife and create a new self. He later becomes aware that his wife Elizabeth has given birth to his son whilst he was in Utah, the experience of which has sent her insane. She becomes a parodic Mrs. Rochester, which only serves to heighten the Gothic nature of the Barbers' history.

When Effing dies, Fogg contacts this heir, Soloman Barber, who, it transpires, was Emilly Fogg's lover and Marco Fogg's real father. Marco realises this at the same time as his attempt at paternity is being frustrated by his lover Kitty Wu's insistence on having an abortion. Shocked that Sol is his father, Marco accidentally pushes him into an open grave, an act of patricide. Weisenburger notes that,

This genealogy simply fails to exfoliate in any "natural" way; it never grows "outside" the highly formalised obsessions of the family it represents. Instead the genealogy collapses inward on Marco and thus approaches a near erasure, or zeroing-out, in the abortion Kitty demands over his objections. (p.133)

Patricia Tobin claims that the classical novel draws on a linear dynastic line on which to hang its narrative, a line that unites diverse generations and serves to legitimise state authority. (Barone p.134). Auster is questioning the linear progress of the state and its authority and historical time. Amid the information saturated post-modern world Fogg's confused genealogy mimics the chaos and fluctuation of American society.

Paternalism is undermined throughout the book. Just as Fogg's genealogy appears to be a gathering zero, due to Kitty's abortion, Auster introduces into the narrative a circularity in which events in Marco's life reflect those of his father's and grandfather's and he seems trapped in a self-annihilating sequence prescribed by the twisted roots of his family tree.

Auster himself experiences a fear of repeating the dysfunctional male relationships in his genealogy, a fear that is ingrained in The Invention of Solitude and motivates the ontological quest of "The Book of Memory". The lives of Marco, Sol and Effing and their biographies are constantly interpenetrating, reflecting each other. Barber's Kepler's Blood, one of the most prominent of these mirror texts, is a Jungian creation myth that incorporates what the young Barber knows about his father, and the WASP extermination of the Native American under the guise of manifest destiny. Yet for all its naiveté it prefigures the patricide of the main text with Kepler's son killing him, and then unwittingly killing his own son in shape-shift form years later.

Kepler is seduced by the West and abducted by Indians just as Fogg imagines his father as Buck Rogers, abducted by space and the alien future. Barber pushes the West as lunar landscape theme to its extreme and invents a creation myth that Indians descended from the moon, a mirror of the story Fogg tells Kitty concerning Cyrano's 1649 text about a trip to the moon and his landing among the Indians of New France. Fogg's starvation after his Uncle's death, mirrors Barber's gorging. As Fogg says, "I was trying to separate myself from my body" (p.29), which is exactly what Barber is trying to do. Fogg's ontological and almost physical death and resurrection in the cave in Central Park after he tells himself, "No one is allowed to die more than once,'" (p.67), mirrors his Grandfather Barber's rebirth as Thomas Effing in the cave in Utah. Sol Barber's death triggered by his fall into a cave in the ground - the open grave, leads to a physical rebirth as his body is stripped of fat, his hair grows back and he is revealed physically as Fogg's father. Fogg exclaims, "all of a sudden I realised that I was looking at myself. Barber had the same eyes I did." (p.296).

Auster also emphasises the textuality of these characters so that we can think of them as part of an intertext: Marco begins signing his papers M.S. and was "delighting in the fact that the initials stood for *manuscript*.", his Uncle Victor tells him that, "'Everyman is the author of his own life,. . .The book you are writing is not yet finished.'" (p.7), whereas Fogg's father is a "blank" space. All the main characters are obsessed with their most basic individual textuality - their names. The surname denotes roots and kin and the first name individuality, both Marco and Sol Barber, initially sacrilize their names, as Marco claims, "This name was so bound up with my sense of who I was that I wanted to protect it from further harm." (p.7). Gradually though they both play on their names, Sol turns himself into a sun and shaves his head so that it resembles a moon, Fogg later "welcomed any added associations or ironies that I could attach to myself."(p.7), Effing relinquishes the legacy of

the ruthless "Old Man" Barber, steals his own legacy and changes his name. All of them realise the potential space for identity their names provide.

As a name "Marco Stanley Fogg", with its reference to Marco Polo, the Stanley who found Dr. Livinstone and Phileas Fogg , pre-empts Fogg's journey of self discovery. Moon Palace is told from the first-person perspective by Fogg, as an autobiography, yet in Chapter 4 we are almost exclusively in Effing's consciousness, hearing *his* autobiography, Auster also makes it clear that Barber's histories stem from his own ontological explorations as much as any historical facts. Auster seems to be subscribing to the old adage that men need to inscribe something on the world in order to leave something behind for future generations, because they do not experience pregnancy. He is also suggesting that every text is a form of autobiography and that objective writing and action is impossible, we are all trapped into articulating our own psychosis.

Auster's aim is to challenge the representational texts of America. At one level the characters in the book recognise the errant potential in representative texts themselves. For example the young Solomon Barber's search for his father and double Oedipal-killing of the representatives of his father in his adolescent short story "Kepler's Blood" which fuels his nationally acclaimed histories. Effing and Fogg's random consumption of literature destroy hierarchies of worth and relevance, and in Fogg's case constitutes mourning for Uncle Victor and thus a subsuming of the general to the personal. Fogg feels in his arbitrary reading of his Uncle's books he is occupying the same mental space,

> It was like following the route of an explorer from long ago, duplicating his steps as he thrashed out into virgin territory moving westward with the sun, pursuing the light until it was finally extinguished. (p.21)

Books for Fogg and Sol Barber offer an alternative world to outside reality, literature is space, a sublime vastness, but, more importantly, Marco feels he is absorbing his Uncle's life through these second-hand books, "By the end all the blanks would be filled in, all distances would be covered." (p.22). The metaphor of the West is important because, just as Fogg reads his Uncle's books, his father's books and his grandfather's books, he literally follows their trails out West. Is his faith that the blanks will be filled in justified? Does he satisfy his ontological quest? Does he find the sublime other to give him self-definition? These are all questions I will address in my conclusion.

Though Moon Palace appears to be a spiritual and ontological text, it is also technically interesting and a political work. Auster debunks Romanticism, American representational art, Frontier mythology and Manifest Destiny, Whitman, Columbus, Capitalism, industrial progress, the Apollo landing and the 60's radicals as tools of the hierarchy, by subverting such genre and given beliefs, through absurd coincidences and self-conscious writing. Some of the self-conscious aspects of the text can be attributed to Auster's post post-modernist imperative, (his knowing, but narrative-driven writing) others have a greater significance to the text. For example, the books Victor reads aloud to Marco are Robinson Crusoe, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr .Hyde, The Invisible Man and these of course, encapsulate all of Auster's themes, solitary exile, doubling of lives, absence of the father (see "Portrait of an Invisible Man.") This is a typical deconstructive ploy used by Auster in most of his works. Neil Armstong becomes a policeman, Effing meets the cliche outlaws, the Grisham Brothers, Fogg wanders West like a character straight out of Steinbeck, a "beautiful loser" seeking redemption in California.

Alternatively, Effing's critique of American art contributes to the philosophical thrust of the book. Effing criticises the Hudson River School, in particular Thomas Moran, because,

> he was the one who showed Americans what the West looked like. The first painting of the Grand Canyon was by Moran, it's hanging in the Capitol building in Washington; the first painting of Yellowstone, the first painting of the Great Salt Desert, the first painting of the canyon country in southern Utah - they were all done by Moran. Manifest Destiny! They mapped it out, they made pictures of it , they digested it into the great American profit machine, Those were the last bits of the continent, the blank spaces no one had explored. Now here it was, all laid out on a pretty piece of canvas for everyone to see. The golden spike, driven right through our hearts! (p.149)

Once again Auster is highlighting the cash nexus and commodification at the heart of American art. Effing claims he had been in Paris in 1906 and therefore knew about the Modernist art movement before the historic Armory Show. Effing's art, he claims, fell between the two movements, "Mechanical abstractions, the canvas as the world, intellectual art - I saw it as a dead end. I was a colorist, and my subject was space, pure space and light: the force of light when it hits the eye. I still worked from nature," (p.150). It is significant, too, that the only painting Fogg tells us of in Effing's house is "one of the panels from a series of paintings by Thomas Cole entitled *The Course of Empire*, a visionary saga of the rise and fall of the New World."(p.108) that suggests that Cole - the founder of the Hudson River School - came to realise that the manifest destiny he was helping to distil was destroying his beloved nature.

Painters like Albert Bierstadt responded to large-scale landscape with large-scale canvas, but when Effing attempts to paint the Great Salt Desert,

> there was no other way to wrestle with the size of things. The marks on the page became smaller and smaller, small to the point of vanishing.. . Again, it all jumped out at me in ways I wasn't

prepared for. The mountains, the snow on top of the mountains, the clouds hovering around the snow. After a while, they began to merge together and I couldn't tell them apart. Whiteness, and then more whiteness. How can you draw something if you don't know it's there? . . It didn't feel human anymore." (p.154-155)

Effing initially concludes that "It's all too massive to be painted or drawn . . . the more you see, the less your pencil can do. To see it is to make it vanish." (p.157). Effing responds to this natural sublime with awe and dread, which forces him inward to take refuge from this stark outside,

All that bloody silence and emptiness, You try to find your bearings in it, but it's too big, the dimensions too monstrous and eventually it just stops being there. There's no world, no land, no nothing. It comes down to that, Fogg, in the end it's all a figment. The only place you exist is in your head. (p.156)

Effing is degraded to a state of nothingness, from which he needs to reconstruct his self and identity.

After the treacherous Scoresby has abandoned Effing with the fatally injured Byrne, Effing has a fit of insanity, and discovers the hermit's cave: "He had food and water; he had a house; he had found a new identity for himself, anew and utterly unexpected life. The reversal was almost too much for him to comprehend. Just one hour before, he had been ready to die." (p.167). He has ontologically died and been reborn and this awakens him to a new relationship with an outside he has previously dreaded and found incomprehensible. He can now paint it:

The true purpose of art was not to create beautiful objects, he discovered. It was a method of understanding, a way of penetrating the world and finding one's place in it and whatever aesthetic qualities an individual canvas might have were almost an incidental by-product of the effort to engage oneself in the rules he had learned, trusting in the landscape as an equal partner, voluntarily abandoning his intentions to the assaults of chance, of spontaneity, the onrush of brute particulars. He was no longer afraid of the emptiness around him, The act of trying to put it on canvas had somehow internalised it for him, and now he was able to feel its indifference as something that

belonged to him, as much as he belonged to the silent power of those gigantic spaces himself.(p.170)

Effing has learnt not to see the landscape as a foe to be captured or mastered, he attains a oneness that interpenetrates with his surroundings. As Effing gradually exhausts his material supplies, covering all his canvases and filling all of his notebooks, "He had descended so deeply into his solitude by then that he no longer needed any distractions. He found it almost unimaginable, but little by little the world had become enough for him."(p.172). He gains the self-signification that eludes Quinn at the end of "City of Glass". Quinn subsumes himself to his text so that the ending of his notebook signals the end of his existence. Effing transcends this, uniting the outside reality with his inner self and finds solace in solitude, whereas Quinn longs for community. Effing's revelation provides an important analogy for the text.

