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**A Labyrinth of Endless Steps:
The Postmodern City and Paul Auster's Urban Detective**

Allan Andrew Burke

**A Thesis
in
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of
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

A Labyrinth of Endless Steps: The Postmodern City and Paul Auster's Urban Detective

Allan Andrew Burke

Taking as its starting point Fredric Jameson's assertion that postmodernity is marked by "a mutation in built space itself," this thesis examines the representation of urban space in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and attempts to characterize the effects of this spatial mutation on Auster's detective protagonists. The detective's traditional cognitive function is shown to depend upon a cartographical ability to spatially organize the events of a case as part of the process of transforming them into a coherent narrative in hopes of producing a solution. The novels which constitute Auster's trilogy, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room* demonstrate that this spatio-cognitive function has become more difficult for the urban detective as, with the transition from modernity to postmodernity, cities have grown to staggering proportions. The sheer immensity of the postmodern city has rendered the detective's task of bringing a series of disparate and random facts together nearly impossible. This inability to comprehend the totality is precisely the effect of postmodernity that Jameson diagnoses in the postmodern subject and thus Auster's detectives are read as proxy for the postmodern subject in general. In an effort to forestall the negative effects of this inability, most readily articulated in terms of a crisis of subjectivity in that the subject is no longer able to locate himself or herself in the various discourses that constitute reality, Jameson proposes a strategy of cognitive mapping. This strategy, fundamentally a reiteration of the necessity to totalise in any effort to comprehend one's subjective position, is instructive in the analysis of Auster's texts. Auster, like Jameson, recognizes the necessity of such a strategy but at the same time remains deeply sceptical that such a tactic is possible at all. The thesis concludes that Auster's *The New York Trilogy* functions as a meditation on this paradoxical position, juxtaposing the totalizing gesture described by Jameson with the representation of a postmodern urban reality which denies its possibility.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE - <i>Urban Space, Postmodernism and The New York Trilogy</i>	1
I. The Urban Subject and Postmodern Space	1
II. The Individual as Geographer	7
III. Spatiality and <i>The New York Trilogy</i>	10
IV. Postmodern Detective Fiction and Cognitive Mapping	13
CHAPTER TWO - <i>Walking in the City</i>	29
I. Acts of Disappearance	29
II. The <i>Flâneur</i> : Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin	34
III. Situationism	39
IV. Watching the Detective	44
V. The Persistence of Chance	48
VI. Walking and Detection	51
VII. Delirious New York	54
VIII. Space and Literary History	60
CHAPTER THREE - <i>Detection, Surveillance and Urban Space</i>	67
I. A Genealogy of Detection	67
II. Schizophrenia and Spatiality	75
III. Boredom, Surveillance, and Writing	79
IV. Windows, Frames, and Contextualization	87
CHAPTER FOUR - <i>Disappearance and the Double</i>	96
I. Architectural and Textual Space: The Locked Room Motif	96
II. Tracing Stillman's Trajectory	101
III. The Confrontation of the Double	112
CHAPTER FIVE - <i>Totality, Fragmentation, and Nostalgia</i>	123
I. Paranoia, Conspiracy, and Postmodern Detective Fiction	123
II. One Totality	131
III. Two Paintings	134
IV. Three Utopian Gestures	137
WORKS CITED	148

CHAPTER ONE - Urban Space, Postmodernism and The New York Trilogy

The Urban Subject and Postmodern Space

"The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the threshold at which visibility begins. They walk - an elementary form of this experience of the city: they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of the urban 'text' they write without being able to read it." (93)

Michel de Certeau

The Practice of Everyday Life

In his *Postmodernism, or, Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson argues that postmodernity is marked by "a mutation in built space itself" (Jameson 1991: 38). This assertion derives from his recognition that the postmodern subject has a substantially different experience of space than the experience of his or her modernist predecessor. This new experience is characterized as a generalized subjective and cultural disorientation, a pervasive inability to locate oneself in the various social networks which are seen to constitute the contemporary world.

Jameson is by no means alone in recognizing this "spatial turn" in postmodern culture. Indeed, the growing prevalence of geographical terminology in critical practice (literary studies, philosophy and the multiplicity of discourses which fall under the category of cultural studies), indicates the heightened awareness of space as an influential, even determining, factor in various debates, most notably those concerning subjectivity. The spatialization of the debate surrounding subjectivity has reconstrued the self non-metaphysically, that is to say, situated it materially and physically in space and within the cultural discourses which constitute that space.

This rejection of the transcendent Cartesian ego, as Steven Pile and Nigel Thrift point out in their introduction to *Mapping the Subject*, brings the subject back down to earth and narrativizes identity:

Nowadays, the subject and subjectivity are more likely to be conceived of as rooted in the spatial home of the body, and therefore situated as composed of and by a "federation" of different discourses/persona, united and orchestrated to a greater or lesser extent by narrative, and as registered through a whole series of senses (Pile & Thrift 1995: 11).

This conception of subjectivity locates the subject in both space and time; identity is conceived not as an entity but as a narrative path or trajectory.

It is the citydweller who becomes the key figure in discerning the constitution of this spatialized and narrativized subject. The city stands as the privileged space of postmodernity (much as it was the privileged space of modernity) and its citizens provide a multiplicity of examples of the extension of subjectivity through space. For each citydweller there exists a different itinerary, a different narrative path and thus a different identity. This narrativization transforms the city itself into a heterogeneity of texts written by its inhabitants. As the epigraph by Michel de Certeau suggests, it is these "ordinary practitioners" of the city, these pedestrian-subjects, who create the city, just as the city creates them in a dialectical manner. This relation creates a dual geographical and cartographical metaphor. First, the individual citydweller negotiates the city by mapping it mentally; the narrativization of identity demands the spatial competence that allows this movement. Second, the city shapes and molds the identity of its inhabitants; the discourses which constitute the city, the various power matrices, to invoke a Foucauldian term, produce the resistance that allows identities to

be formed. Through the impact of these forces, the subject comes to reflect his or her discursive environment, as, in Donna Haraway's brilliant cartographical metaphor: "bodies are maps of meaning and power" (Haraway 1990: 222). These two instances of the cartographical metaphor reveal the dialectical aspect of subject constitution.¹

If the citydweller can be regarded as the primary figure in an analysis of postmodern subjectivity, further subcategorization of this figure exposes more specific urban identities which can clarify individual aspects of the postmodern experience. The (fictionalized) detective, I would argue, emerges as a potentially fruitful figure in an exploration of not only the characteristics of this new postmodern space but also in distinguishing the differences between postmodern hyperspace, to use Jameson's term, and an older, now eclipsed, modernist space. The detective is simultaneously a fairly recent fictional type (the birth of the detective story proper is usually identified with Edgar Allan Poe's "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque" in the 1840s) and one which, despite its youth, spans three essential literary/philosophical/economic periods: realism, modernism and postmodernism.² The detective, a primarily urban figure, can thus be seen, to modify de Certeau's phrase, as an "extraordinary practitioner" of the urban text. The detective, more so than the average citydweller, has to know the city, to have a certain mastery of it and to be able to traverse and survey it with a certain degree of skill. The detective's business is a cognitive one, to *know* more than his or her adversary, to be ahead in the game. This knowledge, a form of spatial competence, identifies the detective as a figure who is capable of locating

himself/herself in the way that the newly spatialized conception of subjectivity demands. This is to suggest that if the city-dweller is the exemplary postmodern subject and the detective is a specialized sort of city-dweller, then an investigation of the detective's changing function over the course of its literary history will potentially reveal the "mutation in built space itself" that Jameson heralds as one of the distinguishing characteristics of postmodernity. Again, as with subjectivity, the relation appears dialectical: the genealogy of the detective should reveal the transformations in urban space that have occurred in the shift from modernity to postmodernity while these same transformations should help to explain the changing nature of the detective.

The detective figures heavily in two key articles which attempt to define an emergent postmodern sensibility in literature. William Spanos's "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination" (1972) and Michael Holquist's "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction" (1971) are pivotal early attempts to define not only a specifically postmodern literary sensibility, but also a postmodern condition reflected in this literature. Citing numerous and diverse literary examples,³ Spanos and Holquist identify as the primary feature of postmodern fiction (which both see as exemplified by the new sort of anti-detective or metaphysical detective fiction written by Alain Robbe-Grillet or Vladimir Nabokov) a tendency toward irresolution and ambiguity. While both situate the cause of this symptom in a challenge to the modernist sensibility, primarily the humanist tradition, whether it be Hegelian progress or

Cartesian transcendence, it is only Jameson's "On Raymond Chandler" (1970) that begins to identify the role of space in modifying the literary account of the world. Jameson construes the increasing inability of the detective to solve the task at hand as allegorical for the individual's confusion in emerging postmodern space. For Jameson, Raymond Chandler's fictional detective, Philip Marlowe, represents both a disappearing modernist subject and an emergent postmodern subject. In the same way, Marlowe's Los Angeles is both a soon-to-be eclipsed modernist space and a prototypical postmodern space. The detective and the city reflect and shape each other.

I believe that Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* represents a key contemporary example of postmodern detective fiction. The novels which constitute the trilogy, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*, exhibit many of the characteristics of anti-detective fiction or metaphysical detective fiction that Spanos and Holquist describe in their attempts to identify a new, specifically postmodern genre. As well, Auster's trilogy is a specifically urban one, registering the attributes of the space that its detectives occupy. The dual function of the cartographic metaphor is apparent in these novels; Auster's detectives both map and are mapped within city space. I propose to analyze the novels of *The New York Trilogy* as a means to interrogate Jameson's assertion that postmodernism is characterized by "a mutation in built space itself" (Jameson 1991: 38). Auster's urban trilogy, I want to argue, is an experiment in which, among other things, a descendent of the modernist anti-hero, the postmodern detective, both Kafkaesque and "hard-boiled", is introduced

into the space of New York City. The negotiation of this space by the protagonists reveals both the city's residual modernist characteristics and its emergent postmodernist tendencies. By marking this shift from modernity to postmodernity in spatial terms, I will also attempt to discern whether the subject, in this case Auster's detectives, has kept pace with this mutation. Jameson suggests that the subject's evolution into postmodernity is dependent upon the tactic of "cognitive mapping", which he describes as a method of situation and location through which the subject, decentered by the shift into a new type of space, can reorient himself or herself. The postmodern detective, an exemplary postmodern figure, should expose the functioning of this tactic as well as determine the range of its potential.

The novels which constitute Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* further reveal the dialectical functioning of the cartographic metaphor. In each of these novels, the identity of the protagonist depends upon location and orientation within the urban space of New York City. The urban experience plays a crucial role in shaping the identities of each of the protagonists, and the familiarity of the city environment continually reaffirms their identities. This is countered, however, by the possibility of spatial disorientation. Within these novels, Auster illustrates the correlation between being lost and a loss of identity. Auster's emphasis on the processes of orientation in the negotiation of urban space reveals the extent to which he recognizes the impact of space (urban space primarily, but also architectural and textual space) on the construction of subjectivity and the possibility of agency. As Jameson suggests, however, this act of location exceeds or transcends the usual geographical

processes. The negotiation of space by the protagonists of *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*, I will argue, exemplifies the complexities of the cartographic metaphor and points to how the concept of cognitive mapping can be extended to accommodate the complexities of subject formation. The difficulties that Auster's detectives experience in mapping the city and maintaining their grip on reality suggests the limitations of cognitive mapping as a tactic of identity stabilisation. Through his detective protagonists Auster questions the manageability of the act of location that Jameson's aesthetic of cognitive mapping represents. Thus cognitive mapping can be extended to account for subject formation while, at the same time, a malfunction of this capacity indicates the potential for subjective disintegration.

The Individual as Geographer

The geographic subdiscipline of cognitive mapping has evolved since Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* was first published in 1960, in which he sought to understand how the average individual manages to negotiate urban space. Lynch concluded that, as a measure to counterbalance the possibility of urban disorientation, the citydweller has the ability to spatially organize and mentally represent city space. This is not to say, however, that a cognitive map is merely a psychovisual representation of the urban layout. Cognitive mapping, instead, is an abstraction covering the various mental abilities that enable one to "collect, organize, store,

recall, and manipulate information about the spatial environment" (Downs & Stea 1977: 6). It is a personal, subjective process in which mapping, in addition to organizing the urban environment and making it legible, also imbues the cityscape with meaning. The individual city-dweller activates meaning within that space, organizing it within the larger and unrepresentable geographic totality. It follows that everybody's cognitive map is different, since each individual maps the city from a different subjective position. The theory of cognitive mapping accentuates the status of the city (and of space in general) as something that is not *given* but *produced*, something that is not merely *perceived* but also must be *interpreted*. It effects a textualization of the city and reconceives it as an interpretable object whose "meaning" is contingent upon the subjective positioning of the interpreter.

Fredric Jameson adopts Lynch's conception of cognitive mapping and reworks it as a key political strategy in his assessment of postmodernism. Jameson suggests that cognitive mapping can be viewed as a spatial analogue to Louis Althusser's conception of ideology. Althusser formulates ideology as the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Althusser 1994: 123).⁴ For Althusser, that ideology is a construct which represents the individual's relation to the larger, unrepresentable social totality. Ideology functions as an allegory which can span the gap between the individual's limited perception and the totality of discourses in which he or she is situated. It is key to note here that Althusser is not using ideology in a purely negative sense: ideology can be something which obscures the "reality" of a person's situation (obfuscating oppression based on

race, class or gender by representing it in a way that denies its existence or presents it as "natural"), but is also, perhaps ironically, necessary; there is no space outside ideology. What is necessary is some representation of the social; that this representation would be ideological is a given for Jameson and Althusser, both Marxists. As Jameson argues, Althusser's conception of ideology functions as a spatial analogue to Lynch's conception of cognitive mapping because both attempt to situate the individual in a larger, unrepresentable, totality through a process of mapping:

Whatever its defects and problems, this positive conception of ideology as a necessary function in any form of social life has the great merit of stressing the gap between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated, a gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience; but this ideology, as such, attempts to span or coordinate, to map, by means of conscious and unconscious representations (Jameson 1988: 353).

Just as Lynch's city-dweller attempts to negotiate the city through a process of mapping, so too, Jameson argues, must the individual subject attempt to negotiate socio-political space, which, the analogy goes, is as impossible to conceive in its totality as the city.

The act of location associated with cognitive mapping is, for Jameson, both necessary and political. It is necessary in that a failure to locate oneself, to comprehend one's situation either within a city or within the social, ultimately results in being lost. This is a state which, in the smaller scope of the city, can be characterized as mere disorientation but in the larger socio-political scope results in a sort of "schizophrenia" which is related both to the contemporary crisis of subjectivity

and to the experience of postmodernism in general. Indeed, in Jameson's account of postmodernism, the inability of the subject to locate himself or herself within the produced space of late capitalism engenders a schizophrenia, the loss of a coherent subject position that forecloses the possibility of movement. The postmodern condition is characterized for Jameson by the difficulties it presents spatially, and thus necessitates an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping":

Jameson points to what he considers "the need for maps," for new theoretical and aesthetic mappings of postmodern society and culture. He claims that spatial disorientation and confusion (i.e. not knowing where we are) are salient characteristics of the postmodern condition (Kellner 1989: 33).⁵

The inability to map, to locate oneself socially, causes a paralysis. Cognitive mapping, then, is necessary in that it allows us to function at all and it is political in that it is only with the ability to cognitively map that any agency is possible.

Spatiality and *The New York Trilogy*

The convergence of subjectivity and spatiality in the novels of *The New York Trilogy* reveals the instability of identity even as it explores the possibilities of a stable or firmly situated identity. In suggesting cartography as a possible metaphor for subjectivity, a metaphor which is particularly revealing in analyzing *The New York Trilogy*, I wish to place a certain significance on the ability to locate oneself within space and within discourse: to know who we are we attempt to figure out where we

are. The self, both in the cartographic metaphor and in Auster's treatment of subjectivity, can be determined, reaffirmed, or even jeopardized through various acts of location and dislocation. Auster's protagonists hang precariously between being lost and being situated: the in-betweenness of their plight reveals subjectivity as a process or even a struggle. The site of this struggle, the body in the urban space of New York, makes the process even more difficult as the city offers not stability and permanence, but flux. If the city is always shifting and refusing to be pinned down, then the city-dweller will experience and reflect this instability, which will, in turn, lead to perpetual renegotiations of subjectivity as the city mutates and transforms.

It may seem odd initially to think of Auster's trilogy in terms of Jameson's concept of the postmodern. Even though Auster's texts are frequently designated as postmodern, this designation is usually assigned on the basis of their metafictionality and their self-deconstructing impulses, rather than on the sedimented figurations of the logic of late capitalism which Jameson sees as synonymous with postmodernism.⁶ But in dealing with subjectivity and spatiality the novels of *The New York Trilogy* coincide with two essential themes of Jameson's postmodernism. Jameson identifies spatiality and subjectivity as dual focal points through which the effects of the shift from modernity to postmodernity can be recognized:

I am proposing the notion that we are here in the presence of something like a mutation in built space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied by any equivalent mutation in the subject (Jameson 1991: 38)

The protagonists of *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* share various symptoms of the discrepancy Jameson identifies between the postmodern subject and postmodern space. Auster's protagonists all engage in some sort of cognitive mapping (from Quinn's literal mapping of his trajectories through the city to Fanshawe's biographer's more oblique grappling with his own subjectivity), in order to rectify this discrepancy. Their failure to fully close the gap results in their various crises of subjectivity, leading either to madness or disappearance. That these characters and Auster's novels do not explicitly foreground their positioning in what Jameson would term "the multinational space of late capitalism" (and do not likewise expressly concern themselves with geopolitics or economics), does not diminish their ability to interrogate Jameson's formulations. It is precisely because these novels appear to be more conducive to a "purely" geographic analysis of the Lynchian sort that we can consider the applicability of Jameson's adaption and whether cognitive mapping can be transformed to serve the purpose (that of subjective re-orientation), Jameson assigns it. If this transformation is possible, the ways in which Auster's protagonists negotiate the city will reveal various features of the subject's negotiation of postmodern space.⁷

Postmodern Detective Fiction and Cognitive Mapping

One of the characteristics of so-called postmodern fiction (and I shall further attempt to illustrate how *The New York Trilogy* both conforms to and resists this categorization), is that it subverts and mutates (often in parodic fashion) traditionally established generic patterns. Particularly susceptible to this sort of subversion is the detective story since it relies on highly stylized generic patterns such as linear movement, realistic representation and, most importantly, closure as part of its end-dominated narrative momentum. The postmodern subversion of detective fiction denies the conventional expectations of the reader, making the "traditional detective's quest into something more elusive and complex" (Rowen 1991: 224). If the traditional detective story reassured its reader of narrative resolution, with its framework guaranteeing that problems are to be solved and answers are available to those who search for them through a diligent reading or analysis of the clues available, then the postmodern detective novel undermines this interpretive confidence by exploring non-solubility and by admitting that mystery, even incomprehension, dominate our detective-like efforts to decode the clues presented by the novel or, to think macrocosmically, the world. Stefano Tani terms this postmodern adaption of the detective novel "anti-detective fiction" (Tani 1984: 35).⁸ Quite in line with contemporary critical theory, anti-detective novels, of which the novels of *The New York Trilogy* appear to be a sort, point to the instability of meaning and the difficulties of interpretation (whether it be of fiction or of reality, both being texts), rather than

the ease of comprehension and interpretability which are projected by the conventional detective novel and its realist origins.

Anti-detective fiction would seem to function as a skepticism of the methodology and presuppositions of the traditional detective novel, primarily its teleological impulse, its drive toward narrative resolution. In its skepticism of solubility, anti-detective fiction falls in line with poststructuralist thinking which, as is now familiar, points to the endless deferral of the signified which continually pre-empts closure and denies a fixity of meaning.⁹ The traditional detective novel is a heterogenous genre to say the least, with radically divergent practitioners ranging from the archetypal Poe to the hard-boiled Hammett or Chandler, all of whom are intertextually present in Auster's trilogy. While their classical detectives exemplified a sort of heroic individualism based upon the powers of logical thinking or the manipulation of particular knowledges (the hard-boiled detective's use of "street-smarts"), by contrast, postmodern detectives are notable for their suspicion of the empirical data which feeds logical thinking. In the postmodern detective novel this information is always questionable, if not totally unreliable. This is a suspicion which echoes the crisis of a realist epistemology. Part of the postmodern condition for Jameson is a crisis or breakdown of "an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it - projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself" (Jameson 1984: vii). In all three novels of the trilogy this crisis manifests itself as the now

familiar schism between signifier and signified, here articulated by Blue in *Ghosts*: "For the first time in his experience of writing reports, he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (Auster 1987: 148). Quinn, in *City of Glass*, suffers from an even more acute epistemological anxiety: "There was no way to know: not this, not anything" (Auster 1987: 56).

This scepticism towards empirical evidence is matched by the suspicion that particularized or localized knowledges are ineffectual when the "crime" being investigated is not comprehensible within a limited sphere, or it exceeds the capacity of a single individual. The applicability of cognitive mapping here becomes apparent if we consider the development of this new genre, variously called the metaphysical detective novel, the anti-detective novel or, most simply, the postmodern detective novel, as a result of and identifiable symptom of the shift from modernity to postmodernity.¹⁰ The confusion of the postmodern detective, by this reckoning, is a result of an obfuscation of the causes and effects of empirical phenomena. Even if the event can be accurately perceived, there remains the difficulty of properly contextualizing it, framing it in order to assign the event a comprehensible meaning. The failure of the postmodern detective to solve the various crimes that have been perpetrated or mysteries that exist reflects a scepticism of the notion that the world is comprehensible, or that the individual, functioning within the small sphere, can solve any mystery whose sources are dispersed and causes scattered. In a radically discontinuous reality, ironically caused by the seeming interconnectedness of all

things, the closure offered by the traditional detective story becomes implausible. The non-solution of the postmodern detective story, as well as the confusion and frustration of its protagonists, is paradigmatic of postmodern living in which "immediate lived experience" (Jameson 1991: 411) is negotiable but somehow still not fully comprehensible, its explanation or meaning occurring in an imperceptible larger sphere. As Jameson puts it,

the truth of...experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of...limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people (Jameson 1991: 411).

The postmodern experience that Jameson describes as "fragmentary" or "schizophrenic", then, has as one of its primary causes being lost. This spatial disorientation functions on several scales, from the local to the global, and therefore the act of location is always multiple and part of a larger process or negotiation.

These postmodern concerns were anticipated by Jameson himself in his essay, "On Raymond Chandler." Published in 1970, the essay prefigures many themes which would surface in his 1984 essay, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism": a fascination with Los Angeles, an emphasis on historicity, the blurring of the demarcations between art and commodity and an effort to periodize both the economic and the aesthetic. Indeed, as Kristin Ross notes, the detective novel, and Chandler in particular, "becomes the vehicle for Jameson to talk about what he really wants to talk about: a set of cultural phenomena that had not yet been theorised as

postmodern" (Ross 1992: 50). Jameson argues that Chandler's novels are emphatically site-specific: Los Angeles's horizontal urban/suburban sprawl anticipates a postmodern America of the near future. The sprawl of Los Angeles is emblematic of a geographic and demographic fragmentation along various lines of difference, especially those of race and class. Los Angeles has become a privileged space for the analysis of postmodernism precisely because of this fragmentation. The sprawl of Los Angeles, which Chandler's detective is forced to negotiate, is a product of the geographical compartmentalization of marginalized social groups. In Chandler's texts, Jameson recognizes the shift between modernity and postmodernity in the space of Los Angeles itself; the spatial organisation of the city represents the emergent social organisation/geography of postmodernism. Los Angeles, even in the time of Chandler's novels, is already a decentered city, the various groups which constitute it forcibly isolated from each other:

[Chandler's] social content anticipates the realities of the fifties and sixties. For Los Angeles is already a kind of micro-cosm and fore-cast of the country as a whole: a new centerless city, in which the various classes have lost touch with each other because each is isolated in its own geographical compartment (Jameson 1970: 629).

It is important to note, however, that this isolation is in no way arbitrary. It may be less that the various classes "have lost touch with each other" than that the dominant classes have forcibly peripheralized the weaker groups to the margins of the city and heavily regulated the use of city-space through various techniques of surveillance.¹¹ Jameson argues that Chandler's Los Angeles is already a "centerless city" because of the multiplicity of "edges" that marginalized groups have been forced to inhabit. For

Jameson, the center undoubtedly remains capital and its accompanying logic of differentiation to defuse social movements against it. While in 1970 (when the article was initially published), there was no identifiable center of Los Angeles, by 1984 the Bonaventure Hotel had begun to function, some would argue, as the symbolic center of Los Angeles, a monument to multinational capital and a focal point for the theorisation of postmodernism.¹²

Chandler's detective, Philip Marlowe, stands, for Jameson, as the figure who is able to bind these fragmented social realms together as he transverses various geographic and demographic boundaries in his effort to solve the crime. Marlowe functions as an entity through which the whole of the urban fabric can be conceptualized because of his nomadic circulation through the various spaces which constitute the city:

Since there is no longer any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped, a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routine and life-pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together (Jameson 1970: 629).

Marlowe, in his efforts to solve the case, must master the space of the city, conceptualize it in its totality by spatially organizing its fragments. For example, a murder in the middle class suburbs may point to both the underworld dealings of the lower class as well to the machinations of upper class business transactions.¹³ It is only Marlowe who can access these very different realms, circulate between them and subsequently solve the mystery. The identity of Marlowe, then, is not fully associated with any particular realm but operates in the midst of all of them, giving

him more of a cognitive function than a moral one:

In doing this the detective in a sense once again fulfills the demand of the function of knowledge rather than that of lived experience: through him we are able to see, to know, the society as a whole, but he does not really stand for any genuine close-up experience of it (Jameson 1970: 629).

