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# *Report from the Interior* in Paul Auster's work: Self-writing or "the uninterrupted narrative that continues until the day we die"<sup>1</sup>

Sophie VALLAS

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## Prologue: the name on the cover and the name in the story

- <sup>1</sup> *City of Glass*, Paul Auster's very first novel, opens on a portrait of the main character of the book: Daniel Quinn who, "as a young man, [...] had published several books of poetry, had written plays, critical essays, and had worked on a number of long translations" (4)—a description which could be that of young Auster himself—, is now a broken man who has lost his wife and son in an accident, and who "no longer exist[s] for anyone but himself" (4). Quinn now writes mystery novels under the (Poesque) name of William Wilson, a pseudonym which allows him not to "consider himself to be the author of what he wr[ites]" (4). One night, a phone call turns his dull, suspended life upside down: when a man calls twice looking for "Paul Auster, of the Auster Detective Agency," Quinn suddenly delves into the mystery that knocks on his door and becomes Paul Auster, accepting a complex case, playing the detective, finding the right tone and behavior, following a man on the streets of New York City, getting used to acting like Paul Auster—the detective and finding relief in getting away from himself:

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 trick of the intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer. At the same time, he knew it was 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. 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. For imagining himself as Auster had become synonymous in his mind with doing good in the world.

He wandered through the station, then, as if inside the body of Paul Auster, waiting for Stillman to appear. (50)

- 2 At this stage in the novel, Quinn can still feel playful and confident: switching to being Paul Auster is still an easy game (“a charade”) which he masters effortlessly. As a matter of fact, eager to protect the helpless young man who has hired his services, he feels more and more entitled to impersonate the famous detective and to slip into Auster’s noble mission. Wearing his shining armor in Grand Central Station, Quinn is therefore ready to face his first investigation, empowered by this “deft little twist of naming” that he is so proud of.
- 3 Of course, Daniel Quinn is ignorant of what he has triggered off and he will quickly start learning what there is, indeed, in a name. A few minutes after this scene of self-satisfaction, Quinn meets a girl sulkily reading one of the books he has signed as William Wilson, *Suicide Squeeze*, and today, the Austerian reader recognizes a variation on the title of a mystery novel (*Squeeze Play*) published by Auster... under a pseudonym (Paul Benjamin). Except that when *City of Glass* was published (1986), Auster had not yet revealed the paternity of his 1982 mystery novel that he signed using his middle name; so that when Quinn recognizes the book as his in the hands of a stupid reader who does not seem to be able to appreciate it at its fair value, and he cannot reveal his identity lest he should give away the secret of his pen-name, Auster (Auster-the real) can make fun of his (real) reader with complete impunity—he has already multiplied masks and identities, creating several reflections of himself in and out the frame of the novel, thus raising the question of the original and the copy. When, at the end of the story, an exhausted and deeply troubled Quinn resolves to find Paul Auster-the detective in order to find help in a case that is on the verge of engulfing him, who should he find but the only Paul Auster whose name and address are “in the [phone] book” (*City of Glass* 94)—Paul Auster, a writer, who lives in Brooklyn with his wife Iris and his son Daniel, the very reflection of the real Paul Auster who lives in the same Brooklyn apartment with his wife Siri and his son Daniel... And what should the two of them discuss when they meet? The brilliant and delightful game Cervantes plays at the beginning of (and throughout) *Don Quixotte*, embroidering on the origins of the manuscript, muddying the waters by multiplying languages, translators and editors in the writing of this story which deals with “the dangers of the make-believe” (*City of Glass* 98), and ending up raising the question of authorship and of the many masks and identities an author can play with. From that conversation on, in which Paul Auster-the writer proves especially witty, Quinn little by little seems to dissolve in the novel: as the case he was working on suddenly comes to an abrupt end and the people involved in it vanish into thin air, he no longer recognizes himself in a mirror, seems to have lost his space and time coordinates, loses his apartment and finally disappears, leaving only a red notebook behind in which “half the story” is contained, of course, as an anonymous editor and narrator of the story concludes (*City of Glass* 132)—a narrative voice which, in passing, blames Paul Auster-the writer for his careless attitude in the whole matter.

