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PAUL AUSTER'S ANTI-DETECTION: Quixotic codes in three dialogues of *City of Glass*

„S.G.: You must have had mixed feelings about finding yourself labelled so often (at least initially) as a »detective writer«.

P.A.: Yes, I must say I've found it rather galling at times. Not that I have anything against detective fiction - it's just that my work has very little to do with it.”

„J.M.: (...) Did you feel that you were writing a mystery novel?

P.A.: Not at all. (...) But I was using those elements [elements of detective fiction] for such different ends, for things that had so little to do with detective stories, and I was somewhat disappointed by the emphasis that was put on them. (...) I tried to use certain genre conventions to get to another place, another place altogether.

J.M.: *The problem of identity, right?*

P.A.: Exactly.””

Concerning the first volume of Paul Auster's New York Trilogy I intend to shed some light on a couple of narrative ideas, which form the base of a special technique already involving the possibility of a style, which finally leads to that idiosyncratic genre which is quite often referred to as what Stefano Tani has called „anti-detective fiction”.¹ I think it can be stated without further justification that the discourses of Auster's novels bear some strong similarities to one another. These intertextual and/or subtextual parallels provide us with the presupposition that it is valid to talk about *austerian fiction*. Here I will not dwell on this topic, since the scope of this paper should be kept well within the boundaries marked by

¹ Paul Auster, *The Red Notebook*. London-Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995, p.139

² Ibid. pp. 108-109.

³ Stefano Tani: *The Doomed Detective*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1984.

the title above. Yet, peeling the label „anti-detective fiction” off of these works is one rewarding way of getting closer to a „positive” *de*-finition of his prose as a whole.

By interpreting works belonging to the popular register (eg. with the means of myth criticism) their extension, recycling and abuse became possible. The detective story, having given birth to a new genre has started to flourish like an ageing woman. While Ian Fleming and Ken Folett fall prey to the newborn tradition, in the case of Gardner or Le Carré the situation is somewhat different. It is not that they fear the attack of parasites, on the contrary they are counting on it.

By using an example I wish to illustrate how interpretation makes the „tur-boosting” of this genre possible. I assume that one of the most important features of popularity does not lie in philological exactness, but rather in the way it is incorporated in tradition. Thus, I am not trying to point out a certain textual locus, but instead, I invite the reader to one of those familiar yet quite shapeless and dim regions of experience.

One could come across the following episode in several spy fictions and movies. Our hero and the breathtakingly beautiful damsel in distress are imprisoned in a luxurious high-tech dungeon by the evil professor. On the door no lock can be found, the furniture is impossible to move, all surfaces are cold and smooth — there’s no escape from this place. On top of all, everything that is happening in the cell is being recorded by a camera. Fighting like a cornered animal, our hero has no other option than to step into the grammar of his captor’s language in order to operate the system from the inside for his own purposes. He has to *turn everything upside down* for the key to the problem or else he and his charming companion shall have to struggle to the bitter end. Here interpretation is a matter of life and death. Feeling his pocket for gadgets, in the turmoil of a loaded biro, a wallet with a built-in crowbar and pneumatic hammer disguised as a paper handkerchief, our hero’s hand bumps into psychoanalytic interpretation. Regarding the circumstances, this seems to be a most wise choice indeed. He identifies the design in a split second. Now the passage is there wide open, since he already holds the necessary passwords and codes in his hand. We might just as well lean back comfortably in a cosy easy-chair and indulge ourselves, only waiting for the action to come. In the blink of an eye the symbolic relationship between the self and the room with the indexical connection between the objective of the camera and the superego

flashes through the spy's mind. Now it takes no more than just a small step to realize that he himself is standing in the middle of the room like an animated exclamation mark — the icon of the conscious. So here we go, nothing is easier now than to point down the weakness of the system, namely the subconscious. Our hero puts his arms around the eye-catching lady and they start necking (seemingly seizing the only day they have got left) and they unconsciously back into the corner. Throughout all those years the objective of the superego must have gotten used to the fact that the subconscious is always a little bit out of perspective — this very part of the room is a blind spot in the camera's view. The professor overlooks the event. Having isolated himself from the ever watching eyes of his captor, escaping from the dungeon for a spy of our hero's magnitude is a piece of cake.