In this sense then, Marlowe is clearly performing as a cognitive cartographer who is able to map and to totalize the space of Los Angeles and, in doing so, to solve its mysteries. The key here is that the Los Angeles in which Marlowe functions is not a fully postmodern Los Angeles, but is more accurately a proto-postmodernist city. It can be assumed that the effort it takes Marlowe to solve the mystery, to see the whole, would increase exponentially in a further fragmented postmodern space. With Marlowe, Chandler has created a modernist hero who is encountering a new form of space. As Kristin Ross argues:

Marlowe is a modernist hero cut adrift in a postmodernist cut-and-paste world; ironic distance keeps the beautiful soul of the detective pure in a corrupt universe, a universe granted depth precisely by the detective's own ironic detachment from it. 'Down these mean streets,' Chandler begins a famous passage describing his detective, 'a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid...He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man yet an unusual man' (Ross 1992: 55).¹⁴

Marlowe is conceived as a modernist detective in a proto-postmodernist city. In the Los Angeles of Chandler's era, the modernist hero through solitary and exemplary effort could still fathom the mysteries of the city and bring the narrative to a satisfactory resolution.

To see how Chandler's texts evoke a unique historical and, ultimately, spatial situation, one can either look forward to the postmodern detective and the further

fragmentation of space, or backward to the earlier, more unified space of the realist detective. The development of detective fiction in the Nineteenth century is historically coincident with the development of the modern city. Jameson notes that:

the origin of the literary detective lies in the creation of the professional police, whose organization can be attributed not so much to a desire to prevent crime in general as to the will on the part of modern governments to know and thus to control the varying elements of their administrative areas (Jameson 1970: 629).

As capitalism organized itself into urban configurations to increase industrial productivity, new controls were needed to regulate that space. It is precisely this spatial organisation that Foucault details in his *Discipline and Punish*. Throughout his writings on power Foucault outlines how discipline functions in a specifically spatial manner, regulations assuming a particularly spatial form. This form is represented through the example of the panopticon which, in its grid-like and geometric proportions, represents an almost ideal geography for regulation. While Foucault initially describes panoptism as a model of spatial organisation for individual institutions (prisons, hospitals, schools, etc.), he later designates it as an archetype for social organisation as a whole:

Panoptism was a technological invention in the order of power...This invention had the peculiarity of being utilised first of all on a local level, in schools, barracks and hospitals. This was where the experiment of integral surveillance was carried out...[but], at a certain moment in time, these methods began to become generalised. The police apparatus served as one of the principal vectors of this process of extension (Foucault 1980: 71-72).¹⁵

The detective, however, often operated in a sphere adjacent to the law. While the police served as an "extension" of the state apparatus, the detective was freelance,

emphasizing both his (and, until recently, with the exception of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, detection was an exclusively masculine domain) individuality and superiority to the pedestrian cognitive abilities of the police. The detective, beginning with Poe's Dupin, is usually a solitary intellectual from the upper-classes for whom solving crime represents a challenge: crime is a puzzle to be solved.¹⁶ As Stefano Tani explains, the detective as a literary figure emerged at a historical moment when the specific cognitive ability of deductive thinking was particularly privileged:

Poe, besides pioneering a genre, introduced into literature a characterization of the detective professional and a professional (scientific) way of dealing with crime. His invention comes at the philosophically appropriate moment, corresponding to the nineteenth century rise of the scientific and optimistic attitude of positivistic philosophy towards reality through the development of technology...Dupin's 'technology' is the passage from 'the creative' to 'the resolvent' moment, whose result imposes rationality on the apparent irrationality of the case (Tani 1984: 11).

Poe's detective, like Jameson's reading of Chandler's Marlowe, performs a cognitive function. One of the major differences, however, lies in the relation between the detective and the city. Whereas Marlowe's investigation of crime developed as itineraries through the city and the spaces which constitute it, Dupin's inquiries are almost always purely rational: his trajectory is not a spatial one through the city but a rational one through his own mind. Dupin, unlike the police, is able to grasp the situation as a whole, ironically without even leaving his apartment. This is evident in his critique of Vidocq in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the famed policeman who established *La Surete*, Paris's first organized police force in 1811:

Vidocq, for example was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of

his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily lost sight of the matter as a whole (Poe 1966: 13).

It is only Dupin who can see or, I would argue, map the city as a whole.

Sequestered in his apartment, Dupin is able to solve the mystery solely through his powers of ratiocination which have a distinctly spatial element. This is most apparent in Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Roget" which features Dupin mapping the space of Paris by identifying the trajectory of Marie on the morning of her death. In this analytical process, Dupin assumes an Archimedean point above the crime and the city itself, gleaning his empirical information not from the crime scene but intertextually from the daily newspapers. Dupin's analytical process offers him a purely rational vantage point which is analogous to (and perhaps even modelled on) the disembodied perspective assumed by the traditional cartographer. Just as the traditional cartographer attempted to objectively represent space, so too does the classical detective attempt to stand above it all, assuming, as Dupin does, a positivistic and objective position.

I hope it is evident that this omnipotent position was always an impossibility and an ideological illusion. This position did not simply disappear, but instead has slowly eroded as its impossibility has become more apparent. And with this erosion comes as well a substantial change in the role of the detective, who, I would argue, becomes more and more immersed in space and, concomitant with this, his uncertainty and confusion increase. Even this limited genealogy of the genre suggests a coincidence between the detective's further immersion into the space of the city and

a denial of any cartographical or objective perspective. Both of these, in turn, lead to epistemological uncertainty and confusion. Whereas Poe's Dupin could often solve the mystery from above, Chandler's Marlowe is forced into the space of the city in order to solve the mystery. By the time of the postmodern detective, as is especially evident in Auster's writing, the confusion of the detective increases exponentially. Whereas Marlowe could still shuttle between the "spaces" of Los Angeles, it becomes impossible for the postmodern detective to negotiate the increasingly layered space of the city which, as Jameson notes, often has its "explanation" elsewhere.

The eclipse of the modernist detective and of modernist spaces is perhaps best exemplified in a shorthand way by Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965). A curious blend of Noir (drawing on the legacy of Chandler and Hammett) and science-fiction, *Alphaville* traces the strange adventures of private eye Lemmy Caution, a character who is an obvious homage to the hard-boiled detective. Godard creates the "futuristic" city of Alphaville through an ingenious shooting of 1960s Paris. In this act of cinematography Godard illustrates that the urban future had already arrived. Throughout the film, the resolutely modernist and hard-boiled Caution is juxtaposed against this new urban landscape: the banal spaces of late modernity/early postmodernity that were fragmenting Paris into a city of *banlieues*. The shift from modernity to postmodernity that Jameson sees in Chandler's Los Angeles, Godard sees in Paris. This makes the assessment of Caution (by the man Caution has been sent to kill) at the end of the film strikingly appropriate: "Look at yourself. Men of your type will soon be extinct. You'll become something worse than death. You'll

become a legend" (Godard qtd. in Darke 1994: 12). The modernist detective cannot survive in postmodernist space. The mastery of space that he depended upon is no longer a possibility. The legendary status given to him results not in the possibility of re-emergence but only in the pastiche of his stance. The hard-boiled detective can be mimicked, but the position itself is no longer accessible.

The novels of Auster's trilogy feature detectives who persist in the attempt to assume this now eclipsed position. Auster's protagonists, in this way, represent a persistence of a modernist ethos in a postmodern reality. Through the extensive use of cartographical and geographical figures in *The New York Trilogy*, Auster indicates just how pervasive a modernist sensibility is in contemporary urban life. It resides first and foremost in our interaction with space itself. Auster's detectives are but displaced versions of the postmodern subject and their difficulties in mapping urban space suggests the necessity of a strategy such as Jameson's cognitive mapping. At the same time, however, the often futile use of cartographical and spatial tactics, especially by Quinn, suggests the limitations of Jameson's cartographic metaphor which, to a large extent, replicates the deficiencies of the modernist detective in its urge to totalize. Auster's trilogy, I would argue, maintains a dual and somewhat paradoxical position. First, it articulates a hope that a strategy of totalization, both cartographical and analytical, captured in the detective's desire to see the big picture, enables the individual to make sense of the world. Second, and in contradiction to this sense of hope, Auster's trilogy remains deeply sceptical that this totalizing gesture is possible at all. This paradox, which I will return to in my conclusion, manifests

itself in various forms throughout the trilogy and maintains a disturbing subtextual presence.

Notes

1. This dialectic has its precedent most notably in Althusser's theory of interpellation, Kristeva's theory of the constituting and constituted subject, and Foucault's account of subjectivity.
2. This periodisation is essential to Jameson's attempt to historicize postmodernity. It is Jameson's argument that literary periodisation (realism, modernism, postmodernism) not only coincides with but derives from economic periodisation, or, "shifts in the mode of production" (Jameson 1991: 35-36). This distinction is reiterated throughout Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and is best explained in his article of the same name which first appeared in 1984.
3. Spanos cites, amongst others, T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*, Nathalie Sarraute's *Portrait of a Man Unknown* and Eugene Ionesco's *Victim of Duty*. Holquist cites Robbe-Grillet's *The Voyeur*, Borges's "Death and the Compass" and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*.
4. This classic essay is reprinted in an edition titled *Mapping Ideology* which is part of a larger series which also maps nations, women's movements and the West European Left in different volumes. These examples of the cartographic metaphor to describe the survey of, or introduction to, a specific concept or discipline indicates the extent to which theoretical practice itself is now prone to spatialized description. In *Mapping the Subject* (again part of a larger, different, *Mapping* series), Pile and Thrift argue that in a situation "where *positioning* has become a crucial element of everyday critical practice" (Pile & Thrift 1995: 16) many critical texts lapse from mere "epistemic reflexivity" to a "narcissistic textual reflexivity". Again, this would seem to reaffirm the applicability of the cartographic metaphor as it emphasizes both a politics of location and subjectivity (even the subject position of critic) as a continual process.
5. By terming it an aesthetic, Jameson establishes cognitive mapping as a subjective and creative process whereby each individual negotiates and creates his/her own map. This emphasizes the uniqueness of each subjective position, as well as the maps' intertextuality; even though our map is our own, like any text, it is constructed from borrowings and reworkings of other maps (discursive knowledges) rather than through any unmediated interaction with the real.
6. For other articles which discuss Auster as a specifically postmodern writer, but less in terms of a Jamesonian postmodernism than other definitions see Dennis Barone's "Paul Auster and the Postmodern American Novel" (1995), William Lavender's "The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*" (1993), and Chris Tysh's "From One Mirror To Another: The Rhetoric of Disaffiliation in *City of Glass*" (1994).

7. For an article which discusses the role of urban space and postmodernism in a later Auster work see Tim Woods's "'Looking for Signs in the Air': Urban Space and the Postmodern in *In the Country of Last Things*" (1995).
8. The anti-detective novel can either be seen as occurring outside the generic bounds of detective fiction (Tani cites Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Nabakov's *Pale Fire* as two exemplary instances) or as part of a hybridization of detective fiction and experimental writing. (I prefer the latter as it potentially blurs the high and mass culture distinction rather than legitimizing the popular form via some parasitic relation to the avant-garde. It also makes it a specifically postmodern phenomena as Jameson indicates that a challenge to the boundary between high and mass cultural artefacts is one of the primary characteristics of postmodernism). This distinction is particularly applicable to Auster's trilogy, especially the first installment, *City of Glass*, which was nominated for an Edgar award in 1985, an award which honors the best mystery of the year. That Auster's philosophical and metafictional text, which seemingly challenged the generic boundaries of detective fiction, was still considered to be part of that genre, even a noteworthy addition to it, illustrates the extent to which complex metaphysical and epistemological questions have their place in pop culture/popular fiction and are not the sole property of a more 'proper' literature or criticism.
9. For an article which specifically discusses *The New York Trilogy* in Derridean and deconstructive terms, see Alison Russell "Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster Anti-Detective Fiction" (1990).
10. As Jameson notes, postmodernism (and its theorists) suffer from a "pathology distinctly autoreferential" whereby every observation about contemporary culture can be pressed into service "as a symptom and an index of the deeper logic of the postmodern" creating a "schizophrenic present that is incomparable virtually by definition" (Jameson 1991: xii). To avoid this tautological cul-de-sac Jameson argues that his observations do not constitute an index of postmodernist instances or artefacts, since any index would concern itself with identifiable styles which would justify the categorization of something as modern or postmodern. Instead, Jameson argues that postmodernism is not a style but the cultural dominant which calls for a historical analysis rather than any stylistic appraisal. Postmodern detective fiction, to borrow his logic, does not signal the shift from modernism to postmodernism merely through stylistic signals but rather the shift from modernity to postmodernity prefigures, and is a condition of possibility for the genre, or sub-genre, itself.
11. For an excellent account of techniques of surveillance and exclusion that are constituent features of the space of Los Angeles (that is to say that the production of space in Los Angeles is the (re)production of a highly exclusionary and regulated space) see Mike Davis's *City Of Quartz*. Davis conceives of Los Angeles as a carcereal or fortress city where the production of space serves to protect the dominant classes: "In cities like Los Angeles, on the bad edge of postmodernity, one observes an

unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single comprehensive security effort" (Davis 1990: 224).

12. See not only Jameson's discussion of it in his *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, but also Edward Soja's "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in Citadel-LA", and Jean Baudrillard's *America*. Mike Davis adopts a very different interpretation of the Bonaventure in his "Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism" which remains the most interesting critique of Jameson's seminal 1984 article on postmodernism

13. A situation such as this occurs in the Chandleresque *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1973), set in 1930s Los Angeles, in which Jake (Jack Nicholson) circulates between several different Los Angeleses in attempt to fathom the mystery he is investigating. While much of the action occurs at street-level, the peripheralized Los Angeles of its ghettos (including the one from which the title is taken) and the not-yet suburban Orange County, the action also occurs within the political, bureaucratic and commercial space in which the deals concerning the reservoirs and water supplies take place. What perhaps singles this as a postmodern artefact, in addition to the historicist stylisations of the 1930s in which it is set, is the frustration of epistemological uncertainty specifically caused by the extent to which "space not time hides consequences from us" (John Berger qtd. in Soja 1989: 22) captured in the film's final line: "Forget it Jake. It's Chinatown."

14. Ross is quoting Chandler's essay "The Simple Art of Murder" in this passage. Ross goes on to argue very convincingly that in Marlowe, Jameson is expressing his own position vis-a-vis postmodernism, his own desire to cognitively map that realm, despite the difficulty, or perhaps impossibility, of assuming such a position of mastery: "Jameson's relation to his own attempt to 'tie the separate and isolated parts' of postmodernism together raises questions. Is Jameson's desire Marlowesque, that is, does he stand outside postmodernism to explain and judge it? And isn't this an impossible task under postmodernism, when, according to Jameson, all critical distance or perspective collapses?" (Ross 1992: 55).

15. At the end of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault refers to the "imaginary geopolitics" of the carceral city as a privileged ground for an analysis for the functioning of power. Moreover, institutions are frequently described in terms of spatial configurations or architectures.

16. Poe begins "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" with an explanation of the pleasure of the detective: "As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play" (Poe 1966: 2).

CHAPTER TWO - Walking in the City

Acts of Disappearance

The thematics of disappearance play a central part in the novels of *The New York Trilogy* as they do throughout Auster's oeuvre. This thematic consistency pulls in two directions. First is the anxiety of being lost, whether the disorientation is geographical, spiritual, metaphysical, emotional, or otherwise. Second is the strange pleasure of being lost, the desire to lose oneself, a desire that is a utopian impulse, the desire to be nowhere. It is from within this thematic boundary, a specifically spatial one, that my analysis of *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room* will proceed.

As Lynch concedes, cognitive mapping is not a guarantee of spatial orientation. He does assert, however, perhaps with the overconfidence that an urban geographer might have, that the modern city is legible enough to be easily negotiated by the average individual. This assertion of a minimal geographic competence or cartographic literacy allows Lynch to define being lost in a very specific way:

To become completely lost is perhaps a rather rare experience for most people in the modern city. We are supported by the presence of others and by special way-finding devices: maps, street numbers, route signs, bus placards. But let the mishap of disorientation occur, and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being. The very word 'lost' in our language means more than simple geographic uncertainty; it carries the overtone of utter disaster (Lynch 1960: 4).

To go beyond Lynch here, I would suggest that being lost can be linked to a crisis of

the self in which the various points of reference that help us situate where we are become obscured or completely effaced. The terror and anxiety engendered by geographic disorientation links being lost to a (potential) loss of identity. To be lost, cut free from geographic reference points, prefigures a loss of all reference, a situation in which identity cannot be reaffirmed and is left hanging, cut from the comfort and assurance of familiar surroundings. How this is valenced, however, depends on the person experiencing it. The transformation of being lost from frightening to exhilarating can perhaps be reduced to a simple twist in reception.

City of Glass, the first novel of *The New York Trilogy*, is the story of Quinn, a detective writer who, due to a wrong telephone number asking for the Auster detective agency, with which he plays along, is allowed the opportunity to assume the role of a detective. Quinn is a man strangely driven in his pursuit of nothingness; he is motivated by a nihilistic desire to disappear, a desire at least partially explained by the death of his wife and child years earlier in an automobile accident. This trauma has transformed Quinn into a man curiously devoid of feeling, almost an automaton, who is merely going through the motions of living, having pared his life down to a few simple pleasures and a pathological solitude. Quinn's pursuit of nothingness is achieved through a routine of walking, described in thorough detail by Auster:

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 neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with a feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well... By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and

he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again (Auster 1987: 3-4).

Quinn's desire to be lost does not fit with Lynch's "terror and anxiety" but neither is it a blissful emptiness: spatial disorientation leads to a utopian feeling, a "nowhere" in which Quinn leaves the world and his own identity behind. New York becomes an unfathomable expanse for Quinn, something that cannot be grasped as a whole but provides a seemingly infinite number of itineraries. This plenitude means that there is an ironically inverted relation between Quinn's knowledge of the city and his explorations of it: the more he surveys the urban space he occupies, the more daunting total knowledge seems; the more he explores, the more he feels lost.

This sense of disorientation is perhaps more metaphorical than literal. Quinn does not suffer absolute disorientation; he can always find his way home. Rather, he is overwhelmed by the staggering extent of the urban space. It is a space of "endless steps" and infinite itineraries that could never be exhausted by a single individual. What Quinn does come to know about its "neighborhoods and streets" is always dwarfed by the (geographical) knowledge that is beyond a single person's grasp. The spatial disorientation that Quinn experiences on his walks in turn causes a subjective disorientation, the feeling of being lost "within himself as well" (Auster 1987: 5). The labyrinth of New York City thus mirrors the labyrinth of Quinn's own identity. Subjectivity is represented spatially and identity is figured as a maze - we are never allowed an Archimedean or cartographical perspective of our own identity but must stumble through it in a perhaps futile effort to map it completely.

Quinn, during his walks in the city, goes further into the maze which

constitutes his own subjectivity. This marks an effort to disappear in two separate but related spaces: the external space of New York and the internal space of identity. In each case the normal efforts of orientation, of cognitive mapping, are suppressed:

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 (Auster 1987: 4).

Quinn wanders "aimlessly" in the hope of leaving himself behind and blurring the city into an undifferentiated mass, a pure space without identifying characteristics in which "all places become equal" (Auster 1987: 5). The effort to leave himself behind depends upon this blurring of urban space. Familiar places would only remind Quinn of his own identity by evoking previous experiences and prompting memories. In order to escape the burden of his consciousness, he has to evade the space which dialectically reaffirms that consciousness: the urban space which perpetually reminds him of who he is, the cognitive map in which his identity is latent. Quinn's aimless wandering frees him from familiar coordinates. He leaves his "home" literally when walking and, at the same time, also escapes the coordinates of his identity. As Michel de Certeau succinctly puts it, "To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper" (de Certeau 1984: 103). In wandering aimlessly Quinn leaves his home in an attempt to find his proper place, a utopian space that he can momentarily occupy. De Certeau suggests that the city is made up of these spaces momentarily inhabited by walkers in search of their own private utopia: "the city is a network of residences temporarily appropriated by

pedestrian traffic, a shuffling among pretenses of the proper, a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed of places" (de Certeau 1984: 103). It is precisely these dreamed of places that Quinn seeks in wandering aimlessly; the city is transformed into a nowhere and his sense of self is dissipated through his self-reduction to a "seeing-eye" with no interior. His ability to deny difference in the objective world, essentially to evacuate it of meaning, allows a similar evacuation subjectively: a truly aimless wandering through the maze of his own identity.

Quinn is able to destabilize his identity by merely drifting along. This dispersal of the self depends on the aimless nature of the wandering. The flux of the city allows the space to be blurred more readily but the evasion of self is achievable only through a trance-like effort:

The world was outside him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal and it no longer mattered where he was (Auster 1987: 4).

The repetition latent in the act of walking allows Quinn to empty his mind (comparable to saying a word over and over until it becomes strangely foreign and it does not seem to convey meaning but is instead merely a conglomeration of sounds), and focus on the body. The grammar of walking (the individual steps), when endlessly repeated evacuates the surroundings of meaning; when this occurs the excursion no longer has an identifiable purpose (usually put in terms of destination) but instead becomes *drifting*. This process of drifting occurs when the "official" cartographies of the city are ignored and the individual pursues his or her own

itinerary as an almost stream-of-consciousness articulation of desire. A Cartesian dualism is re-enacted here as Quinn isolates his body from his self. The self becomes lost, enters a no-where while the body bobs and drifts on the currents of the pedestrian traffic. Walking allows Quinn the opportunity to subordinate the mind to body, thought to an empty and utopian urban practice of wandering.

The *Flaneur*: Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin

The supposed catastrophe of being lost is problematized, however, by the individual who desires disorientation. The simple pleasure of wandering has, in a few historical instances, been transformed into a larger revolutionary urban practice which has signalled a change in the way that the city has been perceived and experienced. I want to briefly mention two such historical instances and signal their relation to Quinn's ambulatory practices. The archetype of the *flâneur* emerged from the writings of Charles Baudelaire who, particularly in his *Les Fleurs de Mal*, charted the movements of "a new kind of public person with the leisure to wander, watch and browse" (Wilson 1995: 61). The appearance of the *flâneur* coincided with the transformation of mid-nineteenth century Paris into a "modern" space shaped and regimented by the growth of consumer capitalism. This is the historical moment when the modern city develops into a space dominated by commodified spaces rather than public spaces; a city geared not for the citizen but for the consumer. The

flâneur emerges at this moment as an outsider who observes, a solitary wanderer through the streets of Paris who consumes the city visually by taking in the urban spectacle. The *flâneur*, for Baudelaire, was a man of relative leisure, ideally the poet or painter, who could indulge his scopophilic desire by being part of the urban crowd, by being an unseen presence: "To the perfect spectator, the impassioned observer, it is an immense joy to make his domicile amongst numbers, amidst fluctuation and movement, amidst the fugitive and infinite" (Baudelaire qtd. in Friedberg 1993: 29). Baudelaire identifies the *flâneur* as the "perfect spectator", the ideal figure to experience and record the modern urban spectacle.

Baudelaire's account of the *flâneur* is intertwined with his now canonical definition of modernity:

By modernity, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable (Baudelaire qtd. in Brooker 1996: 14).

It is the *flâneur* who escapes the fixity of time and the bourgeois attachment to tradition to explore the new spaces of the city (as opposed to the traditional space of the home) and to experience the novel spectacles of the urban. As John Lechte argues, the *flâneur* gives himself up to the "drift" of the city and becomes a uniquely atemporal and aspatial entity:

The *flâneur* searches out the ephemeral, the transitory and the contingent. The *flâneur's* trajectory leads nowhere and comes from nowhere. It is a trajectory without fixed spatial coordinates; there is, in short, no reference point from which to make prediction about the *flâneur's* future. For the *flâneur* is an entity without past or future, without identity: an entity of contingency and indeterminacy (Lechte 1995: 103).

It is not difficult to see how Lechte's interpretation of the *flâneur* as a thoroughly indeterminate entity, characterized above all by being lost, coincides with the nihilistic Quinn's seeking to disappear in a New York of his own making. But Lechte, in ignoring the other half of Baudelaire's formulation of modernity, which points to the stable and determinate, gives a one-sided account of the *flâneur*. The *flâneur*, as evident in Walter Benjamin's assessment, is not merely a blissed out urban wanderer but an investigator and recorder of urban phenomena and experience.

It is Benjamin, some sixty years after Baudelaire's discussion of *flânerie* in *Les Fleurs de Mal* and "*La peintre de la vie moderne*", who seizes on the *flâneur* as not merely an eclipsed historical figure but as a key representation of a way of experiencing modern metropolitan life. Although Baudelaire's *flâneur* was borne of a unique historical situation, long passed by Benjamin's time, the figure still held, for Benjamin, a way of articulating urban experience in which walking, watching and contact with the urban crowd were paramount. Indeed, just as Baudelaire had used Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" to define the *flâneur*, Benjamin uses Baudelaire, and Baudelaire's reading of Poe, to investigate the continuing importance of the *flâneur* and the crowd in defining urban experience. The solitary stroller for Benjamin, like Baudelaire, is not so much a consumer of commodities as a consumer of the urban spectacle. Benjamin, as Elizabeth Wilson points out, imagines the *flâneur* as a quasi-anthropologist, observing the details of everyday urban existence:

[t]he *flâneur* appears as the ultimate ironic detached observer, skimming across the surface of the city and tasting all its pleasures with curiosity and interest. Walter Benjamin writes of the way in which the *flâneur-as-artist* "goes botanizing on the asphalt." He is the naturalist

of this unnatural environment (Wilson 1995: 65).

The *flâneur*, in this instance, is not merely an aimless wanderer but an "impassioned observer" (to borrow Baudelaire's phrase) who strives to comprehend the urban experience and, as David Frisby suggests, to unearth "the secret topography" (Frisby 1985: 229) of the city. It is this notion of a secret topography that Frisby argues was a starting point for Benjamin's unfinished *Das Passagen-werk*, or, *Arcades Project*, in which Benjamin sought to unearth Baudelaire's Paris by becoming a modern *flâneur*. In so doing, Benjamin reveals a crucial aspect of the *flâneur*: the art of becoming lost. Benjamin in this passage develops a notion of metaphorical lost-ness and posits it as essential to the *flâneur*. Intriguingly, Benjamin's language here anticipates Lynch's passage in *The Image and the City*; the way-finding devices are noted but used for very different ends:

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance - nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city - as one loses oneself in a forest - that calls for quite a different schooling. The signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of the bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its centre. Paris taught me this art of straying; it fulfilled a dream that had shown its first traces in the labyrinths of the blotting pages of my school exercise book (Benjamin qtd. in Frisby 1985: 229).