- 4 Auster's first novel brilliantly exposes this labyrinth of reflections and doubles that he has been exploring from the very beginning of his career as a writer. In *City of Glass*, he later explained, he played with the outside and the inside of a book, "the machinery" which implies an "author self": "I don't mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self, that mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books. What I was hoping to do, in effect, was to take my name off the cover and put it inside the story. I wanted to open up the process, to break down walls, to expose the plumbing" (McCaffery and Gregory, 293). Daniel Quinn, in *City of Glass*, imprudently experiences what it means to become Paul Auster—in other words, what is to be found in the body and the mind of another man whose name and identity he borrows. Auster has been doing nothing else, except that the other man whose name and identity he regularly borrows, and whose mind and body he ceaselessly searches and probes, is himself. And *Report from the Interior*, published in 2013, is the latest volume of an autobiographical experience which has been in progress from the very beginning of Auster's long career.

## The early years: Reporting from the exterior

- 5 Auster began his career as a poet, a translator and an essayist. Being a translator, he often explains, was both a way of earning a living and of getting closer to the French poets he admired so much: Auster thus translated his beloved Jacques Dupin (see "The History of a Friendship"), for instance, or André du Bouchet, and put together the bilingual *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* in 1982, in which the French poems are translated by various English-speaking poets, the two versions appearing side by side. In his dense introduction, Auster provides a brilliant analysis of French poetry as well as a rich development on French and Anglo-Saxon literary traditions, on writing and translating, on the original text and its English version, and explains how he has used existing translations, sometimes rescuing them from "the obscurity of library shelves and microfilm rooms," and how he has commissioned new translations when needed, paying particular attention to "bring together compatible poets" (*Random House Book XLVIII*). Acting as the editor of the anthology, a translator and a scholar at the same time, Auster multiplies his presence in the volume (see Cazé) and thus explores the many sides of the art of poetry which he himself practices at the same period<sup>2</sup>. In the same way, because the literary essays he wrote were "only [...] about writers who interested [him]," as he once said in an interview, Auster turned the exercise into "an opportunity to articulate some of [his] ideas about writing and literature, to map out some kind of aesthetic position" (McCaffery and Gregory 285). In the 1970s and early 80s, both translating and essay-writing, therefore, were different ways for him to play scales, to find his own voice while listening intently to other voices, to understand the way the poets he admired the most wrote their way out of their demanding relationships to language: "Constantly struggling against the lure of facility, he will never use a word that has not first been won and absorbed through experience," he writes, for instance, about George Oppen ("Private I, Public Eye" in *Art of Hunger* 107); "No word in Ungaretti's work is ever used lightly," he states ("Innocence and Memory", in *Art of Hunger* 112), or again, in an essay about Louis Wolfson's *Le Schizo et les langues*, he quotes Georges Bataille's haunting question which seems to tear open his own life: "How can we linger over books we feel the author was not compelled to

write?" ("New York Babel" in *Art of Hunger* 26). In each one of his deeply literary essays, Auster thus recalls the existential task that takes place on the page. Writing about Charles Reznikoff, for instance, he analyzes the necessity for the poet to "learn to speak from his eye—and cure himself of seeing with his mouth" ("The Decisive Moment" in *Art of Hunger* 35). Such a lesson learnt from Reznikoff finds direct application in Auster's own poetry.

- 6 In his early years, indeed, Auster wrote poems which he later described as "very short, compact lyrical poems" that were "coiled in on themselves like fists" (Mallia 257), or again as resembling "clenched fists; they were short and dense and obscure, as compact and hermetic as Delphic oracles" (McCaffery and Gregory 285). The image of clenched fists especially suits those texts which are indeed *formes-sens*: they seem to enclose a speaking subject in a fetal position, an "I" which very often seems to be reduced to an enormous "Eye" and for whom seeing and speaking come together, as an early poem entitled "Autobiography of the Eye" stages it. His poetry often revolves around "[...] what stands at the edge of whiteness,/ invisible/ in the eye of the one who speaks" ("Wall Writing" in *Ground Work* 43), and suggests that the voice does not come from a non-existent "I" but from this "Eye" which detains the word: "He is alive, and therefore he is nothing/ but what drowns in the fathomless hole/ of his eye," the solitary, still unborn subject of "Disappearances" begins, hesitating to bring himself into the world and into time. Many other poems figure this undifferentiated subject which is still unaware of its outer contour and which, for the moment, bathes in a uterine whiteness, "the white of his eye" which is his sole universe:

