"The Vertigo of Reiteration through Adaptation: Nicompictopoop Representations in *City of Glass* and *Smoke*."

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Pour citer cet article

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> "[…] la fascination que la BD peut opérer sur le lecteur repose, entre autres éléments, sur sa capacité à nous faire fantasmer tout autre chose que ce qu'elle montre positivement : il y a un bruissement des signes aphones (tout comme il y a un grouillement de l'immobile) derrière ces cases sagement alignées."[1]

"What would Peter Stillman, Paul Auster's cracked seeker of Ur-language in *City of Glass* call the visual adaptation of the novel he figures in? A *Crumblechaw*? A *Nincompictopoop??* An *Ikonologosplatt???*" This is the question raised by comics championArtSpiegelman in his preface to the graphic adaptation of Paul Auster's work.[2] Originally, Spiegleman orchestrated the project so as to promote comics as an art form. He therefore elected artists Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli to collaborate on the adaptation of Auster's work, which resulted in "visual 'translations,'" as Spiegelman puts it, or "a strange doppelganger of the original book."[3] The same might be ventured about Paul Auster and Wayne Wang's movie *Smoke*—an adaptation of "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story," the short story originally written by Auster.[4] When looking at these two visual adaptations of Paul Auster's prose fiction, it is hard not to feel the *tour de force* Art Spiegelman describes as "an uncanny visual equivalent to Auster's [descriptions]," one that shows the " 'consubstantial intimacy' between image and text" which Delphine Letort elaborates on in her study of *Smoke*.[5]

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[1] Fresnault-Deruelle, Pierre. « Le Fantasme de la Parole. » *Europe*. N° 720. *La Bande dessinée.* Paris, avril 1989, p 54-65.

[2] Karasik, Paul, David Mazzucchelli [Adapters] and Paul Auster, *City of Glass*. Introduction by Art Spiegleman. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005.

[3] Auster, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.

[4] Auster, Paul. "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story." *The New York Times*, 1990.

[5] Delphine Letort here quotes Bernard Brugière and André Topia : « L'association d'un art à un autre implique tantôt des liens de contiguïté ou d'analogie, tantôt une intimité consubstantielle. Ainsi la présence de la peinture dans la littérature peut d'abord se comprendre au niveau de l'intrigue, de la thématique, ou encore de résonances symboliques parfois accompagnées de réflexions sur l'art. » Bernard Brugière et André Topia, dir., « Préface »,*L'Art dans l'art : littérature, musique et arts visuels (monde anglophone)*, Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2000, p.8. Letort, Delphine. « *Smoke* : une œuvre à la croisée des arts. » *Transatlantica*, 2010 n°2.

Focusing on these adaptations, I would like to question the choices made when translating literature into another medium, and the techniques used in an attempt to represent, convey and suggest what Auster originally couched in narrative, description, and dialogue. For as Spiegelman marks, "For all its playful references to pulp fiction, *City of Glass* is a surprisingly nonvisual work at its core, a complex web of words and abstract ideas in playfully shifting narrative styles." The same might be said about "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story," which furthermore resembles *City of Glass* by harking back to some of Auster's favorite themes. These include the doubling and confusing of identities,[6] uncanny *doppelgangers* and strange coincidences,[7] and by playing with intertextuality,[8] embedded narratives, and metafiction (as for example when the panel represents a type-writer, with a sheet of paper containing the caption "Quinn told him the whole story").[9] Whether in the novella, its graphic adaptation, the short story or its filmic translation, this results in a postmodernist laying bare of the art-making process itself. Consequently, this paper will also delve into the transposition of metafictional devices from prose fiction, to graphic novel or film. Finally, I will investigate some of the many references to art in Auster's work, and see what kind of light the intersemioticity in and from Auster's somewhat abstract work might cast on art, in its various forms.