Lynch's terror and anxiety here is replaced by an exhilaration as Benjamin identifies being lost as essential to the unique urban experience that the *flâneur* represents. Benjamin's *flâneur* emphasizes being lost not as actual physical disorientation but as absolute immersion in the city experience. Certainly Quinn's wandering constitutes a sort of immersion in the crowd but it is curiously devoid of the *flâneur*'s scopophilic

tendency. Quinn's aimlessness does not constitute a sort of "botanizing on the asphalt" (Benjamin 1983: 26), but rather seeks to blur everything together. Quinn, as will be discussed further, becomes more of a *flâneur* when he becomes a detective, as he no longer seeks to lose himself within himself but rather seeks to lose himself in the case he undertakes. This, in turn, requires him to lose himself in the city very much in the way Benjamin describes.

The *flâneur*, as described by both Baudelaire and Benjamin, is an urban figure which poses a challenge to Lynch's (and Jameson's) desire for geographic certainty. The *flâneur* paradoxically illustrates that the search for a "secret topography" of the urban (which entails a sort of mapping) does not exclude but requires a desire to be lost, to be so immersed in the city as to be literally and metaphorically disoriented. This desire for disorientation is premised, however, on its dialectical opposite, stability or location. While the *flâneur* needs to succumb to disorientation, reorientation must occur to make it meaningful. Like Baudelaire's definition of modernity, both elements, stability and disorientation, the immutable and the contingent, must be present to account for the urban experience of the *flâneur*. If the *flâneur* stands as a challenge to Lynch's and Jameson's desires for geographical and cognitive certainty it is precisely because the *flâneur* would not share their anxieties of postmodern instabilities and can weigh the contingent and the immutable in equal measure. Quinn, in this scheme, emerges as more modern than postmodern. Like the *flâneur*, Quinn experiences the contingent during his long unstructured walks which are premised on an eventual return home. It is when Quinn abandons this

Baudelairean balance, failing to return to the stability of home, that he begins to lose his grip on reality. Quinn, the modernist detective, does not counterbalance the contingent with the immutable and becomes stranded in a postmodern New York, swamped by the contingent without a stable anchor for his identity.

Situationism

This desire for disorientation surfaces again in the urban practices of the Situationists, a political-artistic movement which developed in Paris in the 1950s. Situationism, as its name suggests, argued that in order to counteract the increasing commodification and regulation of everyday life, the individual must seize control of ordinary situations in order to break the repetition of circumscribed activity. What the situationists recognized was that the organization of space was elemental in the functioning of power, that individuals were regulated and controlled through practices of urban design. Their focus on situations was to acknowledge that there is no outside to this power, that revolution must come from within by commandeering isolated moments, seizing everyday situations and asserting one's subjectivity.¹ The situationists were particularly critical of the practice of urban planning. While the emergence of the *flâneur* was roughly contemporaneous with the modernization of Paris, the situationist drifter appeared at the moment of the city's postmodernization. Anticipating Foucault's comparison between prison architecture and the structure of

society as a whole, the situationists defined urbanism as "a rather neglected branch of criminology" (Kotanyi and Vaneigem qtd. in Marcus 1989: 139). For the situationists, urban design and redesign merely perpetuated the capitalist logic of the urban system, a logic which focused primarily on the flow of goods, the distribution of product and the movement of consumers. It is also fundamentally a design which protected itself, establishing within its system a series of checks, a programme of surveillance, and a regulated regime of everyday life for its citizens. As the situationists argued, urban living suggests freedom but really is an intensification of control, obscured by ideology:

The whole of urban planning can be understood only as a society's field of publicity-propaganda - that is, as the organization of participation in something in which it is impossible to participate (Kotanyi and Vaneigem qtd. in Marcus 1989: 139).²

For the situationists, participation could only be achieved through activities which escaped or evaded the political and spatial organization of the city. The primary situationist gesture was the *dérive*, or drifting, which was "a game of freedom" and a "systemic questioning" (Debord qtd. in Marcus 1989: 174) in which the individual would wander through the labyrinth of the city seeking its hidden areas and erogenous zones. Drifting would treat the city as a fantastical landscape to be explored rather than as a functional grid for the workings of capitalism. As Greil Marcus observes, the situationists, like Quinn, sought a nowhere within the space of the city itself:

The LI [Lettrist International] wanted to create a city of possibilities in the heart of the city of the spectacle. First, though, the group had to create a city of negations: to escape the city's social elements of work and art, of production and ideology, to function as their anti-matter. The new city would be a psycho-geographical amusement park; before

that, it would be an affective black hole (Marcus 1989: 364).³

This process of negation is repeated in Quinn's walks but is less total and less revolutionary. For the situationist drifters self-destruction was part of the process of letting go, speaking the counterlanguage of the drift rather than the sanctioned language of urban organization in the pursuit of pleasure. For Quinn self-negation is an end in itself. His bliss, his nowhere, is the desire for nothingness, for his disappearance. His utopian New York is a no-where, an absolute nothingness, whereas the negation of Paris by the situationists was in hope of transforming the urban landscape into "new, chaotic jungles, sparkling experiences without purposes, devoid of meaning" (Wolman qtd. in Marcus 1989: 370).

While Quinn's walks afford him a certain amount of pleasure (an ambivalent pleasure marked by the ability to forget) because they are always pre-empted by a return home, they do not reach the sustained chaotic bliss of situationist drifting. Both, however, maintain an element of danger: the danger derived from never returning home and of being permanently lost, unmoored from any center. This is best described by Ivan Chtcheglov, a Lettrist and situationist who was the primary exponent of *dérive* and, in his "Formula for a New Urbanism," compared drifting to psychoanalysis and language, noting its potential dangers:

The *dérive* (with its flow of acts, gestures, strolls, encounters), was *to the totality* exactly what psychoanalysis (in the best sense) is to language. Let yourself go with the flow of words, says the analyst. He listens, until the moment when he rejects or modifies (one could say *détourns*) a word, expression, or a definition...But just as analysis [as a treatment complete in itself] is almost always *contra-indicated*, so the continuous *dérive*...is dangerous to the extent that the individual, having gone too far (not without basis, but...) without defenses, is threatened

with explosion, dissolution, disassociation, disintegration. And so the relapse into what is termed 'ordinary life,' which is to say, in reality, petrified life'...In 1953-1954, we drifted for three or four months at a time: that is the extreme limit, the critical point. It's a miracle it didn't kill us. (Chtcheglov qtd. in Marcus 1989: 362).⁴

Drifting is the effort to negate the totality whether that totality is language or whether it is geography. Or, more precisely, it forms an attempt to negotiate the totality by rejecting the false projections of totality that are disseminated by various institutions which are called upon to organize and regulate urban space. If, as the situationists suggest, urban planning is a tool used against urban citizens rather than to their benefit, then de Certeau provides the antidote. Official organizational systems are ideological illusions and the citydweller can evade them by drifting:

the geometrical space of urbanists and architects seems to have the status of the "proper meaning" constructed by grammarians and linguists in order to have a normal and normative level to which they can compare the drifting of "figurative" language. In reality, this faceless "proper" meaning (*ce "propre" sans figure*) cannot be found in current use, whether verbal or pedestrian...The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can only take place within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them) (de Certeau 1984: 100-101).

Walking, then, becomes a revolutionary, liberating and utopian practice through its randomness and unpredictability. Individual pedestrians, like Quinn, write their own urban text and the multiplicity of these individual "*lignes d'erre*" or wandering lines (de Certeau 1984: 34) constitute the city itself. Thus the city's totality can be read, metonymically, in these arbitrary paths and unpredictable routes.

To drift as Quinn does is to suppress the larger sense of the city as indicated in his cognitive map and to simply walk: "Motion was of the essence, the act of

putting one foot in front of the other" (Auster 1987: 4). The psychoanalytic "flow of words", for Quinn, is translated into "the movement of the streets" (Auster 1987: 4), and while letting himself go in this way allows him the pleasurable "salutary emptiness within" (Auster 1987: 4), it also puts him in jeopardy of never returning home, of losing himself in the streets forever. But Quinn does return home and the threat of "explosion, dissolution, disassociation, disintegration" is always forestalled by this return to familiar surroundings, even if he plans the very next day to return to following "the drift of his own body" (Auster 1987: 4). Quinn's will to disappear, thus, is denied by the fact that he has a home, an apartment to which he returns at the end of each walk. New York may be "the nowhere that he has built around himself" (Auster 1987: 4) but upon return to his point of origin, an act of location in itself, this nowhere again becomes a somewhere. Quinn centres himself not only in his home but returns as well to the "spatial home" of his body. While Quinn's walks permit him to leave himself behind, the (inevitable) return home forestalls an absolute dispersal of the self. Home, as Steven Alford points out in his discussion of *The New York Trilogy*, in addition to being a geographic location is a "transcendental point of reference" (Alford 1995: 623; the phrase itself is borrowed from George van den Abbeele). Upon returning home, Quinn's identity floods back. Quinn's walks are a momentary escape into nothingness, but his identity is reaffirmed at their end. Ironically, of course, Quinn does not return home in the end; he disappears, the ultimate end of drifting.

Watching the Detective

This comfortable return to home at the end of each walk is echoed when Quinn assumes the identity of a private detective. Quinn's assumption of this role allows him to push aside his own identity, to lose it beneath the skin of the new role he performs: that of a private detective named, coincidentally enough, Paul Auster. In assuming Auster's identity, Quinn notes the pleasure that it affords him in characteristically restrained terms:

As he wandered through the station, he reminded himself of who he was supposed to be. The effect of being Paul Auster, he had begun to learn, was not altogether unpleasant. Although he still had the same body, the same mind, the same thoughts, he felt as though he had somehow been taken out of himself, as if he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. By a simple twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer. At the same time, he knew that 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 (Auster 1987: 50).

Knowing that he can return to the comfortable feeling of being Quinn through a reverse "twist in naming" allows Quinn the momentary bliss of being dislocated from his own identity: "the burden of his own consciousness" being an unwelcome weight. Quinn, in this instance, does not want to permanently lose himself behind Auster but instead wants the momentary pleasure of disappearing behind another identity. Quinn is amused that he still occupies the same space, still constitutes the same mass, but has, as "Quinn," disappeared momentarily. Auster, as the shell of the man whose identity he has usurped, is a man with no interior. Quinn is allowed a "salutary emptiness within" (Auster 1987: 4) through his performance of Auster, the same

evasion of self he strived for in walking. This suppression of self, of course, can never be complete. While in Grand Central Station, Quinn, as Auster, waits for Stillman, the man he is to follow as part of the case, to appear. He sees a display photograph of New England at a photo booth and it prompts a memory of visiting Nantucket with his wife years before. Quinn reprimands himself for slipping back into Quinn when he is supposed to be performing as Auster: "he tried to suppress the pictures that were forming in his head. 'Look at it through Auster's eyes,' he said to himself, 'and don't think of anything else.'" (Auster 1987: 51). He is somewhat successful in doing this: he begins to think of *Moby Dick*, Nantucket in the previous century and Herman Melville. These thoughts reassure him for a moment, being less Quinn-related than the thoughts of his dead wife, an intimate and unique memory. But ultimately these thoughts too are Quinn's; though they seem more objective they too come from his reservoir of knowledge, his cognitive map of New England. Although the idea that Auster the writer would turn to literary history to suppress his own memories seems likely, Auster ironically puts forward the improbability that Auster, the detective, would be thinking of *Moby Dick* at that point. The allusion to literary history at this point, then, suggests that Quinn is incapable of inhabiting Auster's detective persona. Moreover, the nature of the allusion points insistently to the author himself, meaning that Quinn is thinking like "Auster" but the wrong one; he mirrors the author and not the detective.

Quinn's solitude enables him to control the illusion of being Auster. His friendlessness makes the performance more total and safer: it will not be shattered by

someone else's recognition of him as "Quinn" and not "Auster". To some degree this freedom to perform either as a new identity or as a variation on one's own identity is a liberty that one is granted in a larger city. Since urban experience is characterized by a multiplicity of fleeting relationships and chance encounters, the individual is allowed to occasionally escape the recognition of others that fix one's identity.⁵ Whether one is acting in character or not becomes difficult to judge when one's character, as determined by others, is never established. The only check in this instance is self-surveillance: Quinn knows that he is pretending and a return to his real identity would be his own choice.

Once Quinn assumes the role of the detective his walks, hitherto aimless, acquire a purpose and a focus. Quinn has been hired to follow a man named Stillman. He has been hired by Stillman's son who was subjected in his infancy to a bizarre experiment at the hands of his father. Stillman had forced his son into absolute isolation in the hope that the son would speak an Edenic tongue, acquire a prelapsarian language. Stillman's experiment had been exposed and he was forced to spend thirteen years in a mental institution. The narrative begins as Stillman is released from psychiatric care and returns to New York City. His son wishes to hire Quinn-Auster to protect himself from his father. Quinn, after meeting with Peter Stillman, Jr.⁶, the son, under the pretence of being Auster, accepts the job. Quinn, after investigating Stillman (he reads Stillman's book on utopian thought and colonial America), is set to trail Stillman, staking out Grand Station Central awaiting his arrival.

Already Quinn has partially acceded to the identity of Auster. He assiduously performs the role of the detective, arriving at Grand Central several hours early to "study the geography of the place" (Auster 1987: 50). His life, which previously had focused exclusively on the desire to disappear is now granted an urgency, even a drama, in which Quinn quickly becomes immersed: "The fact that there was now a purpose to his being Paul Auster - a purpose that was becoming more and more important to him - served as a kind of moral justification for the charade and absolved him of having to defend his lie" (Auster 1987: 51). When Stillman's train finally arrives Quinn is thrown into crisis by the fact that there are two individuals who resemble Stillman. Quinn is forced to pick one and realizes that this choice is inevitably an arbitrary choice. Very much unlike a detective who should make decisions based upon evidence (or even on a "hunch," but Quinn is genuinely confused and does not have these detective instincts), Quinn is forced, in his first real decision as a detective, to submit himself to chance. This unfollowed second Stillman haunts the rest of the novel, imbuing the narrative with uncertainty.

The Persistence of Chance

City of Glass, setting the tone for the entire trilogy, begins with the recognition that "nothing was real except chance" (Auster 1987: 3). Auster's fiction operates on the sort of coincidences that are more reminiscent of nineteenth century fiction than of today's writing, which tends to eschew chance or coincidence as a narrative contrivance. Of course, in a typically postmodern move, a tactic of several writers (not only Auster but also Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon amongst others) is to highlight and to ironize coincidence or chance. These writers do not merely use these devices to navigate a narrative path but thematize them. *The New York Trilogy*, true to Auster's analysis on the very first page, does seem to be about chance and mystery: "Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell" (Auster 1987: 3). Or, things happen but they are by no means predictable; retrospective analysis, too, is suspect because it was not inevitable that any particular sequence of events should occur. Chance, then, is not necessarily comprehensible in the larger sequence of events (the totality of the plot) but is part of the uncertainty and contingency of (postmodern) life. What Auster's reliance on chance evokes is not the teleological determination of a so-called "realist" narrative but the powers of contingency. Chance marks not the assurance that things will reach their pre-ordained end but that anything can happen.

Within the space of the city, chance represents the intersection of numerous trajectories or narratives. One's own trajectory is not predictable precisely because of its constant intersection and interruption by other trajectories, other people. The wrong phone number which sets the narrative in motion is an example of this sort of chance. The story traces the effects of the initial incident of chance but does not speculate on the cause of the incident itself. It is left as an unexplained coincidence which sets a series of events in motion but which has no inherent meaning itself. That this chance event occurs in the form of a wrong number is particularly appropriate since the network of connections that constitute a telecommunications system is analogous to the space of the city itself. A wrong number is an act of mislocation which, in this case, translates into a misidentification. More so than a chance meeting in the street, a wrong number represents the vagaries of chance within an organized grid and allows Quinn to assume an identity, a space, a number which is not his own.

This use of a wrong number has a precedent in postmodern detective fiction. In Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*, Doctor Juard approaches a bank of telephones in a train station in order to accept a call. The paged announcement, however, has not indicated which telephone he is supposed to answer. This leads him to consider the notion of chance:

Now he would have to pick up all the receivers, one after the other... This presents no insurmountable difficulties, and if a station employee came to ask him to account for his behaviour, he would explain that no one told him which of these telephones he was wanted on. Nothing more natural after all. Unfortunately he risks intercepting other messages and finding himself mixed up in some new drama, as if

the situation in which he is struggling were not complicated enough already. He thinks back to the unlucky day when he made another man's acquaintance, following an error of the same kind: he had dialled the wrong number, and immediately events had followed one another so quickly that he had not been able to disengage himself; one thing led to another and he ended up agreeing to... Besides the other man left him no choice (Robbe-Grillet 1964: 202).

Ironically, the events which Doctor Juard notes are the events which constitute the narrative of the novel. Unlike Quinn who does not play along with the wrong number initially (he only assumes the role of Auster the fourth time the caller dials his number), Juard makes the call himself. While Quinn enters into the intrigue of his own free will, Juard is caught up in it, the man on the other end of the telephone having "left him no choice." Despite these differences, in both cases a wrong number marks the beginning of a "new drama." They are chance occurrences which propel the individual into a new, and hitherto unanticipated, trajectory. The detective story, especially its postmodern variation, plays on both this sense of contingency and determination. That is, the city increases the possibility of chance occurrences while, at the same time, these chance occurrences trigger events in a seemingly causal way: "immediately events had followed one another so quickly" (Robbe-Grillet 1964: 202); "there was simply the event and its consequences" (Auster 1987: 3). The chance occurrences provide these postmodern detective novels with narrative momentum but, at the same time, prefigure the impossibility of a resolution. The persistence of chance counteracts the possibility of determination.

Walking and Detection

Quinn's penchant for walking is reminiscent of another postmodern detective: Wallas, from Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*. Sent to a small provincial Flemish city to investigate a murder, Wallas wanders through a labyrinth of streets in a search for clues. Several times he walks in circles or fails to follow simple directions given to him by locals. The confusion caused by the geographic layout of the city is matched by Wallas's inability to fit the clues of the investigation together. Walking, for Wallas, is an act of reassurance. Unlike Quinn, he does not walk to disappear but walks to reassert his own agency and to reassure himself that the world is comprehensible and that events are unfolding in a rational, coherent, and even predictable manner:

Wallas likes walking. In the cold, early winter air he likes walking straight ahead through this unknown city. He looks around, he listens, he smells the air; this perpetually renewed contact affords him a subtle impression of continuity; he walks on and gradually unrolls the uninterrupted ribbon of his own passage, not a series of irrational, unrelated images, but a smooth band where each element immediately takes its place in the web, even the most fortuitous, even those that might at first seem absurd or threatening or anachronistic or deceptive; they all fall into place in good order, one beside the other, and the ribbon extends without flaw or excess, in time with the regular speed of his footsteps. For it is Wallas who is advancing; it is to his own body that this movement belongs, not to the backcloth some stagehand might be unrolling; he can follow in his own limbs the play of the joints, the successive contractions of the muscles, and it is he himself who controls the rhythm and length of his strides: a half second for each step, a step and a half for each yard, eighty yards a minute. It is of his own free will that he is walking toward an inevitable and perfect future. In the past, he has too frequently let himself be caught in the circles of doubt and impotence, now he is walking; he had recovered his continuity here (Robbe-Grillet 1964: 47-48).

The repetitive act of walking that allows Quinn to draw himself out of his body, to forsake agency and thought for the pleasure of emptiness, in contrast allows Wallas to feel more materially centred: "it is to his own body that this movement belongs."

Walking for Quinn quickly turns into endless steps while for Wallas the steps are measured and counted in a process in which he asserts control over his own actions, and "controls the rhythm and length" of his own strides. The practice of walking allows Wallas to assert his own identity in space, while Quinn's walks allow him to disappear into space. While Wallas wants the reassurance that his surroundings are real and not a film set, Quinn is not concerned. The reality or unreality of Quinn's New York is not, in the end, in question; it is a New York of his own construction and to designate it real or unreal seems to be a category mistake.

The most important difference between Quinn and Wallas is the putative nature of their walks. Quinn's walks are random while Wallas's are teleologically driven: "he is walking toward an inevitable and perfect future" (Robbe-Grillet 1964: 48). Quinn's description of walking comes before he receives the wrong number and assumes the role of a detective. Given the detective's focus, Quinn's walks are transformed into something more like Wallas's in that they are forced to reckon an end: he becomes a detective in search of a solution to the task he has been assigned. Prior to this, however, no "end," no conclusion, is intended by his aleatory wandering. In this instance, the space of the city becomes a strangely atemporal space in which the "continuity" of self and of narrative that Wallas seeks is subordinated to a fragmentation of the spatio-temporal continuum that can generate

the nowhere, the utopia that Quinn desires. Quinn's utopian aspirations involve not only a spatial disorientation but a temporal confusion: a subversion of the teleological designs (our trajectory through space, our passage through time) which shape the narratives of our lives. The aleatory, as practised by Quinn, is an attempt to subvert these narrative principles that establish contiguity. That this surrender to chance is incompatible with detective fiction is illustrated in Wallas's practice of walking. Wallas uses walking to establish continuity and to initiate a narrative and teleological trajectory which evades "the circles of doubt and impotence" (Robbe-Grillet 1964: 47) which would be crippling for the detective whose primary task is to draw conclusions from evidence and to move with confidence in pursuit of a solution. What makes Robbe-Grillet's novel an early example of postmodern detective fiction is Wallas's inability to put the clues together and make them cohere. His spatial disorientation is matched by his analytical frustration. (He is also, incidentally, plagued by a criminal who, physically, is his double, a frequent detective story motif originating in Poe, which Auster uses brilliantly in *Ghosts*.) In light of his eventual failure, Wallas's use of walking as a method of reassurance seems particularly desperate, as if he were trying to convince himself of the essential comprehensibility of the world when it is apparent to the readers that the assumption of resolution is no longer plausible for the (postmodern) detective.

Delirious New York

The no-where that Quinn has "built around himself" (Auster 1987: 4) is a specifically New York nowhere. It is a no-where which suggests an inexhaustibility of itineraries within, paradoxically, a fixed and finite space. Throughout the whole of *City of Glass*, Quinn restricts himself to the island of Manhattan, remaining loyal to his intention of never leaving it again. The single time he is tempted to leave the island, the impulse is quickly quashed: "For a moment he considered taking a ride on the Staten Island Ferry, but then thought better of it and began tracking his way to the north" (Auster 1987: 107). Restricting his movements (and his existence) to the island of Manhattan allows Quinn a fixed grid to explore: a matrix of twelve avenues and one hundred and fifty-five streets which, taking into consideration various topographical anomalies, add up to two thousand and twenty-eight city blocks. The inexhaustibility of this space is intensified by the continual change occurring within it. In some Heraclitean way, a New Yorker can never walk down the same street twice due to the rapid cycles of creation and destruction which define the city, its architecture and its citizens. The gridded configuration of Manhattan was devised in 1811 in what, retrospectively, can be viewed as either a bold prophecy or brash speculation of the urban metropolis to come. It is also a work of philosophical modernism: the imposition of a rational and eminently Cartesian system upon a topographical *tabula rasa*. As architect Rem Koolhaas argues in his *Delirious New York - A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, the uniformity and rigidity of the grid

does not foreclose on creative possibility but merely demands a new type of urban creativity, which he dubs "Manhattanism":

In spite of its apparent neutrality, [the Grid] implies an intellectual program for the island: in its indifference to topography, to what exists, it claims the superiority of mental construction over reality. Through the plotting of its streets and blocks it announces that the subjugation, if not obliteration, of nature is its true ambition. All the blocks are the same; their equivalence invalidates, at once, all the systems of articulation and differentiation that have guided the design of traditional cities. The Grid makes the history of architecture and all the previous lessons of urbanism irrelevant. It forces Manhattan's builders to develop a new system of formal values, to invent strategies for the distinction of one block from another (Koolhaas 1978: 15).⁷

Whereas European cities such as London and Paris have been able to grow radially, to expand centrifugally from a center, Manhattan is bound by its fixed co-ordinates. It is a grid determined by its watery perimeter. For Quinn, Manhattan *is* New York; the river and the harbour are the spatial boundaries of his terrain and the boroughs off-island are beyond his no-where. Compare this to Chandler's Los Angeles: Marlowe frequently traverses not only the various satellite cities of Los Angeles (Pasadena, Santa Monica, etc.) but also ranges into the developing Orange County. Unlike Los Angeles's decentered urban sprawl, New York's dense urban nucleus is best experienced on foot, rather than by car. While the sprawling suburbs and satellite cities of Southern California provided the hardboiled detective with a horizontal landscape best traversed by automobile, New York, especially downtown Manhattan where Quinn walks, is alarmingly vertical. But if the skyscrapers of midtown evoke a semi-permanence of concrete and glass (the juxtaposition of architectural styles points toward larger cycles of growth and decay), the vehicular,

and especially pedestrian, traffic constitute a fluid New York. The vertical structures of New York provide a background, a field, for the movement within it.⁸ The continual flow of traffic through the city is a current to which Quinn surrenders himself.

The sprawl of Los Angeles represents the continuous redefinition of its borders, the expansion of its perimeter further and further from its vaguely defined center. In contrast, Manhattan is a fixed canvas that has long been fully developed and whose expansion is predicated not upon the seizure of new space beyond its borders but through the reworking of space (the painting over of old canvas) within the Grid itself. As Koolhaas indicates: "Since Manhattan is finite and the number of block forever fixed, the city cannot grow in any conventional manner" (Koolhaas 1978: 15). The growth of New York, then, after the exhaustion of its 2028 blocks was not out but over and up:

The Grid's two-dimensional discipline also creates undreamt-of freedom for three-dimensional anarchy. The Grid defines a new balance between control and de-control in which city can be at the same time ordered and fluid, a metropolis of rigid chaos (Koolhaas 1978: 15).