Taking this example we have to regard two important movements, which must be seen as typical for anti-detective fiction: first, the codes, the indispensable keys to solve the mystery of/or meaning and secondly, that interpretative drive, which focuses on these visible remnants of meaning. Understandably, if these two features occur in a metafictional narrative space, their confrontation will result in a play, which creates all those interpretative traps, which repeatedly try to persuade the reader that they are only side effects. Nevertheless, digression is the very crux of the problem itself. Whatever centre should we pick for our codes to surround, it is impossible to build a logocentric system which wouldn't subvert itself. Closure, solution, the very substance of the detective story is denied by its descendant (anti-detective fiction). This way, the picture can never be put together; not even retrospectively is it possible for the center to be determined. The episode cited beforehand will disseminate solution or meaning due to its being metafiction. Our hero, in his quest for origin and presence, will dissolve in fictional space according to the law of entropy.

This mechanism of postponing the meaning(s) of the text or creating undecidables turns up every time when anti-detective stories are interpreted. With a U-turn back to the start, now I would like to return to my original point.

My presupposition is that in the case of Auster's prose, besides the main stress on postponing the meaning(s) of the text, there can be found a secondary one laid on postponing the meaning of the codes. Here the word »secondary« is not supposed to be associated with hierarchy but

refers only to its being constituted in the micro or deep structure of the text.

Roland Barthes in his famous book *S/Z* posits five codes. Each code is „one of the voices of which the text is woven“. Such voice is the hermeneutic code which comprises „all the units whose function is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or *delay its answer*“ (my emphasis). This is that function of storytelling, which is responsible for creating suspense, tension and mystery. In my view, all codes in Auster's works are such hermeneutic codes, which are (to borrow Bruce Baver's exclamation“) „all rather overdone“. I can not but agree with the rigorous critique that these codes are „tur-boosted“ at least to the point of travesty. The way these codes show their effects and operate can be illustrated in the three dialogues of *City of Glass*.

Daniel Quinn, a mystery novelist, due to a wrong phone call suddenly finds himself usurping the role of Paul Auster, a private investigator. His job is to tail a certain Peter Stillman Sr., a linguistic professor, who had been keeping his only son locked up in a dark room for nine years so that he would be able to talk the *Ur-language* of God. Throughout this long period of time Peter Stillman Jr. had been isolated from any stimuli whatsoever, apart from the occasional beatings that were to prevent him from speaking his mother tongue. The incidents of child abuse were accidentally revealed and the father went to prison, while the now heavily disabled child was receiving constant medical attention in a hospital. After thirteen years the professor is freed, along with his obsession. However, the threat he had made earlier left no doubt about what was going to happen once he was out of jail. Quinn is hired to keep him under continuous surveillance and defend the young Stillman.

Quinn has been watching the old man for weeks until finally he decides to approach him.

Quinn has three encounters with Stillman, and each time they meet he defends his identity by using different selves as camouflage. Unbelievably enough, it seems that the scientist never recognizes his former

* Roland Barthes: *S/Z*. Paris: Seuil, 1970, p. 18

** Bruce Baver: *Doubles and more doubles*. In *The New Criterion*, April 1989, p. 67-71

acquaintance. Interpreting these conversations is a matter of life and death for Quinn, since protecting the life of the young Stillman is an act of mourning for the death of his own little son, whose name was also Peter. On one hand, the character of the disillusioned protagonist is an allusion to the film noir atmosphere and scenario we know so well, while on the other hand it is this very meaning whose subversion the detective story as metafiction promises the reader. So the presupposition follows that before postponing it, first the codes inherent in the text have to constitute the mystery. Yet it remains to be seen if this promise is to be fulfilled or it is just another mere delusion.