Adaptation Techniques

Paul Karasik and David Mazzuchelli's work first consisted in selecting the elements from Auster's novel which they would turn into panels. They indeed had to decide which cuts from the original text would be injected into speech balloons and narrative captions, and which parts would be represented graphically instead of with words.[10] Overall, the resulting 145 pages encapsulate most of the action and dialogues, leaving out very little which cannot be inferred, either visually,[11] or through meaningful "arthrology" and "braiding" of the panels, strips and pages.[12]

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[6] Cf. Karasik *et al., op.cit. p*. 6, 88.

[7] Ibid, p.53.

[8] *Ibid.,* p.75,79.

[9] *Ibid.,* p.89.

[10] This is obvious for instance when looking at *Ibid* p.10.

[11] *Ibid.,* p.13-14.

[12] In *Système de la bande dessinée*, Thierry Groensteen uses the term "restricted arthrology" (*arthrologie restreinte*)for the linear articulation of panels into syntagmatic sequences*.* Other, translinear, distant relationships creating echoes and series between panels throughout the comics he refers to as "general arthrology" (*arthrologie générale*) which reveals the "braiding" (*tressage*) at work in the creation of comics, that is the structuring of translinear networks of series p.27, 173. Groensteen, Thierry. *Système de la bande dessinée*. Paris : PUF, 1999.Although I have read Groensteen's book in the original, French version, I will for the sake of clarity be using the English translation by Bart Beaty and Nick Iguyen and referring to page numbers in *The System of Comics* when reusing some of his key terminology.

Reversely, the collaborative work between Wayne Wang and Auster in *Smoke* has lead them to fill in and expand on the short story they adapted. They have thus added new characters, episodes, and dialogues to the frame story, which recounts how the writer, autoreferentially called Paul in the short story and Paul Benjamin in the movie,[13] has come to write his rather unconventional Christmas story. Yet they have very faithfully adapted the embedded narrative contained in the original short fiction piece, relating how Auggie Wren came to possess a camera and, thereby, came to photography. This narrative is rendered word for word in the movie. In fact, just as the extradiegetic narrator in the story delegates the telling to Auggie, making him an intradiegetic narrator for half of the text, there is in the movie a rather long sequence where Paul Benjamin listens to Auggie's tale. However the episode is duplicated right after that, as an epilogue to the movie, in a long, mute, black-and white sequence enacting the story Auggie has just told, with a couple of very subtle additions.[14] Auggie's story is thereby re-presented twice in the movie, first textually, through telling, and then visually, by showing. This disjunction between text and image at the end of the movie stands against the opposite, nearly permanent co-presence of these two modes of representation in the graphic novel medium. Indeed, most panels are made of drawings with either speech balloons–round inserts into the picture, signaling that the characters are speaking—or captions— usually rectangular in shape and sharing some of the panel's contours, more often then not at the top of the panel, and introducing the narrator's voice.

Inasmuch as *Smoke* introduces new characters into the *diegesis*, it soon becomes apparent however that all these characters may to a certain extent read as doubles of one another. Indeed, the novelist's dead wife finds an echo in Cole Senior's dead wife; Rashid Cole's missing father finds a reflection in Ruby's missing father; and Paul Benjamin's dead offspring—killed when his pregnant wife is accidentally shot in a bank robbery—is mirrored in Ruby's late, underground abortion. Typically Austerian variations on one of the writer's recurring themes—that of missing fathers and children—these duplications participate in a mirror effect which is also at the heart of *City of Glass*.

In the comics version however, the analogical mode at play is even more apparent, since textual echoes engender strong, visual parallels.[15] These are often underlined

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[13]   Paul Auster's middle name is Benjamin. Incidentally, calling the novelist Paul Benjamin may also obliquely refer to Walter Benjamin's philosophy and notions, which have obviously influenced Auster's work when dealing with language, meaning and translation. A survey of the common traits between the German philosopher and the American novelist has been conducted by Peter Kirkegaard, "Cities, Signs and Meaning in Walter Benjamin and Paul Auster, or: Never Sure of Any of it." *Orbi Litterarum,* Volume 48, Issue 2, July 1993, p.161-72.