The speed with which New York permutates, its cycles of construction and destruction, development and decay, is counterbalanced by the uniformity of its blocks. In this environment Quinn can maintain the paradox that drives his walks: the constant change allows him to focus on nothing while focusing on nothing enables him to recognize that all places are the same; that every block, despite its apparent difference, is equal.

It is this paradox, different but the same, that characterizes the landscape of

mid-town Manhattan that Quinn covers. Spatially New York is repetitious, each block giving way to another, not *ad infinitum*, but to the limits of possibility as defined by a natural obstacle, Manhattan's own status as an island.⁹ This spatial repetition is matched by a history which is more cyclical than linear, as Koolhaas articulates:

Manhattan is a *theater of progress*...the performance can never end or even progress in the conventional sense of dramatic plotting; it can only be the cyclic restatement of a single theme: creation and destruction irrevocably interlocked, endlessly re-enacted.
The only suspense in the spectacle comes from the constantly escalating intensity of the performance (Koolhaas 1978: 10).

This cyclical pattern has given mid-town Manhattan a curiously jumbled skyline as different spaces operate according to different cyclical/historical frequencies creating an architectural landscape which functions on juxtaposition: the graduated towers of the 1920s and 1930s (the Empire State building, the Chrysler Building), the high modernist monoliths of the 50s and 60s (the Seagram Building, the World Trade Center), the vaguely ironic postmodern towers of the 80s (the AT&T building), along with remnants of earlier eras all jostle for position in a crowded downtown area. Despite this seeming heterogeneity, for the pedestrian, New York, due to its rigid grid, tends to blur into an undifferentiated mass. This blurring of difference is intensified by more recent architecture as the reflective surfaces of both the high modernist skyscrapers and the postmodern towers create a series of mirrors which reflect each other's surfaces and, in so doing, reproduce space in their reflections. Walking between them is not unlike walking between two mirrors and casting a reflection of oneself infinitely, as in the now-famous cinematographical sequences in

Welles's *Citizen Kane* and *The Lady from Shanghai*. Moreover, postmodern architecture, abandoning the flat surfaces and glass curtains of its high modernist predecessor for a more textured and irregular surface, casts a distorted, funhouse/hall of mirrors images which, as Celeste Olalquiaga argues, further distorts the space of the city-dwellers between the two structures:

Casting a hologramlike aesthetic, contemporary architecture displays an urban continuum where buildings are seen to disappear behind reflections of the sky or merge into one another, as in the downtown areas of most cosmopolitan cities and in the trademark midtown landscape of New York City. Any sense of freedom gained by the absence of clearly marked boundaries, however, is soon lost to the reproduction *ad infinitum* of space - a hall of mirrors in which passersby are dizzied into total oblivion. Instead of establishing co-ordinates from a fixed reference point, contemporary architecture fills the referential crash with repetition, substituting from location an obsessive duplication of the same scenario (Olalquiaga 1992: 2).

The nowhere that Quinn has built around himself is a nowhere achieved by adhering to the logic of the space itself: allowing the repetition of the architecture and the urban plan to do their work, to fulfil their capacity to disorient. Quinn allows himself to drift through this space, to give himself up to the logic of this space, "the movement of the streets" (Auster 1987: 4), and through this is able to lose himself, to dislodge himself from his body and to deny location. In her study of the city and postmodernity, *Megalopolis*, Olalquiaga uses the term psychasthenia to describe this specifically urban sense of disorientation. She defines psychasthenia as:

a state in which the space defined by the co-ordinates of the organism's own body is confused with represented space. Incapable of demarcating the limits of its own body, lost in the immense area that circumscribes it, the psychasthenic organism proceeds to abandon its own identity to embrace the space beyond (Olalquiaga 1992: 2).

Quinn actively desires this sense of disorientation and, by walking through midtown New York, "flooding himself with externals", Quinn feels capable of "drowning himself out of himself" (Auster 1987: 61). As with Jameson's identification of a widespread cultural schizophrenia, Olalquiaga perceives psychasthenia as a prevalent cultural condition: "[p]sychasthenia helps describe contemporary experience and account for its uneasiness. Urban culture resembles this mimetic condition when it enables a ubiquitous feeling of being in all places while not being anywhere" (Olalquiaga 1992: 2). Quinn's walks, during which "all places bec[o]me equal" (Auster 1987: 4), are an intensification (precisely because disorientation is so rigorously pursued) of what Olalquiaga identifies as a predominant postmodern psychopathology. Quinn's quest to disappear is merely a step beyond what Olalquiaga recognizes as occurring "naturally" in postmodern culture. While this general sense of disorientation is potentially frightening, it ultimately aids Quinn in his attempted transformation of New York. New York is Quinn's no-where; and, in its architecture and in its urban plan it is also a city of glass, reflecting and replicating its logic (Manhattanism if we follow Koolhaas) over and over again inducing precisely the psychasthenic sensation that Olalquiaga perceptively identifies.

Space and Literary History

Throughout *The New York Trilogy*, Auster uses space to mark his own debt to a legacy of nineteenth century American writers. This is most apparent in *Ghosts*, which contains a trio of literary anecdotes told not by the detective Blue but by his opponent Black. Set in 1947, *Ghosts* reaches back into the previous century intertextually to illustrate how several literary "ghosts," Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, persist into the present day, virtually inscribed in the landscape itself.

The style of *Ghosts* is sparse, simultaneously evoking the deliberate minimalism of Samuel Beckett and the clipped tones of a hard-boiled detective. Alison Russell suggests that *Ghosts* can be regarded as a "ghost" of *City of Glass*; the novel is stylistically "stripped down to the generic level" (Russell 1990: 77). This is apparent from the opening lines, which reduce the plot to a series of relationships between the primaries of the case. This reduction from people to primaries is indicated by the use of colours for names:

First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black...The case seems simple enough. White wants Blue to follow a man named Black for as long as necessary (Auster 1987: 135).

This seeming arbitrariness of naming is extended to the choice of location. The narrator suggests that the setting is arbitrary and that his choice is a matter of convenience:

[Blue] goes to the apartment that White has rented for him. The address is unimportant. But let's say Brooklyn Heights, for the sake of argument. Some quiet, rarely travelled street not far from the bridge - Orange Street perhaps. Walt Whitman handset the first edition of

Leaves of Grass on this street in 1855, and it was here that Henry Ward Beecher railed against slavery from the pulpit of his red-brick church. So much for local colour (Auster 1987: 137).

The concluding dismissive remark obscures the extent to which *Ghosts* is suffused with specifically this sort of "local colour," information which centers *Ghosts* very much within the space of New York City while simultaneously decentering its location from Manhattan to Brooklyn. Moreover, the pun on "colour" is a typical Auster gesture as it becomes significant at another level. Its use in a gesture of dismissal produces the opposite effect; it alerts the reader to the significance of these supposedly arbitrary places and names. Even as Auster attempts to disappear behind a sense of randomness and arbitrariness, his presence in the trilogy becomes more acute. The locations and names, as well as the numerous allusions and intertexts littered throughout the trilogy point insistently to Auster even as he, through diverse metafictional tactics, attempts to obscure or erase his authorial position.

Ghosts, as a sort of homage to Brooklyn, reveals how space retains history and how personal and collective memory come to constitute a specifically spatial history. The urban space of New York, to once again invoke the image of painting over an already used canvas, is best described as a palimpsest. Each space has its history as well as its possibilities for the future. This creates what Koolhaas terms a "phantom architecture" within the "real" space of New York: "Not only are large parts of its surface occupied by architectural mutations (Central Park, the Skyscraper), utopian fragments (Rockefeller Center, the UN Building) and irrational phenomena (Radio City Music Hall), but in addition each block is covered with several layers of

phantom architecture in the form of past occupancies, aborted projects and popular fantasies that provide alternative images to the New York that exists" (Koolhaas 1978: 6). Auster evokes this sense of the impermanence and ephemerality of a building in his screenplay for Wayne Wang's *Smoke* (1995). In the film, Auggie Wren, proprietor of the Brooklyn Cigar Shop, takes a picture of his store each morning. From these photographs he has created an album which gives a brief history of that space. This obsessive act reveals an anxiety, a desire to reaffirm the stability of one's existence through an attachment to a stable place within an ever-changing landscape. *The New York Trilogy* contains several examples of literary ephemera which contribute to the layering of a palimpsestic New York. Auster's miscellany of literary legend constitutes a veritable cognitive map of his New York. If, as Jameson argues, postmodernism is marked by its inability to think historically, Auster would seem to be fighting this postmodern tide of historical erasure by using spaces as a mnemonic device, revealing the "past occupancies" (Koolhaas 1978: 6) which make up both American and American literary history for him. That Auster believes this act of memory to be a type of responsibility is perhaps evident in this cryptic passage from *City of Glass*:

Stillman retreated to Riverside Park, this time to the edge of it, coming to rest on the knobby outcrop at 84th Street known as Mount Tom. On the same spot, in the summers of 1843 and 1844, Edgar Allan Poe had spent many long hours gazing out at the Hudson. Quinn knew this because he had made it his business to know such things (Auster 1987: 83).

What exactly Auster sees as Quinn's primary business, is not made clear. I would argue, however, that Quinn's responsibility is triple. He feels obligated "to know

such things" not only as a writer and detective (both positions marked by knowledge, often obscure knowledge needed to solve a case or resolve a plot) but as a New Yorker as well. That is not to say that Auster, through Quinn, is involved in some unconditional celebration of New York. There is however the sense that the space of the city and its latent history can serve to anchor identity, a cognitive map which can stabilize an individual in a perpetually changing landscape. Black's interest in literary history, which stands in for Auster's own apparent interest, is an optimistic gesture very much against the highly synchronic tendency of postmodern thinking. It can perhaps be aligned with Jameson's frequent call to think historically as a means to forestall the fragmentation of the present and the obliteration of the past that postmodernism, in a worst case scenario, seems to promise. As Black remarks in *Ghosts*: "It's my hobby, says Black. I like to know how writers live, especially American writers. It helps me to understand things" (Auster 1987: 175). What Black's historical sense seemingly allows him to understand is not merely "things" but "the state of things." The writers to whom Black appeals for this understanding, Thoreau, Whitman, and Hawthorne, are certainly not postmodern and are very different from Jameson's primary texts in his efforts to cognitively map the present. Auster, through the character of Black, suggests specifically the importance of a literary-historical consciousness in the effort to understand the state of things. This historical call, a call to recognize and acknowledge literary tradition, resonates quite strongly with a modernist ethos. It is not surprising, then, that Auster sets *Ghosts* in 1947, thus figuring Black in the midst of modernist period. Through Black, though,

Auster is seemingly reiterating this call in a very different historical situation, that of postmodernism. The juxtaposition is striking and perhaps even anachronistic, a modernist gesture in postmodern times.

Notes

1. The situationists occasionally collaborated with Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre. The situationist manifesto very much overlaps with Lefebvre's ideas, especially his emphasis on the politics of everyday life and the exercise of power through space. Lefebvre, in turn, influenced many other theorists including Jameson and Foucault. The radical urbanism of the situationists and their critique of power very much anticipates the work of these later theorists.
2. Jameson identifies a similar ideological obfuscation in his *The Seeds of Time*. He argues that a market society projects an image of the city as a paradigmatic site of freedom and choice while, in fact, the contemporary capitalist city functions on a homogenization of people, products and activities: "this is precisely the ideological background against which it is possible to market and to sell the contemporary capitalist city as a well-nigh Bakhtinian carnival of heterogeneities, of difference, libidinal excitement, and a hyperindividuality that effectively decenters the old individual subject by way of individual hyperconsumption" (Jameson 1994: 31). It is interesting to note the extent to which commodities do not play a role in Quinn's life. Whereas Don DeLillo or Thomas Pynchon actively critique market capitalism through a parody of advertising technique or by ironically noting the ubiquitous penetration of products in everyday life, Auster's Quinn seems on the margins of this circulation. Virtually the only things that Quinn purchases are the red notebook and his pen (which he buys, not from a store, but on the street from a deaf mute). Quinn's tendency to eat at a diner, as well, creates a link to an earlier hard-boiled era, since it is a gritty and low-rent setting. But even Chandler or Hammett novels tend to have a greater focus on commodities: Chandler's description of clothes sometimes verges on the fetishistic. Quinn, having pared down his life to a minimum of needs, is perhaps most comparable to Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*. Hamsun's starving writer restricts his concerns to food and paper. This is a model which, obviously, far precedes the commodity saturation of late capitalism.
3. The Lettrist International was the revolutionary group which preceded the Situationist International. The situationists were a splinter group which eventually absorbed most of the key members of the Lettrists. For more information see Marcus 1989 and Plant 1992.
4. See also *On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957-92*. This catalogue of a major Situationist retrospective contains a selection of Situationist writings entitled "Imaginary Maps of the Real World." Though Chtcheglov's article is excluded, the key Situationist manifesto on urban planning, "Unitary Urbanism at the end of the 1950s", appears.

5. The seminal article on this phenomenon dates from the turn of the century. In his "The Metropolis and Mental Life", Georg Simmel details the sort of alienation that city engenders and delineates the cultivation of the blasé attitude by the city dweller who is simultaneously excited and anxious about the liberation of self and identity that the urban experience allows.

6. I will henceforth refer to Peter Stillman Jr. as "Peter" while referring to Peter Stillman Sr. as "Stillman." This bifurcation of the name splits their double identity.

7. The grid is central to Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* as well. As Gerd Hurm argues in his book *Fragmented Urban Images* the grid not only "signifies order and control and represents the sprawling metropolis of late consumer capitalism" but also "stands for the labyrinth of meaning and the proliferation of semantic patterns in the novel itself" (Hurm 1991: 300-301). In the novel Oedipa Maas compares the Southern Californian urban/suburban sprawl to a circuit card: "The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seem no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she only tried to find out)" (Pynchon 1990: 15). Thus Pynchon establish a firm connection between the logic of the grid and the post-industrial Californian landscape. Unlike the Koolhaasian Manhattan, however, this space remains largely unbounded and reproduces its form through sprawl rather than through vertical growth. This, its seems, only intensifies its mystery and the difficulty in grasping it as a whole.

8. This is perhaps most evocatively represented in films such as *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) and *Powaqqatsi* (1988), both of which are films without dialogue presenting various images of the earth and its inhabitants. In these films New York is depicted in constant motion, accelerating a single rush hour into a few seconds of film. The effect is a flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic which transforms the crowds of New York City into an amorphous mass best described in liquid terms: a current or a wave. Both films are scored by Philip Glass whose hyper-repetitive compositions accentuate the repetition that Quinn identifies as elemental to the "spatial practice" (to use Michel de Certeau's unique phrase) of walking and are visible in various spatial cycles of New York City.

9. Jameson argues in his "Spatial Systems in *North by Northwest*" (1995) that the detective novel or the thriller needs some form of spatial boundary to produce what he terms a "totality-effect" (Jameson 1995). The boundaries provide the possibility of the cognitive map which, in turn, provide the possibility of comprehending the totality. In the novels of Raymond Chandler, the example that Jameson uses, the California coast is the boundary which produces this totality-effect; in *City of Glass*, I would suggest, the island status of Manhattan functions in a similar manner.

CHAPTER THREE - Detection, Surveillance and Urban Space

A Genealogy of Detection

Quinn's sense of New York changes dramatically once he begins to operate as a private detective. Throughout the span of this charade Quinn is removed from reality, his relation to it mediated by the identity of Auster which is merely a shell and has no interior. This is the space that Quinn fills, but he can only do so inadequately: having to perform as Auster means having to imitate him, a difficult task since Quinn has no idea who Auster is. Quinn fills this void with what he imagines a detective to be. Quinn himself is a writer of detective fiction. He writes under the pseudonym of William Wilson a series of detective novels featuring the hard-boiled protagonist Max Work. Despite being a writer of detective fiction, Quinn's knowledge of the detective is woefully limited:

Like most people, Quinn knew almost nothing about crime. He had never murdered anyone, had never stolen anything, and he did not know anyone who had. He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films and newspapers. He did not, however, consider this to be a handicap (Auster 1987: 7).¹

Quinn's textual knowledge of crime and detection is more than adequate for the purpose of writing detective fiction, but it ultimately proves inadequate when he assumes the actual role. Quinn fills the void of Auster not with himself but with Max Work, the private-eye protagonist of his pseudonymously written detective novels.² Quinn cannot fulfil the role of Auster with his own identity since so little remains of

it: bereft of friends and hiding behind a pseudonym, Quinn leads what he calls a "posthumous life" (Auster 1987: 5), a denial of interiority symbolized by the fact that he never remembers any of his dreams. Since he cannot fill a shell with a shell, he performs the role of Auster by assuming the identity of Max Work, his fictional detective. Disappearing behind Work (the task of writing as well as the character), is merely another way that Quinn negates his identity:

He 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. His detective necessarily had to be real. The nature of the books demanded it. If Quinn had allowed himself to vanish, to withdraw into the confines of a strange and hermetic life, Work continued to live in the world of other, and the more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work's presence in that world became (Auster 1987: 9).

While accepting the role of Auster, Quinn assumes the identity of Work; externalizing the fictional character into "real" space is not so much a matter of Quinn's will but a matter of Work's persistence. Work is the dominant identity "[i]n the triad of selves that Quinn had become" (Auster 1987: 6). Filtered through the evocative pseudonym William Wilson (more on various Poe connections later), Work becomes the animating force in Quinn's now layered identity:

Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise (Auster 1987: 6)

Added to this trajectory of identity is the figure of Auster, to which Work is the subjective precedent rather than Quinn himself. This narrative trajectory simultaneously comprises both a historical genealogy and a spatialisation of Quinn's

multilayered identity: Quinn - William Wilson - Max Work - Paul Auster. Bracketing out Quinn for the moment, the historical legacy is clear. William Wilson is taken from the Edgar Allan Poe story of the same name and, while not a detective story in itself, is prototypical of the mystery story and anticipates many of the themes of Auster's trilogy. Max Work figures as a hard-boiled detective both in Quinn's description of him and at the level of the signifier. Quinn's admiration for Work is best characterized as a sort of nostalgia for the heroic individualism of the hard-boiled private eye. Work is conceived as part of a hardboiled tradition exemplified by Chandler's Marlowe and Hammett's Sam Spade. The hardboiled detective has come to represent an idealized modernist subjectivity characterized by an intrepid individualism: "Work was aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself. The very things that caused problems for Quinn, Work took for granted, and he walked through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and indifference that never failed to impress his creator" (Auster 1987: 9). Quinn admires Work's ability to assert his will in the process of getting the job done, whatever that job may be. What Quinn valorizes in Work is the combination of effort and existential tenacity, for this is the meaning of Work's name: Max Work, or, Maximum Exertion. Quinn's creation, identification, and ultimate assumption of Work's identity reveals a longing for the existential heroics of the hard-boiled detective. Quinn's ultimate failure suggests a moral that Work/work does not work. Madeleine Sorapure argues in her article "The Detective and the Author" that, "in the process of becoming a detective in an 'actual' mystery, and in attempting to apply the

methods of his fictional hero to a 'real' situation, Quinn comes to realize the inadequacy of the principles that inform Work's actions and ideas" (Sorapure 1995: 78). Just as Quinn creates, identifies with, and ultimately commandeers Work's identity, I would argue that Auster, as the author of *City of Glass*, creates Quinn in order to explore his relation as an author to the New York in which he places Quinn. The relationship between Quinn and Max Work is paralleled, then, by the relationship between Paul Auster and Daniel Quinn. And if Quinn comes to realize that Work's methods are ineffective and out-of-date, the same conclusion is repeated in Auster's manipulation of his surrogate author-detective.

Work, however, is not the final identity in the subjective chain. The identity of Auster antecedes Work, and is in the subjective position which confronts reality. It is in the schism between Work and Auster that we see a radical disjunction between the fictional world that Work negotiates and the "real" world that Auster is forced to negotiate. Auster completes the chain historically as the postmodern detective. That he takes the same name as the author of the novel is both self-aggrandizing and self-deprecating. Auster (the author) figures himself (through the deft act of naming) as the end of the family line at the same that he points to, and narratively and philosophically exploits, the hopelessness of the detective who shares his name in articulating what can be described as a postmodern condition.

Just as Quinn's interest in detective stories is explained as intertextual rather than mimetic, so too is Auster's; the analysis of Quinn's interest is equally applicable to Auster: "[w]hat interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to

the world but their relation to other stories" (Auster 1987: 6). But just as Quinn wants to "have a Work-like experience for himself" (Nealon 1996: 96) and reverts to a hard-boiled modernism, so too does Auster's text reveal a nostalgia for the pre-postmodern.³ Despite the trilogy's focus on the fragmentation of reality and the uncertainty that plagues these detectives in an age of epistemological collapse, the novel is confidently unified and narratively constant. It acknowledges the uncertainty identified with postmodernism but attempts to contain it within a cool prose and linear narrative. It does seem crucial to note that Auster's form does not, ultimately, reflect his thematic content. Auster's formal practice, consisting of various strategies of containment that allow these stories to be narrativized at all, let alone in such a controlled manner, situates him as analogous to Quinn and exposes their shared residual modernist tendencies.

If, for the classic and hard-boiled detective, effort, both cognitive and physical, was sufficient to allow comprehension of the mysteries that the world provided, penetrating even the most devious criminal minds, or charting the most tangled labyrinths, the world of Auster (both the author and the absent fictional detective) shows that even the most tenacious and analytical investigative methods may not be sufficient for the detective. Quinn's assumption of the role of Work is a retreat into a modernist stance which proves inadequate in the postmodern reality that confronts Auster. As the subjective trajectory shows, Auster's experience filters back to Quinn only through Work and Wilson, who, combined, represent the sum of Quinn's intertextual knowledge of detection. This sum of knowledge is insufficient,

partly because it projects an idealized conception of the detective's task: "[t]he detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them" (Auster 1987: 8). The detective's task, then, is to totalize, to bring the previously fragmented and dispersed objects together, to form these seemingly random and unrelated events into a narrative and to bring the narrative to a satisfactory resolution with a minimum of unanswered questions. Quinn rightly compares the detective's task to that of the writer's: "[i]n effect the writer and detective are interchangeable" (Auster 1987: 8).⁴ The question remains whether this act of totalisation remains possible for either the writer or detective in the postmodern era. Jameson articulates this inability to totalize in spatial terms in his analysis of architecture. Jameson's ambivalent approach to postmodernism signals that the act of totalisation is both necessary and possible but, for the moment, largely exceeds the capability of the individual postmodern subject who, most often, like Quinn, is hypostatized at a modernist stage, either as an act of nostalgia (perhaps partly motivated out of fear) or through a sheer inability to evolve:

So I come finally to my principle point here, that this latest mutation in space - postmodern hyperspace - has finally exceeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surrounding perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment - which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as velocities of spacecraft to those of the automobile - can stand as the analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects (Jameson 1991: 44).

It does not seem reckless to posit a relation between the postmodern subject and Auster's detective to complement the frequent relation between the classic detective and more epistemologically certain philosophical positions. Just as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes or Poe's C. Auguste Dupin are examples of an empiricist tradition and the hard-boiled school of Chandler's Marlowe or Hammett's Spade exemplify an existentialist tradition, so too may the postmodern detective, as represented here by Quinn, be likened to Jameson's postmodern subject. Whereas previous philosophical correlations boded well for the detectives, Holmes and Dupin aligned with rational analysis, Marlowe and Spade bolstered by a radical freedom, for Quinn and other postmodern detectives the comparison to the postmodern subject suggests only uncertainty and points to their inevitable failure. This failure is perhaps most evident in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, in which the detective figure, Oedipa Maas, does everything that a good detective should do, following Quinn's formula in analysing seemingly insignificant clues, constructing hypothetical plots and scenarios and chasing leads up and down the California coast. Despite these efforts, Maas is stymied in the end, unable to comprehend the Trystero mystery and left, along with the reader, without a satisfying resolution to her inquiries. As Sorapure suggests in her discussion of *The Crying of Lot 49*, this reveals a problem not with the effort of the individual detective but with the application of a classic methodology to a postmodern case:

This novel, like most anti-detective fiction, calls into question not the abilities or efforts of the individual detective, but rather the methodology of detection itself, a methodology that valorizes the power of reason in the face of mystery, that validates the hermeneutic

enterprise, and most importantly, that allows for an authoritative position outside the events themselves from which omniscient knowledge is attainable (Sorapure 1995: 72).

The Archimedean position that would make attainable the omniscient knowledge is, as said before, both an illusion and an impossibility. Indeed, the focus on locomotion in detective fiction locates the detective in the "thick of things." Rather than occupying a privileged transcendent position, the detective is cast as a lowly commuter. Maas is Marlowe's Californian descendent. In contrast to Marlowe's use of boulevards and back roads, Maas traverses the earliest superhighways in a complex transportation network between emergent satellite cities. Neither assume an authoritative position but, for Marlowe, it has been argued (by Jameson primarily), totalisation was at least still possible. Quinn's mobility, on foot, is circumscribed even further and, even with the totality-effect that the bounded Manhattan produces, totalization seems an impossibility, disappearing behind a plenitude of fragments, all of which are potential clues, that splinters a total reality.

Schizophrenia and Spatiality

Jameson argues that a temporal and linguistic breakdown is characteristic of postmodern life in general and that the postmodern subject suffers or enjoys (depending on how one approaches it) a series of discontinuous presents. This fragmentation of temporal continuity produces a condition akin to schizophrenia:

the breakdown of temporality [characteristic within postmodernism] suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescrivable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material - or better still, the literal - signifier in isolation (Jameson 1991: 27).