One of Auster's common themes is connectedness and Moon Palace contributes to his ongoing debate. Uncle Victor creates alternative genealogies and links in order to compensate young Marco's lack of substantial roots, "Uncle Victor found meanings where no one else would have found them and then, very deftly, he turned them into a form of clandestine support."(p.7). After the moonlanding, the "Moon Palace" sign becomes very significant for Fogg,

Everything was mixed up in it at once: Uncle Victor and China, rocket ships and music, Marco Polo and the American West. I would look out at the sign and start to think about electricity . . . One thought kept giving way to another, spiralling into ever larger masses of connectedness. The idea of voyaging into the unknown, for example, and the parallels between Columbus and the astronauts . . .It went on and on like that, and the more I opened myself to these secret correspondences, the

closer I felt to understanding some fundamental truth about the world. . .suddenly as I had gained this power, I lost it. I had been living inside my thoughts for three or four days, and one morning I woke up and found that I was somewhere else; back in the world of fragments, back in the world of hunger and bare white walls. (p.33)

Fogg, like Auster, wants to see connectedness and causality within the chaos of his reality. Later in the novel, Effing claims that everything is connected by electricity, but is careful to make the distinction between the natural electricity surrounding us and man-made electricity which is shown in a negative light, most emphatically in the description of Edison's electric chair. Early in the text, Fogg describes watching an oil tanker explode and experiences an epiphany of sorts, "it occurred to me that the inner and the outer could not be separated except by doing great damage to the truth" (p.25). At this juncture Auster is making the point that the general history of the 60's is essential to understanding Fogg's personal history. Yet Fogg and Auster are very troubled by the "outer", the general history, with which they do not know how to deal.

There is constant discussion in the context of outside and inner experience, and of history; the general history of America is oblique, referenced and listed but never truly acknowledged. Rather, Auster focuses on the spiritual and cultural crisis of identity. Self-discovery and significance are exclusively the domain of the claustrophobic interiors that litter the book: Solomon Barber's grotesque body, Fogg's stripped apartment, Effing's cave. The outside historical text never encroaches on Fogg's cerebral preoccupations; even his army medical is remembered as a dreamlike experience until he asserts his own intellectual pursuits on it, (in his interview with the army psychologist) and is deemed insane and politically unsound (a pinko) by the establishment. Concerning his Vietnam medical, our narrator becomes strangely unreliable. He remarks,

Much of what followed is lost to me now. Bits and pieces remain, but nothing that adds up to a full-fledged memory, nothing that I can talk about with any conviction. This ability to see what happened proves how wretchedly frail I must have been. (p.76)

Auster is further asserting personal history over general history.

Auster makes some important points in this text about progress and the destruction of the natural and its attendant sublime, nuclear power and its dangers, but never tackles issues such as the Vietnam war and American identity head on. He does not attain that balance of the personal and the general, so that any political aspects of the texts remain fragmented and ambiguous and lack a unity of purpose. So if the historical and political are subsumed by the personal and ontological, the overriding question remains: does Fogg attain balance, security and identity at the end of the text, or does his walk West have the emptiness of meaning of Forrest Gump's aimless running and is the reader, like Gump's followers, trusting in our leader's purpose only to be disappointed at the end, when nothing is revealed? The book finally draws its concluding scene from what Byrne tells Effing: "A man can't know where he is on the earth except in relation to the moon or a star." (p.153) geographically and according to Auster spiritually. So does Fogg solve his ontological quest and gain self-satisfaction?

The book ends with Fogg finally bringing those the two tropes that are constantly compared and haunt the book together: namely the mythic West and the mystical Moon. As Fogg stands apart from the town's "late-century American noises", he sees the moon rising over the Pacific: "I kept my eyes on it as it rose into the night sky, not turning away until it had found its place in the darkness." (p.307). This ending is both highly romantic and symbolic at the same time: Fogg has

seemingly rejected the industrial for the natural, now sure of his roots he has completed the quest, but does this romantic ending suggest that he can now adopt mainstream America and its myth of western rebirth?

Again we must return to "Moonlight" and Fogg's response to it,

> I wondered if Blakelock hadn't painted his sky green in order to emphasise this harmony, to make a point of showing the connection between heaven and earth. If men can live comfortably in their surrounding, at peace with themselves and the world, and the more I thought about it, the more this serenity seemed to dominate the picture. . . If men can live comfortably in their surroundings he seemed to be saying, if they can learn to feel themselves a part of the things around them, then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness. (p.139)

This is the ideal, harmony and balance between self and other, inside and outside, individual and community. Yet how can Fogg draw on the animistic aura of the moon to give him these things, now that he knows that astronauts have planted, "a flag in the eye of what had once been the goddess of love and lunacy." (p.31).

To return to "Moonlight", finally, and to Leonard Fisher's interpretation of it,

> *Moonlight* is one of those singular canvases of plausible reality that in effect expresses the lonely soul of a man who has come to grips with his seeming insignificance in a vast and ominous world. Blakelock's *Moonlight* was more an inner vision of himself than the depiction of a moody Indian camp.(Fisher p.99)

It is possible that Fogg is left at the end of the text with an understanding of his own insignificance, as Effing was when he met Tesla and he will begin his life anew. It is certain that Moon Palace articulates Auster's inner turmoil as much as it weaves a good story. In terms of the text, its title is an oxymoron in that the natural, "the moon", and the manmade, "the Palace", will always be at odds

with each other never gaining the harmony that the title, a distinctly empty and missing sign in the book, suggests.

More likely is the idea that the moon, "as round and yellow as a burning stone." (p.307) becomes purely representational and remains for Fogg, that symbol of otherness, that projection of the possibility of a space, a blank area, an arena of the sublime, a landscape like the old Frontier, which hasn't been colonised by the American imperialist imagination- or from his perspective does not appear to be - which still offers an opportunity for dissent and a gap for innovation and the hope of connectedness.

Fogg has learned the need for such a space through his act of describing things to Effing; he learns to grasp the essence of an object, revelling in the errancy of representational discourse as opposed to its finality. Auster as a writer, demands that sphere which is unrepresentational, which is why characters such as Stillman Snr. in his quest for oppressing language in "City of Glass" are so damned.

Moon Palace, can be read on many different planes of understanding, as a good yarn: as an analogy of the 60's, as a frontier romance, as a Faulknerian saga of origins, as a critique of late capitalist America. But Auster intermingles these various texts so that they overlap each other, absorb each others constructs and form, so that it becomes a book about the act of writing, of the validity of representation and the motives behind texts and representations. Auster is documenting the lack of space for discovery of self through art and experience, as information, genres, form, texts, histories and discourses overlap. In this book Auster throws himself into the stew of accelerated culture,

prising out those textual gaps; those "white spaces" of innovative possibility and imagination, that gap between self and expression of self and covets them.

Chapter 5: Leviathan

On first reading, Leviathan appears to be Auster's most realistic and conventional novel for it contains little of the experimentation of The New York Trilogy, few of the cerebral passages that peppered Moon Palace and none of the fairytale elements of Mr. Vertigo. Ultimately Levitation is an unresolved novel that fuses themes and ideas which Auster has explored before, namely the doubling of "Ghosts", the ghost-writing and subsumation to the dominant ego of "The Locked Room", the de-mythologizing of America and personal against political tussle of Moon Palace and the contingent reality or chance as dictate, that feature in all his work.

Leviathan is remarkably similar to Moon Palace in many respects. A first person narrator who is also the protagonist, which lends the text that element of autobiography and confession, tells it retrospectively. Peter Aaron's biography contains elements of Auster's own, as did Fogg's in Moon Palace; Aaron's first wife is called Sophie as is Auster's, his second is called Iris, Auster's is Siri; he writes his novel *Luna* in his Vermont retreat, the same Vermont retreat as Auster no doubt.

Leviathan, like Moon Palace is concerned with male angst and male identity. The women in the book are insubstantial, unhinged characters; Fanny, Maria, and Lilli, all have more in common with Kitty and Mrs. Barber than they do with any of the men in their lives. We are told that Sachs' novel, "The New Colossus" has a distorted drawing of the Statue of Liberty on the cover (as does the British edition of Moon Palace) and it is this image that inspires Sachs planned bombing campaign, in the same way that

Blakelock's "Moonlight" inspires Fogg's trip West. "The New Colussus" ". . .is filled with references to the Statue of Liberty"(p.35), just as Moon Palace is filled with the trope of the moon. Sachs' wife Fanny is actually curating a Blakelock exhibition at one point in Leviathan. Fogg's sparse, fragmented genealogy seems completely different to Sachs' endless sisters and relatives, yet Sachs is affected by his genealogy in a similar way to Fogg. He seems alienated by its vastness, lack of intimacy, reflected by his relatives' interpenetrating dialogues, symbolised by the family home with its "Victorian labyrinths" (p.28)

Technically, Auster relies again to the same extent as in Moon Palace, on elements of self-conscious writing, so that our imaginative disbelief snags just enough on his barbed asides to cause discomfort. Again, he is merely restating the nature of literature at the end of the 20th Century. Similarly, Auster is restating his belief that there is something wrong with America and that this problem is affecting intelligent American males more acutely. In Moon Palace he focused on problems caused by genealogy, technology and the destruction of the Natural sublime. In Leviathan he concerns himself with political impotency, psychology, authentic representation and the culture of consumption. Both texts are haunted by a nuclear-paranoia, and an oblique sense of the impending apocalypse, which Aaron suggests contributed to the rebellion of Sachs,

> Sachs often talked about 'the bomb'. It was a central fact of the world for him, an ultimate demarcation of the spirit, and in his view it separated us from all other generations in history. Once we acquired the power to destroy ourselves, the very notion of human life had been altered; even the air we breathed was contaminated with the stench of death . . .there's a certain eeriness to the obsession, as if it were a kind of deadly pun, a mixed-up word that took root inside him and proliferated beyond his control. (p.24)

Yet the outside world and general history remains as oblique throughout the text as it is in Moon Palace. Aaron notes Reaganism's affect on Sach's ability to publish magazine articles-"in the new American order of the 1980's, his position became increasingly marginalized" (p.104), but for the most part personal history is foregrounded and the outside world ignored. Any encroachment on this clique of characters by outside forces, be they the FBI or the reporter hounding Lillian, are seen in a negative light.

In the simplest terms Leviathan is the biography and projective analysis of the life of Ben Sachs, as told by Peter Aaron; a narrator whose biography and linguistic philosophising reflect Auster's own. The novel begins with a quote by Emerson: - "Every actual State is corrupt." One would assume that Emerson was referring to a system of government, when using the word "State", though if Auster's book sets out to prove this then it fails miserably, because the State or government are mere shadows in the wings of his unfolding drama, and the protest bombings of Sachs are given short shrift - little insight is given to their political implications and message and perhaps that is the point. Rather, Auster conceives of the "State" as an objective being or objective definition, that being the case then Leviathan proves the Emerson statement. Auster creates a novel in which every character, truth, narrative detail or opinion is unreliable, and suspect.

Leviathan is a study of surfaces in modern America, and the impossibility of fracturing those surfaces and exposing the substance or matters they are shielding. By using such terms as "substance", "matter" and "shielding" I am suggesting a duality of meaning that is pertinent to this particular text. A "shield " is often used to refract, or divert an attempt

to penetrate the thing behind it, "substance" and "matter" can refer to a physical presence, but also a cerebral or ephemeral presence. Capitalism has created an exchange system whereby icons or symbols represent objective worth and as the foremost capitalist system in the world, America has squared its philosophical, religious, social and political beliefs with this system. Due to the failure of religious authority, the culture of confusion, inability to objectify or know the self or other, the representational system that dictates financial relationships has been co-opted for use in human relationships. This is shown most radically by Sachs, who replaces Lillian's husband DiMaggio in every way and who gives monetary recompense for his murder of DiMaggio. Sachs is a fluctuating symbol, when Aaron first meets him he notes that, "He resembled Ichabod Crane, perhaps, but he was also John Brown" (p.12), the pastoral writer and the worthy insurrectionist the two extremes of Sachs' personality spectrum, his attitude to his scars, which I will address later, emphasises the importance he places on representation of self.

In Leviathan Auster is showing how the commodification and representational system that is a by-product of capitalism is now the interface between the self and reality in America. Both Aaron and Sachs are involved in quests to reduce this gap or space between the representation and the reality, in an attempt to touch authenticity and truth.