[14]   The scene which shows the action in fact adds a couple of details to the source story. First, the grandmother whom Auggie ends up spending Christmas' Eve with turns out on film to be African-American, thus adding a multicultural dimension to the representation of Brooklyn. And second, the movie makes use of dramatic irony and adds a comical touch to the frugal Christmas meal when Auggie painstakingly tries to carve the roast chicken with one of the blind old lady's blunt knives, and, figuring that she cannot see him, goes at the poultry and dishes it out with his bare hands.

by what Groensteen calls "spatio-topia," i.e. the meaningful location of a panel within the page. This is the case for instance when Stillman's seemingly erratic wandering represented in the lower-right-hand corner is mirrored in a drawing of a wind-up mechanical toy occupying the same position on the opposite page.[16] The striking physical resemblance between Daniel Quinn's late child, Peter, and the writer Paul Auster's little Daniel furthermore propels the vertigo of reiteration activated by the resurfacing of the same names within and across the various diegetic planes.[17] The best example of this appears in the panel where little Daniel Auster says "goodbye myself" to his namesake, Daniel Quinn.[18] The explicit envy and pain caused to Quinn by the encounter with the writer's family is visually enhanced in the comics via a mirror effect between the perfect little family picture presented before Quinn's eyes,[19] and that of the memories of his own family, both literally and metaphorically fading away with time in the *incipit* of the comics.[20] Similarly, the uncanny, growing likeness between Quinn and the character he traces, Stillman,[21] is highlighted by kinesics, as Quinn's slouching posture,[22] toward the end of his fruitless quest, graphically signals the interchangeability between the anomic trajectories of the two drifting characters.

Furthermore, the graphic version offers a forceful vision of "the triad of selves that Quinn [has] become,"[23] writing under the pseudonym William Wilson of the adventures of his detective hero Max Works: "Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. [...] Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy."[24] Enhancing the crack in Quinn's split personality, Karasik adapts these multiple entities embodied in Daniel Quinn, by representing the contours only of William Wilson who remains a dark, featureless, yet towering figure looking over Quinn's shoulder. As for Quinn, he is portrayed in an oversimplified way and with a square mouth, making him look, indeed, like a genuine puppet, tucked into bed by his fictional avatar, Max Work.[25]

One explicit hypotext in Auster's *City of Glass* casts Daniel Quinn as a postmodern Don Quixote,[26] obsessed with a hermeneutical quest into the analogical.[27] In the

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15   Karasik *et al.,op. cit.,* lower-right-hand corner, p. 59.

16   *Ibid.*, p.56-57.

17   *Ibid*., p.5, 94-95.

18   *Ibid.*, p.96.

19   *Ibid.*, p.96.

20   *Ibid.*, p.5.

21   *Ibid.*, p.56.

22   *Ibid.*, p.125

23   Auster 1987, *op. cit.,* p.6.

24   *Ibid.,*p.6.

25   Karasik *et al., op. cit., p.*8.

novella, his first encounter with Peter Stillman Junior triggers a three-page-long incursion into other cases of wild children growing up deprived of human contact.[28] Quinn's reflection ends with an analeptic vision of his son's burial, and the understanding that saving Peter Stillman from his father becomes a necessary, chivalric mission, partly redeeming the loss of his own little boy, also called Peter. In the graphic adaptation, the episode is rendered in a double page designed somewhat like a checkerboard, with strips alternating somber panels representing Quinn's wandering—and wondering—, the captions indicating his train of thought, through the city, with lighter panels showing close-up, sketched portraits of a series of wild boys.[29] The series starts with Peter Stillman Jr., and loops back to him in the bottom right strip, breaking away from the aforementioned regular pattern. Instead of continuing the previous alternation between shots of the city and wild boy portraits from one panel to the next, the last strip engulfs the reader into some analogical displacement process, resorting to a technique similar to stream of consciousness in novelistic discourse. This passage gradually shows an anamorphic transformation of Peter Stillman Jr. into Quinn's boy, which himself then morphs into an abstract representation of anguish. Besides, the sketch-like drawing of an open-mouthed screaming individual is quite reminiscent, as it goes, of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. The cunning visual symmetry, conflation and inversion here at play point to the many possibilities in terms of exploiting the meaning-making system of comics, or, to take up Groensteen's term again, the "arthrology" of comics. Moreover, the last panel in this double-page creates another interpictorial link to an earlier, obliquely metadiscursive panel, which it duplicates and builds on.[30] This anguish leitmotif in fact resurfaces seven times altogether, at times with slight variations.[31] Forming a series of disseminated panels overarching all the way to the very last panel in the book, the icon figures amongst many others which end up in the final bonfire of symbols, thus subsuming the story coming to a close.[32] It thereby prompts a retrospective, translinear reflection over these selected, recurring motifs of the dummy, the scream, the fingerprint, the umbrella, the notebook, or the detective, each coming together into meaningful, iconic "constellations."[33]