This echoes the blissful intensities of the situationist *dérive*, which, like Jameson's description of postmodern disorientation, consisted of isolated and fragmented moments or *situations* which transformed the surroundings into "sparkling experiences without purpose" (Wolman qtd. in Marcus 1989: 370). Primary in both the situationist gesture and in Jameson's characterization of postmodern life is an effacement of history.⁵ This effacement marks the depthlessness of postmodern life, an era no longer focused on the temporal but which is dominated by space and spatial logic (Jameson 1991: 16). Quinn's propensity to drift and to seek utopia is a gesture in line with this dominant spatial logic. Quinn's will to disappear marks not the subject's utilization of cognitive mapping to forestall the "morbid content" (Jameson 1991: 29) of schizophrenia but the courting of its more nihilistic aspects.⁶ The desire for utopia is a desire for a realm which transcends the specifics of time and place.

For Quinn, utopia is, as its etymology signifies, a no-where which negates temporal continuity as it seeks a spatial sphere beyond space itself. That Quinn's utopia can be seen as schizophrenic depends upon the extent to which it marks an erasure of time *and* space. This forgetting, or denial of his personal history is achieved only when he enters his no-where New York, a utopian space which annuls his subjective continuity and induces a schizophrenic state of fragmentation and forgetfulness.⁷ Quinn's lostness seems a particularly extreme sort of postmodern schizophrenic disorientation which, by focusing on the moment (the intensity of each step), obliterates the past.

Stillman's return to New York marks what he sees as a new beginning in his pursuit to establish a utopian language in a fallen reality. His task, as he sees it, is to re-establish the connection between subject and object by giving each object a new name. Seeing himself as a latter-day Adam in the very post-Edenic moral vacuum of New York City, Stillman wanders throughout the city by day collecting rubbish and debris from the streets in order to return to his hotel and grant each piece of detritus a new name. After trailing Stillman for several days, Quinn decides to confront the old man and question him on his wanderings. Stillman explains his "work" to Quinn in a lucid and comprehensive manner. Central to Stillman's task is its location, as he reveals to Quinn:

My work is very simple. I have come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap. It suits my purpose admirably. I find the streets an endless source of material, an inexhaustible storehouse of shattered things. Each day I go out with my bag and collect objects that seem worthy of investigation. My samples now number in the hundreds -

from the chipped to the smashed, from the dented to the squashed, from the pulverized to the putrid (Auster 1987: 78).

While Quinn attempts to transform New York into his no-where, Stillman has very different utopian aspirations for New York. For Quinn, the city is an inexhaustible space that disappears as he walks through it; for Stillman the city is also inexhaustible, but this inexhaustibility denies him any utopian transcendence. Instead he must try to transform the world through acts of re-naming. Stillman's monomaniacal obsession with re-naming, as well as his cruel confinement of his son, stems from his analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Before trailing Stillman, Quinn goes to the library at Columbia University and reads Stillman's book, *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World*, which was published before Stillman incarcerated his son. In this text, Stillman postulates, based on the work of Henry Dark, a supposed follower of Milton (this turns out to be a hoax - Stillman made him up to justify his own theories), that America represented the hope of a new utopia. This utopia was not a place but was a possibility within humanity, according to Dark/Stillman:

There were no maps that could lead a man to it, no instruments of navigation that could guide a man to its shores. Rather, its existence was immanent within man himself: the idea of a beyond he might someday create in the here and now. For utopia was nowhere - even, as Dark explained, in its "wordhood" (Auster 1987: 46-47).

From this Dark/Stillman postulates, taking Milton's ideas further, that it would be possible to undo the fall by restoring language to its prelapsarian state. If words once again coincided with the objects they were meant to represent, the world, so Stillman/Dark's argument goes, would recover its Edenic innocence, language its

truth, and humanity its relation with God.

For Stillman, New York is the most diseased part of a contaminated and broken world; it is the ultimate end of the collapse of the Tower of Babel: a polylinguistic amoral city-space in contrast to the unilingual and idyllic Garden. Stillman is as much lamenting the loss of referentiality as he is the loss of God. Indeed, he sees these two losses as the same thing. His prophecy of paradise is founded upon his ironic deconstruction of Milton's text, his pursuit of those words in Milton which "embodied two equal and opposite meanings - 'one before the fall and one after the fall'" (Russell 1990: 71). Instead of revelling in the potentialities of this "free play", to invoke a familiar deconstructionist term, Stillman assumes a moral stance. The focus of this ultimately moral stance is the decline of Christian utopian thinking, the loss of belief in paradisaal space. Stillman's antagonisms are, in the end, focused on modernity as the loss of referentiality which, together with the Nietzschean death of God, represents a transition into the twentieth century. The shift into postmodernity only exacerbates Stillman's antagonisms as the fragmentation of reality is ultimately accelerated in the space of postmodernism. Indeed, as Jameson argues in the following passage (which is somewhat reminiscent of Stillman's own analysis), this fragmentation, amplified to a staggering degree, is a determining characteristic of postmodernism:

The break-up of the sign in mid-air determines a fall back into a now absolutely fragmented and anarchic social reality; the broken pieces of language (the pure signifiers) now fall again into the world, as many more pieces of material junk among all the other rusting and superannuated apparatuses and buildings that litter the commodity landscape and that strew the "collage city," the "delirious New York"

of a postmodernist late capitalism in full crisis (Jameson qtd. in Gregory 1993: 338).

While there is little question of his madness, Stillman nevertheless represents the strong tendency in postmodern culture to lament the loss of a straightforward referentiality. While both Jameson and Auster fully acknowledge this loss of referentiality, both phrase it in terms of a "crisis", partaking in a lamentation of its disappearance while simultaneously seeking ways to "bring it all back together" through gestures of unification and synthesis.

Surveillance, Boredom, and Writing

Quinn sets about his surveillance of Stillman with remarkable enthusiasm, arriving early and tracking Stillman throughout each day. This enthusiasm is quickly dampened as Quinn, despite his rigorous surveillance, fails to see anything threatening, or even meaningful, in Stillman's actions. The task at hand, to protect Peter from his father, requires little or no effort by Quinn. Stillman makes no attempt to confront his son and instead spends his time wandering about the city with apparent aimlessness. Quinn is both bored and irritated by Stillman's lengthy and seemingly pointless walks. Having sought a *Work*-like adventure such as those in his William Wilson series, Quinn is frustrated by the boredom and monotony of the most basic of the detective's tasks: surveillance. Most importantly, Quinn's pursuit of Stillman does not allow him the same pleasure that his own wandering had. Forced to focus on an individual who does nothing of note frustrates Quinn:

Quinn was used to wandering. His excursions through the city had taught him to understand the connectedness of inner and outer. Using aimless motion as a technique of reversal, on his best days he could bring the outside in and thus usurp the sovereignty of inwardness. By flooding himself with externals, by drowning himself out of himself, he had managed to exert some small degree of control over his fits of despair. Wandering, therefore, was a kind of mindlessness. But following Stillman was not wandering. Stillman could wander, he could stagger like a blindman from one spot to another, but this was a privilege denied to Quinn. For now he was obliged to concentrate on what he was doing, even if it was next to nothing. Time and again his thoughts would begin to drift, and soon thereafter his steps would follow suit (Auster 1987: 61).

Denied the privilege of drifting, Quinn is unable to transform New York into the utopian space it becomes during his wanderings. In a forced act of concentration he decides to record every possible detail about Stillman:

Not only did he take note of Stillman's gestures, describe each object he selected or rejected for his bag, and keep an accurate timetable for all events, but he also set down with meticulous care an exact itinerary of Stillman's divagations, noting each street he followed, each turn he made, and each pause that occurred (Auster 1987: 62).

This hyperattention to detail more than occupies Quinn's time and is a particularly obsessive extension of his initial assessment of detective work: "Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence" (Auster 1987: 8). This obsessive attention to potential clues, forcing him to truly account for the external rather than merely using it to suppress the internal, "experiencing the proliferation of its details" (Auster 1987: 8), unifies the various identities of Quinn: he is forced to be writer, detective and pedestrian simultaneously. Quinn is able to integrate these activities with practice, an ability which, as Norma Rowen argues in

her article, "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam," echoes Stillman's desire to unify signifier and signified. Quinn, now capable of "seeing the thing and writing about it in the same fluid gesture" (Auster 1987: 63), projects his authorial self into cityspace and opens up a textual space (the red notebook) for his acts of detection. The interchangeability of writer and detective cited earlier becomes even more apparent.

In *Ghosts*, the second volume of *The New York Trilogy* which explores further the relation of writer and detective, Blue is hired to observe a man who does nothing but sit in an apartment and write. And since part of the agreement with his client is a weekly report, "typed out in duplicate" (Auster 1987: 135), Blue is forced to do the same thing. Blue, who readily admits that he is "not the Sherlock Holmes type" (Auster 1987: 139), accepts a case in which there is nothing to do. A man of action, not unlike Max Work, Blue is allowed too much time to think, too much time to try to identify with Black, to try to get inside his head. This act of identification, the application of Dupin's maxim from Poe's "The Purloined Letter" that the detective must identify with the intellect of his opponent, forces Blue's surveillant gaze back upon himself:

To speculate, from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying on Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of watching another, he finds that he is watching himself (Auster 1987: 144).

The narrator attributes Blue's uncanny sense of doubleness to a heightened awareness of time: "Life has slowed down so drastically for him that Blue is now able to see things that have previously escaped his attention" (Auster 1987: 144). Although this

temporal deceleration certainly is a constituent factor of Blue's growing recognition of Black as his double, equally important is the role that space plays. An equivalence is generated spatially as Blue and Black pair up symmetrically in third floor apartments on opposite sides of Orange Street. This symmetry transforms Blue's window into a mirror and the resulting reverse perspective, which reveals Blue as Black's equivalent, a man who does nothing but sit by a window and write, both comforts and unnerves Blue:

In this early period, Blue's state of mind can best be described as one of ambivalence and conflict. There are moments when he feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out, he need merely to look into himself...On the other hand, not all moments are like these, there are times he feels totally removed from Black, cut off from him in a way that is so stark and absolute that he begins to lose the sense of who he is (Auster 1987: 156).

The deliberate ambiguity of the final "he" confirms the extent to which Blue's identity has become intertwined with Black's. The "he" is both himself and Black. When he is unable to identify with his opponent in a Dupinesque manner, Blue becomes trapped in his own monadic space, architecturally represented by the one-room apartment he is forced to occupy as part of the case: "Loneliness envelops him, shuts him in, and with it comes a terror worse than anything he has ever known" (Auster 1987: 156). The terror arises from the fear of losing his own identity, in being trapped in a space with no reference to the outside except the window onto Black, his double, whose actions betray no meaning.

On the day that Blue is to write his first report he finds himself unable to do

so. While he had always been able to write such reports in the past, this time the nature of the case, marked most of all by Black's inactivity, seems to deny any straightforward representation. Blue, as a writer, had always relied upon the transparency of words: "[w]ords 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" (Auster 1987: 146). Subscribing to a realist epistemology, Blue is caught off guard when the words he attempts to use to describe Black's actions fail to work: "[f]or the first time in his experience writing reports, he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (Auster 1987: 147-148). Confronted with a case in which he watches his adversary through a window, which has become a mirror, Blue discovers that words, which he had hitherto considered windows, also do not allow a clear view of his adversary. His opponent, then, is obscured through this double set of windows, windows which, far from allowing Blue access to some external reality, either obscure it or merely reflect his own image and thoughts.

Just as Quinn opens up the textual space of the red notebook in an attempt to organize the information garnered in his treks through cityspace, Blue uses a notebook to record his thoughts about the case in preparation for the transformation of his observations into the narrative form of the weekly reports he sends to White. Both Quinn and Blue have to maintain a certain faith in their antagonists, a belief that Stillman's and Black's actions are meaningful. To this end, Blue speculates about what Black is involved in to merit this sort of surveillance and "begins to advance

certain theories" (Auster 1987: 44). This activity is not merely a way of passing the time but becomes an attempt to justify his own presence. Blue's speculation, however, gets nowhere: "[f]or Black is no more than a kind of blankness, a hole in the texture of things, and one story can fill the hole as well as any other" (Auster 1987: 145). This inability to assign meaning to Black's activities has dire consequences for Blue who relies on his antagonist, his double, to lend his own task significance. If Black is no more than "a kind of blankness" (Auster 1987: 145) and Blue's job as a detective is to assign meaning based on speculation then Blue is forced to reflect, or mirror, Black's blankness. The same holds true for Quinn who, despite scrutinizing Stillman's every move and trying to make them cohere, is left with nothing. Stillman remains, despite all the facts that Quinn records about him, "a kind of blankness" (Auster 1987: 145). While Quinn at times wonders "if he had not embarked on a meaningless project" (Auster 1987: 60), he maintains his belief that Stillman's movements have meaning and notes "[h]ow much better it was to believe that all his steps were actually to some purpose" (Auster 1987: 61). To ascribe purpose to his own steps, the steps of a detective, Quinn must assume that Stillman's steps are to some (criminal) end. The projection of meaning and comprehensibility precedes the act of identification which is able to transform this potential significance into actual criminal intention. It is worth noting here that the relationship between criminal and detective parallels the relationship between author and reader. The detective, as the reader of his adversary's actions, must assume a certain comprehensibility in these actions however random and arbitrary they may appear.⁸

Poe's maxim that the reasoner must identify with the intellect of his opponent is problematic for both Quinn and Blue. They are unable to complete the act of identification with their opponents because the actions of their opponents betray no rational motivation or coherent explanation. Both detectives are stymied because they are forced, if they want to follow Dupin's logic of detection, to identify with a madman. An irony of course is that Poe, in his "The Murders at Rue Morgue", the first of his "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque," makes this identification impossible. While the police are attempting to ascribe a human logic to the bizarre crime, Dupin discerns that there is no rational mind, no author, behind it. Dupin fathoms the irrationality of the act and, by doing so, identifies an orangutan as the perpetrator of the crime. Quinn and Blue, in contrast, persist in their tenacious efforts to discern meaning in the actions of their opponents. In each case, however, an outdated methodology prevents Quinn and Blue from effecting the act of identification that would allow them to penetrate their opponents motivations, intentions, and designs. Frustration with the boredom of surveillance gives way to a disillusionment about the efficacy of surveillance at all:

Quinn was deeply disillusioned. He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behaviour could be understood, that beneath the infinite facade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, a source of motivation. But after struggling to take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman than when he first started following him. He had lived Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability (Auster 1987: 67).

Blue, as well, comes to doubt the value of surveillance: "in one sense, Blue knows

everything there is to know about Black: what kind of soap he buys, what newspapers he reads, what clothes he wears, and each of these things he faithfully recorded in his notebook. He has learned a thousand facts, but the only thing they have taught him is that he knows nothing" (Auster 1987: 170). Despite Blue's recognition from the outset of the case that "he can no longer depend on the old procedures" (Auster 1987: 147), he persists in their application simply because "when he tries to imagine what will replace these things, he gets nowhere" (Auster 1987: 147).

The boredom of surveillance originates in its fragmentation of time and space. Given the vague task of "watching" Black, Blue must assume that every action of Black's is potentially significant. Such a total surveillance is, of course, impossible, and this disturbs Blue:

For if Black must be watched, then it would follow that he must be watched every hour of every day. Anything less than constant surveillance would be as no surveillance at all. It would not take much, Blue reasons, for the entire picture to change. A single moment's inattention - a glance to the side of him, a pause to scratch his head, the merest yawn - and presto, Black slips away and commits whatever heinous act he is planning to commit. And yet, there will necessarily be such moments, hundreds and even thousands of them every day. Blue finds this troubling, for no matter how often he turns this problem over inside himself, he gets no closer to solving it (Auster 1987: 143).

The fragmentation of Blue's surveillance time into a near infinity of single moments reveals the impossibility of contextualization. With an overabundance of clues, the identification of those that are significant is rendered impossible.

Windows, Frames, and Contextualization

Unlike Quinn, whose surveillance entails movement as he trails Stillman throughout Manhattan, Blue is assigned a sedentary task. While Blue follows Black on the few occasions he leaves his apartment, the vast majority of his time is spent simply watching Black through the window of his apartment. For Blue "a case with nothing to do" but watch hardly constitutes a case at all, "[f]or to watch someone read and write is in effect to do nothing" (Auster 1987: 139). Particularly interesting here is Blue's equation between watching and having nothing to do.⁹ With his view of the case (cinematically) framed by the window, Blue is forced to attempt to comprehend the case by focusing on what occurs within the frame. This, however, proves futile; there simply is not enough going on within the frame. The explanation, then, must occur beyond the boundaries of the frame. Blue, however, is somewhat reluctant to transgress these boundaries as this would violate the mandate of the case. Thus, Blue becomes immobilized and transfixed, watching the case unfold within the boundaries of the frame. The irony is that the case does not "unfold" at all, but merely stays the same, offering Blue little opportunity to comprehend what he is watching.

That the limited frame denies him the opportunity to see the big picture casts Blue in a role nearly opposite of Jameson's cartographic detective Philip Marlowe. Blue does not merely represent a failure to totalize but is placed in a position where the gesture is rendered an impossibility if he sticks to the task that he has been assigned. As Blue becomes more confident that Black is not going to stray from his

normal routine, he no longer feels the obligation to watch at all: "[w]hole days go by when he doesn't even bother to look through the window or follow Blue onto the street. Now and then, he even allows himself to make solo expeditions, knowing full well that during this time he is gone Black will not have budged from his spot" (Auster 1987: 156). Liberated from his position in front of the window frame, Blue frequently chooses to situate himself in front of another frame, the screen of the cinema.

Unlike *City of Glass* and *The Locked Room*, both of which are set in the present day, the events detailed in *Ghosts* occur in 1947 and 1948. It is made clear, however, that the narration occurs in the present day: "For we must remember that all this took place more than thirty years ago, back in the days of our earliest childhood" (Auster 1987: 195). This makes Blue both a contemporary and a descendent of the hardboiled detectives of the *noir* films that he goes to see: *Lady in the Lake* (based on the Raymond Chandler novel of the same name), *Fallen Angel*, *Dark Passage*, *Desperate*, and others. This dual temporal frame means that Blue is simultaneously a modernist and postmodernist detective; that is, Auster places Blue within the hardboiled genre only to strip away many of the genre's conventions, leaving Blue stranded in a situation very much unlike the cases his hard-boiled contemporaries would have to face. Blue eventually comes to suspect that Black and White are involved in a conspiratorial plot against him. This suspicion, however, can rightly be extended to include Auster as well who, as author, has written Blue into a space that exceeds his capabilities to comprehend it. Blue is a modernist detective cast adrift in

a world and involved in a case that refuses to conform to the rules of the genre and that renders Blue's traditional methodology useless.

Blue's "particular weakness for movies about detectives" (Auster 1987: 160), as well as his fondness for *True Detective* magazine, provide him with an idealized conception of detective work. What he sees within the cinematic frame differs drastically from the static non-drama he watches through his window frame. In the *noir* films that Blue watches, the cases unfold dramatically, operate according to various generic assumptions, and conclude with some sense of closure. While films such as *The Lady in the Lake* have their moments of surveillance, surveillance time is compressed. Cinema uses various devices to create the illusion of time passing in order to propel the plot forward. Surveillance is not an end in itself but only a means of introducing new information. *Ghosts*, like *City of Glass* before it, does not so much extend the detective's surveillance time but attempts to represent it in its true duration, making it a subject in itself. This attempt to represent time, paradoxically, functions as a temporal distortion since it contradicts how time usually functions within the genre of detective fiction. Blue's trips to the cinema, then, provide him with a model of how a case should unfold. That his own case would seem to contradict the smooth deployment of genre conventions which these films represent is no matter. After all, what Blue likes about the cinematic experience is "the way the pictures on the screen are somehow like the thought inside his head whenever he closes his eyes" (Auster 1987: 160). Auster's choice of *The Lady in the Lake* here is particularly telling. A unique cinematic experiment, Robert Montgomery's *The Lady*

in the Lake is shot entirely from a first person perspective. The eye of the camera coincides with the eye of the detective, Philip Marlowe. Ironically, Marlowe is played by the director himself lending the already powerful gaze of the detective an even more powerful directorial vision. In having the detective's eye augmented by the structuring position of the director, *The Lady in the Lake* is a key cinematic referent for Blue. Blue experiences reality, or, more specifically, wants to experience reality as already cinematically shaped: orchestrated by an unseen director, edited to prevent boredom and shot from his own perspective. For Blue, thoughts are cinematic and it is apparent that he frames the world in the same way, as an image or picture consisting of words: "[w]ords are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world" (Auster 1987: 146). This realist illusion conflates real space with cinematic space (and textual space as well) and anticipates Blue's frustration when reality does not conform to cinematic convention: when the case unfolding within Blue's window deviates from the cinematic model and contradicts the fantasies which unfold within the cinematic frame.

Blue's frustration with the lack of action offered by Black is doubled when he attempts to read Thoreau's *Walden*, a book he saw Black reading and which Blue bought in hopes that it would reveal something about its reader. *Walden*, however, merely replicates the lack of narrative momentum and sense of blankness that Blue views through his window. Unlike the cinema which offers him, at the very least, a coherent narrative, *Walden* lacks both content and motion: "Blue thought that he was going to get a story, or at least something like a story, but this is no more than

blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all" (Auster 1987: 163). Although Blue is able to offer an interesting account of his favourite film, *Out of the Past*, even drawing out some of its more complex narrative turns, *Walden* eludes him.

Thoreau's book, like the non-drama of *Black*, simply does not frame itself in a cinematic way. Intriguingly, the narrator breaks in at this juncture to both chastise and pity Blue:

It would be unfair to blame him, however...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 the situation - that is to say, of *Black*, of *White*, of the case, of everything that concerns him (Auster 1987: 163).

This moral gesture on behalf of the narrator indicates his frustration with Blue's inability to grasp the larger significance of *Walden* to the case in which he is involved. But this condemnation does seem somewhat disingenuous, since the totalising gesture that would enable Blue to comprehend the larger significance of *Walden*, and the case as a whole, is denied him by the limited boundaries of the task itself, the frame decided upon not by Blue but by *White*, the client.

The case, then, is framed for Blue by *White* and in the same directorial motion Blue himself is also framed. As Arthur Saltzmann suggests, "Blue's principal discovery is that he is a prisoner of the case he has undertaken" (Saltzmann 1990: 65). Blue comes not only to suspect that "Black is somehow working in league with *White*" (Auster 1987: 169), but also that he is "being observed by another in the same way that he has been observing *Black*" (Auster 1987: 168). Blue believes that he is trapped between client and opponent, between *Black* and *White*, as it were, whose

machinations are anything but transparent. Blue's one-room apartment becomes the spatial metaphor of his articulation of the plot of which he is the target:

White is the one who set the case in motion - thrusting Blue into an empty room, as it were, and the turning off the light and locking the door. Ever since, Blue has been groping about in the darkness, feeling blindly for a light switch, a prisoner of the case itself (Auster 1987: 109).

Reminding the reader of the darkened room that confined Peter and which Quinn eventually occupies, and also anticipating the very title of the trilogy's closing novel, *The Locked Room*, Auster sets up the architectural space of the room as not only an obvious symbol for confinement but as a metaphor for the subject's limited perspective. If Blue, like Quinn, functions as an extreme case of (postmodern) subjectivity, then it would follow that we are all, to a large extent, *in the dark*. That this is not an enviable position suggests why the narrator pities Blue, but the idea that this position is surmountable by a reading of *Walden* "in the spirit in which it asks to be read" (Auster 1987: 163) is questionable. If Thoreau's ultimate message in *Walden* is that one can find his or her place in the world through a process of reflection in solitude, then the narrator is frustrated that Blue is unable to capitalize on his boredom and translate it into a Thoreauvian revelation. The fact is, however, that Blue, in being framed, is offered such a limited perspective on the world that such a revelation is impossible.

This returns us to the idea of cognitive mapping, for which the multiple frames, boundaries, and spaces of *Ghosts* provide a rather different perspective. Blue does eventually realize that he has been framed, confined to a space and a task which

offers him no connection to the outside world. His reduction to a private eye/private "I" is reminiscent of Quinn's self-reduction: Blue loses his fiancée and his freedom in his pursuit of the case. Without outside referents, he is unable to situate himself in the world and is trapped hermetically in the space of the case itself. Blue's revelation, when it comes, then, is not a form of Thoreauvian self-realization but rather consists of the awareness that if he continues he will disappear, very much like Quinn, into the textual space of his own reports. The passage is worth quoting in full because it so lucidly captures Blue's assessment of his own situation, of how the textual space of the case's narrative becomes the darkened, claustrophobic space of the locked room:

They have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all. Yes, says Blue to himself, that's what it feels like: like nothing at all. He 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 alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realizes, 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? (Auster 1987: 169).

Blue, unlike Quinn, is unwilling to disappear in the textual space of the case and its narrative. The architectural space of the room and the textual space of the narrative of the case have merged, each reflects the other, and both are characterized, above all, by a nothingness.

Notes

1. Hiding behind this triad of Quinn-Wilson-Work is Auster who, like Quinn, writes *The New York Trilogy*, not based upon any experience as a detective but rather as a consumer of detective stories. This emphasizes again the lack of confrontation with reality and the mediation of experience through pop culture. The thorough intertextuality of Auster's trilogy points to a lack of authentic experience and to the oxymoronic 'textual nature' of experience which is an persistent postmodern concern. As Jameson claims, we "are condemned" in the postmodern era "to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history" (Jameson 1991: 25). Auster's postmodern detective is appropriately preceded by William Wilson (the name taken from the Edgar Allan Poe story) and Max Work (a name evoking the hard-working hard-boiled detectives) since Auster (the author and the character) is meant to function as an intertextual culmination of that tradition and a problematization of it. This, in turn, makes the novels of *The New York Trilogy* as much meta-detective novels as detective novels.
2. This is especially interesting in light of the fact that Paul Auster himself wrote a pseudonymous detective novel, using the name Paul Benjamin and titled *Foul Ball*, three years prior to the release of *City of Glass*. The novel, due to Auster's immense popularity in France, is more readily available in French translation than in the English original. *Fausse Balle*, the book's translated title, was released as part of *le serie noire*, a long established hardboiled detective series of the French publishing house Gallimard. It has since been rereleased as part of Auster's collection *La Diable dans le queue*.
3. Jameson is also often accused of this sort of nostalgia. Despite his constant denial that his analysis of postmodernism forecloses on the possibility of moral stance (it is, as he states, not a style but a condition), Jameson is often interpreted as analysing the postmodern in an 'elegiac' tone which, his detractors assume, suggests a residual modernism of a Habermasian sort.
4. See Tzvetan Todorov's essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction". In the article Todorov not only provides an intriguing categorization of detective fiction, breaking it down into sub-genres but also comments on S.S. Van Dine's formulation of the homology that drives the mystery: "author: reader = criminal: detective". This homology, which does not coincide with Quinn's analysis, is sufficient for classical detective fiction but, as Todorov notes, breaks down quite early, historically with the novels of Hammett and Chandler. It might be better argued that in modernist and postmodernist detective fiction both author and reader function as detectives signalling their shared lostness in the case and the lack of an omniscient perspective.
5. The difference, of course, being that, as a Marxist, Jameson is worried about postmodernism's inability to think historically while the situationists celebrate and attempt to accelerate its disappearance.