One of the key exchange systems is language and Auster himself, as ever, is struggling with the problems and fissures inherent in this system. He dramatizes these problems through his narrator, Peter Aaron, and Aaron's argument concerning literature and its effects on reality. As Aaron tells the FBI men,

> Because my books are published, I said. People read them, and I don't have any idea who they are. Without even knowing it, I enter the lives of strangers, and for as long as they have my book in their hands, my words are the only reality that exists for them . . . A book is a mysterious object, I said, and once it floats out into the world, anything can happen. (p.12)

Auster consistently undercuts Aaron's assertion that "my words are the only reality that exist for them". Auster takes great pleasure in disproving this arrogant statement. In a perfect relationship between a literary work and its consumer this pure imaginative exchange is possible. However, Auster shows that experiences, both literary and literally, affect or distort the relationship between reader and fiction, author and fiction, or author and fictional narrator. The statement (the book) is never absorbed objectively by a reader, one always filters a text through one's subjectivity. Many texts in Auster are dismissed by their readers, like Blue in "Ghost" and the narrator in "The Locked Room" who gains no insight from Fanshawe's last statement. It is important that Sachs is not inspired to begin his bombing campaign by the revolutionary text of "The New Colossus", he literally judges the book by its cover, the picture of the Statue of Liberty, and is inspired by that alone.

Leviathan begins with Aaron informing us of an explosion in Wisconsin, which has killed a man, a friend of his whose "true story" he will tell. Aaron has refused to cooperate with the FBI, which gives him room to compile and compose his own version of Sachs' life, just as the FBI are composing their version. The fact that Aaron gives his version to the FBI at the end of the book negates the notion that he is writing against the government or official report; rather, the emphasis in the book is one of the infinite versions of one man's life, and the fact that the definitive truth about anything can never

be grasped. In trying to interpret and translate the life of Sachs, Aaron has only Sach's projected image and the narratives, secondary accounts and his own subjective analysis of their shared experience on which to base his biography.

The doubling that is occurring, "In other words, the whole time I'm here in Vermont writing this story, they'll be busy writing their own story, intrigues Auster and Aaron. It will be my story and once they've finished it, they'll know as much about me as I do myself." (p.7), develops the theme of doubling, which dominates the book. There is an internal mirroring whereby events and thoughts intersect to predict future occurrences, but there is also a reflection or refraction of an outside reality comprised of Auster's own autobiography and his own act of writing. This is no more evident than in the way in which we catch a glimpse of Auster through Aaron's relating of the story and his philosophising on "Auster-ian" topics such as writing, chance and causality. Auster deftly exposes just enough of his construction work, largely through irony, to unsettle the reader's relationship with the narrator, Aaron.

Auster creates unease in the reader in the very next page, when he describes the FBI men's black suits and Raybans- a pure cliché. Aaron notes their "blankness" and "indifference" and states, "Their names were Worthy and Harris, but I forget which one was which. I don't want to make too much of first impressions." (p.5). These characters are blank and forgettable because they are purely representational and stereotypical; they exist only as first impressions because they only reappear at the end of the book; even

their names, "Worthy and Harris", or Harass, suggest the "Mr. Nice, Mr.Nasty" interview techniques familiar to anyone who has seen a police drama. They even offer to investigate the "impostor" who is signing Aaron's book. Auster is drawing on a narrative technique learnt from his earlier digesting of hard-boiled novels, having the "small" crime as the key to the larger case. At the end of the book they discover the "impostor" was Sachs, which is ironic because Aaron has deputised for Sachs in every sphere, whilst Sachs himself is deputising for Dimaggio, whereas Auster is controlling all of them. So who is the real impostor?

Once Auster's presence is glimpsed, Leviathon becomes a series of exquisite ironies, tongue-in-cheek philosophising and self-ridicule. For the discerning reader, this constant undercutting only adds external meaning and depth to an interesting story and frank narration of the lives of Ben Sachs, Peter Aaron and a circle of "off-the-wall" characters.

Aaron, Auster and Sachs are all obsessed with causality and connectedness. Aaron edits his biography of Sachs so that particular emphasis is placed on events in Sachs' past that he believes led specifically to his death, such as Sachs' mother's vertigo in the Statue of Liberty, his rebellious childhood, his paranoia over nuclear bombs, the fact that he is heavily influenced by Thoreau, especially "Civil Disobedience", even the fact that his fall occurs on July 4th whose fireworks display and "explosion had turned New York into a spectral city, a metropolis under siege" and the fact that "just moments before Ben fell, we drifted onto the story that he and his mother had told about their visit to the Statue of

Liberty in 1951." (p.108), suggest that there was always a chance that Ben would become the "Phantom of Liberty" and begin a bombing campaign to restore America.

Aaron is constantly emphasising the web of connections that result in Sachs' death. He establishes the fact that the Statue of Liberty is a trope for Sachs until his death, and uses a brief description of Sachs' novel "The New Colossus" to corroborate this. "The New Colossus", he tells us is a book of "lacerating anger that surged up on nearly every page: anger against America, anger against political hypocrisy, anger as a weapon to destroy national myths." (p.40)

Whilst Aaron has difficulty transcending the gap between the true Sachs and the knowable Sachs, and is obsessional about the validation and authenticity of his account, Sachs seems to revel in the possibilities of symbolic representation. This is borne out when we compare the text "Leviathan" by Peter Aaron with, "The Colossus" by Ben Sachs.

In "The New Colossus" Sachs creates an environment and a context whereby historical and literary characters can coexist, communicate and establish relationships. The democratic nature of this exercise creates a personal utopia for Sachs. He desires a mythic America, in which space transcends time, in which the boundaries of genre are crossed and fiction and reality merge with no impediment. We are told that,

> Among the characters who appear in the novel are Emma Lazurus, Sitting Bull, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Pulitzer, *Buffalo Bill* Cody, Auguste Bartholdi, Catherine Weldon, Rose Hawthorne, Ellery Channing, Walt Whitman, and William Tecumseh Sherman. But Raskalnikov is also there (straight from the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*- release from prison and newly arrived as an immigrant in the United States,

where his name is anglicised to Ruskin), and Ishmael from *Moby Dick* (who has a brief walk-on role as a bartender in New York). (pp.37-38)

Sachs is using the projected image, their edited selves, and their transcendent *characters* in every sense to create a mythic America. His interpretation of his fall is Puritanical and allegorical and demonstrates that significant reality for him is becoming a series of symbols. He gravitates towards Maria Turner because "he would be able to keep the symbol of his transformation constantly before his eyes." (p.126) and he recognises in her artwork a desire to reduce reality into symbols and to artificially produce an edited reality. Maria plays with representations of self; she fluctuates between different guises, such as a detective's quarry, a stripper etc.

Like Hester Prynne, Sachs recognises that he must now be represented by his Fall, but whilst Hester reconstitutes her defining symbol and eventually transcends it, Sachs is overwhelmed by his representational symbol (his scars) until they are belittled by another event, his killing of DiMaggio, whose perceived life and vocation Sachs mythologies and propagates as his own. Even Aaron realises that,

He wanted to display his wounds, to announce to the world that these scars were what defined him now, to be able to look at himself in the mirror every morning and remember what had happened to him. The scars were an amulet against forgetting, a sign that none of it would ever be lost. (p.125)

Similarly, Aaron notes that "Sachs confessed to me that he wore a beard 'because Henry David had worn one'- which gave me a sudden insight into how deep his admiration was." (p.26) or ironically, how superficial his admiration was; mimicking Thoreau's facial hair does not allow you to write Walden.

Sachs, like Auster, also takes pleasure in seeing a connectedness in history, literature and reality:

"Sachs loved these ironies, the vast follies and contradictions of history. The way in which the facts were constantly turning themselves on their head. By gorging himself on those facts, he was able to read the world as though it were a work of the imagination, turning documented events into literary symbols, tropes that pointed to some dark, complex pattern embedded in the real." (p.24)

On one level this explains why Sachs takes advantage of fate, which presents him with an opportunity for contrition and a new-identity, when Maria reveals to him that the man he has killed is her best friend's ex-husband. On a different level though Auster seems to be ridiculing himself and his obsession with chance and causality, which is documented in The Red Notebook and The Invention of Solitude.

The way in which Leviathan is constructed contributes to the frustration the reader feels with the book. Firstly, Auster gives us the punch line before telling us the joke: the first page retells the details of Sachs' death and the following text tells us in retrospect how this event came to pass. Aaron is like a Shakespearean Chorus, summarising the plot so that we focus on the details. However, the details of this case are always in question and the flat, confessional style of the text prompts reader alienation. So who is to blame for this anticlimatical work? Is it Aaron? If Auster is responsible for the flatness of this text we need to question why he wrote it this way. The most important indication that the nature of the text and its possible effect on the reader is premeditated is Auster/Aaron's critical discourse on "The New Colossus". After describing some scenes from the book, Aaron concludes.

There are dozens of such episodes in the book. All of them are true, each is grounded in the real, and yet Sachs fits them together in such a way that they become steadily more

fantastic almost as if he were delineating a nightmare or hallucination. As the book progresses, it takes on a more and more unstable character-filled with unpredictable associations and departures, marked by increasingly rapid shifts in tone-until you reach a point when you feel the whole thing begin to levitate, to rise ponderously off the ground like some gigantic weather balloon. By the last chapter, you've travelled so high up into the air, you realise that you can't come down again without falling, without being crushed. (p.39)

One must question why Auster explicates the conceit of the fictitious "The New Colossus". Is he saying this is the book I could have written? Is Auster decrying this overtly political, protest book as lacking post-60s relevance? Leviathan is dedicated to Don DeLillo, and "The New Colossus" with its time and genre transcending qualities echoes some of DeLillo's work. Aaron's criticism of the book could apply to a work by DeLillo or, in fact, one of Auster's previous books. By including a thoroughly transcendent novel in a deliberately terrestrial book, is Auster pre-empting criticism of the anticlimax of Leviathan? Is this then a critical safety net for Auster? If we believe that Auster is being ironic, then we forgive him Leviathan's inability to take off, it is his lead Zeppelin. Auster's balloon analogy is an ironic acknowledgement of his preceding work, Moon Palace in which Verne's 80 Days Around the World, provides a metaphor for transcendence for the protagonist Fogg, who ultimately finds himself hypnotised by the universal icon of transcendence, the moon, in the American metaphor for transcendence the West.

This summary of Sach's novel serves to authenticate Aaron's text, but also debilitate it, by presenting amore interesting alternative, the very fact that the last words of Leviathan remind you that you are holding a document or a text in your hand make any leap from the terrestrial impossible. It also makes us question our roles as readers. Are we the FBI

agents the ones who demand a single narrative and absolute meaning, or have we just read a leaked document, and uncovered a conspiracy to suppress Sachs biography? Auster is once again placing emphasis on the reader to interpret, form an opinion and create their own subjective meaning from this text. These final lines give the book containment, reinforcing the actuality of the text as an object, thus shattering any imaginative contemplation that usually accompanies the end of a novel. Containment is also a theme in the context of the book. The masses and any forces outside of Leviathan's clique of characters are viewed with disdain and any impingement, be it Reaganism on Sachs or merely a reporter coming to talk to Lillian, always comes with negative connotations. Is Auster highlighting that ruthless individualism and elitism ruled in 80's America, or is he merely being cynical? His cataloguing of the growing "Phantom of Liberty" cult seems to suggest so. What begins as a radio debate soon descends into a novel strip-show.

"The New Colossus" is typical of a 60's experimental text; it is post-modern to the extreme and Auster by highlighting this text, is simultaneously showing it to be dated. It is possible that he is assuring us that literature has gone beyond such post-modern conceits. Auster appears to be saying that experimentation has exhausted literature to the point of implosion, yet the modern writer cannot ignore these developments, but should, rather, acknowledge them within a naturalistic narrative. This could explain Auster's use of intextuality and referencing in Leviathan. Name-dropping and deference to other texts add a depth to the book. This depth is arguably superficial in that referencing seems to

suggest certain connections and, subsequently, certain narrative interpretations that are never confirmed in Leviathan.