It's all one to him—  
where he begins

and where he ends. Egg white, the white  
of his eye: he says  
bird milk, sperm

sliding from the word  
of himself. For the eye  
is evanescent,  
clings only to what is, no more here

or less there, but everywhere, every

thing. ("Obituary in the present tense" in *Ground Work* 90)

- 7 If this unborn subject feels a "hunger" to be born, a hunger which is never defined, which is raw and extreme ("We would sleep, side by side/ which such hunger," "Unearth" in *Ground Work* 10; or again: "a hunger/ that became a bed for me," "Elliptic. Les Halles" in *Ground Work* 38), the speaking eye seems to be satisfied with fantasizing his own apparition: the word "birth", the verbs "to begin" and "to breathe" are thus omnipresent but only point on a horizon which remains unreachable. In "Disappearances," for instance, the voice on the page evokes the moment when it will resound in the world and give birth to itself, but the subject of the poem seems to be locked somewhere between an already last breath and a still-to-come first breath which would force him into the world:

Out of solitude he begins again—

as if it were the last time

that he would breathe,

and therefore it is now

that he breathes for the first time  
beyond the grasp  
of the singular. (*Ground Work* 61)

- 8 The present tense used in "it is now that he breathes" is only an illusion and seems contaminated by the expression "as it were" that comes just before. The whole poem keeps returning to this "first," fantasized breath which is endlessly postponed: "as if he, too, might begin to breathe/ for the first time/ in the space that separates him/ from himself" ("Disappearances" in *Ground Work* 64). Being born, breathing and allowing a voice to rise, means entering into language which, in Auster's poetry, means entering into "the wall" which haunts his poems, a wall made of thousands of stones ("the monstrous sum/ of particulars," "Disappearances" in *Ground Work* 61) and thousands of words ("For the wall is a word," "Disappearances" in *Ground Work* 64), a wall which is a threat to the subject ("And the wall is death," "Disappearances" in *Ground Work* 62)<sup>3</sup>. The poems thus oscillate between dreaming the birth of the voice and renouncing it in the same effort, preferring always to keep it in a safe womb: "My voice turns back/ to the hunger it gives birth to," says the subject of "Unearth" who refuses to separate the desire from the voice because they feed one another (*Ground Work* 24). Throughout his poetry, Auster thus stages an unborn subject and, in one of his very last published poems, accepts the failure of his poetic voice: "and merely to speak of it/ is to see/ how words fail us" (*Ground Work* 100). In *Facing the Music*, Auster's last collection which includes a poem written for his recently dead father ("S. A. 1911-1979"), the ever-to-be subject even writes his own obituary by way of birth certificate ("Obituary in the present tense") as well as his epitaph ("In Memory of Myself").
- 9 Auster's early years are, unsurprisingly, years of formation. Translating and writing, Auster remembers in his 2003 *Paris Review* interview, were exercises which demanded an immersion into the works of various writers in order for him to forge his own tools and "map out some kind of aesthetic position," as mentioned before: "Both were about discovering other writers, about learning how to become a writer myself. My literary apprenticeship, if you will" (Wood 574). As he stopped publishing essays and translations at the very end of the 1970s, he also stopped writing poetry. Auster has often alluded to this period as a "dark moment" during which he had the feeling that he had "written [himself] out," that he was "finished as a writer"; and that his rebirth as a *prose* writer came when he "stopped caring about making *Literature*. [...] The only thing that mattered was saying the thing that needed to be said. Without regard to preestablished conventions, without worrying about what it sounded like" (Wood 574-5). The time for reporting from the exterior, from the positions of grand masters, from other languages or from some great *ars poetica* was thus over. From such a Copernican revolution on, "the words came out as prose" (Wood 574), and from the interior.