6. Jameson dialectically opposes the "morbid content" of schizophrenia with the possibility of "an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" (Jameson 1991: 28). While I think this accurately described the situationists' utopian ends, Quinn's utopia is largely free from these euphoric qualities, a space of indifference but also a space of self-negation.

7. The intensification of a synchronic reality that marks schizophrenia is discussed by Auster in his review of Louis Wolfson's *Les Schizos et Les Langues*. The review article, published in 1974 and intriguingly titled "New York Babel," suggests that Wolfson's schizophrenia, marked, above all, by a pathological phobia of English, allows him to give an "excruciatingly precise" account of New York street life: "There are few books that have given a more immediate feeling of what it is to live in New York and to wander through the streets of the city. Wolfson's eye for detail is excruciatingly precise, and each nuance of his observations...is rendered with attentiveness and authority. A strange movement of objectification is continually at work, and much of the fascination of the prose is a resulting of this distancing, which acts as a kind of lure, always drawing us toward what is written. By treating himself in the third person, Wolfson is able to create a space between himself and himself, to prove to himself that he exists" (Auster 1993: 30). All three of Auster's protagonists engage in this sort of self-distancing, an alienation from their own identity which amounts to an induced schizophrenia. Quinn, in particular, opens up a subjective space through an objectification of urban space not unlike the process that Auster notes in Wolfson.

8. This coincides with Foucault's analysis of the "author-function" in his "What is an Author". Foucault argues that the author is, for the most part a construct of the reader meant to allow the text a comprehensibility by limiting its possible meanings: "The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations...The author is a principle of thrift in a proliferation of meaning" (Foucault 1988: 209).

9. The spatial set-up of *Ghosts*, spying on another through a window, is a frequent urban trope, most often associated with Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, itself set in New York. Whereas Blue is reluctant to leave his apartment and confront Black because it would violate the mandate of the case, Hitchcock's protagonist (Jimmy Stewart) is immobilized by a broken leg. Forcibly confined to the spectatorial position, Stewart's surveillance is framed by the eponymous window.

CHAPTER FOUR - Disappearance and the Double

Architectural and Textual Space: The Locked Room Motif

The novel that concludes the trilogy, *The Locked Room*, continues Auster's meditation on chance, uncertainty, disappearance, identity, and the play of the double. That its title signifies an architectural space confirms that once again space is fundamental to Auster's effective deconstruction of genre paradigms. The figure of a locked room is a frequently deployed motif in detective fiction. Poe's "The Murder at Rue Morgue," has its murder unfold within a room locked from the inside, presenting Dupin with a conundrum, as the murderer would have no means of escape. The locked room, then, functions as a space of mystery, a space in which the detective's adversary may seemingly disappear, and a space that the detective must attempt to comprehend.

A brief synopsis of *The Locked Room* reveals its similarities to the preceding novels of *The New York Trilogy*. The novel's unnamed narrator receives a telephone call from Sophie Fanshawe, the wife of a childhood friend. Her husband, known simply as Fanshawe, whom the narrator has not seen in over ten years, has disappeared. Sophie informs the narrator that Fanshawe had chosen him as his literary executor. The narrator reads Fanshawe's unpublished material and, recognizing its brilliance, has it published to great acclaim. He also falls in love with Sophie and they plan to marry. The marriage is preceded, however, by a letter from Fanshawe who, as it turns out, is not dead, but does not want to be found. Still

fearing, however, that he may lose Sophie to Fanshawe if he decides to return, the protagonist insists they marry immediately. Shortly after this, the narrator is asked to write a biography of Fanshawe. He reluctantly agrees and begins to research Fanshawe's life. The narrator, however, is disturbed by Fanshawe's continued existence, a fact only he knows. His research quickly transforms into an irrational pursuit of Fanshawe, and the narrator, much like Quinn and Blue, begins to lose his sense of proportion and reality:

The book for me now only in so far as it could lead me to Fanshawe, and beyond that there was no book at all...Everything had been reduced to a single impulse: to find Fanshawe, to speak to Fanshawe, to confront Fanshawe one last time (Auster 1987: 268-269).

He does, however, recover and return to Sophie. Three years later he receives another letter from Fanshawe who wishes to meet him. The meeting takes place with Fanshawe inside a locked room and the narrator outside. Fanshawe gives the narrator a red notebook which he claims explains everything. Without ever seeing Fanshawe, the narrator departs. He reads and subsequently destroys the red notebook, without revealing its contents.

One of the most striking aspects of *The Locked Room*, and something which sets it in contrast to *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, is the absence of Fanshawe throughout the narrative. Whereas Quinn and Blue are engaged in surveillance and are allowed several opportunities to confront their opponents, the narrator of *The Locked Room* is denied Fanshawe's presence until the very end. Quinn and Blue share space with their opponent, tracking them through the space of New York City. Fanshawe's friend, in contrast, has to pursue a ghost, an absence. He does not so much share

space with Fanshawe as take over Fanshawe's place in the world. He marries Sophie and adopts Fanshawe's son Ben, thus assuming the familial space that Fanshawe had hitherto occupied. Fanshawe's disappearance is reminiscent of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Wakefield," in which the eponymous hero decides to leave his wife, without warning, and take up residence one street away in order to surreptitiously observe his wife in his absence. Notably, this story is one which Black tells Blue in *Ghosts*. Black's description of Wakefield's motivation, or lack thereof, aptly captures the sense of being pushed on by chance that pervades *The New York Trilogy*: "[h]e can't say for sure why he's doing it, but he does it just the same" (Auster 1987: 176). Hawthorne's account of Wakefield's disappearance resonates throughout *The Locked Room*: "[Wakefield] had contrived, or rather he had happened, to dissever himself from the world - to vanish - to give up his place and privileges with living men, without being admitted among the dead" (Hawthorne 1967: 98). This stands not only as a possible explanation for Fanshawe's disappearance but is seemingly applicable to Quinn's "posthumous life" (Auster 1987: 5) in *City of Glass* or Blue's abandonment of the future Mrs. Blue in *Ghosts*. In *The Locked Room* it is the narrator's task to track down the man who has contrived to vanish. In order to do so he becomes his biographer, a curious mixture of writer and detective who seeks to both find and reveal his subject, to write him both in and out of existence.

The narrator of *The Locked Room* is the first of Auster's protagonists within the trilogy to exceed the boundaries of New York City. As biographer, Fanshawe's friend makes trips to the New Jersey suburbs where he and Fanshawe grew up, and to

France where Fanshawe had lived for several years. He pursues Fanshawe and tries to recreate him, to reconstruct his vanished identity by visiting spaces that Fanshawe had once occupied and interviewing people he had known. This process, however, proves futile and the narrator realizes that he has not learned anything of worth about Fanshawe, that Fanshawe will paradoxically continue to elude him as long as he continues to look for him:

Instead of looking for Fanshawe, I had actually been running away from him. The work I had contrived for myself - the false book, the endless detours - had been no more than an attempt to ward him off, a ruse to keep him as far away from me as possible. For if I could convince myself that I was looking for him, then it necessarily followed that he was somewhere else (Auster 1987: 292).

The narrator realizes that the mystery of Fanshawe can not be fathomed through any conventional act of writing or detection. Instead, as happens to Blue in *Ghosts*, the window must become a mirror and the narrator must recognize that the mystery of Fanshawe exists in himself, that it cannot be explained by external phenomena ascertainable by the detective or writer but only through introspection:

Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there from the beginning. From the moment the letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been - but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was an impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude - living perhaps, breathing perhaps, drawing on God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull (Auster 1987: 293).

Fanshawe himself is the mystery inside the locked room. The narrator recognizes that in order to penetrate this mystery he will have to gain entry to the locked room, that is, gain entry to Fanshawe's thoughts. Once again Auster implicitly invokes

Dupin's dictum, "[a]n identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent" (Auster 1987: 40). In order to comprehend Fanshawe, the narrator must enter the locked room, to accede to Fanshawe's thoughts and to fulfil his role as Fanshawe's double; a role that has been apparent to the reader since the opening paragraph of the novel:

It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am...Whenever I think of my childhood now, I see Fanshawe. He was the one who was with me, the one who shared my thoughts, the one I saw whenever I looked up from myself (Auster 1987: 199).

The image of a locked room stands as an apt metaphor for Auster's figuration of identity in each of the three novels. It is a mysterious place and perhaps, ultimately, an impenetrable space marked by darkness, solitude and confinement. It also highlights the circular nature of Auster's meta-detective fiction. His writer-detectives may initially be propelled into urban space in search of an other but all eventually recognize that their quest is actually for themselves and that their opponents are mere doubles. The centrifugal force generated by the structure of detective fiction, projecting the detective into urban space, is transformed into a centripetal force as Auster reorients his detectives's gaze back upon themselves, their own impenetrable identities symbolized by the locked room.

Tracing Stillman's Trajectory

The penetration of Stillman's motivation in *City of Glass*, the unlocking of the meaning of the movements, comes through less an identification with their perpetrator than a similar, seemingly mad or unexplainable act by Quinn himself: "For no particular reason that he was aware of, Quinn turned to a clean page of the red notebook and sketched a little map of the area Stillman had wandered in" (Auster 1987: 67). This random and spontaneous act reveals a possibility of meaning within Stillman's movements. Mapping Stillman's walks, Quinn discovers that Stillman's steps, while appearing random, are not arbitrary at all. Seen from above, Stillman's walks form letters which, over the course of fifteen days, spell out THE TOWER OF BABEL. A form of spatial calligraphy, Stillman's movements appear to be a clear reference to his work on utopias. What disturbs Quinn is the sign's (each individual letter as well as the clue as a whole) ephemerality, a sort of writing under erasure:

For Stillman had not left his message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down. It was like drawing a picture in the air with your finger. The image vanishes as you are making it. There is no result, no trace to mark what you have done.

And yet, the pictures did exist - not in the streets where they had been drawn, but in Quinn's red notebook (Auster 1987: 71).

Quinn's cartographical representation of Stillman's movements functions as a narrativization of them, transforming them from a series of details into a trajectory. The completed trajectory, in turn, is a sign which is endowed with meaning only by figuring Stillman as an author. The individual signs (each day's walk) multiply into a

message written on the space of the city over the course of fifteen days. Space becomes text and Quinn, as cartographer, becomes the recipient of this text, closing the semiotic circle by representing space textually. As Steven Alford suggests in his article "Spaced-Out: Significance and Space in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*", the transmission of this message integrates properties of space and text:

To engender significance, Stillman's steps have to be transformed from the movements of a pedestrian through space to vectors on a map. However, "to be mapped" in one's movements implies an other to do the mapping (even if that other is *ex post facto*, oneself). The space opened between the pedestrian and the mapper is the space of signification (Alford 1995: 626).

Stillman transforms space into text through this peculiar act of writing. Going beyond Quinn, who writes in the red notebook when he walks, Stillman writes *with* his steps. This transforms space into a textual surface and, even more so than Quinn's surveillance, transforms writing and walking into one fluid gesture.

Quinn's pursuit of Stillman is reminiscent of the shadowing which forms the basis of the narrative in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd". Poe's narrator, observing the flow of pedestrians from a sidewalk cafe in nineteenth century London, spots an old man within the crowd and is intrigued by him:

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age) - a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression (Poe 1966: 218).

The narrator follows the man, struck by "a craving desire to keep the man in view - to know more of him" (Poe 1966: 218), noting both his ragged clothes and feeble

condition. This echoes the description of Stillman when Quinn first encounters him at the station. Watching the crowds disembark from the train Quinn describes the flow of people as "surging around him" (Auster 1987: 54), until finally he spots Stillman, noting, as Poe's protagonist does, the peculiarity of his expression:

He was tall, thin, without question past sixty, somewhat stooped. Inappropriately for the season, he wore a long brown overcoat that had gone to seed, and he shuffled slightly as he walked. The expression on his face seemed placid, midway between a daze and thoughtfulness. He did not look at things around him, nor did they seem to interest him (Auster 1987: 55).

Poe's narrator follows the old man throughout London, amazed by his pace and stamina. Just as Quinn is confused by Stillman's wandering so too is Poe's narrator; both Stillman and the old man proceed "without apparent aim" (Poe 1966: 219). More quickly than Quinn, however, Poe's narrator is able to recognize a pattern to the old man's wanderings: "I was surprised, however, to find, upon his having made a circuit of the square, that he turned and retraced his steps. Still more was I astonished to see him repeat the same walked several times" (Poe 1966: 219). This identification of a pattern, however, does not initially reveal any greater meaning to the old man's walks; it remains uninterpretable and the narrator admits that "I was at a loss to comprehend the waywardness of his actions" (Poe 1966: 220). This confusion and doubt of comprehensibility function as an intertextual model for Quinn and Stillman's relationship. While not a detective story proper, "The Man of the Crowd" emphasizes the spectre of incomprehensibility that is brought to the fore in examples of postmodern detective fiction. It is for perhaps this reason that Benjamin concludes that "Poe's famous tale 'The Man of the Crowd' is something like an X-ray

picture of a detective story" (Benjamin 1983: 48). Quinn, who is hired to follow Stillman, the latter day man of the crowd, becomes the *flâneur* in this X-ray: "In the *flâneur*, the joy of watching is triumphant. It can concentrate on observation; the result is the amateur detective" (Benjamin 1983: 69). Quinn, Auster's amateur detective, struggles to find meaning in the wayward movements of the old man. His inability to do so links him with Poe's narrator and, in turn, the figure of the *flâneur*.

The man of the crowd's circulation through London illuminates what in Poe's time would have been an increasingly prevalent urban phenomena: an anxiety of the crowd and a fear of objectification as a member of that crowd. The man of the crowd, whom Poe's protagonist follows throughout the night, represents a fear of the objectification of the self; the fear of disappearance within the crowd. An allegory for individuation, the story reveals an urban anxiety over the loss of identity, being swallowed by the crowd but yet somehow still needing it to affirm or locate oneself. Poe's narrator realizes this in concluding the tale: "'This old man,' I said at length, 'is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds'" (Poe 1966: 222). Just as Quinn is staggered by the insidiousness of Stillman's scheme, the bizarre way that he has chosen to transmit his message, Poe's narrator is frustrated in the end as well. Both cases seem solved in some superficial sense but still conceal some greater mystery or deviousness, pointing either to a larger, incomprehensible plan or to the uninterpretability of madness. Both the man of the crowd *and* Stillman seem instances of, to use Poe's phrase, "the genius of deep

crime", that is properly incomprehensible and horrific in a Poesque or Kafkaesque manner.

Quinn's seemingly successful attempt to decode Stillman's ambulatory deviations comes only when he assumes an additional role to that of the detective, that of a cartographer. His initial sketch of the boundaries of Stillman's divagations reveals "a conscious design" by Stillman, whose walks "kept to a narrowly circumscribed area, bounded on the north by 110th Street, on the south by 72nd Street, on the west by Riverside Park, and on the east by Amsterdam Avenue" (Auster 1987: 58). This oblong area forms a space which looks remarkably like a piece of paper, giving an indication of Quinn's subsequent realisation that it is textualized space, space that has been written upon.

Quinn is able to render Stillman's movements meaningful only when he chooses to trace them from above. At ground level Stillman's movements are incomprehensible; in order to make them cohere Quinn must assume the transcendental, Archimedean perspective of the traditional cartographer. This act, I would argue, is an act of totalisation whereby Quinn attempts to complete the picture through a mastery of space. This act of totalization is a fundamental feature of detective fiction. It is as if Quinn is taking another lesson from Poe, in addition to the one garnered from "The Purloined Letter". In "The Mystery of Rue Morgue," Dupin stresses the need to totalise by criticizing the police sergeant's focus on individual detail: "He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in doing so he,

necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole" (Poe 1966: 13). The necessity of totalisation occurs as well in the hardboiled novel, as seeing "the big picture" is a fundamental function of the detective who is forced to negotiate not merely the incompetence of the police (which is primarily stressed in Poe's works) but their corruption as well.¹ Quinn's recourse to actually mapping the case is, therefore, simply a reification of an already established detection method. He makes textual what had always been a primary cognitive function of the detective.

The most immediate precursor to Auster's textualization of this cognitive function occurs in Jorge Luis Borges's "Death and the Compass."² In that story, itself considered a primary example of postmodern detective fiction, Erik Lonrot, a police inspector, is confronted with a series of murders. Lonrot establishes that these murders are occurring along a set geographical pattern: the first in the north, the second in the west, the third in the south. In addition to this geographical design, Lonrot, through an analysis of the writings of the first victim, establishes the probability of four murders. These writings by a Jewish scholar contain a monograph on the Tetragrammaton. The Tetragrammaton, representing the name of God, consists of four letters, JHVH, which, in turn, Lonrot reckons, correspond to the four points of the compass:

Erik Lonrot studied [the locations of the first three murders]. The three locations were in fact equidistant. Symmetry in time (the third of December, the third of January, the third of February; symmetry in space as well... Suddenly, he felt as if he were on a point of solving the mystery. A set of calipers and a compass completed his quick intuition. He smiled, pronounced the word Tetragrammaton (of recent acquisition) and phoned the inspector. He said:

'Thank you for the equilateral triangle you sent me last night. It

has enabled me to solve the problem. This Friday the criminal will be in jail, we may rest assured.'

'Then they're not planning a fourth murder?'

'Precisely because they *are* planning a fourth murder we can rest assured' (Borges 1970: 112).

Lonnrot anticipates the location of the fourth murder both spatially and semiotically. That is, the fourth murder is a gesture that will complete both the spatial figure, the diamond produced by the four points of the compass, and the utterance, the fourth letter in the name of God. Just as Quinn is able to predict the trajectory of Stillman's next two walks as they will complete the phrase the Tower of Babel, Lonnrot expects the subsequent murder by anticipating spatial and semantic closure of the compass and name respectively. In a Borgesian gesture, Auster notes the final two letters of Stillman's lengthy spatial phrase: "[t]he last two letters remained - the 'E' and the 'L'...struggling through the torpor one last time, he told himself that El was the ancient Hebrew for God" (Auster 1987: 72). In both cases it is only God, or a semantic variation thereof, who can impose closure on the mystery; standing as the definitive transcendental signified, God arrests the deferral of the signified and allows the mystery to be solved. In both cases, of course, this is ironic and the idea of God as transcendental signified does not go un-deconstructed.

In "Death and the Compass", Lonnrot, anticipating the fourth murder, proceeds to the geographically predicted scene of the crime. Much like Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*, in which Wallas returns to the scene of the crime only to commit another crime in turn, Lonnrot is dizzied by a sense of unreality, primarily articulated in spatial terms:

Viewed from anear, the house of the villa of Triste-Le-Roy abounded in pointless symmetry and in maniacal repetitions...On the second floor, on the top floor, the house seemed infinite and expanding. *The house is not that large*, he thought. *Other things are making it seem larger: the dim light, the symmetry, the mirrors, so many years, my unfamiliarity, the loneliness* (Borges 1970: 114)

The house itself becomes a labyrinth³ for Lonnrot, who, in the end, is confronted by Red Scharlach, a criminal whose brother Lonnrot had arrested years earlier.

Scharlach, improvising on a sapphire heist gone wrong, concocted the entire scheme to lure Lonnrot to the fourth location. The irony, of course, is that the first murder was an accident, the result of a bungled heist, and that Scharlach only developed the stratagem after Lonnrot had begun to work on the case. Anticipating Lonnrot's cognitive abilities, Scharlach was able to work with the element of pure chance, that the first victim had been a scholar working on article on the name of God, to ensnare Lonnrot. The master criminal outwitted the master detective simply by anticipating his detection expertise. This is an obvious reversal of Poe's dictum, that the reasoner must identify with the intellect of his opponent. Borges seizes on the instabilities of these categories: it is, of course, not stated that the detective need be the reasoner and the criminal the opponent. Borges's reversal situates Scharlach as the master reasoner and Lonnrot as the opponent whose ratiocinative ability leads him to his own death.

Borges's story also reiterates the similarity between detective and criminal; the antagonists match wits through an act of identification with each other, blurring their individual identities and creating a mutual dependence. Borges emphasizes this dependence through the names of his detective and criminal. Both "Red Scharlach" and "Erik Lonnrot" evoke the colour red. In addition to his first name, the criminal's

family name translates from the German as "scarlet". The detective's name, Norwegian in origin, contains the Norwegian word for red, "rot", as well as evoking the historical name, Erik the Red. Through this act of naming, Borges blurs the distinction between the two antagonists. Red, the colour of blood, foreshadows Lonnrot's eventual death as well as creating a bond between these two "red"/blood brothers. Whereas Lonnrot's comprehension of the mystery allows him to act, to proceed to the location of the fourth murder in hopes of stopping it, Quinn does not know quite what to do when he figures out Stillman's design. He spends the final two days, the days during which Stillman completes both *THE TOWER OF BABEL* and God's name, EL, confronting Stillman in hopes of comprehending whether he presents any danger to his client. While their three meetings confirm that Stillman has embarked on a utopian project, they do not provide Quinn with any "solution" on par with Lonnrot's. Indeed, since Quinn's task is merely to follow Stillman (ironically Stillman is not a still-man at all, he walks constantly), there is no "solution" to be had. This is not to say, however, that the novel does not seek resolution, if only, as a postmodern detective novel, never to reach it. Resolution would consist of an acceptable end to the task at hand: the trailing of Stillman and the protection of Peter. Once Stillman completes his spatial writing he disappears.

Unable to track him down, Quinn phones Virginia to tell her that Stillman has evaded his surveillance. After this message, Virginia and Peter disappear as well, leaving Quinn alone in the novel, without his antagonist and without his employers. Auster's novel denies resolution by having the mechanics of the detective novel fall

apart. Quinn is left without a case, which represents, for the detective, a complete failure:

Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine (Auster 1987: 104).

Reminiscent of Wallas's despair in *The Erasers*, Quinn is lost at this point. The basis for his decision to continue is not reason but a curious notion of fate which is best conceived in terms of a paranoid determinism. The novel after this is less about Quinn's pursuit of the case than Quinn's descent into madness through his continued and irrational pursuit of the case: "[f]or the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it" (Auster 1987: 130). It is through his retreat to the small, darkened room in Peter's apartment, long since abandoned, that Quinn is equated not with his opponent but with his employer. Regressing to a wordless state, Quinn's decline is measured by the dwindling space left in the red notebook. In the red notebook he writes of utopia, not the nowhere he had initially sought through walking but a far different one. His nowhere and his self-negation becomes based on hope rather than on despair:

Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. 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. They no longer had anything to do with him (Auster 1987: 130).

In this passage we see Quinn's ultimate identification with his opponent. Echoing Stillman's utopian desires, Quinn imagines a world in which subject and object are

one, a prelapsarian paradise opposite to the fragmented New York he eventually disappears within. The similarity of Quinn's utopian writing and Stillman's utopian task, both recognize transcendence through the unification of words and things, marks a regression in Quinn's thinking rather than a progression. Quinn's failure to map the city and to "master" postmodern space is answered not by a modification of strategies and tactics that would perhaps make that space more legible, but by a withdrawal from that space altogether. Quinn finds his modernist skills outmoded and reverts to a pre-postmodern, even pre-modern, worldview. He adopts a theocentric utopianism which is a veritable continuation of the project that Stillman, now dead, embarked upon. This dynamic, the failure to adapt to postmodern space, and an inability to adopt a sensibility that would allow this adaptation, is reiterated in different ways in the other volumes of the trilogy. Auster wants to play out ways in which the leap from modernism to postmodernism can take place for his urban detectives but is, at the same time, drawn nostalgically to a pre-modern space characterized by unification rather than fragmentation.

The Confrontation of the Double

The conclusions of both *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* echo the ending of *City of Glass* insofar as all three stage confrontations between detectives and opponents. In the latter two, however, the confrontations are explicitly a confrontation of doubles. Indeed, Auster's trilogy can be read as an exploration of the ways in which the detective story and the story of the double merge. Both genres are spatial stories as their protagonists either chase or evade their double or adversary. These two actions often become confused and the detective is caught in a peculiar cycle of attraction and repulsion with his opponent. This is so much the case that, as happens to Fanshawe's biographer, the detective may come to realize that as the pursuer, he has become the pursued: "[t]he whole process had been reversed. After all these months of trying to find him, I felt as though I was the one who had been found. Instead of looking for Fanshawe, I had actually been running away from him" (Auster 1987: 292). This confusion of roles, essentially an inability to locate oneself in the situation unfolding, is reminiscent of Jacques Derrida's analysis of Poe's "The Purloined Letter." In critiquing Lacan's oedipalizing interpretation of the same story, Derrida indicates the fundamental instability of the formulaic roles of detective fiction. Auster's conventional deployment of the familiar detective fiction triad of detective - adversary - client is susceptible to the same self-deconstructing tendency Derrida identifies in "The Purloined Letter." In his analysis Derrida suggests that each role defers to another for its identity. This results in duplicitous, even

multiplicitous, (though no less oedipalized as Barbara Johnson points out), subject positions:

We have seen that *all* the characters of "The Purloined Letter," and those of the "real drama" in particular, Dupin included, successively and structurally occupied all the positions, the position of the dead-blind king (and the Prefect of Police thereby), then the positions of the Queen and of the Minister. Each position identifies itself with the other and divides itself (Derrida 1988: 203).