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26   *Ibid.,*p.36, 92.

27   *Ibid.,*p.62-63.

28   *Ibid.,*p.33-35.

29   *Ibid.,*p.32-33.

30   *Ibid.,* the middle panel in the bottom strip, p.7.

31   Karasik *et al., op. cit.,* p.5, 33, 50, 52, 104, 119, 138.

32   *Ibid*., p.138.

33   I am borrowing this vision of the series of panels as a constellation from Groensteen, op. cit., p.175.

Metatexuality, Metapictoriality, and Metafiction

In the movie *Smoke*, the reiteration of situations and transfer of identities participate in a mirror effect which leads to a *mise en abyme* of lying and stealing. For instance, Rashid Cole steals money which was stolen in a bank-robbery and then steals Paul Benjamin's identity, usurping his name so as to pass for a stranger when meeting his father. The latter evidently reads as an embodiment of the actual writer, named Paul Benjamin Auster. In both the movie and the short story, Paul's convoluted camera story is taken from Auggie, who steals a camera which has presumably been stolen before that by the thief, who, let us not forget, initially tried to steal a magazine from Auggie's shop. Moreover, if Auggie at first intends to return the thief's lost wallet, he ends up stealing the identity of the thief as he lets the blind old lady mistake him for her grandson. As the movie prompts the viewer to believe Auggie has made up the entire story altogether—when the story actually allows for more uncertainty—it becomes apparent that lying and stealing may read as metaphors for story-telling and finding inspiration, while most of the characters in some way function as avatars of the artist.

Whereas the short story clearly allows the reader to equate narrator Paul's voice with that of the extradiegetic writer, Paul Auster himself, the movie introduces the corporeality of the actor, William Hurt, as an obstacle which plays down the original autoreferentiality lending Austerian features to the narrator-writer within the story. Wayne Wang's role as movie-director might have played an evident role in toning down Auster's authorial presence at the heart of this collaborative work. Meanwhile, Karasik has on the contrary accentuated the referential illusion by drawing the fictional Paul Auster as a spitting image of the real Paul Auster.[34] Nevertheless, both the movie and the comics make great use of pervasive, autoreferential metonymies drawing attention to the act of writing via key close-ups on pens,[35] type-writers,[36] books,[37] notebooks,[38] and pages.[39] Clearly, all authors here involved revel in the sheer fun of metafiction, constantly jumping from one diegetic plane onto another.[40]

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[34] Karasik *et al., op. cit.,* p89.

[35] *Ibid*., p.88-89, 102, 105.

[36] *Ibid*., p.89, ante-penultimate and last pages.

[37] *Ibid*., p.3.

[38] *Ibid*., p.86, 102, before-last.

[39] *Ibid*., p.132-33.

[40] *Ibid*., p.37.