## ***The Invention of Solitude* or the beginning of autogenesis: Becoming readable**

- 10 When *The Invention of Solitude* was published in a small press in 1982, the book went unnoticed and yet it was a manifesto, the first prose book of a man who once was a poet and an apprentice scholar and who had suddenly decided to become readable. The first part of the book, indeed, is devoted to his recently dead father: "Portrait of an Invisible Man" aims at holding back the mysterious figure of Samuel Auster whose ontological invisibility was simply made even more concrete by a banal heart-attack. The father's impalpable presence in the family turned his son into an abstract being wasting his childhood vainly waiting for a validation of his own existence which could only be granted by the father's eyes. But the father's eyes "[saw] nothing," as the only photograph of him that is included in the memoir perfectly illustrates:

There are several of him sitting around a table, each image shot from a different angle, so that at first you think it must be a group of different men. [...] And then, as you study the picture, you begin to realize that all these men are the same man. [...] There are five of him there, and yet the nature of the trick photography denies the possibility of eye contact among the various selves. Each one is condemned to go on staring into space, as if under the gaze of the others, but seeing nothing, never able to see anything. It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man. (*Invention* 31)

- 11 In this trick photograph taken in an Atlantic City studio, Auster analyzes, it is as if his father had "inadvertently made himself disappear" by paradoxically multiplying himself. With his eyes thus staring into the void, Samuel Auster failed to acknowledge his only son:

Like everything else in his life, he saw me only through the mists of his solitude, as if at several removes from himself. The world was a distant place for him, I think, a place he was never truly able to enter, and out there in the distance, among all the shadows that flitted past him, I was born, became his son, and grew up, as if I was just one more shadow, appearing and disappearing in a half-lit realm of his consciousness. (*Invention* 24)

- 12 In Samuel Auster's strange, hazy world, Paul "became his son" (notice how the verb clashes with its complement) but then remained a shadow among many, "a vapor or a person not wholly of this world" (*Invention* 60). "It was not that I felt he disliked me. It was just that he seemed distracted, unable to look in my direction. And more than anything else," Auster concludes, "I wanted him to take notice of me" (*Invention* 21).

- 13 Because his father was a hard-working man who believed that "you became part of the world by working," and that "[b]y definition, work was something that brought in money," the son's decision to become a poet was simply impossible to understand, a way of "squandering [his] gifts" (*Invention* 60-61). So if the father's ontological incapacity to fix his eyes on his son was undeniable, Auster also retrospectively understands to what extent he himself erred on the side of obscurity and hermetism: "I realize now that I must have been a bad son. Or, if not precisely bad, then at least a disappointment, a source of confusion and sadness. It made no sense to him that he had produced a poet as a son," he writes (*Invention* 60). One of the most beautiful passages in the fragmented, painful portrait Auster draws of his father shows Samuel attempting to read his son's poetry:

Once, when I was still living in Paris, he wrote to tell me he had gone to the public library to read some of my poems that had appeared in a recent issue of *Poetry*. I

imagined him in a large, deserted room, early in the morning before going to work: sitting at one of these long tables with his overcoat still on, hunched over words that must have been incomprehensible to him.

I have tried to keep this image in mind, along with all the others that will not leave it. (*Invention* 61)