Through self-conscious writing techniques, revealing his craft and construction though the text, he is exposing himself as the outside power or puppet-master, of whom his characters are dimly aware and to whom they refer to as "fate" or "the power", that controls their actions, the same idea he develops more fully in The New York Trilogy . Aaron articulates Auster's equivocation on the relationship between reality, chance and causality when he states,

> No matter how wild we think our inventions might be, they can never match the unpredictability of what the real world continually spews forth. This lesson seems inescapable to me now. *Anything can happen. And one way or another, it always does.* (My italics) (p.160)

Auster is re-stating a belief that reality is stranger than fiction, ironically through a controlled environment- a fictional account. He suggest there is a hidden power controlling reality, but undercuts this idea in his books by exposing that hidden power as the author; he is a religious agnostic.

In Leviathon he is re-working a theme inherent in his previous books, that of fiction and reality coalescing and interpenetrating and the inevitable storification of reality once that "reality" has been transcribed. By maintaining this uneasy dichotomy, Auster is again placing emphasis on the reader's interpretation of the book. However, Auster does not saturate Leviathan with meanings and symbols from which a purely subjective reading is

the only possibility, rather one senses a suggested reading which produces more frustration due to its lack of textual confirmation.

The character of Maria Turner offers a valuable insight into Auster's ruling philosophy in Leviathan . Maria's projects concern the creation of order, the documentation or storification of an artificial reality. She shares Hamlet's view that, "The World is a stage and we are all players." Maria explains Sachs' attraction to her projects to Aaron, "What he especially seemed to like was the combination of documentary and play, the objectification of inner states. He understood that all my pieces were stories and even if they were true stories, they were also invented." (p.126). Paradoxically, Maria creates her own artificial realities but, like Auster, recognises the potential for a causality in reality and also the inevitable editing and storification of that reality once it has been documented. One of Maria's projects involves a detective following her around New York and recording a detailed account of her activities, a similar project to the one that the mysterious White asks Blue to perform in "Ghosts"; "When he handed in his report at the end of the week and she studied the photographs of her movements, she felt as if she had become a stranger, as if she had been turned into an imaginary being." (p.63). Maria is attempting to objectify herself, in order to discover her true self, a technique she uses to reconstitute Sachs' self after his accident, when "he had withdrawn so far into his pain that he was no longer able to see himself." (p.129). She forces him to pose for pictures, reconstructing Lacan's mirror-stage for him. Aaron speculates that,

Every time Sachs posed for a picture he was forced to impersonate himself, to play the game of pretending to be who he was. After a while, it must have had an effect on him. By repeating the process so often, he must have come to a point where he stared seeing

himself through Maria's eyes, where the whole thing doubled back on him and he was able to encounter himself again. (p.130)

But, as Aaron gradually realises, the self is by definition unknowable as is another person's self. Aaron remarks, "Every time I tried to think about him, my imagination failed me. It was as if Sachs had become a hole in the universe. He was no longer just my missing friend, he was a symptom of my ignorance about all things an emblem of the unknowable self." (p.146). Aaron is tantalised by a sense that everything is connected to everything else, and that the epicentre of this cogency is Sachs. Aaron constantly emphasises his own relevance to Sachs' biography as if he needs to prove his legitimacy as Sachs' biographer. We have seen him assuming Sachs' persona, but he still does not truly know Sachs or Sachs as himself; he cannot deal with his quarry directly so he tackles the subject from various angles and various narratives -

Each one of us is connected to Sachs' death in some way, and it won't be possible for me to tell his story without telling each of our stories at the same time. Everything is connected to every thing else, every story overlaps with every other story. Horrible as it is for me to say it, I understand now that I'm the one who brought all of us together. As much as Sachs himself, I'm the place where everything begins. (p.51)

Aaron has enough ego to stake his claim to being the eye of this hurricane of events, but is it himself or himself as Sachs that, in his opinion, is the epicentre. So that Sachs is the Leviathan/ Ahab compound for Aaron's Ishmael, the whiteness of the whale, the ungraspable essence of self, yet also the pursuer of that self-knowledge whose pursuit ends in death.

For all of Aaron's confessional prose and dramatised search for Sachs and the "truth", it is the threshold Sachs' character that mesmerises the reader. Sachs transforms Leviathan from being an introspective sketch of a New York cultural clique into an American epic:

what begins as "Annie Hall" mutates into "Taxi Driver". Auster creates an enviable dichotomy, the American epic that simultaneously deconstructs the American epic, as he did in Moon Palace. Sachs is an American hero in the American grain but not from Williams' "In the American Grain". He is part American Adam but is also composed of Ahab's dark obsession and the religiosity inherent in both.

Sachs' fall is conceived by Auster as mirroring the Fall, and Sachs himself recognises this, he knows he has been tempted by Maria. Aaron notes, "The business with Maria struck me as trivial, of no genuine importance, a trite comedy of manners not worth talking about. In Sachs's mind, however there was a direct connection. The one thing had caused the other, which meant that he didn't see the fall as an accident or a piece of bad luck, so much as some grotesque form of punishment." (p.117). Moments before his accident Sachs realises that he has deluded himself whilst flirting with Maria, " It wasn't a question of being unfaithful to Fanny, it was a question of self-knowledge. I found it appalling to discover that I was capable of tricking myself like that." (p.114). By discovering the surfaces and their abstractions in his own psyche, he reconstitutes himself through Maria's photo project, he acts out his former role as Ben Sachs. Having been betrayed by his inner self he becomes a container for a possible version of DiMaggio and ultimately becomes a pure icon, the "Phantom of Liberty" - a ghost, less than human, a symbol of an abstract idea who is trying to unite word and meaning, representation and reality, self and ego. Sachs has now become one of the mythic breed he is obsessed by, and Aaron has been left to shape that legacy. Saltzman notes that, "Sachs reads agency and, connection and cause into his affairs, if only to confer meaning upon them," (p.168

Barone) Sachs knew his fate which is why he returns to bequeath his legacy to Aaron, who confers his own meaning on events.

In "City of Glass", Quinn discusses Henry Dark's Miltonic musings concerning the Fall, and how it also marked the fall of language in that things no longer related directly to words and thought is divorced from action. Sachs experiences a similar phenomenon after his accident. He finds that the writing that was so natural to him before, can no longer be performed, "'God knows what was stopping me, but every time I picked up a pen and tried to start I would break out in a cold sweat, my head would spin, and I'd feel as though I was about to fall. Just like the time I fell off the fire escape. It was the same panic, the same feeling of helplessness, the same rush toward oblivion. (p.226)

Sachs explains to Aaron the sensation of his fall and the epiphany he experiences,

"An immense, overpowering rush of conviction, a taste of some ultimate truth. I've never been so certain of anything in my life. First I realised that I was falling, and then I realised that I was dead. I don't mean that I sensed I was going to die, I mean that I was already dead. I was a dead man falling through the air, and even though I was technically still alive, I was dead, as dead as a man who's been buried in his grave. I don't know how else to put it. Even as I fell I was already past the moment of hitting the ground, past the moment of impact, past the moment of shattering into pieces, I had turned into a corpse, and by the time I hit the clothesline and landed in those towels and blankets, I wasn't there anymore. I had left my body, and for a split second I actually saw myself disappear." (p.116)

Sachs epiphany and subsequent behaviour is almost Christ-like. He experiences resurrection, life after this death, and begins displaying the scars his crucifixion on the clothesline has given him. He turns himself into an icon, "The Phantom" a holy spirit, a self-deluding representation. Aaron notes that Sachs' (The Phantom's) motivation was that,

He simply wanted America to look after itself and mind its ways. In that sense, there was something almost Biblical about his exhortations, and after a while he began to sound less like a political revolutionary than some anguished, soft-spoken prophet. (p.216)

This "death" frees him of his ontological quest for self, and he heads to California, the American site of rebirth, to replace the man he has killed and seek forgiveness. "That was the reason he had come to California in the first place: to reinvent his life, to embody an ideal of goodness that would put him in an altogether different relation with himself." (p.198)

Aaron and Sachs are both guilty of finding sanctuary from the endless ontological quest for self by subsuming themselves to other egos and motivations. Aaron replaces Sachs, sexually with Fanny, literary by using the title of Sachs book for his own, geographically by writing on Sachs' desk in his Vermont retreat, and seeks to psychoanalysis Sachs by interpreting his actions from various sources. Sachs, having lost his "self and ego" in his "death" epiphany, obsessionally becomes DiMaggio by replacing him in his role as father and provider for Lillian and her daughter, soaking up his anarchist influences by reading his thesis, and ultimately pursuing Dimaggio's terrorist activities. It is ironic that Sachs says he is most free when he is in prison, or blowing up "Liberty"; he needs a structure, a mapped out routine, and a purpose in which he can lose self-determination, as much as he needs a dominant ego to subsume himself to.

Leviathan appears to be Auster's most political book to date, but closer examination seems to uncover a philosophical subtext that strips the book of its politics. Auster constantly uses ironies and paradoxes to undercut any political acts; Sachs is most free

when blowing up images of freedom and admits to Aaron that he felt paradoxically free in a State prison and in a prison state in his room in Vermont. Dimaggio is a prefigurement of the Unabomber, and Sachs becomes obsessed by him and vows to continue his radical activities. "The Phantom of Liberty" project is politically undermined, unwittingly by Aaron and consciously by Auster. In the editing of his prose Aaron suggests that Sachs' bombing campaign is not political at all but merely a form of therapy in which to exorcise his own troubled psyche, by emphasising Sachs' mother's vertigo and his guilt over Dimaggio's death. It appears that his discovery of a copy of "The New Colossus" with its picture of the Statue of Liberty on the cover gives him his cue to start his bombing campaign - "It was an astonishing coincidence, a thing that hit me so hard I felt it had to be an omen." (p.226). Ironically it is the iconic cover not the revolutionary text that inspires the bombings.

Sachs' political action is also undermined by the fact that Dimaggio's example and beliefs are highly suspect. The inconsistent Lillian informs Maria that Dimaggio 'had gone weird on her,' that he was hanging out with 'a bunch of idiot radicals'" (p.165). Sachs believes that Dimaggio is an eco-terrorist for an extreme sect of "The Children of the Planet"; but later Lillian says, "In her view, Dimaggio was working as an undercover agent for the government. The CIA, the FBI, one of those cloak-and -dagger gangs" (p.239), ironically the representatives and guardians of the same system the Phantom is acting against.

Auster's dissection of Sachs's highly political book, "The New Colossus", tends to belittle the idea of political fiction. Its cover art seems similar to that of Auster's own Moon Palace whose message Leviathan shares, namely that political acts are always tainted by personal psychosis. It is as if the bombing campaign has become a replacement for the creative act of writing for Sachs. As Aaron notes, "He was proud of what he had done, unshakeably at peace with himself, and he talked with the assurance of an artist who knows he has just created his most important work." (p.231). As much as a political act, it is a piece of performance art for Sachs.

Sachs's quest to have Liberty re-valued is a partial success, but quickly becomes debased,

> In the past few months the Phantom of Liberty had been the subject of editorials and sermons. He had been discussed on call-in radio shows, caricatured in political cartoons, excoriated as a menace to society, extolled as a man of the people. Phantom of Liberty T-shirts and buttons were on sale in novelty shops, jokes had begun to circulate, and just last month two strippers in Chicago had presented an act in which the Statue of Liberty was gradually disrobed and then seduced by the Phantom. He was making a mark, he said, a much greater mark than he had ever thought possible. As long as he could keep it up, he was willing to face any inconvenience, to gut his way through any hardship. (p.234)

Sachs' mythic alias and political message are commodified, his rebellion is belittled and the media machine's endless repetition has reproduced him and his message on T-shirts destined to fade. Is this the curse of America that the whole media and representative system, is so accelerated that it can contain attempts to destroy it? Just as the Vietnam veteran Bickle in Taxi Driver "saves" America's innocence-represented by a Southern teenage prostitute - Jodi Foster, as an expression of his unstable post-war psyche and is turned into a blue-collar hero by the media, Sachs' rescue mission is reconstituted by America. But unlike every American rebel from Crazy Horse to Lenny Bruce he does

not choose between conformity or death, because no authentic rebellion can exist in America in the late 20th Century.