To hide the truth, Quinn first introduces himself by his original name (since the name he has to keep in secret now is Paul Auster). Alison Russel^{*} accidentally states that at their first meeting Quinn presents himself as Paul Auster^{**}. This slip of the tongue by Russel made me think what would be the case if Quinn had done the same. However, one has to realize that what would have been lost if this had occurred is the very fact that Quinn lies by telling the truth, not unlike a double agent. The polarity of reality and fiction is undermined, losing its significance.

The initials of the protagonist's name (D. Q.) function as an index in the text. The wrong number which by chance event leads to Quinn is given to Stillmann's wife by a retired policeman, Michael Saavedra. This way our first provokingly obvious code is Cervantes or rather Don Quixote. Quinn, to straighten things out visits the only Paul Auster in New York, who happens to be a writer. After having made it clear that he has nothing to do with detective agencies, Auster starts chatting about his present work which turns out to be an essay about the authorship of Don Quixote. Not really trying to prove anything, he explains that under the name of Cid Hamete Benengeli it was Don Quixote himself who wrote the novel with the words of the illiterate Sancho Panza and with the pen of his friends, the barber and the priest. Samson Carrasco translated the work into Arabic, which Cervantes discovered and had translated back into Spanish by the disguised Don Quixote. Daniel Quinn is a metonym for Don Quixote.

^{*} Alison Russel: *Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction*. In *Critique*, Winter, 1990, p. 71-84

^{**} Ibid. p. 75

Putting this *mis en abym* into a parallel with the novel, one may find the result perplexing. „The real” Paul Auster is the author, the „Cervantes” of the text. Yet, the story is presented by the mysterious anonymous friend, so consequently he is the translator or rather the narrator. But then again, according to the hoax, the text was translated by Don Quixote himself, so it follows from the logic of the codes that the narrator is nobody else but Daniel Quinn. However, Quinn is not only the protagonist but rather the author of the story as well — that is, he is Paul Auster. „I like to imagine that scene in the market place at Toledo. Cervantes hiring Don Quixote to decipher the story of Don Quixote himself. There’s great beauty to it.” — says Paul Auster to Quinn, one of his possible selves. (Quinn is also a wasted poet.) „And around and around it goes.”” There’s indeed great beauty to it.

Sitting on his paradoxical train of thoughts at large, Auster refers to the three attempts which were made by Quixote’s friends to pull him back to the ground from the world of make-believe. In other words, they tried to enter the grammar of his language in order to subvert it, just like the spy did in our example. Again, we see the interpretative drive as a means of the narrative. These three types of appearances will be of assistance to outline the narrative structure of the dialogues.

The First Encounter

The barber and the priest in their first attempt to spare Don Quixote’s bare life from total destruction disguise themselves as ghosts. The notion of the ghost is one of the countless hermeneutic codes which occur in Austerreich. Primarily it signifies the absence of presence. Therefore first Daniel Quinn takes the role of a transparent ghost, he is in the state of being vanishing permanently. „Things are inert: they have meaning only in function of the life that makes use of them. When that life ends, the things change, even though they remain the same. They are there and they

* Paul Auster, *New York Trilogy*. New York: Penguin, 1990, p. 119. Further references are to this edition.

** Ibid. p. 122

are not there: tangible ghosts, condemned to survive in a world they no longer belong to.” „What counts is the thing itself, and the thing that is seen can come to life only when the one who sees it has disappeared.”^{***} Quinn has to get rid of himself in order to *recept* Stillman, and as we will see this is exactly what is going to happen in the three stages of metamorphosis. At the time of their first meeting „[t]here was light everywhere, an immense light that seemed to radiate outward from each thing the eye caught hold of (...)”^{****} while finally „the light like gauze on the bricks and leaves, the shadows lengthening.”^{*****} The light gradually vanishes since „[o]nly darkness has the power to make a man open his heart to the world (...)”^{*****} All of our codes indicate that Quinn the spy will succeed in his attempt to vanish, from which logically follows that despite our presuppositions concerning metafiction, the mystery of the suspected person is going to be revealed. The question goes, is it a promise or a threat?