The self-reflexive distanciation from Auggie's story induced in the movie by the somewhat grotesque zooming-in on his speaking lips finds an equivalent in Karasik's adaptation of Peter Stillman's mesmerizing narrative in *City of Glass*.[41] Interestingly, the peculiar, elongated shape of the speech balloon appendixes throughout Stillman's speech is reminiscent of the shape and symbolism of the ubiquitous smoke constantly emanating from the characters' mouths in the eponymous movie. In both cases, the effect is to keep much of what is shown and heard at a distance, while focusing the viewer's gaze on orality.

Another artifice drawing attention to the system of comics has to do with the various tricks used to transcribe the different characters' idiolects. Peter Stillman's long, stilted monologue stands apart from the rest as the font changes. The rectangular narrative captions and majority of elliptic speech balloons are normally typed in capital letters throughout. Yet, Peter Stillman's partial aphasia is signaled by the irregular use of lower case and capital letters.[42] As for Stillman Sr., his dementia is reinforced by the marked out, trapezoidal shape of his balloons, as angular as his facial features, and thus encapsulating his manic cues.[43]

Wayne Wang and Auster use black and white film to underline their own creative process, using the shift from color to black and white as a *mise en abyme* of art-making. They indeed resort to black and white for Auggie's photo albums, which are said to be in color in the short story. The shots of Auggie taking his pictures also come in black and white, as well as the final shooting of Auggie's so-called "Christmas story," implicitly imagined on the spur of the moment. Rather suggestively, this last sequence staging Auggie's invented story is accompanied by a Tom Waits song with a looping chorus that sounds like a metafictional coda: "It's memories that you're stealing, but you're innocent when you dream."

As for Karasik and Mazzuchelli, the multiframe of the page or double page is often exploited so as to draw attention to itself, as when the panel serves as a *mise en abyme* of the multiframe.[44] At the end of Stillman's speech, for instance, marked throughout by the systematic regularity of the page format—each with three strips of three panels—the gutters (the margins between the panels) no longer divide the page into separate panels, but on the contrary bring all the panels together into one, representing language as a prison.[45] The following page subsumes the multiframe altogether, replacing the main division in strips and panels with one single hyperpanel, merging the contours of the panel with that of the hyperframe,

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[41] Karasik *et al., op.cit.*, p.15)

[42] *Ibid.*, p.15-23.

[43] See for instance *Ibid.,* p.15-23, 73.

[44] *Ibid.,* p.45.

[45] *Ibid.,* p.22.

thereby occupying the entire page, and representing a disarticulated, cast-away, puppet boy wallowing at the bottom of an abyss.[46]

As Spiegelman observes, Karasik and Mazzuchelli have toyed with the many possibilities offered by the comics format: "the grid as window,[47] as prison door,[48] as city block,[49] as tic-tac-toe board,[50]" and, one might add, as cellphone dial pad,[51] checkerboard,[52] as Manhattan grid,[53] or labyrinth,[54] and, again as Spiegelman claims, "the grid as a metronome giving measure to the narrative's shifts and fits."[55] The sudden breech at the end[56] in the pattern of isomorphic panels and symmetrical pages which has prevailed up to then signals the falling apart of language eventually experienced by Quinn, as he finds himself sucked into a dark pit.[57] The loose panels are tipped over and seem to be descending into a dark chasm reminiscent of the experiment Stillman has conducted on his infant son,[58] and possibly therefore expressing a vertiginous language aporia. The frame of the comics here seems to give way, with the gutters and page numbers disappearing first, then resting only on non-figurative signs, the panels having been turned into pages, and the drawings having vanished almost entirely.[59] The ending thus loops back to the very first page, evoking in both cases the typed novella the comics self-reflexively draws from. In so doing, Karasik and Mazzuchelli, like Auster at the end of his novella, bring forward the mention of Daniel Quinn's red notebook, which simultaneously again breaks through the diegetic frame in that it may also refer to the title of one of Paul Auster's very own works, precisely called, *The Red Notebook*.[60]

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[46]   *Ibid.,* p.23.

[47]   *Ibid.,* p.2.

[48]   *Ibid.,* p.22, 27.

[49]   *Ibid.,* back-cover.