Paradoxically, just as Aaron imitates consciously or unconsciously, Sachs, Sachs' true character becomes more obscure and ungraspable. Aaron faces the same problem that troubled Auster in The Invention of Solitude , that of translating a man's life into words. Like Auster he finds this complicates his understanding of his subject, due to the necessary editing and inevitable storification that takes place. Aaron's narrative is riddled with self-doubt and misgivings over each statement or fact he reveals about Sachs, he tends to disclaim any significant revelation, on his biography of Sachs Aaron concludes,

> There is nothing definitive about it. It's not a biography or an exhaustive psychological portrait, and even though Sachs confided a great deal to me over the years of our friendship, I don't claim to have more than a partial understanding of who he was. I want to tell the truth about him, to set down these memories as honestly as I can, but I can't dismiss the possibility that I'm wrong, that the truth is quite different from what I imagine it to be. (p.22)

Aaron, however, misses the point in "Leviathan", he is too concerned about the truth, the details, the different versions; whilst a mythic text is reductionist - it turns possibilities into concrete fact and an authoritarian single narrative. Ironically, just as Aaron cannot grasp the real Sachs, Sachs cannot really grasp Liberty or even its single narrative representation, the Statue of Liberty; he is diverted by colloquial representations of the Statue that are further abstracted from the essential idea. This has political implications outside the book, for Auster is documenting America's culture of reproduction which leads to a culture of despair, because an idea such as Liberty can no longer be touched or felt or known in its pure or source form, due to a history of repetition and interpretation

which pollutes its genesis with associations and cultural baggage. Like Warhol's screen-prints of Marilyn Monroe, the quality disintegrates with each successive print until the final image is a gaudy smudge of ink. Sachs is interfacing with that smudge and trying to see Norma Jean, so that the image merely serves as a Rorschach test that reflects his own psyche.

Ultimate truth or meaning can never be found in such an accelerated American society, something that Aaron never realises throughout his attempted biography. Assuming that Aaron's attitude to the truth about Sachs is unbending, the FBI man who stops his endless research and re-drafting is seen as a saviour figure. Aaron frankly admits that, "My plan was to go through the manuscript as many times as necessary, to add new material with each successive draft, and to keep at it until I felt there was nothing left to say. Theoretically, the process could have continued for months, perhaps even for years- but only if I was lucky." (p.243). So, is Auster concluding that FBI suppression is acceptable?

Who is the Leviathan? Auster appears to have borrowed his title and philosophy from Hobbes' Leviathan. Hobbes argued that each state needed a sovereign who had unlimited ideological authority over morality, epistemology, religion, linguistics and day-to-day politics. The sovereign enters into a contract with his individual subjects, to provide the necessities of life, which can only be resisted when that individual's survival was in question. Sachs rebels because he believes the American government has abdicated its responsibility. We would like to think the Leviathan is Auster, controlling the characters

and their reality in the book, but by conceiving of the text as a leaked document Auster is suggesting that we need a Leviathan or State to provide an official version of reality and law, an accepted reality that our subjective realities recognise. But he also realises the need for leaked documents, fissures in the official reality that allow for subjective meanings and space for the imagination. Auster is also using Hobbes' "Leviathan" as an analogy for ontological questions facing individuals today. If Auster's Leviathan demonstrates one truth, it is that we dedicate our lives to forces and people we can never truly know - Aaron's sovereign is Sachs, Sachs' is DiMaggio. As Hobbes states, rule is about perceived power, and in Auster's text the sovereign has become more than an individual "Other", which secures our identity through alterity, but a Hobbesian sovereign, a sublime vastness, that inspires awe and dread, to whom we subsume ourselves and who subsequently thinks and decides for us.

Aaron is obsessed by alternative versions of events and the fact that if chance or fate (read Auster) had intervened at certain junctures in small ways the outcome would be different. Auster's constant undercutting of his narrator's vision through staged ironies, brief exposes of structure maintain the fictionality of Aaron's reality. Aaron's claim at the start of Leviathan that once a reader has one of his books in their hands, "my words are the only reality that exists for them" is destroyed by Auster who shows that books reflect a more legitimate and complex "reality" when they acknowledge the inevitable offshoots of storification and the literary, cultural, psychological and personal influences that directly affect the creation of a work of literature. The end of Leviathan's narrative is anticlimactic, but very clever. Aaron defeated, tells us that he gives his manuscript to

the FBI man, but as we the reader have just read it we own a copy, we are part of the rebellion, the Leviathan's rule and suppression has been undercut. We have corrupted Emerson's monolithic State.

Chapter 6: The Music of Chance and Mr. Vertigo.

The two novels that I will focus on in this final chapter would sit more comfortably with readers if they had appeared at the start of Auster's career, and would no doubt have been praised for the interesting ideas and concepts that they explore. Critics would have remarked on their promise, and noted that they represent a clearing of the throat by a new voice in American literature.

These works came at junctions in Auster's career when his voice was established above the roar and when others were handing him a loudhailer, or at least hailing him loudly. "Music" contains Auster's typical explorations of causality, ontology and the paranoia of meaning in the modern world. It also has some provocative political ideas, though these suffer from Auster's deliberately ambiguous political position. "Music" suffers mainly because it lies between the twin narrative towers in Auster's canon- Leviathan and Moon Palace, his self- styled, deconstructed American epics. "Music" is less impressive, in terms of length, structural complexity and themes.

Mr. Vertigo, has few of the redeeming features of a novel such as The Music of Chance. It represents the antithesis to the jarring experimentation and essentialism of Auster's first book The Invention of Solitude. Mr. Vertigo is a lightweight American fairytale dealing in clichés, the flat narrative voice hides no ironic subtext or self-conscious sleight of hand. As Janet Goodwyn put it in her review for The Observer: "Everything is explained and assigned." "Vertigo", is not merely Auster demonstrating he can "play it straight", it is the statement of a writer who has stopped

asking questions of himself, the world and his readership and has settled into comfortable acceptance.

Mr. Vertigo suffers because Auster is struggling throughout with his tone and style. As Michael Hulse, writing in The Guardian, notes: "The plot is comic-strip Dickens, luridly peopled with caricatures, driven by a prose so fast it feels greased." The novel is picaresque; its plot a fantastical pantomime, its characters cliches, yet Auster alarmingly tries to deal with issues such as racism, social deprivation, corruption, and freedom within this context, with apparent seriousness. Our narrator, the eighty year old Walt, recounts his autobiography in a relentlessly flat style, a style that Auster usually draws on when the self-conscious aspects of his work are at their peak. The reader waits with bated breath for the ironic, hidden, suggested meaning to emerge from this disappointing novel; it never does.

It is extremely ironic that Walt and Yehudi head for Hollywood after puberty has ended Walt's flying career, to trade on his name and make the fortune that was stolen from them. Auster too, has travelled that road after his mercurial ascendance has been grounded and "Vertigo" in several ways has precluded this. Firstly, as it is Auster's first failure; secondly, because the book is so influenced by the movies. The way Auster cuts and pastes his scenes, the rapid movement of narrative means that "Vertigo" reads like a Hollywood adaptation of an epic novel. Its literary influences have all been cinematically processed. The second half of the novel is pure "Goodfellas", in terms of narrative style and content; the tone and voice is "Guys and Dolls"; Walt's wiseguy spiel is Runyon spoken by Sinatra; Dizzy Dean is a cornpone "Natural", whom the bullet missed, which strips him of the meditative and redemptive

qualities of Redford's character. Auster also adopts Malamud's magic-realism as his mode in the first half of "Vertigo".

Walt is one part Dickensian orphan, one part Billy Bathgate, one part Peter Pan and the rest is Huck Finn. Hemingway said that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn." and Auster borrows shamelessly from Twain throughout; as Goodwyn notes: "Like Huck, Auster's poor white boy tells his own story, where he is variously abandoned, shot at, kidnapped, ambushed, held for ransom." He also chooses his own father and is pursued like Huck by his malicious kin, in Walt's case Uncle Slim. Auster could have easily referenced Twain or even parodied Huck Finn, but chooses not to. Like Huck Walt is outside society, but has none of Huck's hard-won illumination; rather, he is an older Forrest Gump, consigned to bear witness to the 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's, yet like the retarded Gump, is unable to philosophise or reflect on his times.

One of the main points of interest in the opening third of the book is the issue of ethnicity and racism. In his previous work, Auster has not dealt directly with his Jewish identity. In Last Things, the Holocaust informs the tone and provides the roots for his post- apocalyptic society and there are often Jewish characters in his books, but racial identity is never truly explored.

Again, like Huck Walt is conditioned by a racist society and he responds to his placement in the allegorical American household that Auster creates of a Jew, a Black and a Sioux, with predictable bigotry. Yehudi's appearance is that of the cliche European Jew resurrected by Goebbels in the mid 1930's: swarthy, black caped and

black hatted and subsequently, Walt's racism is almost medieval in its imagery: "She was Mother Sue, Queen of the Gypsies and Master Yehudi was her son, the Prince of Blackness. They were abducting me to the Castle of No Return."(p.11). Mother Sue is equally clichéd, the silent Indian and manly, "ugly and fat" utilitarian squaw. Aesop the storytelling Black, is racially extreme, as Walt notes, "He wasn't brown like most of the coloured folks I'd run across back home, he was the colour of pitch, a black so black it was almost blue."(p.12), and he is physically handicapped; his motivations and character are borrowed wholesale from Steinbeck's Crooks in Of Mice and Men. When Walt racially slurs Aesop, Yehudi remarks, 'We don't talk like that around here, boy,' he said. 'All men are brothers, and in this family everyone gets treated with respect.'"(p.13).

Predictably all the non-white characters are virtuous and the surrounding whites are cast as racist rednecks or ruthless capitalists. To make Aesop more objectionable to Walt, he is the master's pride and joy. He is witty, intelligent, compassionate and speaks "like an English lord"(p19). Yehudi is idealistically preparing Aesop for college- "He can continue his studies there and once he graduates and goes out into the world he'll become a leader of his race, a shining example to all the downtrodden black folks of this violent, hypocritical country."(p.18). This is a worthy and significant aim, but its expression is laboured and telegraphs Aesop's lynching.

On page 21, Auster has Walt call Yehudi, "Gypsy", "Jew man", "kike" and "Hebe" in an unprovoked display of anti-semitism and ignorance. Auster's treatment of the race issue is clumsy; instead of being a realistic exemple his contrived racial structure of the household; becomes absurd due to the one-dimensional aspects of its charicatures.

Walt's racism is brutal and shocking, but seems divorced from the rest of his character; Auster never explores the roots of this racism or how it may have developed.

Yehudi's admonitions are riven with hackneyed, politically correct phrases imported from the 90's. Walt's conversion has none of the complexities, guilt and troubled conscience of Huck Finn's; the salving of his racism seems merely to come from the giving of affection, as Walt concludes, "perhaps it all boiled down to the fact that I was finally getting used to them. If you look into someone's face long enough, eventually you're going to feel that you're looking at yourself."(p.35). Walt's revelation is an acceptance of the individual as opposed to the individual and their race.