Quinn manages to be absolutely transparent during all the three conversations with the help of his 'disappearing strategy'. His contribution to the dialogues is limited to the absurdity of continually nodding all the time, not unlike a yes-man would do. While Stillmann is giving a lecture on his preoccupation with issues of language philosophy, all Quinn is doing is sending signals of understanding: he agrees, confirms („yes”, „that's right”, „exactly”, „indeed”, „I'm reassured to hear it”, „I don't doubt it”, „now I see”), he asks back („the key?”, „a new language?") and he is taken aback by the news he hears („ah”, „I can imagine”, „I hadn't realized it was as bad as that”, „You've taken on quite a bit”, „An admirable response”)^{*****}. He addresses Stillman by saying practically nothing. Another index with which the text signifies the duality of mystery and solution; or rather — as metafiction — questions its logocentric existence.

^{*} Paul Auster: *The Invention of Solitude*. London-Boston: Faber and Faber, 1982, p. 10

^{**} Paul Auster: *The Art of Hunger*. London: The Menard Press, 1982, pp. 19-20

^{***} Ibid. p. 88

^{****} Ibid. p. 100

^{*****} p. 278 (Paul Auster, *New York Trilogy*, third volume, *The Locked Room*)

^{*****} pp. 89-95

Quinn is sitting next to Stillman pretending not to notice him for about fifteen or twenty minutes, then starts to keep his eyes fixed on Stillman as if he could „burn a hole in Stillman’s skull” for another five minutes, not uttering a single word. Quinn makes his position totally dependent on that of Stillman’s, he is a „pure” spy. This austere dialogue is nothing more than a monologue since Quinn is rather a catalyst, lacking any substance whatsoever. The codes which are supported by Stillman not only defines the Stillman Quinn gets knowledge of by interpreting him, but also Quinn himself as the beholder, who gets lost among his selves (Daniel Quinn, the poet, the mystery writer, the widower etc; William Wilson, his pen name; Max Work, the hero of his novels; Paul Auster, the private investigator; Daniel Quinn, the ghost; and also his two other masks he is to use in the other dialogues). This vanishing is also indicated by the root of *Stillman’s* name — to get lost in silence.

As Auster cites the celebrated poet, Reznikoff: „I must diet / on silence; / strengthen myself / with quiet.” The notion of naming and disappearance are put parallel by the very first code that is offered by Stillman. He states that he is not willing to talk to anyone whose name is unknown to him. He is certainly not being polite. As soon as he gets to know Quinn’s name he lets free his stream of consciousness and disseminates the name by endless connotations. Thus, he erases the memory of Quinn’s identity, which Quinn was able to preserve only by the twist of covering that personality with which he got into the story with Stillman. He accomplished it by using his (in a temporary sense) original name. The technique of using associations is still the most important one. The conversation follows a lateral line of thoughts lacking structured speech or topic sentences, yet, out of the seemingly random thoughts a recognizable ground plan can be distinguished, similar to Stillman’s apparently aimless roamings earlier, which were duly and meticulously recorded by Quinn, who having copied these routes to a map, could read the inscription of „The Tower of Babel”. In his improvised lecture Stillman explicates his views on the fall of language, Aristotle and Plato, nominalism versus realism, Swift’s Laputa and non-entitative semantics, to name only a few of the references. His example is a non-functional umbrella, to which no name can be attached, for it is no longer what it used to be, while his

* p. 31 (Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*)

goal is a purely referential language, a restored version of the language of Eden. He defines New York as Babel and himself as the new Adam of naming. Upon these codes and definitions Quinn constructs a Stillman-interpretation with which on the level of understanding he can identify. As a ghost Quinn possesses the Stillman he constructed in himself for the purpose of interpretation. It is time for the next step, the next meeting.