The confrontations which conclude *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* are efforts by their respective protagonists to arrest this ceaseless deferral and to stabilize the subject position with which they primarily identify: writer-detective.

Blue comes to recognize that a confrontation with Black is inevitable when he understands that escape is impossible. Blue acknowledges that Black is his double and that, unless he kills him, there can be no escape:

[t]hen, from out of the blue, he begins to consider another possibility. What if he just simply left? What if he stood up, went out the door, and walked away from the whole business? He ponders this thought for a while, testing it out in his mind, and little by little he begins to tremble, overcome by terror and happiness, like a slave stumbling upon a vision of his own freedom. He imagines himself somewhere else, far away from here, walking through the wood...But this is as far as he gets. For no sooner does he begin to walk through the 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. It goes on and on, Blue thinks. If he doesn't take care of Black now, there will never be any end to it (Auster 1987: 186-187).

Blue, like Robert Mitchum in *Out of the Past*, is a man marked by fate, a fate which he cannot avoid. Blue's conclusion to his analysis of *Out of the Past* seems, at this later point in the narrative, prescient:

[s]omething happens, Blue thinks, and then it goes on happening

forever. It can never be changed, can never be otherwise. Blue begins to be haunted by this thought, for he sees it as a kind of warning, a message delivered up from himself, and try as he does to push it away, the darkness of this thought does not leave (Auster 1987: 162).

Before Blue's confrontation with Black, he breaks into Black's apartment and steals some of his papers. When he returns to his apartment to read them, he discovers that they are nothing but his own reports. This confirms his suspicion that Black is in league with White. More disturbingly perhaps, it presents the possibility that *Black is White*. This paradox, an absolute disruption in Blue's realist epistemology, engenders Blue's breakdown and, as the narrator states: "It is not certain that Blue ever really recovers from the events of this night" (Auster 1987: 189). Like Quinn who, in the end, realizes that the case is really about him rather than Stillman (Auster 1987: 130), Blue recognizes that he too is the centre of the story that is being told:

For several days, Blue does not bother to look out the window. He has enclosed himself so thoroughly in his own thoughts that Black no longer seems to be there. The drama is Blue's alone, and if Black is in some sense the cause of it, it's as though he has already played his part, spoken his lines, and made his exit from the stage (Auster 1987: 190).

Whereas Fanshawe's biographer recognizes that Fanshawe exists inside him as much as outside him, Blue hovers on the brink of this recognition. Unable to accept his equivalence with Black, he must deny Black's existence:

For Blue at this point can no longer accept Black's existence, and therefore denies it. 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 without a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he could no longer conceive of being anywhere

else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it (Auster 1987: 190).

Blue cannot bring himself to acknowledge that there exists, as in the case of Fanshawe's biographer, a locked room inside his head in which Black, and the mystery surrounding Black, dwells. The final confrontation of *Ghosts* marks the penetration of this space. Unlike Blue's first foray into this space, during which he "stood there alone", his second breach of the room will bring him face to face with his double and will force him to acknowledge, and ultimately violently act upon, the equivalence he had hitherto denied.

When Blue enters Black's apartment, Black confronts him with a revolver. Blue, fatalistically, walks toward him and Black fails to fire. This gives Blue the advantage and, swatting the gun from Black's hand, Blue proceeds to beat Black to a point (he, ironically, beats him black and blue) where "he cannot say whether Black is alive or dead" (Auster 1987: 195). The confrontation between Blue and Black evokes the final confrontation in Poe's "William Wilson." In that story, William Wilson is pursued by his double, a man who shares his name as well as his countenance. The chase ends in Rome, where Wilson, driven mad by his double, stabs him repeatedly "in an absolute phrenzy of wrath" (Poe 1966: 169), after many years of being pursued, shadowed, and haunted by his adversary. Wilson discovers, however, that in killing his double, he has also killed himself. This is evident in his double's dying pronouncement:

You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead - dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist - and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how

utterly thou has murdered thyself (Poe 1966: 170).

Similarly, Blue's identity becomes confused with Black's and, after their struggle, Blue "removes the mask from Black's face and puts his ear against his mouth, listening for the sound of Black's breath. There seems to be something, but he can't tell if it's coming from Black or himself" (Auster 1987: 195). Blue escapes the room and thereby escapes the haunting presence of Black. He has penetrated the locked room in which his double dwells and he has emerged from it. Stealing Black's complete manuscript and reading it, Blue discovers that he knew its story already. The mystery of the case, never revealed to the reader, remains in the textual space of Black's notebook and Blue, entering that space, recognizes that he had been there all along. Black's story is his own and the story ends only when Blue is able to escape this textual space, the locked room that had contained both him and Black. From there Blue, having exhausted the (textual) space in which he resided, like Quinn and the red notebook, disappears: "For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment, we know nothing" (Auster 1987: 196).

The final confrontation in *The Locked Room* occurs, notably, through "closed double doors" (Auster 1987: 304), with Fanshawe's biographer on the outside, and Fanshawe himself within. Fanshawe, like Black, has a gun but refuses to even allow his adversary into the room. Fanshawe's biographer remains at a remove from Fanshawe and, unlike Blue, is unable to penetrate the space of the locked room. Fanshawe explains that he had been endlessly pursued by a private detective named

Daniel Quinn. Auster, through this intertextual gesture, collapses the fictional space of each individual novel into one. In what Stephen Bernstein terms "the key metafictional pronouncement of *The Locked Room*" and "by extension...the entire *New York Trilogy*" (Bernstein 1995: 99), the narrator of *The Locked Room* reveals himself to be the author of all three novels:

[t]he entire story comes down to what happened in the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds true for the two books that come 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 (Auster 1987: 294).

What each of these stories is about, however, ultimately remains hidden from the reader. In each case the mystery has escaped the confines of a locked room in the textual form of a (red) notebook but what these notebooks may be able to tell us about the fundamental mysteries the stories hold is still in doubt. Although the red notebook in *City of Glass* allows the narrator to retrace Quinn's trajectory, it denies a complete reconstruction of what "actually" happened: "[t]he red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand" (Auster 1987: 132). Likewise, Black's manuscript only tells Blue what he already knows; it is fundamentally incomplete despite the fact that Blue knows "it all by heart" (Auster 1987: 195).

It is only with *The Locked Room* that the reader is offered a clear sense of what is contained in the red notebook. The final notebook stands metonymically for the others and for the mysteries of all three locked rooms. Fanshawe's biographer reads the notebook but is unable to comprehend it. In its transition from the symbolic

space of the locked room to the textual space of the red notebook, the mystery has not subsided but only intensified:

I at last opened the notebook, I read steadily for almost an hour, flipping back and forth among the pages, trying to get a sense of what Fanshawe had written. If I say nothing about what I found there, it is because I understood very little. All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out (Auster 1987: 313-314).

The notebooks, in the end, can tell us nothing. Although the individual may escape his double and emerge from the locked room more or less intact, the mystery that the locked room both holds and symbolizes cannot be brought out of that space. This is because, as Steven Alford notes, the mysteries that pervade the locked room, primarily the mysteries of identity and meaning, exist in the world as well:

The detectives and searchers in Auster's fiction, by contrast, realize that possession of meaning invariably lies in becoming one with the other, the object of their surveillance or search. What they do not realize, and what carries the main thematic weight of these texts, is that they have failed to take the next step, the movement from the violent confrontation with the self-other to the realization that both figure in a larger whole, that a set of texts, whose shifting relations of difference and deferral form what we know as the world (Alford 1995: 30).

The mysteries which exist in the locked room persist in the real world itself which, in its totality, resists comprehension and leaves Auster's writer-detectives nowhere. In a world in which everything refers to everything else and there is no position from which to see the whole, the locked room is turned inside out and the world comes to simulate it. Both the interior, architectural space of the locked room and the exterior, geographic space of the city are paradoxical spaces, spaces in which the detective, the subject, is both confined and free to wander.

If the novels of *The New York Trilogy* create this paradoxical space marked by both confinement and freedom then it may be possible, in the figure of the author himself, to posit a quasi-transcendent position. Auster creates in these three novels elaborate locked room puzzles which frustrate the analytical capacity of both his protagonists and his readers. "Paul Auster" is metafictionally pervasive throughout the text, existing as both, in Madeleine Sorapure's terms, a "marginal character" and the "master plotter" (Sorapure 1995: 85). Indeed, Auster's desire to stand both inside and above his own fictional texts is a desire to have the best of both worlds. By being both author and character Auster insists that he is simultaneously enmeshed in the same confusing reality that frustrates his protagonist writer-detectives and that he, as author, is uniquely able to sort things out and fashion them into narrative. This dual existence is a similar basis for the accusation that Kristin Ross levels at Jameson, most pointedly articulated when she asks, "[i]s Jameson's desire Marlowesque, that is, does he stand outside postmodernism to explain and judge it? (Ross 1992: 55). With this in mind it remains difficult and perhaps even untenable to adhere to Jameson's willingness to totalize. Nevertheless, an adherence is recognizable in many evaluations of Jameson, as in this appraisal by Martin Jay:

Jameson self-consciously takes on the role of high-wire performer, but one willing to risk gazing into the abyss beneath. Seeking to provide a "cognitive map" of the territory beneath him, anxious to discern the "cultural logic" underpinning the changing forms of its seemingly chaotic surface, he boldly assumes the high-altitude vantage point of the synoptic totalizer. Indeed, the much maligned concepts of totality and totalization are ones he hopes to rescue - rightly I would argue - from their currently debased status as the handmaidens of totalitarianism (Jay 1993: 296).

Even if Jameson's assumption of the role of cognitive cartographer is "self-conscious" in the way Jay describes, it remains deeply problematic since the sheer possibility of such a position continues to be a contentious issue. While Marxists such as Jay and Jameson remain confident of the possibility of such a vantage point, other critics, such as Ross, see it as illusory, a remnant of an earlier era and epistemology which still appeals to these would-be Marlowesque heroes, whether authors or critics.

If Jay's justification of Jameson's analytical position rests on the latter's "self-conscious" meta-critical perspective, one can see also how Auster's authorial position might be said to rest upon his "self-conscious" meta-fictional practice. Both Auster and Jameson would retain in this gesture a privileged vantage point denied to their readers. By naming a character after himself Auster implies that he too is caught up in the same confusions and paradoxes that his novels explore. This, I would argue, is not dissimilar to Jameson's occasional confession, most notably in his analysis of the Bonaventure hotel, that postmodern space bewilders him. Despite their mutual acknowledgment that they too exist in the labyrinthine space they seek to represent, Auster and Jameson retain for themselves the ability to assume a vantage point above this space which offers a unique and privileged perspective. Madeleine Sorapure notes that Auster retains this position only after imparting to his readers the knowledge that such a position exists:

the author-function in detective fiction provides the basis on which detective and reader can move with assurance through the text; positioned beyond the events of the text, the author, in effect, guarantees that there is such a position. *City of Glass*, however, insistently frustrates the efforts of its author characters to achieve an author's perspective on events in which they are engaged. The novel

frustrates, as well, the reader's or critic's attempt to locate the real Paul Auster behind the scenes (Sorapure 1995: 85).

Whether this position is "guaranteed" and ensures smooth movement through the text as Sorapure suggests remains a point of contention. I would argue that Auster's complex metafictional strategies could themselves imply an anxiety on the author's behalf as to whether he really does occupy a privileged position over his own texts. Nevertheless, and despite this anxiety, Auster does assume this position. And, as will be discussed in my concluding chapter, Auster's assumption of this perspective, both implicated within and somehow still above his own fiction, represents both a utopian gesture and a desperate one, the desire to forestall the fragmentation of postmodernism through a perhaps impossible totalizing gesture.

Notes

1. For Chandler's Marlowe the ability to totalise, the mastery of space through an always present cartographical function (even if Marlowe does not explicitly map, his intimate knowledge of the Greater Los Angeles area indicates a perpetual mapping), represents not only a spatial and cognitive ability but a concomitant political one as various law enforcement boundaries (municipal, state and federal) have to be negotiated as they are transgressed. Marlowe's mapping of the Los Angeles area marks an overlapping of spaces within a single space as Marlowe attempts to discern the truth from the various representations, often contradictory, offered by the different levels of law enforcement. See Jameson's "On Raymond Chandler" (1972).
2. Borges's "The Library of Babel" is also a significant intertext here. Auster follows Borges in his recurrent thematization of the textual and the association of it with mystery and intrigue.
3. It is interesting to note the extent to which Borges's description of Lonrot's passage through the house at Triste-Le-Roy or Robbe-Grillet's of Wallas's passage through Dupont's house, both articulated in terms of uneasiness, disorientation and repetition, reminiscent of Jameson's descriptions of both his explorations of the Bonaventure Hotel and Frank Gehry House. This is not to suggest that either of these fictional structures are representative of postmodern architecture, but it does seem legitimate to say that it is a key postmodern characteristic to represent space in this way. The labyrinth, as Borges would indicate, has been around since ancient times, but it does seem imbued with added significance, and used with increasing frequency in contemporary times. This is, if we follow Jameson, part of an attempt to articulate a new "experience of space" (Jameson 1991: 43) which figures directly on notions of disorientation and dislocation.

CHAPTER FIVE - *Totality, Fragmentation, and Nostalgia*

Paranoia, Conspiracy and Postmodern Detective Fiction

Quinn's initial reaction to Stillman's spatio-textual message is a sort of nausea brought on by disbelief. This feeling is succeeded by skepticism, a belief that he willed the message into the maps himself:

[t]he letters continued to horrify Quinn. The whole thing was so oblique, so fiendish in its circumlocutions, that he did not want to accept it. Then doubts came, as if on command, filling his head with mocking sing-song voices. He had imagined the whole thing. The letters were not letters at all. He had seen them only because he wanted to see them. And if the diagrams did form letters, it was only a fluke. Stillman had nothing to do with it. It was all an accident, a hoax he had perpetrated on himself (Auster 1987: 71).

This skepticism, though strong, never displaces Quinn's belief that Stillman is behind the letters. Quinn puts Stillman in the position of Foucauldian author-function and wills the motivation, the coherent intention upon him. Quinn, as detective, makes the assumption of sanity and purpose on his antagonist's behalf; without this assumption it would be impossible to continue. The peculiar method of Stillman's plot, however, points to a deviousness that Quinn had not imagined. This moment figures as a key point in Quinn's psychological decline. The obliqueness of the clues, combined with the fact that Quinn stumbled upon the key to decipher them, induces a sort of paranoia in Quinn:

Quinn's mind dispersed. He arrived in a neverland of fragments, a place of wordless things and thingless words...In his dream, which he later forgot, he found himself in the town dump of his childhood, sifting through a mountain of rubbish (Auster 1987: 72).

The dispersal of Quinn's mind, the beginning of a nightmarish rather than pleasurable loss, into a "neverland" rather than a "nowhere", marks the beginning of a paranoia. This paranoia is merely an extension of the original detective's dictum that everything is a potential clue, that it is the detective who "demands that the world reveal itself to him" (Auster 1987: 9). From this demand arises the belief that everything is simultaneously significant and cryptic. This extreme belief in the significance of things and the resultant proliferation of potential clues also occurs in Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*. In that novel, Fabius, Wallas's mentor, descends into a sort of paranoia. His previously meticulous analysis becomes hampered by a chronic positivism:

despite his attachments to old-fashioned method, even his adherents reproach him occasionally for a kind of irresolution, a marked discretion that makes him hesitate about accepting even the most established facts. The perspicacity with which he detected the slightest weak point in a suspicious situation, the intensity of impulse that carried him to the very threshold of the enigma, his subsequent indefatigable patience in recomposing the threads that had been revealed, all this seemed to turn at times into the sterile skepticism of a fanatic. Already people were saying that he mistrusted any easy solutions, now it is whispered that he has ceased to believe in the existence of any solution whatever (Robbe-Grillet 1964: 56).

With Fabius, Robbe-Grillet creates a transitional figure, a classic detective who, caught in an increasing complex world which weaves increasingly intricate plots, succumbs to a paralysis of indecision.¹ His skepticism, as Robbe-Grillet indicates, ultimately leads to total epistemological collapse, a refusal to believe in solutions at all. This is a situation crippling to the ordinary individual and even less tenable for the detective, whose purpose, after all, is to reveal solution and not to abandon the

possibility of it. Fabius's paralysis anticipates Quinn's paralysis. Both men represent a refusal to relinquish an older method of detection which has been proven unworkable, a relic from a different period. Blue, in *Ghosts*, understands that his methodology is outdated but can find nothing to replace it. Reaching a point at which he recognizes that he "was nowhere... [h]e had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing" (Auster 1987: 104), Quinn, ironically, intensifies his pursuit of the case and becomes increasingly incapable of separating the extraneous from the consequential. He is driven by the sense of deterministic paranoia. Quinn interprets everything at this point as an indication that he should continue the case: "The busy signal he saw now, had not been arbitrary. It had been a sign, and it was telling him that he could not yet break his connection with the case, even if he wanted to" (Auster 1987: 111). Despite the disappearance of the elder Stillman and his inability to contact Virginia Stillman (which points to the younger Stillman's disappearance as well), Quinn doggedly persists in his attempt to bring the case to resolution.

Quinn's Sisyphean effort to close the case links him both to an earlier existential paradigm, as figured in the hardboiled detectives, and a postmodern irrationality in which fate is construed as conspiracy and engenders a general sense of paranoia. This sense of paranoia features prominently in postmodern detective fiction as the ability to comprehend the larger picture is negated and a limited individual perspective is projected to occupy the void left by an absent totality. Here again, the concept of cognitive mapping arises, so Jameson argues, because this cognitive and allegorical function can properly fill that void and allow the individual some sense of

situation and location. As Jameson argues in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, paranoia, and the impression of conspiracy that arises from it, mark an inability to cognitively map properly. And, as the various communication, transportation, and dissemination technologies that both constitute and allegorically represent postmodernism become more labyrinthine and global, the sense of conspiracy also becomes more pervasive.

Jameson notes this in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

Yet conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt - through the figuration of advanced technology - to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system. It is in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that, in my opinion, the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized (Jameson 1991: 38).

In this passage, Jameson provides a specifically spatial conception of both postmodernism and conspiracy. Totality is confirmed as both a geographic and political phenomenon (hence his favoured use of "geopolitical" to describe the new global space of late capitalism), which can only be inadequately mapped by the individual who is denied a transcendental, cartographical perspective. Jameson's privileged cognitive mappers all function as detective figures: from his valorization of Marlowe (as more a prototype, pre-postmodern figure) in "On Raymond Chandler" to his focus on journalists Woodward and Bernstein in his analysis of Alan J. Pakula's *All The President's Men* (1975) in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. Jameson's focus on Pakula's so-called "Paranoia Trilogy", *Klute* (1972), *The Parallax View* (1974), and *All the President's Men* initially strikes one as pre-postmodern, especially if resolution is taken as an impossibility in "true" conspiracy.² The recent groundswell in the

popularity of conspiracy as a narrative focus, exemplified by television's *X-Files* and a range of Kennedy conspiracy material, including Oliver Stone's film *JFK* (1991), Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), and James Ellroy's *American Tabloid* (1995), hint at a more total, more all-pervasive conspiracy which perfectly fits the structural demands of an ongoing television series or the need for filmic or novelistic sequelization.

The irresolution of the contemporary conspiracy narrative is repeated in various examples of postmodern detective fiction. Jameson focuses on Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* to illustrate the way in which cognitive mapping has both a literal and an allegorical function: conspiracy in that novel is not only represented by various communication networks, but is also *inscribed in the landscape itself*. Oedipa Maas's attempt to sort through the various clues of the Trystero postal conspiracy is matched by her movements through the California landscape, which operates as yet another network despite its residual "natural" elements. As Jameson notes, it seems as though Pynchon's novel aspires "to contaminate its readers and beyond them to endow the present age itself with an impalpable but omnipresent culture of paranoia" (Jameson 1992: 17). Oedipa, as detective, is caught up in this contamination when she becomes incapable, as Quinn does, of sorting the extraneous from the significant and is left with a morass of clues which cannot be unified into a coherent narrative to dispell the sense of conspiracy.

This sense of conspiracy is articulated in *City of Glass* not by name, but rather through a peculiar conception of "fate" in a universe that is clearly not God-centered. Fate is figured as an absent referent, a conspiratorial forward motion which pushes

Quinn to an anticipated but never achieved resolution:

Was 'fate' really the word that he wanted to use? It seemed like such a ponderous and old-fashioned choice. And yet, as he probed more deeply into it, he discovered that was precisely what he meant to say. Or, if not precisely, it came closer than any other term he could think of. Fate in the sense of what was, of what happened to be. It was something like the word 'it' in the phrase 'it is raining' or 'it is night.' What that 'it' referred to Quinn had never known. A generalized state of things as they were, perhaps; the state of is-ness that was the ground on which the happenings of the world took place (Auster 1987: 111).³

By grounding the operations of fate on a "generalized state of things", Quinn points to an incomprehensible and immense totality as the driving force behind the movements of the world. Blue accepts the "old-fashioned" designation "fate" and recognizes his submissive position before it: "[t]his is what the ancients called fate, and every hero must submit to it" (Auster 1987: 187). Whether this is conspiracy as such is not so important as that it functions like conspiracy.⁴ It is a fatalism derived from the belief that things are beyond our control (reinforcing the puppetry and ventriloquism references in the novel) and beyond our comprehension. Quinn marks the transformation of the detective into the paranoiac, defined by Lesley Stern in this passage:

The paranoiac suffers from "delusions of reference": everything means something, every utterance and image refers to something else, the world is full of signs, of coded messages. When Freud says, in a throwaway remark, that "paranoiac delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system," I take him to mean that paranoia is something like a perversion of rational thought, a parody of the (philosophical) interpretive method (Stern 1995: 86).

To amend this, paranoia marks a perversion of the detective's methodology, based as it is on rational thought and the ability to interpret reality. Paranoia transforms the

world of the detective into an incomprehensible whole in which the meaning of individual clues is infinitely deferred. Combined with Quinn's ultimately hardboiled tenacity and refusal to abandon the case, this sense of an ungraspable totality results in stasis. Since the city becomes representative of the total (just as Southern California functioned in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Manhattan functions as a bounded metonym for totality), and the total is recognized as cognitively insurmountable, Quinn's reaction is to remain static. He gives up walking and turns to immobile surveillance as he camps outside Peter and Virginia's apartment, despite the fact that they have abandoned it.

Before he abandons walking, however, Quinn wanders freely once more. His walk takes him through nearly the whole of the island. It is significant that he chooses not to leave the island; a momentary impulse to take the Staten Island ferry is thwarted and a possible escape from "fate," one feels, escapes as well. Freed from following Stillman, Quinn indulges in the aleatory. Despite this freedom, however, Quinn is unable to achieve his usual and pleasurable "emptiness." Instead he is unusually focused on the events occurring around him. Quinn ultimately submits to the impulse to record the various narrative fragments unfolding in the city-space around him:

For the first time since he had bought the red notebook, what he wrote that day had nothing to do with the Stillman case. Rather, he concentrated on the things he had seen while walking. He did not stop to think about what he was doing nor did he analyse the possible implications of this unc customary act. He felt an urge to record certain facts, and he wanted to put them on paper before he forgot them (Auster 1987: 108).

The things that Quinn records that day point to his ongoing identification with Stillman. Quinn's notes are largely a catalogue of the "drifters and drunks" (Auster 1987: 108) that occupy New York's streets and who are the "broken people" (Auster 1987: 78) to whom Stillman refers. Whereas prior to becoming a detective Quinn's walks transformed New York into a nowhere, an emptying of content, his walks now are marked by a surplus of content: the narrative fragments regarding the "broken people" that he records in his red notebook. Heeding the detective's dictum and recording each potential clue, which is to say recording *everything*, Quinn becomes cognizant of the inexhaustibility of totality. His new identity as detective forces him to attempt to sort through "this morass of objects and events" in hope of grasping "the idea that will pull all these things together" (Auster 1987: 8), but it is a task that is beyond him and his capabilities. The postmodern detective, and by analogy, the postmodern writer, cannot pull the world together in this way. As Jonathan Raban states in *Soft City*, this effort to bring things together is made impossible by the expanse and chaotic movement of the postmodern city:

the city and the book are opposed forms: to force the city's spread contingency and aimless motion into a tight progression of a narrative is to risk a total falsehood. There is no single point from which one can grasp the city as a whole (Raban 1974: 222).

Totalization, Raban indicates, contra Jameson, is a capacity which exceeds that of the individual and which, if we look at Quinn's "fate", engenders a sort of paralysis.

Quinn's maniacal focus on Peter and Virginia's empty apartment represents a deranged attempt at total surveillance. It is primarily a wrong-headed effort to comprehend the totality since it focuses on the temporal rather than the spatial. While

Blue recognizes there are limits to surveillance which deny its absolute efficacy, Quinn does not. Acting on the idea that "[a]nything less than constant surveillance would be as no surveillance at all" (Auster 1987: 143), begins to camp out in an alley outside Peter's apartment. Quinn, for a matter of months, slips into a paralytic stasis. He does not move and this absence of movement, ironically, allows him what he had desired all along, to disappear: "How he managed to keep himself hidden during this period is a mystery... Remarkable as it seems, no one ever noticed Quinn. It was though he had melted into the walls of the city" (Auster 1987: 116).