Walt experiences a degradation process that all of Auster's protagonists pass through; that stripping down to their base elements of existence, so that they become "nothing". Only then can they be resurrected and reborn into a new identity. Yehudi recognises the need to reverse the civilising process. From their first meeting, Yehudi tells Walt that he needs to break his spirit and the reason he has chosen him, "Master Yehudi chose me because I was the smallest, the dirtiest, the most abject. 'You're no better than an animal,' he said, 'a piece of human nothingness.'"(p.3)

Yehudi forces Walt to begin a programme of ritual humiliation, torture and mutilation, similar to the one to which Stillman subjects his son in "City of Glass". Yehudi buries Walt alive, thus tapping into Auster's familiar paradigm, so that like Fanshawe in "The Locked Room" and A. in "Invention" the drowning, suffocating

process creates the dichotomy of death as constant and rebirth as possibility, once self has confronted the void of inwardness. Yehudi tells Walt that after you have been buried alive, "Death lives inside you eating away at your innocence and your hope and in the end you're left with nothing but the dirt, the solidarity of the dirt, the everlasting power and triumph of the dirt."(p.41). Walt has his self and identity erased and it is only when his degradation is complete that he is able to fly - "I was weightless inside my own body, floating on a placid wave of nothingness, utterly detached and indifferent to the world around me. And that's when I did it for the first time -without warning, without the least notion that it was about to happen. Very slowly, I felt my body rise off the floor."(p.58)

In previous texts Auster's protagonist's degradation has been a subtle, cerebral, existential suffering more than physical suffering. Rebirth and redemption has often come through the Other and other people. Protagonists such as Anna Blume, Marco Fogg, A. have, like Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire , "depended on the kindness of strangers."(p.142) which has reinforced humanitarian solidarity. Their drowning in inwardness has been a gradual descent, an unlearning of the world, sensitively monitored by Auster. Ontological exploration and the self-sacrifice inherent in that, have been replaced by a literal, shamanistic sacrifice. Yehudi echoes Auster when he states, 'you have to leave a part of yourself behind before you can attain the full magnitude of your gift.'(p.88) so he cuts off Walt's little finger. The precedent for Walt's forced dissipation of self, is Stillman's barbaric abuse of his son. Yehudi's method is structured, rigorous and carefully planned, based on cold calculation, not the slippage of emotion and declining ability to cope with the chaos of causality in the modern age that afflicts Auster's other characters. It is almost as if

Auster is parodying his own obsessions, ridiculing his own existential angst; the subtle watercolours depicting individual suffering have become a lurid pop art. For all Yehudi's progressive attitudes, his relationship with Walt is one of exploitation. He plays on Walt's need for affection and even when Walt is the Wonderboy and a remarkable success, the reader has little true affection for Yehudi.

The fairytale and absurd elements temper the violence visited on Walt: Yehudi's superhuman strength, cartoon-like digging, and references to the Wizard of Oz and Snow White in the poisoning of Slim and Pinnochio. Walt is of course Peter Pan, but with puberty he loses the ability to fly above the earth; like Shirley Temple, Drew Barrymore, Carrie Fisher and, more specifically, choir-boy stars like Aled Jones, he is cursed by the child star precedent that he is only of interest when he is innocent and young.

The remainder of Walt's life is one of terrestial mediocrity and mundanity, it and Auster's relaying of it, is one long anti-climax. We have various Hollywood processed mythologies, as Walt becomes a Mafioso, murderer and soldier. Auster, too indulges himself and writes the romantic tribute to the baseball he loves, that he has threatened from the start of his career. At the end of the text the eighty year old Walt explains how he began writing this autobiography as a way to rescue himself from boredom and the loneliness of old age. He instructs that the text be left to his nephew Daniel Quinn, the protagonist in "City of Glass"- "He'll correct the spelling mistakes and get someone to type up a clean copy, and once *Mr Vertigo* is published, I won't have to be around to watch the mugwumps and morons try to kill me. I'll already be dead and you can be sure I'll be laughing at them -from above or below,

whichever the case may be."(p.276). This suggests that Auster acknowledges that this novel will be critically panned and is distancing himself from it by claiming he wrote it as Walt Raleigh. The novel concludes with Walt stating the moral of the fable; that if we can all unlearn the world and the constructs of civilisation we can all fly. He describes a zen meditation process that ambiguously suggests he is taking off or he is dying. This is death as constant or/ and universal consciousness.

> You must learn to stop being yourself. That's where it begins, and everything else follows from that. You must let yourself evaporate. Let your muscles go limp, breathe until you feel your soul pouring out of you, and then shut your eyes. That's how it's done. The emptiness inside our body grown lighter than the air around you. Little by little you begin to weigh less than nothing. You shut your eyes; you spread your arms; you let yourself evaporate. And then, little by little, you lift yourself off the ground. Like so.(p.278)

This is a clever conceit to end the fairytale, yet it does little to redeem the book.

The Music of Chance is a more complicated work than Mr. Vertigo. Auster is on familiar ground, re-examining his core themes of chance, inheritance, ontology and more the political themes of power and freedom, which he focused on in Leviathan and Moon Palace. Auster is investigating the overlapping territory of the personal and the political, yet whereas in Leviathan he was engaging with governmental power and the iconography of America and in Moon Palace with the general history and mythology of the USA, "Music" is a more allegorical work, an experiment taking place under the author and reader's microscope.

It is a very structured text, economically writtten; its protagonist Nashe is an everyman in the Anna Blume mode, with few of the psychological troubles that haunt more maverick protagonists like Sachs and Fogg. Narrationally, Auster adopts the more traditional omnipotent narrator and the text contains very few self-conscious

techniques and no shifting subjects. Nashe, a character directly lifted from a verse on Tom Waits' Foreign Affairs(1977) album.

I guess you heard about Nash he was killed in a crash
Hell that must have been two or three years ago now
Yeah he spun out and he rolled he hit a telephone pole
And he died with the radio on ("A Sight for Sore Eyes")

Nashe is intelligent, meditative and an engaging character; Pozzi serves as the perfect foil; his wiseguy sharpness, humour and natural rebelliousness bring out Nashe's warmer qualities and give him a jolt from his previous feeling of neutrality.

The novel begins with Nashe in an almost identical position to A./ Auster in "Invention"; his estranged father has recently died, he is divorced and rapidly losing contact with Juliette his young daughter. Whereas A. exorcises his feelings for his father and his self, in the European tradition of existential meditation, Nashe chooses the traditional American method; he heads West. He is possessed by the stamina of the greatest driver in American literature, Kerouac's Dean Moriarty, Sal Paradise's love of music and sharing the same quest of reconciling himself with his father. In the same way as Dean and Sal scour the skid rows for Dean's father, Nashe zigzags across the States losing himself in motion "on the road". Nashe realizes that he has "fallen into the grip of some baffling overpowering force."(p.7), Kerouac's "gotta go".

In the first paragraph, Auster summarizes the text and his general themes,

For one whole year he did nothing but drive, travelling back and forth across America as he waited for the money to run out. He hadn't expected it to go on that long, but one thing kept leading to another, and by the time Nashe understood what was happening to him, he was past the point of wanting it to end. Three days into the thirteenth month, he met up with the kid who called himself Jackpot. It was one of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air- a twig that breaks off in the wind and suddenly lands at your feet. . .Because he had already given up, because he figured there was nothing to lose anymore, he saw the stranger as

a reprieve, as a last chance to do something for himself before it was too late. And just like that, he went ahead and did it. Without the slightest tremor of fear, Nashe closed his eyes and jumped.(p.1)

Desperate and having stripped himself of all ties, Nashe dives into the fickle well of chance. His father's death and inheritance is the catalyst for Nashe to dismantle his life, quit his job, sell his possessions and house. With regards to his daughter he has followed the genealogical imperative, that Fogg cannot escape from in Moon Palace, and that Auster fights so hard against in "Invention"- "he had turned himself into "a ghost.", "an alien" and "an intruder".

The money, the severing of responsibility and ties gives him freedom:-

He felt like a man who had finally found the courage to put a bullet through his head- but in this case the bullet was no death, it was life, it was the explosion that triggers the birth of new worlds.(p.10)

Ontologically speaking, Nashe feels he has wiped the slate clean in classic American style and is now ready for an exciting rebirth.

The car became a sanctum of invulnerability, a refuge in which nothing could hurt him anymore. As long as he was driving, he carried no burdens, was unencumbered by even the slightest particle of his former life.(p.12)

The car becomes one of the locked rooms that we find in all Auster's fiction, the arena in which the self is probed and resurrected, as Auster frequently puts it- "room, tomb, womb".

The inheritance is the same lump of money that is given to all of Auster's protagonists and invariably it is squandered, gambled or stolen; its positive effects are always short-lived, yet it buys time for thought, action, reconstitution. Auster is still trying to reconcile his sense of guilt at living on the inheritance from his estranged father. This

was the catalyst for his subsequent literary career; he is examining the possible outcomes if chance and skill had not rewarded him with a book contract. So, in one sense "Music" sketches a less complex, abstract scenario. The money measures Nashe's entropic state and his freedom- "the money kept it going, but it was also an engine of loss, inexorably leading him to the place where he had begun."(p.17). Nashe's dilemma is how to avoid returning to his old life or a version of his old life and Pozzi represents his chance to stay "on the road".

On the way to the poker game with Flower and Stone, Nashe realises that he has come to the end of his road-trip.

> Something was finished, and something else was about to begin, and for the moment Nashe was in between, floating in a place that was neither here nor there. . . It was as if he finally had no part in what was about to happen to him. And if he was no longer involved in his own fate, where was he then, and what had become of him? Perhaps he had been living in limbo for too long , he thought, and now that he needed to find himself again, there was nothing to catch hold of anymore. Nashe suddenly felt dead inside, as if all his feelings had been used up. He wanted to feel afraid, but not even disaster could terrify him.(p.59)

Nashe has attained the state of neutrality, being neither here, nor there, spacially or ontologically. In "City of Glass" this state is seen as a utopic one by Quinn, because it allows him to escape engagement with self and reality. For Fogg in Central Park this is a state to be cultivated in order to divorce the body from the ego so that the ego a la Whitman, can roam free. For A. in "Invention" it is a state which is cultivated so that one can study the self more objectively, until a new self emerges from the void. For Nashe it is a state that precludes ontological exploration and an emergence of a new self which the labour in the meadow gives him.

Pozzi and Nashe lose the poker game and are forced to work off their debt, by building a wall for Flower and Stone. It is at this point that Auster introduces his principal thematic concern: state power and freedom. Pozzi and Nashe go to Flower and Stone's mansion for the poker game. Pozzi refers to Flower and Stone as Laurel and Hardy, due to their characters and physical resemblance. This "had planted a suggestion of Hollywood in his mind, and now that Nashe was there, it was difficult for him not to think of the house as an illusion." (p.69) The house and the structure of the relationships within it are illusory, because Auster intends them to be repesentative of American-style capitalism as a whole.

Flower and Stone as Laurel and Hardy, the building of the wall and the themes explored, originate from an early play by Auster and subsequently published in Hand to Mouth, called "Laurel and Hardy Go To Heaven". The play is a Godot-esque work involving Laurel and Hardy debating about the building of a wall. They appear to be working under sinister conditions and are paranoid, supposing that they are being watched; the threat of violence lurks namelessly around them. They have been given orders and a set of instructions by an unnamed party and Hardy notes that, "There could be trouble if we don't start soon."(p.133). Their instructions include "spiritual exercises" and "physical exercises for the day", tasks which they find impossible to complete. Hardy reflects, "Has it ever occurred to you that maybe we're supposed to fail? We might be succeeding just because we're failing. It's all a test. They want to see what we're made of."(p.135). Between the characteristic squabbling, silliness and slapstick that are characteristics of Laurel and Hardy, are some moments of clarity where the effects of these "exercises" and the characters' thoughts about the work are

expressed. The comics are involved in the same wall building exercise as Pozzi and Nashe, with the same threat of violence hanging over them.

The threat and directions of punishment in "Music" is embodied in Clavin Murks and his gun; in Laurel and Hardy's case it is the instruction book and some unknowable masters. In both cases the space they occupy is a restricted prison. Laurel is clearly the Pozzi character, emotionally frail, frustrated and rebellious. Hardy is Nashe, more reflective and philosophical about the task, which he sees as a redemptive one. Nashe like Hardy sees his time in the meadow as "a time for taking stock . . . for gaining new strength."(p.141) Hardy realises that a wall can symbolise a variety of things depending on your perspective- "A wall can be many things can't it? It can help things . . . or make them worse. It can be part of something greater . . . or only what it is. Do you see what I mean? It all depends on how you look at it. (p.144) A wall depends on its master's purpose; as a sign of power. What epistemology does it carry? Hardy and Laurel realise that they know neither their employer nor whether they are dead or alive. They have no memories, no past, no future beyond the present construction of the wall. They toy with rebellion; Hardy exclaims, "You know what I'd like to do/ I'd like to kick the whole wall down. . . and then break up all the stones . . .into little stones. . . and I'd just wait here until someone came along - I don't care who . . . the goddamned inspector for all I care- and as soon as he got close enough . . .I'd let him have it!"(p.162). They then convince themselves that rebellion would lead to certain death, so they decide to complete the wall, then get drunk "And then we'll pass out or puke it up and that will be that." Laurel remarks. Auster is obviously critiquing the drudgery, boredom and lack of freedom inherent in the American capitalist system,

and the way its workers are rewarded with drink and temporary escapism and must return to the repressive regime.