[50]   *Ibid.,* p.21.

[51]   *Ibid.,* p.100.

[52]   *Ibid.,* p.32-33.

[53]   *Ibid.,* p.100-101.

[54]   . *Ibid.,* p.85.

[55]   As on *Ibid.,* p.99, where the rhythmic function of panels is rather evident. Groensteen elaborates on the rhythmic function of the layout of the grid, where the dimension of the panels may correspond to the duration of the action: *op. cit.* p.55-57.

[56]   Karasik *et al. Op.cit.*, p.129 and onwards.

[57]   *Ibid.,* p.130-31.

[58]   *Ibid.,* p.23.

[59]   *Ibid.,* p.130-135.

[60]   Auster, Paul. *The Red Notebook*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

Intertextuality and Intersemiotocity in Auster's Work

Auster's writing constantly refers to other, mostly classical, texts. In "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" for instance, the text overtly refers to Dickens and O'Henry, quotes Shakespeare, and comments on the archigenre of the Christmas tale.[61] While the quotation from Macbeth casting light on Auggie Wren's photography is preserved in the movie,[62] the reference to Dickens and the highlighting of the generic intertextuality at play is rather lost in the film adaptation. Reversely, the movie adds an episode referring to Bahktin—no doubt drawing on the latter's dialogic imagination and heteroglossia concepts—and includes shots from New York City foregrounding the interpictorial inheritance from landmark New York photographers such as Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, or Alfred Stieglitz.

Better than Wayne Wang and Auster in *Smoke*, Karasik has managed to render more flagrant visual equivalents to the many intertextual hints dropped throughout *City of Glass,* such as allusions to Robinson Crusoe[63] or Don Quixote.[64] Where the novella, possibly starting from its very title, quotes Lewis Caroll's *Through the Looking Glass*,[65] the graphic version adds pictorial quotations of the famous illustrations of Alice's adventures by John Tenniel.[66] The figure of Humpty Dumpty indeed participates in the braiding of the comics, working as a central, recurring icon of nonsense, underlining the dichotomy between signifier and signified throughout *City of Glass*.[67] In addition, Stillman Jr.'s long, partly nonsensical monologue in the graphic version adds a discrete, visual reference to Hamlet contemplating Yorick's skull[68]—yet a Hamlet adapted into comics—, thus suggesting the intersemioticity at play between different media.

The reflection on the fall of language, central to *City of Glass*, is first prompted in the comics by the lack of obvious motivation in the links between the drawing and

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[61] Auster's narrator implicitly alludes to Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," first published in 1843, and to O'Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," originally published in 1905. Both stories are now easily available online.

[62] "Auggie was photographing time, I realized, both natural time and human time […] As he watched me pore over his work, Auggie continued to smile with pleasure. Then, almost as if he'd been reading my thoughts, he began to recite a line from Shakespeare. 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,' he muttered under his breath, 'time creeps on its petty pace.' I understood then that he knew exactly what he was doing." "Auggie Wren's Chistmas Story" op.cit.

[63] Karasik et al. op.cit., p.115, 128.

[64] *Ibid.,* p.12.

[65] Auster 1987, o*p.cit.,* p.81-82.

[66] Karasik et al., op.cit., p.75.

[67] *Ibid.,* p.79, 130, 139.

[68] *Ibid.,* p.20.

speech balloons contained in each separate panel throughout Stillman's soliloquy. Indeed, taken individually, these panels at first seem to foreground the arbitrariness of signs.[69] Yet, the connection established between the drawings and the text is here to be apprehended translinearly. The drawings often make sense mostly anaphorically or cataphorically in terms of their relationships to the text, as when for example, the bottom strip on p.20 echoes the speech bubble in the top right-hand-corner panel on p. 16. And of course, Karasik's drawings often function symbolically, as for instance on p. 21, offering a series of metonymies for various tricks, illusions, signs, language, music, and art. Not only does the proliferation of images turn out to be less random than at first glance, it moreover provides a visual counterpart to the verbal logorrhea in the original. With the rather abstract graphic adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, Karasik and Mazzuchelli here demonstrate that, as opposed to Groensteen's claim that most of the narrative in comics is achieved via the visual, iconic dimension, rather than its verbal, linguistic content, the relationship between image and text in comics can be one of absolute interconnectedness. Indeed, the images here are not so much concerned with telling the story or representing the action.[70] Should one try as an experiment to go through this sequence after blanking out the speech bubbles, it will appear that the images in themselves, which reiterate an endless series of synecdoches, metonymies, and metaphorical displacement, cannot function autonomously to tell the story nor to convey any coherent sense.