One Totality

Auster's effective deconstruction of the detection paradigm, and analogously, the authorial paradigm, functions on a conflict between representation and totality or between narrativization and narrative fragmentation and proliferation. In each case the city plays a primary role as a representation of (seeming) inexhaustibility, stretching the concept of totality across a spatial canvas. To import Jameson into this analysis is to suggest the possibility of grasping this inexhaustibility specifically through a process of seizing on its spatial characteristics, abstracting and projecting from a specific location a totality in all its immensity. *City of Glass*, as well as *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*, I would argue, problematizes the possibility of this projection at the same time it gives hope for its eventual achievement elsewhere. It

does not seem enough to say that Quinn is mad or to say that he is merely incapable of making the transition from author to detective. The novel instead suggests a discrepancy between individual and world that seizes upon a larger and more generalizable cultural incapability of the sort that Jameson indicates. Quinn seems incapable of negotiating a situation that he has freely entered into. Not unlike the familiar Hitchcockian motif of "a ordinary man in a extraordinary situation" (and we are reminded of the role of chance in thrusting Cary Grant into the spy plot of *North by Northwest*), Quinn becomes part of a larger plot that exceeds his capabilities. The "extraordinary situation" in this case, however, refers not only to the case that Quinn finds himself involved in (which is characteristically hard-boiled: rich family, bizarre circumstances, *femme fatale*) but also to the space that Quinn is forced to map which is the space of New York City. What makes this space extraordinary in its malleability. At times, particularly during Quinn's drifting episodes, it is the Jameson's "postmodern hyperspace", a Koolhaasian "Delirious New York" of discontinuities and fragmentation. At other times, it is residually modern, the space of Grand Central or the gridded streets where Quinn performs his "glorified tail job" (Auster 1987: 29) in the manner of a Marlowe or a Sam Spade.

Ironically, though, it is perhaps this spatial juxtaposition which signals Auster's New York as specifically postmodern. There is something telling in Quinn's trajectory in the final phases of the plot. He writes the observations garnered from his final day of walking in his red notebook on "a stone bench in the plaza" (Auster 1987: 108) of the United Nations. This choice of location, the United Nations

building, a paradigmatic instance of architectural high modernism, signals the last attempt by Quinn to put it all in perspective. The building, a virtual Miesian gesture of transcendence, signals both the eclipse of that era and the onset of a new one. The monolithic tower reinforces the logical clarity of a gridded structure and spatially represents an intense rationality. The accompanying building with its sweeping arc of a roof stands as a counterpoint to the rigid lines of the taller structure; the juxtaposition is virtually a foreshadowing of how the modernist paradigm is to be eclipsed by a fundamentally different and far less linear sort of thinking. The image of Quinn in the plaza, in a final attempt to bring it all together, brings to mind the accompanying image in (once again) *North by Northwest* in which Cary Grant runs across the empty plaza viewed from the transcendent aerial perspective of Hitchcock's camera. While the vertiginous angle combined with the disorienting juxtaposition of the two buildings points to an omniscient perspective in the film (which is ultimately Hitchcock's own perspective), the image of Quinn in the plaza is forcefully grounded by the stone bench and Quinn's lack of motion. Of course it is the beginning of Cary Grant's adventure but the beginning of the end of Quinn's. From here he proceeds into more and more bounded spaces. The vista of the plaza is replaced first by the alley, a distinct descent from the transcendent Hitchcockian perspective to the level of the street. Here Quinn spends "many hours looking up at the sky." His world, bounded by "the bin and the wall" (Auster 1987: 117), is reduced to a vertical perspective. It is then replaced by Peter Stillman's room, a simulacra of the room he was confined in as a child and a room completely blocked from sunlight. Quinn goes

from no walls to two walls to four walls, absolute enclosure in a virtually womb-like space. This trajectory marks Quinn's gradual withdraw from space which concludes with his eventual disappearance. Quinn achieves his utopia by disappearing into a no-where. Where this no-where is located is in textual void of the red notebook: "Quinn literally vanishes from the text when he runs out of space in his red notebook" (Russell 1990: 75). Unable to deal with the postmodern space of New York City, Quinn retreats through a series of ever-enclosing spaces (an anxiety of totality) until his eventual disappearance, an achievement of his utopian desires, into a nowhere of unmappable space.

Two Paintings

The question of whether totalization of the Jamesonian sort, achieved through the process of cognitive mapping, is possible can be further investigated through an analysis of two paintings specifically thematizing space and representation. Like Auster's trilogy, these paintings correlate the analytical with the geographical, emphasizing the relation between the detective, the geographer, and the writer. First is the painting is featured on the cover of Jameson's *Signatures of the Visible*, a companion volume to *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* which also explores the representation of space in contemporary cinema: Vermeer's *The Geographer*. Though there is no reference to Vermeer or this specific painting in the text, it is the spectre

of Vermeer's cartographer that haunts Jameson's text. In an effort "to rethink [various] specialized and cartographical issues in terms of social space" (Jameson 1991: 52), Jameson seeks both to eclipse the classical model of cartography (reliant as it is on a now untenable empiricism) and retain key aspects of it, most notably its ability (or its boldness) to conceptualize the whole. Jameson's cognitive cartographer is ultimately a descendent of Vermeer's geographer. Jameson wants to maintain a family resemblance, the acquired ability to grasp the whole, at the same time that he wants an evolutionary progression in order to deal with a new kind of space. The second painting is brought to mind by the inclusion of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* as a valuable point of comparison for Auster's text. Mark Tansey's painting *Robbe-Grillet Cleansing Everything in Sighs*⁵ stands as a counterpoint to Vermeer's *The Geographer*. Unlike Vermeer's geographer, who stands confidently above his map with a pair of compasses, Tansey's painting depicts Robbe-Grillet on his hands and knees in a desert strewn with enigmatic objects. In the painting Robbe-Grillet is forcefully scrubbing an object. Behind him are objects which he has clearly already cleaned. These objects have revealed themselves through his work: a cube, a small stone horse, a sphere, a small replica of the Sphinx, and so on. Tansey's painting shows the author brought down to ground level. Denied the transcendental perspective of the classical cartographer, the author sorts through the earth's clutter bit by bit. More disturbingly, the clutter extends to the horizon, suggesting that the task is infinite and will never be completed. Despite this, Robbe-Grillet continues on. If we take Quinn's and Auster's analysis that the author and detective are

interchangeable as true, then we can perhaps substitute in Tansey's painting the (postmodern) detective for the (postmodernist) Robbe-Grillet. The stones, then, represent potential clues and the near infinity of clues points to the impossibility of gathering all the clues, let alone assembling them in a coherent order which would reveal a solution. As for Tansey's choice to place Robbe-Grillet in a desert, it might be helpful to invoke Jean Baudrillard's assessment of New York as an example of city as desert, an immense space, seemingly empty, yet cluttered with all manner of things. Auster, in a passage already cited, places Quinn instead at a garbage dump sifting through rubbish. Even more than a desert this identifies the task of the detective as a process of sorting through rubbish, other people's detritus, hoping to find, or unearth, to borrow the archaeological term, the clue that will bring the narrative together. The odds against this discovery are staggering, and like the garbage dump that grows exponentially over time so too does the amount of clues in the postmodern "junk heap" (Auster 1987: 78) of New York City, transforming, analogously, an environmental crisis into an epistemological crisis.

Three Utopian Gestures

Another intriguing point of comparison through which we can further delineate Auster's and Jameson's epistemological positions is Wim Wenders's film *Wings of Desire* (1987). Wenders's film presents us with a fragmented Berlin as brought together by the aerial perspective of its angel protagonists, Daniel and Cassiel. In the film's virtuoso opening sequence, Wenders's camera glides and soars through the skies over Berlin eventually descending into a labyrinth of apartment blocks, back alleys and desolate rooftops. Further it descends into the automobiles of individual commuters, and underground into the Berlin metro. This perspective, free from the bounds of gravity, is an angelic perspective, rendered in monochrome to distinguish it from actual human experience. The angels are Wenders's transcendental gesture, an attempt to record the everyday movement and experience of citydwellers, transforming the quotidian into the historical. As Cassiel reminds Daniel, their duty is "to observe, collect, testify, preserve" (Wenders 1987). The angels' task is historical, to preserve the things usually forgotten, as Cesare Casarino suggests:

They roam around the city daily in search of events to write down in their books. The first time we see Daniel and Cassiel together, they are taking a pause from this search: they are sitting in a car, parked in a show room, and they exchange the stories of the day's labor...The stories they have collected belong to the realm of those (minor yet pivotal) epiphanies which are usually washed away unnoticed in the daily flow of urban simultaneous multiplicities: a woman who stops walking in the pouring rain, closes her umbrella, and lets herself get drenched; a man pasting his rare stamps on letters to be sent away; an old blind woman groping for her watch, and suddenly feeling the angel's presence...[these events] witness and fulfill (even though in the image of a fleeting moment) a desire to break away, a will to resist.

These acts of resistance are the punctuations and caesurae of the otherwise undifferentiated) monotonies of everyday life (Casarino 1990: 171).

This emphasis on the "minor yet pivotal epiphanies" of everyday life recalls the oppositional gestures of the situationists, the key exception being that they are not intentional but instead revelatory. As Casarino argues, they cannot be translated into a specifically oppositional practice attempting to overthrow the hegemony of monotony of the everyday but rather are isolated and fragmented epiphanies.⁶ When Quinn wanders freely through the city again, momentarily freed from his pursuit of Stillman he submits to an impulse to record "certain facts" (Auster 1987: 108). These entries in the red notebook are similar to the minor epiphanies that Daniel and Cassiel record. They are simultaneously banal and profound: he records the lost souls of New York City, the destitute and the insane, perhaps aware that he is soon to join their ranks. Quinn momentarily assumes a position equivalent to that of Daniel and Cassiel. In wanting to "record certain facts...to put them down on paper before he forgot them" (Auster 1987: 108), he assumes the angelic task to "observe, collect, testify, preserve" (Wenders 1987). This fundamentally historical task runs counter to postmodernism's disappearance of history, as identified by Jameson. It is both a transcendental gesture, an effort to see it all, equivalent to the aerial and cartographical perspective, and a nostalgic gesture, a yearning for a lost unity that probably never existed.

Comparing Wenders's angels to Benjamin's angel of history, Casarino recognizes the central difference as being the loss of a sense of the teleological

(comparable to the impossibility of resolution for the postmodern detective), which fragments and isolates the epiphanic moments they record:

These angels write for no one. The fragments remain fragments. Each one of them can be textualized, in beautiful and painful isolation, but no meta-narrative can be constituted out of the separate textualizations. *Wings of Desire* represents the impossibility of representing the history of contemporary metropolitan experience. Clearly, the fact that this experience has generally undergone, since Benjamin's time, an ever-increasing process of fragmentation and splintering, due preeminently to the increasing mechanization of everyday life, is the changed socio-historical condition which gives rise to the impossibility textualized in the film... no transcendental, meta-historical telos can reconstruct and reorganize and reorganize such a fragmentary experience into the image of a single, redeemed historical narrative, not even as a future possibility (Casarino 1990: 174).

The title of Casarino's article, "Fragments on *Wings of Desire* (or, fragmentary representation as historical necessity)", emphasizes his reluctance to believe in the possibility that it (either time or space) can all be pulled together in a properly totalized representation. While Casarino focuses primarily on history in his analysis of the representation of urban experience in *Wings of Desire*, *City of Glass* suggests a possible supplement or augmentation to his title; fragmentary representation is not only a historical necessity but a geographical one as well. Auster's New York, as well as Wenders's Berlin, illustrates that this fragmentation is spatial as well as temporal. Both cities are composed of fragments dispersed both temporally and spatially and not bound together by any overall logic or metanarrative.

We can also posit a more direct relation between Wenders's angels and Auster's detective due to the presence of Peter Falk in *Wings of Desire*. In the film Falk plays himself. An acting job has taken him to Berlin and he is recognized

throughout the city as "Columbo", his best known role. Falk thus functions as an intertextual detective: though playing "Peter Falk", his cultural identification as "Columbo" is inescapable. The primary narrative thrust of *Wings of Desire* is that Daniel wishes to experience human existence, to escape the atemporal and aspatial angelic realm to experience everyday life. While brooding over this choice, Daniel is addressed by Falk who, as it turns out, is a former angel who has come to ground. Falk, it transpires, is not only a intertextual detective but an angel as well, prompting a possible comparison of the angelic and terrestrial realms. An angel who comes to ground, Falk tells Daniel, is able to experience everyday life, to accede into a different experience of space and time. Losing the transcendental angelic perspective, the human Daniel (he follows Falk's advice and descends to earth, vividly illustrated by Wenders through a switch from monochrome to colour) is allowed the experience of moving through time and space. As David Harvey suggests, Daniel's fall ironically allows Daniel a more coherent view of the city since he no longer is forced to attempt the impossible and integrate the totality of fragments but rather is free to create his own narrative by pursuing his own urban trajectory:

[Daniel] has to navigate the city in real physical terms, and in so doing experiences the exhilaration that comes with creating a spatial story (in the manner of de Certeau) simply by traversing the city, which then no longer seem as fragmented but which assume a more coherent structure. This human sense of space and motion contrasts with that of angels, earlier depicted as a hyper-space of speeding flashes, each image like a cubist painting, suggesting a totally different mode of spatial experience (Harvey 1989: 319).

The angelic perspective brought down to earth resonates with the descent of the detective function from modernity to postmodernity (which in turn resonates with

ordinary urban experience). In Falk we have both angel and detective brought to earth, forsaking the aerial perspective for the terrestrial one. On the ground, in the thick of things, the former angel is liberated from the task of trying to bring all the fragments to together, and is free to pursue his or her own trajectory. The detective, on the other hand, despite being gravity bound, seems to aspire to the angelic perspective, to grasp the totality. The irony, of course, is that even the angels's perspective is fragmented and incommensurable. The transcendent gesture for the postmodern detective is a futile one because even the transcendent perspective, angelic or cartographic, cannot bring it all together.

Then what is to be made of Wenders's angels, Auster's detectives, or of Jameson's position itself? There seems to be a nostalgia in each. It is *Wings of Desire* which potentially reveals how this nostalgia functions by identifying its character as both angelic and transcendental.⁷ Though it may sound ridiculous to cite Wenders's angels as specifically postmodern, it seems necessary to identify them as such. Daniel and Cassiel are not capable of unifying the fragments they dutifully record but can only represent them *as* fragments. Casarino argues that while this is not absolute transcendence (not the perspective of a unifying God), Wenders's angels represent the most promising possibility for historical representation:

Through the angels's gnostic somersaults one apprehends the impossibility of representing a unified meta-narrative at the same time that one comes closest to such a unified representation. *Wings of Desire* raises the spectator to the transcendental and omniscient vision of the angels. In this ascent the film represents the deep-seated longing for a gnostic position from which to articulate the fragments of the everyday in a way which would reveal them, their unnegotiable fragmentation notwithstanding, as being structured by and within the

same socio-historical situation. The angels' wanderings and investigations textualize the otherwise radically invisible structure of a history in which all the fragments share. Between a longing for representation and the representation of this longing *Wings of Desire* unfolds as a utopian gesture (Casarino 1990: 179).

The desire for the revelation of a "radically invisible structure" is the desire to apprehend the totality in its immensity. The gathering of fragments, whether by the angels or by the postmodern detective, is a means by which, if we follow Jameson, the totality can be projected from a small sample of isolated fragments. Casarino's identification of this as a "utopian gesture" coincides with Jameson's analysis which is founded upon and driven by utopian desires. For Jameson it is cognitive mapping which functions as his utopian gesture, a method by which a projection of the totality can be achieved, allowing the subject the possibility of understanding his or her circumstances and location in global power structures. Cognitive mapping exists as a means for Jameson to reveal the "radically invisible structures" which constitute both space (the synchronic) and time (the diachronic). The "gnostic position" that the angels assume can be correlated with the potential position of Jameson's postmodern subject when the tactic of cognitive mapping is deployed. In this way cognitive mapping is both a utopian gesture and emblematic of Jameson's "deep-seated longing" for a perspective of totality.

Jameson's postulation of cognitive mapping is a utopian gesture similar to Wenders's belief in the possibility of the angelic perspective. Both, in turn, have an intriguing relation to the figure of the detective. In *Wings of Desire*, Peter Falk, both angel and detective, exemplifies the differences between the angelic and human

perspectives while, at the same time, suggests the possibility of affinities between the two realms. Perhaps former angels would make the best detectives due to their experience in trying to unify the totality of the fragmented city. Jameson notably identifies Chandler's Marlowe as the exemplary instance of the cognitive cartographer. Marlowe's ability to cognitively map can be seen, in light of *Wings of Desire* and through his detective descendent Peter Falk, as angelic. If Jameson is, through his postmodern critique of enlightenment thinking, rejecting the possibility of a transcendental God-like perspective, does the postulation of cognitive mapping simply replace this gnostic position with a lesser but no less impossible one, that of the cognitive cartographer which aspires to Wenders's angelic perspective? To cite again Kristin Ross's skepticism about Jameson's utopian gestures, does cognitive mapping represent no less an impossibility than an absolutely transcendent perspective:

Jameson's relation to his own attempt to 'tie the separate and isolated parts' of postmodernism together raises questions. Is Jameson's desire Marlowesque, that is, does he stand outside postmodernism to explain and judge it? And isn't this an impossible task, under postmodernism, when, according to Jameson, all critical distance or perspective collapses? Where does this desire come from, the desire to 'give a genuinely historical and dialectical analysis' of a period defined by its sheer discontinuity and eradication of historical depth? (Ross 1992: 55).

Certainly it would seem that Jameson's utopian gesture is somewhat out of synch with the extensive fragmentation that he claims to characterize the postmodern condition. The same excessive fragmentation is apparent in Auster's New York and there too exists a nostalgia or longing for a lost unity, formulated in both Stillman's theological quest to unify subject and object and Quinn's investigative and analytical impulse to

"pull all these things [clues, fragments] together and make sense of them" (Auster 1987: 8). Chris Tysh succinctly identifies the difficulty that arises in the attempt to discern Auster's position:

Does Auster's novel promote a nostalgic longing for an Edenic past (the *prelapsarian* scenario staged by the old Miltonic scholar), a romantic lament of loss congruent with the modernist ethos at the service of social critique, or is it an emblematic attack on essentializing narratives of order, meaning, and identity arrogated by the *postlapsarian* discourses and postmodernism in particular? (Tysh 1994: 47).

The solution to Tysh's formulation of Auster's dilemma potentially springs from a sort of dialectical synthesis. Auster's text clearly has both its residual modernist tendencies and latent postmodern characteristics but its epistemological sympathies lie somewhere in the middle. Like Jameson, Auster wants to represent a postmodern world and succeeds in recording its fragmentation, the dissolution of its subject and the irresolution of its narratives. Despite this, however, there remains a sense of nostalgia for a less fragmented and more coherent reality. Auster's utopian gesture is perhaps emblemized as Quinn's red notebook, from which the narrative is reconstructed. Quinn's final entries in the red notebook suggest a unified and utopian world:

He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. 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. They no longer had anything to do with him. (Auster 1987: 130).

Despite Quinn's disappearance, Auster, like Jameson and Wenders, but perhaps more obliquely, posits possible transcendence if only in the guise of disappearance. Quinn

ends up achieving his goal of disappearance, an achievement which is a realization of, rather than a contradiction of, Stillman's utopian desires. At the same time, however, the destruction of Fanshawe's red notebook allows the protagonist of *The Locked Room* to return home. The fragmented utopia represented by the red notebook in *City of Glass*, is rejected for a more conventional familial stability. Quinn's and Blue's disappearances into nowhere are formulated as conditions of possibility for the biographer's return home. This ambivalence characterizes Auster's position: despite the utopian gesture of freedom through disappearance, the overwhelming desire for stability still registers and triumphs.

In Wenders, Jameson and Auster, I hope that it is possible to discern a triad of utopian gestures which operate within and, indeed, even in spite of the recognition of a postmodern condition which renders them strangely anachronistic or even futile. In each case the utopian gesture is made in the hope of "bringing it all together" but, as Casarino indicates, postmodernity and its inherent fragmentation has only made Adorno's abrupt critique of Hegel, "the whole is the false" (qtd. in Casarino 1990: 180), more accurate. The utopian gesture, then, whether it is made by the detective, the author, the angel, the filmmaker or the critic, is a defiant one which does not necessarily coincide with the postmodern aspects of their respective works but can still somehow be regarded as absolutely necessary.

Notes

1. Fabius, despite Wallas's relentless praise and admiration for him, is portrayed as a bit of a lunatic. For example, he is interested in phrenology, a shared interest with the great Sherlock Holmes. This establishes an ironic connection between Fabius and an earlier era of detectives and an humourously outdated criminological methodology. Nevertheless his assessment of Wallas as having a head far too small to be a successful detective is ominous and foreshadows Wallas's eventual failure.
2. Jameson would argue that resolution would not exclude a narrative from the category "postmodern." Again it could be said that this designation is not determined stylistically but in terms of its production. The resolution in *All the President's Men* is a matter of strong cognitive mapping which is perhaps absent from our other examples. Its thematization of the negotiation of conspiracy and some-larger, unseen system is what identifies, for Jameson, *All the President's Men* as a postmodern artefact.
3. Quinn's philosophical musings represent an intriguing intertext with Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*. The final words of Beckett's novel, like *City of Glass* the first novel of a trilogy, read: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (Beckett 1965: 176).
4. Conspiracy, I would argue, also functions around the unknowable and the act of hypothesizing. Hypothesizing on the unknowable is an obviously futile act if one seeks resolution or an answer. As long as it is perceived as a game or an inquiry not seeking resolution it can be managed but Quinn's pursuit of the case, relentless as it is, is neither of these. It can be properly contrasted with the other example of conspiracy in the novel: the discussion of the "real" authorship of *The Adventures of Don Quixote*. This functions as a literary conspiracy (which, incidentally, has interesting intertextual resonances with Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*") the solution of which can only ever be *pursued* and never *determined*. Ironically Quinn's tenacious pursuit of resolution enmeshes him in an increasingly Quixotic situation in which he is unable to distinguish the real from the imaginary, the significant from the inconsequential, until he suffers, in the end, from a Quixotic delirium.
5. Mark Tansey. *Robbe-Grillet Cleansing Every Object in Sight* (1981) Oil and crayon on canvas 72 by 72 1/4 ins. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
6. Two texts which attempts to detail various oppositional practices which can be performed in everyday life are Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In each case the strategies and tactics are specifically geographical, an attempt to recapture a sense of space and to operate within that space evading the dictates of power. The situationist *derive* seems to be the most extreme form of this.

7. The German title of the film, *Der Himmel über Berlin*, seems more enlightening in this instance as it not only emphasizes the situated-ness of the film (it is truly a film about Berlin), but also situates the angels above the city, occupying a transcendent position.

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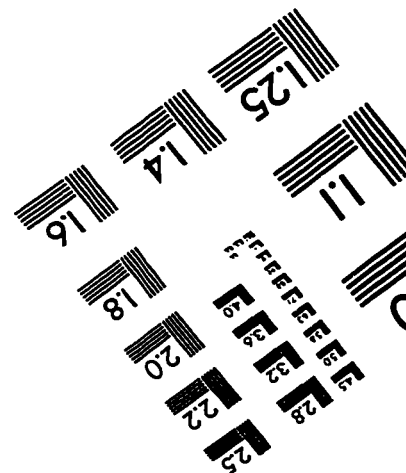
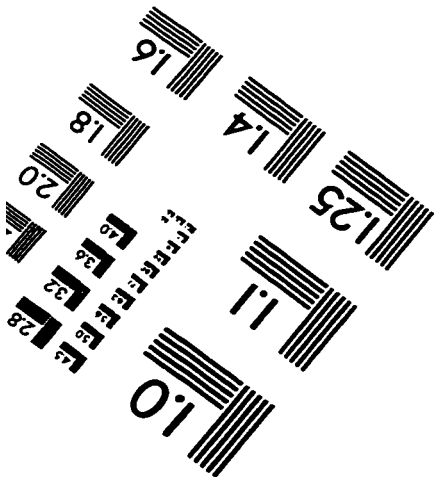
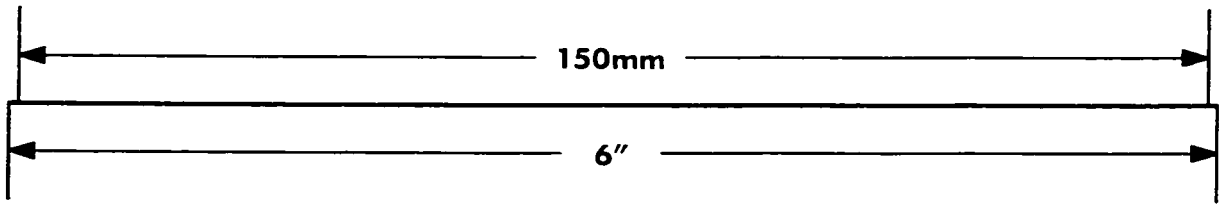
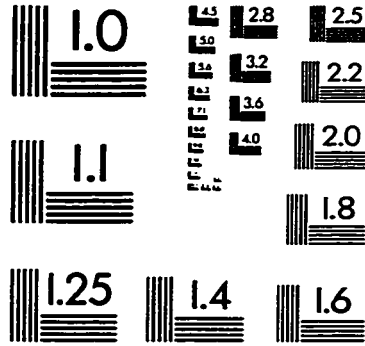
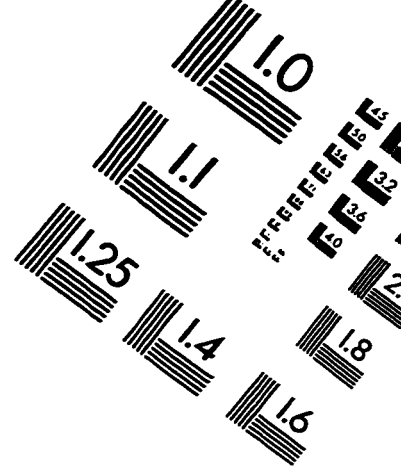
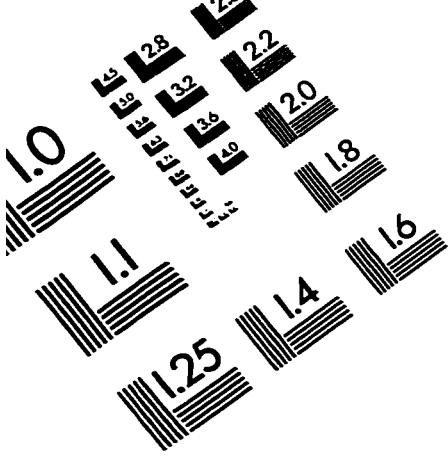
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