The Second Encounter

The fact, that Quinn already changed into something he was not, that the one *shadowing* gradually becomes identical with the one under surveillance is also indicated by the place of their second meeting, which is the Mayflower cafe. In Stillman's mythology America equals the new Paradise, the promise land, where the purification of language becomes possible. Therefore it is emblematic to mention the name of the ship on which the pilgrim fathers landed on the shores of the new world, and which Quinn himself boards now.

For the second time it is Sarrasco disguised as the Knight of the Mirrors who attempts to break the spell and comes to the aid of the bewitched Don Quixote. Identity becomes stronger and stronger; Quinn learned his lesson and starts the conversation right with introduction. He identifies himself as Henry Dark.

„Do I know you?“ he asked.

„I don't think so,“ said Quinn. „My name is Henry Dark.“

„Ah,“ Stillman nodded. „A man who begins with the essential. I like that.“

„I'm not the one to beat around the bush,“ said Quinn.

„The bush? What bush might that be?“

„The burning bush, of course.“

„Ah yes. The burning bush. Of course.“ Stillman looked at Quinn's face — a little more carefully now, but also with what seemed to be a certain confusion. „I'm sorry,“ he went on, „but I don't remember your name. I recall that you gave it to me not so long ago, but now

it seems to be gone.”
 „Henry Dark,” said Quinn.

Henry Dark is a fictitious character in reality (in Stillman’s reality), whose pamphlet, *The New Babel* was made up by Stillman as a pretext to write his book, *The Garden and the Tower: Early visions of the New World*, which was considered controversial and dangerous even by the author himself. Quinn chooses to wear a personality to suit himself, which had earlier been tailored by Stillman. Thus, Quinn turns into a mirror image, while the mirror will be the surface of the encounter of their personalities. By telling his chosen name, Quinn puts Stillman into position, as well as defining his own position at the same time. Quinn — who earlier had not appeared to presume the fact that Dark is only a product of Stillman’s imagination — becomes into one himself by the metonymic act of naming and self definition, when he gets to know the truth. On the other hand, we would never hear Stillman speak without Quinn. At this stage of identity, parasite and host start living in symbiosis. The sheer-drive rhetoric is governed by lateral logic to a larger and larger extent, meaning(s) as possibility is/are spreading horizontally, structure gives place to plural semiotics directed to serve one sole purpose. Anything can be used to take one to the intended destination or to put it in an other way, random coincidences can be read as meaningful events. Not only the fallen nature of referentiality is raised here but also signification as an act.

There is no reason why we should overlook the professor’s absentmindedness („I don’t remember (...)”) when he had already proven to be a great intellect. The code of Eden might answer this controversy. *The uncanny*, accidental coincidence is an event when two different things are connected, put in rhyme. The paradoxical nature of reality and fiction is revealed in these acts. Memory is a place (i.e. memory systems illustrated as maps in the 16th century) where everything happens twice. (Dante’s hell as a mnemotechnical pretext.) In Milton, Satan speaks with double sense deluding. Only the language before the fall, which was spoken by Christ too, is the original, innocent language of paradise. Also it was only before the construction of the Tower of Babel, that people spoke one and the same language. According to the tradition, anyone who took a glimpse at the

* p. 95 (Paul Auster, *New York Trilogy*, first volume, *The City of Glass*)

remnants of the tower forgot everything he or she knew before. Henry Dark predicts that the dwellers of New Babel after having spent forty days in the tower will be able to speak the language before the fall. Here Stillman's black out as a code questions referentiality. The personality of Henry Dark is both Quinn's and Stillman's mutual essence, the surface of their reflections with each other, the saussurean paper they share. Notwithstanding it is undecidable which is the signifier and which is the signified.