In the play, Laurel and Hardy express dissent and contemplate rebellion like Pozzi and Nashe. The Laurel and Hardy characters of Flower and Stone, were boring, small-minded automata, "flour" and "stone"-the daily grind is the obvious pun, clinging rigidly to the same routine for twelve years. The only risk they ever took was buying a lottery ticket every Friday; a lottery which eventually has made them millionaires. Fortune- the two senses of the word, wealth and luck, has boosted Flower and Stone's egos to dangerous levels; Flower boasts,

"No matter what we do, everything seems to turn out right. . . It's as though God has singled us out from other men. He's showered us with good fortune and lifted us to the heights of happiness. I know this might sound presumptuous to you, but at times I feel that we've become immortal."(p.75)

They have become two of Tom Wolfe's self-proclaimed "Masters of the Universe", yet unlike Wolfe's Sherman in Bonfire of the Vanities they remain untouchable.

Their capital power, isolation from meaningful human contact, and massive egos have bred Nietzschean philosophy and totalitarian ideals. Maintaining the dichotomy found in all of his books, "Music's" characters and themes, reflect Auster's avowed take on reality "Meaning. No meaning.", life as random and life as prescribed. After Nashe's heady, restless rush of freedom, around the States and his uncertain theorizing, leading to the ultimate abdication of responsibility and rationalism-gambling, he is now placed in a rigid construct, as symbolised by "The City of the World".

After Auster has re-examinined his established themes of causality, ontological exploration and inheritance, the plot reveals the novel's political dimension. In "Music" Auster is adding a symbolism and a clarity to his attack on American Government and capitalism that he wove into the narratives of Moon Palace and Leviathan. Stone's "The City of the World" is Auster's focus for his political theme. It is a simulacrum of Stone's life, but aside from autobiography it has a more sinister element. Like all visions of Utopia from Orwell to Heaven's Gate there is always a cost to personal freedom. The model seeks to rule time and space, deny history in the same way as the Nazis tried to with the holocaust, or Pol Pot with Year Zero. Flower tells us it is,

> a utopia- a place where the past and future come together, where good finally triumphs over evil. . . Look at the Hall of Justice, the Library, the Bank, and the Prison. Willie calls them the Four Realms of Togetherness, and each one plays a vital role in maintaining the harmony of the city. If you look at the Prison, you'll see that the prisoners are working happily at various tasks, that they all have smiles on their faces. That's because they're glad they've been punished for their crimes, and now they're learning how to recover the goodness within them through hard work.(p.80)

This is a society in which the protestant work ethic is seen as morally corrective, which is exactly what one would expect from two men dedicated to the daily grind. The two eccentric millionaires create their own prison in the meadow for Nashe and Pozzi, and treat them as they claim they would treat citizens of their fantasy utopia. In the film version of "The Music of Chance" the director has Stone plotting their progress in the meadow on his model. Auster/ Nashe notes that Flower has decided that "A punishment would have to be meted out,"(p.105)

Nashe realises the sinister nature of "The City of the World". He views it as "a model of some bizarre, totalitarian world. Of course it was charming, of course it was deft and brilliant and admirable, but there was a kind of warped, voodoo logic to the thing,

as if under all the cuteness and intricacy one was supposed to feel a hint of violence, an atmosphere of cruelty and revenge."(p.87). On studying the model in more detail Nashe confirms his early feelings; when he attends to the prison he sees,

> a blindfolded prisoner standing against the wall just behind them about to be executed by a firing squad. What did this mean? What crime had this man committed, and why was he being punished in this terrible way? For all the warmth and sentimentality depicted in the model, the overriding mood was one of terror, of dark dreams sauntering down the avenues in broad daylight. A threat of punishment seemed to hang in the air- as if this were a city at war with itself, struggling to mend its ways before the prophets came to announce the arrival of a murderous, avenging God.(p.96)

The model and its creators are millennialist and are waiting for the apocalypse so that they, the "immortals" as Flower calls them can rule. They are puritans, wanting to create a society based on penal servitude and authoritarianism, where through Big Brother style surveillance they replace the omnipotent Protestant God.

Tim Woods points out that,

> once out in the meadow; the text takes on an almost laboratory-like experimental feel, as Auster's focus on power and its operation as a means of social control takes on a near Foucauldian twist. For power is demonstrated in the now classically defined Foucauldian forms: through measures of surveillance, both overt in the figure of Murks and more invisibly(*vis-a-vis* the inexplicable violence done to Pozzi on his escape from the meadow); through more overt forms of force like Murk's gun; and ultimately through almost invisible and intangible forces such as capital itself (Flower and Stone and the authority they can summon rests somewhere behind Murks)(p.154 Barone).

It is left to Pozzi to summarize Auster's conclusion on American Society; Pozzi remarks, "'The whole world is run by assholes.'"(p.135)

Pozzi is troubled by the thought that they were cheated by Flower and Stone at the poker match. Unable to find hard evidence for this he subscribes instead to a

metaphysical construction, believing that the world is in harmony, a series of global balancing acts. He decides that Nashe's stealing of the model figures has destroyed the rhythmn and balance of the universe, which resulted in them losing. Nashe the rationalist burns the figures in a ritual exorcism of Pozzi's superstitions, yet it is the dreamer Pozzi who comprehends the reality of their incarceration in the meadow.

Nashe feels that it is a relationship built on mutual goodwill and the just settling of a debt. Nashe sees the wall as redemption and his time in the meadow as an opportunity to recreate himself. Previously he measured his freedom by the dwindling bundle of money; now the days he works on the calendar measure his debt and later symbolise his thoughts. On the last day of their debt Auster tells us that,

> Nashe's mind remained curiously empty, as if he were unable to absorb the magnitude of what he had done. I'm back to zero, he finally said to himself. And all of a sudden he knew that an entire period of his life had just ended. It wasn't just the wall and the meadow, it was everything that had put him there in the first place, the whole crazy saga of the past two years. Therese and the money and the car, all of it. He was back to zero again, and now those things were gone. For even the smallest zero was a great hole of nothingness, a circle large enough to contain the world.(p.155)

Nashe is back to zero financially and ontologically, he can now reconstruct his self and identity. The "zero" is the aperture in the canvas of "Moonlight", where Fogg finds a representation of the limitless potential for representation discourse and self in Moon Palace. How cruel and ironic it is, then, that Nashe's opportunity for freedom is shattered by the fact that they still have a financial debt to pay for their expenses. This merely emphasises the capital power and power of capital that Flower and Stone hold; Nashe will remain until their experiment is complete.

It is during the righting of this debt that Nashe's comprehension of his situation, relationships and self go into a paranoic free-fall, owing to the unreliablity of

everything that surrounds him. Nashe has left one prison only to be placed in a more oppressive, solitary and claustrophobic cell. It is Murks's gun that shocks Nashe out of his illusion of goodwill and confirms the threat of violence and punishment that Pozzi has known from the start. Nashe's sense of self and position has been destabilized; his ability to read and rationalize situation thrown into flux. As Woods states: "The narrative works as a series of ups and downs: there are points of crucial consolidation of the sense of self and situation and control over circumstances, before these are violently subverted or overthrown, as new facts act to unveil illusions of relationship or context."(p.157). Again Nashe is dimly aware of this flux as shown by his choice of music to play on his keyboard, his favourite is "The Mysterious Barricades" because,

> The music started and stopped, then started again, then stopped again, and yet through it all the piece continued to advance, pushing on toward a resolution that never came. . . As far as he was concerned the barricades stood for the wall he was building in the meadow, but that was quite another thing from knowing what they meant.(p.181)

In this modern American capitalist society, ambiguity rules and social constructs, relationships, narratives and identity are unreliable. As Woods concludes, "the constant sense of unreliable and uncertain narrative positions ushers in radical epistemological crises, which always threaten to "tip over" into ontological crisis"(p.159). To highlight his point Auster ends the novel in a state of narrative ambivalence, as Nashe drives his old car with Murks and Floyd into what we assume will be a fatal head-on collision. Nashe can only take his revenge for Pozzi's murder and his own incarceration on the hirelings. He cannot touch the ideological and economic power base that lies behind them, namely Flower and Stone. Like Sachs and his Statue of Liberty bombing campaign, Nashe only destroys representative images and cannot affect the real substance.

The film version has an extra scene, adding a circularity to the narrative as Nashe stumbles out of the wreck, battered and bruised but very much alive, hitches a ride with Paul Auster in a cameo role in a mirror image of the opening scene when he picks up an equally damaged Pozzi. Implicit in this is Nashe's escape from the controlling forces, which never happens in the novel. In the film, Flower and Stone are repressive eccentrics; in the novel they exemplify authoritarianism inherent in capitalism itself. What damages Nashe psychologically is the unconfirmable awareness that he is being controlled,

> Sooner or later, Nashe thought there would be a new section to represent where he was now, a scale model of the wall and the meadow and the trailer, and once those things were finished, two tiny figures would be set down in the middle of the field. One for Pozzi and one for himself . . .Sometimes, powerless to stop himself, he even went so far as to imagine that he was already living inside the model.(p.178)

Nashe joins the pantheon of Auster's paranoid protagonists who are being crushed by controlling forces which keep them in a state of flux ontological crisis and neurosis. Modernity, the city, genealogy, the father, American history, American society: are all leviathans oppressing and irresistibly determining the lives of individuals. Neutrality and non-engagement of the kind that Fogg initially practices in Central Park is a self-defeating option. Auster is arguing throughout his work that awareness of these overwhelming forces, these "Others" leads to a strip-mining of the individual's self, revelation and self-discovery. Our existential pain remains, because we do not have the capacity as humans for complete comprehension and resolution; only death releases us but gives us no satisfaction.

The Music of Chance can also be read as an extended metaphor for Auster's own paranoia concerning his career. Once again we find Auster exploring the circumstances of his own inheritance from the father he did not understand. The wall in the meadow is Auster's textual works, on which he labours physically, as Nashe does. Auster though, envies Nashe because Nashe lost his inheritance and builds his monument from nothing and Auster cannot come to terms with his angst over the fact that his obtuse father laid the foundations for his literary career. He may complete the wall, but like Nashe, only death allows him to escape the financial debt he owes. Financial debt, but also genealogical debt and it is the genealogical debt he strives so hard throughout The Invention of Solitude not to pass on to his son. To return to the microcosm of Auster's narrative in "Music" we find his perspective on reality, life and a summation of his literary work- "the piece continued to advance, pushing on toward a resolution that never came."(p.181).

Conclusion: "Meaning. No Meaning."

In the preceding Chapters of this thesis, my approach has been to explicate individual novels from Auster's canon and draw out a core theme that runs throughout his work, but which is given a sharper focus in that specific text. The self-conscious intertextual elements of Auster's work, his continual referencing of his own autobiography and his focus on a core groups of themes means that the Auster critic is constantly moving from text to text, back and forth; obliquely remembering some obscure phrase in Moon Palace and relating it to the main protagonist in Leviathan, a character who appears in one sentence in The Invention of Solitude whose name is adopted by the protagonist in In the Country of Last Things. It feels as if gradually the books mesh together, implode and reconstitute themselves. Characters seen in the mirror of one of the other texts are thrown into different shapes, your certainties about them fall away as they don a new set of clothes and walk through the walls of another novel. Initially, I considered writing these chapters thematically, but after completing my first chapter on space in Auster's work I changed my tack. The reason for this was the excessive length to which this approach led. Individual books were so complex, the multiple strands of narrative, structure, theme, ideology and philosophy were wound so tight, tangled like an abandoned fishing net, that the gaps between these strands were pin dots, not even holes. This meant that I had to perform an unpicking process on the page before I could even pull out the semblance of a line of thought. By addressing Auster's work in chronological order, I would only have to explicate the text once and had the space to follow the thickest, richest thematic strands into the other novels.