At times on the level of the strip, at times on that of the page, the graphic artists furthermore resort to a cinematic vision, as the panels zoom in[71] or out.[72] This omnivorous adaptation of Auster's novella thus feeds on other forms of art, whether cinema, painting, or engraving (Munch's "The Scream," but also Dürer's "The Fall of Man",[73] or Bruegel's "Tower of Babel."[74] It also calls onto literature and illustrations, while it displays pictorial pastiches of landmark styles of comics, such as the detective genre,[75] pulp fiction,[76] transformers,[77] or X-men.[78] It moreover uses a kind of public semiotics found in street and road signs[79] or symbolic clichés of

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[69]   *Ibid.,* p.21.

[70]   As is obvious from *Ibid.,* p.18-19.

[71]   *Ibid.,* p.19.

[72]   *Ibid.,* p.2, top and central strips, p.4 central strip, p.5.

[73]   *Ibid.,* p.38-39.

[74]   *Ibid.,* p.38-40.

[75]   *Ibid.,* p.3, 7.

[76]   *Ibid.,* p.26.

[77]   *Ibid.,* p.111.

[78]   *Ibid.,* p.47.

[79]   *Ibid.,* p.27.

New York City.[80] In addition, the mixing of genres, codes and conventions in the novella is reflected in the comics by the use of various drawing styles, at times expressionist (as in the bottom strip p. 50, suggesting mounting anguish and fragmentation of the self), at times jazzy, veering into marvelous,[81] or again surrealistic.[82] The drawings exhibit either soft, round features[83] or angular, harsh lines;[84] they are abstract and minimalist,[85] or figurative and flourishing with luxuriant detail.[86] Finally, they shift from pure black and white contrast to softer, chromatic shades of grey in the last three pages. As a result, the stylized graphic version faithfully underlines the generic intertextuality at play in *City of Glass*, wavering between detective story, pulp fiction, philosophical tale on the origins and meaning of language, and postmodernist metafiction.

This postmodernist collage effect points to the fascination at the heart of *City of Glass* with Walter Benjamin's idea that there must exist some kind of "pure language", which, as Stillman puts it, might bring the broken fragments of our world back together (central panel 69).[87] The image of a broken bottle with scattered glass shards literally pictures Benjamin's notion of a fragmented language.[88] Moreover, the top-left strip of this double page metapictorially illustrates this hankering for unity beyond the fragmentation inherent in the comics form. The three panels of this strip with unusual dimensions indeed transcend the separations provided by the gutters between them to form a triptych of panels that unite into one singles image. Indeed, as Groensteen argues, "comics is not only an art of fragments, of scattering, of distribution; it is also an art of conjunction, of repetition, of linking together."[89] In the end, we can only agree when Spiegelman asserts that Karasik has "located the Ur-language of Comics," a language dubbed by Pierre Masson "the art of stuttering."[90] It is a language which, like Walter Benjamin's conception of translation, makes the novella and the comics "recognizable as fragments of a greater language,"[91] a pure language, that is, expressed by a kaleidoscopic,

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[80] *Ibid.,* central strip p.44.

[81] *Ibid.,* p.103.

[82] *Ibid.,* p.111.

[83] *Ibid.,* p.95.

[84] *Ibid.,* p.124.

[85] *Ibid.,* central and bottom strips p.28.

[86] *Ibid.,* p.66.