There are three ways in which the reflection of selves is possible in Auster's novels. All three can be found in the three dialogues, although the stress is never on the same one. First there is the pure reflection of selves such as mirror images, doubles, twins *Doppelgängerns*. The first dialogue is an example for this type (and of course the professor misses not his chance to make a mental note that *Quinn* rhymes with *twin*.) The self can also be parasitic, it lives on the other. Using Henry Dark's personality equals abuse already. The third type is the relationship of father and son, which not only signifies the quest for the Father, for pure presence and origin, but also the quest for self-identity. The third encounter will set an obvious example for that.

In the rest of the dialogue Stillman improvises a spectacular flight of mind based on the initials of Henry Dark's name. It is an egg-allegory really: Humpty Dumpty as an allegory for language philosophy, Columbus's egg as a code for new Paradise, the Moon as an egg. This latter link is so farfetched, that it is quite near to the arbitrariness of Dada, which seems to be the understated target of Stillman's stream of consciousness. Yet, the Moon as a motive also pushes the plot towards the last dialogue. Quinn, who has already identified himself with Stillman as the Knight of the Mirrors, is now ready to appear as the Knight of the White Moon.

The Third Encounter

The Moon is a rather complex symbol in the austerian world, it primarily connotes arrationality. The fact, that the place they meet in the third encounter is Mount Tom, a hill whose atmosphere was deeply appreciated by Edgar Allen Poe, the master of mystery also proposes arrationality. This time — as may be obvious from what has been said

about the reflection of selves — Quinn introduces himself as Peter Stillman.

„My name is Peter Stillman,” said Quinn.

„That’s my name,” answered Stillman. „I’m Peter Stillman.”

Up to this point we have seen the first two types of reflections of selves: they are Doppelgänger, and — also taking Quinn as the one keeping Stillman under surveillance, and Stillman as the one kept under surveillance — they are in a parasite-host relationship. But then:

„I’m the other Peter Stillman,” said Quinn.

„Oh. You mean my son. Yes, that’s possible. You look just like him. Of course, Peter is blond and you are dark. Not Henry Dark, but dark of hair. (...)”

A mental note again that Stillman makes here talking aside. After all, that’s what he is doing all the time. Henry Dark is just another sort of creation of Stillman’s, so it follows that Quinn must be viewed as just another type of his reflection. And, after Quinn’s having chosen the father’s position for Stillman (but what if Stillman chose the position of the son for Quinn?) there is teaching coming, on life and death, memory, lies, all of which leads to the conclusion of a fairly absurd topic sentence, which is: „money doesn’t grow on trees.”” Rhetoric rules over meaning, it turns extatic: anything can be connected to anything. Making no sense, the conversation gives place to communion in the *common-place* of their phraseology. Quinn has identified with Stillman on a third stage, yet this identification means the free-play of signifiers, the total extension of undecidables. At this point the question is raised, then, who followed who? The codes start deconstructing one another. Don Quixote can possibly be Daniel Quinn, but may just as easily be identified with the paper Auster of the book. (Not to mention the „real” Paul Auster who wrote *New York Trilogy*.) However it is Peter Stillman who is *lunatic*, just like Don Quixote is. (The initials of Peter Stillman also refer to *post scriptum* — „[e]verything

* p. 101 (Paul Auster, *New York Trilogy*, first volume, *The City of Glass*)