It is very significant that Auster's novels have this self-referential structure and appear to fuse together, yet retain their individuality, because they are really versions of one story, one self: Paul Auster. When we uncover Auster's overriding philosophy we realise that his canon demonstrates this philosophy. He places himself simultaneously in the European existential tradition of self-analysis in a solitary context and in the American tradition of public display: in classic democratic fashion he is telling his story, yet it is also our story. It is our story because Auster's main concern is the existential questions - Who am I? Why am I here? Questions that every human confronts as the condition of his or her existence.

Auster's story is contained in one section in one of his books, "The Book of Memory" in The Invention of Solitude. The rest of his novels can be viewed as versions of "The Book of Memory" to be added to the fourteen versions in the book. The Invention of Solitude is the rich seam of inspiration that Auster has mined in his subsequent career, returning to its themes time and time again, drawing one out and polishing it until it is bright enough light another up another text. Unfortunately, as Auster's career has progressed he has exhausted "Invention"'s natural wealth so that his later novels lack a strong enough philosophical premise to fuse with their narrative.

All of Auster's work stems from his search for his unknowable father in "Invention". His father may take many forms: Blume's brother, Master Yehudi, Sachs, Fogg's unknown father. His unknowability is allegorically represented by a reality of constant flux in "last Things"; the all seeing oppressive state and culture of consumption and despair that

Sachs tries to affect in Leviathan, the authoritarian power of Flower and Stone in The Music of Chance and, of course, memory in "Invention". Auster no doubt recognises this, as shown by Sachs in Leviathan and the fact that his political bombing campaign is driven more by ontological frustrations and psychological problems and the need for self-expression than by political protest.

The stories that make up The New York Trilogy dramatise once again Auster's attempt to know his father. As I have shown throughout this thesis, Auster draws on the Lacanian theory of self-signification. Auster's father is of course his signifying Other, just as all of the detectives' nemesis in the Trilogy act as Others for the protagonist. In "Invention" Auster is exploring what occurs when the nemesis has superiority or a privileged knowledge that the protagonist does not possess. Logically, if self is defined by the Other and that Other is superior, the self must experience deflation. Auster's father and the enigmas in the Trilogy possess an unknowability that is over coded, not merely the given unknown of the Other, but something greater.

Auster frequently toys with the idea of being fathered and authored and in Chapter 1 I took time to explicate that relationship between father, writer, child. The characters of Blue and the narrator of "The Locked Room" and Quinn know that something is controlling their destiny that they are being authored. Blue and the narrator of "The Locked Room" may discover their authors/creators but this only leads to more unanswered questions and a larger enigma. M. S. Fogg's name and his genealogical

confusion emphasise Auster's point that authorship and fatherhood are inextricably linked in his fiction.

Auster, as we have seen, cannot know his father, so he becomes as enigmatic a creator for his readership who are trying to discover his design, enter his consciousness, just as he seeks to enter his dead father's. We try as he does to reach that sublime beyond, outside of the text which, as Aaron says in Leviathan, is our reality as we read it. Reader, author and all of Auster's protagonists seek to escape to that sublime outside of the text which is their reality. Auster often gives us hope that there is a space outside of the textual reality, a refuge, a pure space for self-expression. It is often a transcendental natural sublime that provokes epiphany; it is represented by the moon for Fogg in Moon Palace, the blue sky for Anna in "Last Things", the desert for Effing in Moon Palace and music for Nashe.

However, other characters, escape existential and ontological questions and the problems of self-signification through subsumation to more dominant egos: Quinn subsumes himself to the detective Paul Auster, Aaron to Sachs, Sachs to Di Maggio, Walt to Yehudi. Yet Auster realises that imperialism, manifest destiny and progress, such sacrilized forces have destroyed the natural sublime in America; power, vastness and unknowability have been transferred to nuclear weaponry, commodity infinitude and the cybernetic forests of the stock exchange.

In Moon Palace Auster argues that even if the sublime, in this case the moon, has been colonised by techno-imperialism it can become purely representation and remain a

symbol, a projection of the possibility of space, a blank area which still offers an opportunity for dissent. In "Ghosts" Blue realises that Black has provided "a hole in the texture of things" (p.144), which he can fill with his own imaginative stories and versions of the case.

Auster's continual fusion of fiction and reality is motivated by the fact that he sees the world and reality as many post-modern and premodern writers do as a text. As Ernst Robert Curtius notes, "as early as Plato, we find the comparison between the dressing of a field and writing". Curtius adds that in the early and middle Christina eras significance was something not to be inscribed on the earth but to be discovered in it: "Nicholas of Cusa remarks that there had been saints who regarded the world as a written book. (p.617 Alford)

Therefore, as I have argued, linear narrative in texts supports mainstream government-endorsed versions of reality, history and representation. Auster knows that textual and physical space is always second-hand, especially when forces whose epistemology is dubious have inscribed upon it. In all of his books Auster is documenting the lack of space for discovery of self through art and experience, as information, genres, form, texts, histories and discourse overlap. Auster's chief aim in his work is to prise out textual gaps, white spaces of innovative possibility, imagination and self-expression which explains the dichotomies prevalent in his work, and the weight he gives to alternate versions of texts and stories throughout his work. There can never be too many versions

of reality for Auster because by their very difference the friction between them creates holes, gaps for further discourse.

Auster's overriding doctrine is paradox, he is obsessed with the duality of existence and the binary nature of reality, he actively cultivates the space of paradox, that place between two ideas or poles. Auster's conclusions, revelations and epiphanies often stem from the neutral position between two oppositional forces. In "Invention" he feels he is "going both forward and backward, into the future and into the past . . .his life no longer dwells in the present." (p.82). This neutrality puts Auster's consciousness in a place or space, of objectivity, out of time, which allows him the freedom to explore memory. That explains why Auster mixes fiction and reality so frequently in his work; he wants to occupy the neutral space of interpenetration between fiction and reality.

The numerous dichotomies that Auster includes in his work create this potential arena for ontological exploration. They are never self-contained but reflect and refract other relationships and connections. In Chapter 1 I dealt extensively with this idea and how it related to Auster's use of rooms, writing and physical space.

Auster's work is often concerned with the experience of displacement and belonging, which connects to Freud's discussion of "the uncanny" to which Auster refers in "Invention" to try and explain the fact that he wants to inscribe meaning to the coincidences he is obsessed with and the natural human desire to see connections and a causality to reality. He notes that,

Freud has described such experiences as "uncanny," or *unheimlich*- the opposite of *heimlich*, which means "familiar," "native", "belonging to the home . . . Even as adults we have buried within us a memory of the way we perceived the world as children. And not simply a memory of it: the structure itself is intact. Freud connects the experience of the uncanny with a revival of the egocentric, animistic world-view of childhood. "It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfils the condition of stirring those mental vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression." (p.148)

Brooker states that

the uncanny is associated with the experience of, or creation of doubles and with coincidence. Thus Freud writes of instances where the subject 'identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self.' (Brooker p.156)

This explains why Auster refers to himself as A., in "Invention" and why characters in similar self -doubt such as Quinn, Aaron and Sachs adopt different names and identities.

Freud's first point also explains why Auster repeatedly returns to the relations of father and sons, doppelgangers, substitutes, mirror images and coincidences. Auster states that,

"In the strictest sense of the word, I consider myself a realist, Chance is a part of reality: we are continually shaped by the forces of coincidence, the unexpected occurs with almost numbing regularity in all our lives." (p.116 Red Notebook).

If the unheimlich is the unexpected, Auster regards it and coincidences as rhymes in reality. Brooker notes,

This, we might conclude, is the fate of Freud's modern uncanny in the post-modern an era notoriously desensitised to the shock of the new, the mysterious, or unfamiliar. (p.160 Brooker)

Auster's realism seeks to replicate the chaos of meaning, the lack of resolution and the unknowability of the postmodern world.

Auster returns to Freud and cites his idea of the figure of the child as a model for the imaginative writer (p.164). This is important because it emphasis the connection between Auster, as father and storyteller, because the telling of stories to his son establishes kinship and security of home. Loving relationships between characters who are fathers and sons and families are often under threat in Auster's work. One thinks of Fogg's twisted genealogy, Nashe and his "kid" Pozzi's treatment by the millionaires, Quinn's estrangement and Blume's lost brother.

Auster's lack of engagement with his family has been well documented in The Invention of Solitude and throughout his fiction he celebrates the need for family stability and loving relationships to build a sense of community with others. The narrator of "The Locked Room" remarks that his loving relationship with his wife places him in a paradise of "no place" and gives him a feeling of utopia:

> By belonging to Sophie, I began to feel as though I belonged to everyone else as well. My true pal 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." (p.243)

Auster seeks to inhabit this hole between the self and the not self and the numerous other dichotomies he sets up in his fiction. Utopia for Auster and his protagonists is space between two oppositions. Aford notes, "It is an arena of mediation out of which the possibility for the spaces of home-away, self-other, inside-outside, and pedestrian space-mapped space emerges." An area that Lousi Marin calls the "the neutral". This utopia of neither here nor there, home (heimlich) or away (unheimlich) is the space for self-signification. (p.117 Alford)

Auster and Fogg realise that self-signification does not lie merely with the Other, that vast unknowability: the father and the Natural sublime. For Fogg the utopic space is between the moon as physical presence and as representative symbol. For Auster the utopic space is ultimately between memory (the sublime) and his conception and comprehension of it.

This neutral space always occurs when a person is in solitude. However, the paradoxical nature of solitude for Auster means, that solitude is a means to the recognition of difference and a sense of connection: as he moves inward he also moves outward towards the world. As I said in Chapter 1, "Auster sees the self as found in the essential state of solitude; the shell for the inner self, leading to individual tunnels, all of which feed in to a cavern of universal consciousness."(p.41)

Auster has maintained an enviable paradox of being a financially successful writer, a critically acclaimed author and a cult novelist. The fact that his books sell may be explained by his strong grasp of narrative; he tells a good yarn. Critics have heaped praise on him because they recognise that he is aware of their profession and the history of critical discourse, which he parodies in several of his texts; he provides enough tangents in his novels for them to pursue and ascribe meaning to, but confirms nothing which places so much more emphasis on the critic's own subjective interpretation. Auster is a cult author, because of the intellectual and existential nature of his texts. He has the requisite moody photographs on his books, is an enigmatic interviewee, hangs out

with denizens of cool like Lou Reed, Harvey Keitel and Jim Jarmusch. But more importantly because he engages with his readership. He does this in a variety of ways, in "Invention" he uses references and quotes to equalize our literary experiences as opposed to placing himself on an intellectual high ground. He also reads through his stream of consciousness prose sections and searches them for meaning concurrently with the reader.

In The Invention of Solitude, Leviathan and particularly In the Country of Last Things, he insists that the reader is essential to the text and stresses that it is our understanding of the text that determines the text's worth and success. Auster and all of his narrators realise that discourse is the essential self-signifier and all of his protagonists are driven to produce a self-justifying test oriented to an other, usually the reader. Auster has a hunger to write, a hunger for human contact that in all of his texts translates into a literal hunger, abnegation, deprivation of an essential aspect of life so that all characters go through a degradation process before their selves are reborn.

Auster is a significant writer, as I have tried to show, because to quote Barone, "he has synthesized interrogations of post-modern subjectivities, explication of premodern moral causality and a sufficient realism." (p.5-6). More importantly he has added humanity to self-conscious post-modern fiction, which interests but often alienates the reader. He dramatizes our struggle to understand the post-modern world and its signs, and our essential human condition of existential questioning and ontological exploration. Death for his characters, as for his audience offers the only true resolution. Auster's summation

of his life and work is that, "the piece continued to advance, pushing on toward a resolution hat never came." (p.181 The Music of Chance) "Meaning. No Meaning", is the only conclusion one can make about Auster's work, yet the space in-between these poles contains worlds.

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