[87] *Ibid.,* p.68-69.

[88] Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Laurence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2000.

[89] Groensteen*, op., cit.,* p.22.

[90] Translation mine, from Masson's phrase "art du bégaiement" in French. Masson, Pierre. *Lire la bande dessinée*, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1985, p.72.

[91] Benjamin, op., cit., p.21.

intersemiotic medium, within which "everything becomes essence: the center of the book shifts, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the end."[92] Alluding to the famous, though anonymous, definition of God as "a circle whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere," *City of Glass* could also read here as commentary on the playful composition of the movie *Smoke*, with no real protagonist, but a multitude of characters and interweaved plots, with stories within stories, and art within art.[93]

In this regard, these works by Auster and their adaptations point to a leitmotif at the heart of the writer's work, residing in a representation of art and language precisely as collections of fragments—whether Auggie's daily snapshots from his street corner, or Stillman's wandering and collection of "shattered things,"[94] reiterated also in *Sunset Park,* as the protagonist takes daily "photographs of abandoned things."[95]

I have tried to show in this paper the dazzling reiteration and mirror effects at play in the visual elements and adaptations of Auster's fiction, which in the end only deepen the endless *mise en abyme* already present in "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story," in *City of Glass*, and, actually in most of the writer's work. Disenchanted with a postmodern world of fragments and simulacrum, Auster's patch-work nevertheless strives for a re-enchantment of the quotidian through story-telling and art-making, as means to "reduce us all to our common humanity" and to create pure, inspiring images, such as those produced by flying prodigy Walt in *Mr. Vertigo,*[96] dancing Kitty in *Moon Palace,*[97] or real life high-wire artist Philippe Petit as related in *The Red Notebook*. The goal, Auster's work suggests, is to help one's "eyes lose contact with all surrounding references" and leave some ever-resounding imprint on one's mind. [98] I believe finally that both of these collaborative adaptations of Auster's work lend veracity to the formula Jean-Luc Godard initially coined about cinema, but which

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[92]   Karasik et al. op. cit., p.7.

[93]   The patchwork of styles here at play, this sense of ubiquitous center, together with the representation of Quinn's seeing eye within a brick wall on p. 111 may allow one to wonder how much Auster and Karasik might have been influenced by the collage technique of Romare Bearden, mostly as one thinks of the overseeing eye at the centre of his well-known "Childhood Memories" collage.

[94]   Auster 1987, *op.cit.*, p.78.

[95]   Auster, Paul. *Sunset Park*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010, p.3.

[96]   "'At ten feet, the effect will be transcendent. At twenty feet, you'll be up there among the angels, Walt, a wondrous thing to behold, an apparition of light and beauty shining joy into the heart of every man, woman, and child who lifts his face up to you.'" Auster, Paul. *Mr. Vertigo*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994, p.69.

[97]   "Dancing was utterly foreign to me, a thing that stood beyond the grasp of words, and I was left with no choice but to sit there in silence, abandoning myself to the spectacle of pure motion." Auster, Paul. *Moon Palace*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989, p.96.

[98]   In his essay "On the High Wire," included in *The Red Notebook*, Auster reflects on Philippe Petit's high wire walking, in a way which suggests where Auster might have found the inspiration for flying Walt in *Mr. Vertigo*: "Step by step, I felt myself walking up there with him, and gradually those heights seemed to become inhabitable, human, filled with happiness. [...] Then, suddenly, [...] my eyes lost contact with all surrounding references [...]. There was nothing else. A white body against a nearly white sky, as if free. The purity of that image burned itself into my mind and is still there today, wholly present." *Op.cit.*, p.97-98.

Thierry Groensteen claims actually suits comics better, when Godard envisioned "the art of making music with painting."[99]

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[99]   Translation mine, quoted in Groensteen *op.cit.* p.56.

PLAN

- Adaptation Techniques
- Metatexuality, Metapictoriality, and Metafiction
- Intertextuality and Intersemiotocity in Auster's Work

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