** Ibid. p. 103

in some sense, can be read as a gloss on everything else.” Everything is in relation with something else without the possibility of hierarchy.) It is also a Peter Stillman (due to the effect of the father-son type of reflection of selves, it is not significant which) who hires Quinn to tail himself similarly to Black and Blue, who are the main characters in the next volume of the trilogy. Stillman exists by being *read*, by being kept under surveillance, by virtue of the other. This is why Quinn has to disappear, because the mutual essence of the two selves can not be divided. As it has already been stated, Quinn functions as a ghost, „pure voice” (a derridean term¹) or Echo. Alison Russel² quotes Northrop Frye³, who interprets the Narcissus-myth. According to Frye, Narcissus’s reflection is only a „sinister” *shadow*, a Doppelgänger, that usurps Narcissus’s existence thus becoming the cause of his death. Russel adds that Auster undermines this opposition by eliminating the hierarchy between the counterparts of this duality. Yet, I can not see this myth as one based on binary opposition. Echo signifies lack of presence. She denies her presence by echoing Narcissus’s (Stillman’s) words. Narcissus sees his reflection in her, she is the surface which separates and connects the two Narcissus at the same time. Echo is a self that is represented by the austerity of the middle volume of the trilogy. These three selves can no more be put in rank than fiction can be separated from reality, and nor can this relation from one to the other be denied. The two Narcissuses on both sides of the mirror are always already oscillating. This lack of presence can not be divided from their essence. This is why I find Alison Russel’s statement questionable that says that „*City of Glass* is a paranoid text.”⁴ Just as there is no point in addressing Echo as „sinister”, there is neither a reason why one should define fear as the drive of the discourse. It is difference that governs the

¹ p. 83 (Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*)

² Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: John Hopkins U P, 1976, p. 65

³ p. 83 (Alison Russel, *Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction*)

⁴ Northrop Frye: *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Scripture of Romance*. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1976, p. 54

⁵ p. 76 (Alison Russel, *Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction*)

text, the plurality of selves: free-play, „the dance of doppelgängers”. Should anyone insist on using terms of pathology, the text could rather be labeled as schizoid.

This analysis took two statements as its starting points. First, that the text presupposes that our codes will create the mystery and secondly, that in accordance with the promise of these codes, identity will be formed by the interpretative drive, which is directed to the solving of mystery and which means that the spy will nab the suspect. Nevertheless, at the end of the chapter Quinn grasping his umbrella has to realize, that he lost track of Stillman for good. Stillman, after having seen Quinn appear in all his three forms, denies our protagonist his presence forever. Here the umbrella functions as a code, which referring back to the paradoxical nature of referentiality indicates the reflection of selves and through that it raises the question of identity. On the level of crime/spy fiction, Quinn proves to be blind to the solution of the Stillman-mystery that is why the suspect could disappear into nothingness. The difference between our original example (about the cornered spy) and this situation (interpreting the discourse as spy fiction) is that in the latter case the blind spot is not only in the camera's perspective but it is also in the spy's view. While on the level of anti-detective story (and anti-spy fiction if necessary) presence denies itself, the postponing of meaning(s) make(s) interpretation impossible. The spy being „out of orbit” is deluded by the deceptive hope for origin, presence and final signifier. The text uses these two levels as interpretative traps, that is, it incorporates them as possibilities. Yet, on the third level, in the micro or deep structure of hermeneutic codes, the postponing of meaning(s) has/have already taken place. Mystery couldn't have been constructed in the first place due to the fact that hermeneutic codes are already postponing their own meanings. However, everything which comes into contact with these codes will appear as mystery to the discourse, since the forces having created the enigma are invisible to it. Interpretation as desire is possible for the ever postponing meanings only at the second level, where the text is defined as anti-detective fiction. The third level refers interpretative drive to identity, which creates the possibility of perception. In parallel with the Echo-parable, the identity formed in the three stages of

* Bruce Bawer quoting Geoffrey O'Brien. In *Doubles and more doubles*, p. 69

the dialogues is an oscillating inner reflection. It is not just Quinn who vanishes by incorporating the suspect's existence, but Stillman himself too. The hero originally in quest for pure presence finds himself in the paradoxical state of free fall. For Quinn, at an undeterminable point in the text, shadowing becomes nothing but a pretext to delve into the extatic desire to unburden „himself of every belief in every system“. As an example for Zenon's paradox, he starts peeling off his personalities, destructing his self-identity to the point when he turns into a work of art, which is the direct expression of the effort by which art expresses itself. The hero seeking the solution of mystery brought us back to Don Quixote, and the knight bewitched by books referred us to the question of the identity of subject. At this point, the discourses of Auster's novels should clearly be separated from the genre of anti-detective fiction.

p. 15 (Paul Auster, *The Art of Hunger*)