- 14 The vignette, created in the distant son's imagination and then carefully preserved in his memory, is poignant: under the eyes of the father, the son's poems, those "clenched fists," are indeed impenetrable, as if at the time, the obscure poet came *before* the son ("it made no sense to him that he had produced a poet as a son," my emphasis) and thus condemned any exchange to naught. If the father's eyes were blind, endlessly staring into the void, the son also failed to make himself visible in his own poetic language.
- 15 The second half of *The Invention of Solitude*, "The Book of Memory," stages Auster alone after his father's death and a divorce, living in a "bleak" room in New York City. The narrative opens on Christmas Eve 1979 and opens on a double challenge that faces him in his existential crisis and utter solitude: first, writing in an empty, Pascalian room which is now his sole horizon ("The world has shrunk to the size of this room for him" *Invention* 79), and second, writing from the depths of his memory in which he is so engrossed that "his life no longer seem[s] to dwell in the present" (*Invention* 76). "He decides to refer to himself as A.," he writes on the very first page of this most autobiographical text which requires considering himself as another and writing in the third person. Throughout this strange, fragmented text, A. brings back novelists, thinkers, philosophers or painters from his memory and he simply quotes, or analyzes, or develops sometimes unfinished dialogues with their texts, essays, characters, paintings or songs that once struck his mind and left durable traces. At the heart of the long list of fascinating texts to which his memory keeps returning are two "parallel texts": the biblical Book of Jonah and Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, the latter being his son's favorite book. Indeed, separated from his father because of his parents' divorce, three-year-old Daniel Auster passionately listens to his father's voice telling him the story of how the naughty wooden puppet drifts far away from old Gepetto who gave birth to him, a puppet who now wants one thing only: "to become a real boy. But it also becomes clear that this will not happen until he is reunited with his father" (*Invention* 132). A. and Daniel delight in this story which echoes their own, and A., who is both a father and a son, wonders: "Is it true that one must dive to the depths of the sea and save one's father to become a real boy?" (*Invention* 79).
- 16 To become a real boy is Pinocchio's most cherished wish as well as Auster's. If it takes saving the father from oblivion and even giving him a life in words, as the last quotation of "Portrait of an Invisible Man," borrowed from Kierkegaard, makes clear ("[...] he who is willing to work gives birth to his own father" *Invention* 68), it also requires the son to undergo Jonah's ordeal—to survive days and nights of utter solitude in the belly of the whale/shark, and to come out as a new being speaking with a new voice; and, as far as Auster is concerned, it also requires writing with a new name, a new personal pronoun, it requires relentlessly "laying out a piece of blank paper on the table" (a recurrent phrase in "The Book of Memory", from page 1 to the end) and repeatedly putting words on paper. André Green defined the writer as he who "will trace down a sign on a surface, for the absentee"<sup>4</sup> (Green 412, my translation). In Auster's case, the absentee is of course his father, whose degree of absence was such that "the people closest to him had learned to accept this absence, to treat it as the fundamental quality of his being" (*Invention* 6), but it is also himself. Evoking his own

conception which took place during his ill-assorted parents' honeymoon at the Niagara Falls, Auster imagines a "passionless embrace, a blind, dutiful groping between chilly hotel sheets" and remarks that it "has never failed to humble [him] into an awareness of [his] own contingency": "Niagara Falls. Or the hazard of two bodies joining. And then me, a random homonculus, like some dare-devil in a barrel, shooting over the falls" (*Invention* 18). The image of the homunculus—that diminutive, artificial human being that alchemists claimed they could create—is especially telling: since his carnal conception was nothing worth remembering, it is on the page that Auster will give birth to himself and create his own identity.

- 17 In *Otobiographies. L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre*, Jacques Derrida analyzes Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and contends that the text « is not auto-biographical because the signatory tells his life [...] but because he tells this life to himself, because he is the first, if not the only recipient of the narration”<sup>5</sup> (Derrida 56, my translation). Derrida reads Nietzsche's famous sentence, "I live on my own credit," as the expression of this "unprecedented contract that he has signed with himself,"<sup>6</sup> a contract stipulated in and by the text itself and which offers Friedrich Nietzsche, whose identity is highly uncertain, a space, a time, a name which is a homonym (Friedrich Nietzsche), masks, identities and lives. Hence *Ecce Homo* inaugurates a completely unheard of conception of autobiography, Derrida writes: the autobiographical text has nothing to do with a literary enterprise which retrospectively revisits and exposes a subject's life, but exists as the prerequisite for a man who "gambles his name—his names— and his biographies"<sup>7</sup>. *The Invention of Solitude* includes such a conception—and invention—of identity: far from signing the "autobiographical pact" that Philippe Lejeune described in his study of classical French autobiography as guaranteeing a triple identity (author, narrator and protagonist) embodied in a trustable "I," Auster indeed follows a Nietzschean temptation of self-invention. For Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche's project did "not at all aim at the constitution of a subject, but at the creation of modes of existence, what Nietzsche called the invention of new possibilities of life. [...] Nietzsche saw this as the ultimate dimension of the will to power, the vouloir-artiste"<sup>8</sup> (Deleuze 160, my translation). In the same text, Deleuze compares Nietzsche's and Foucault's respective conceptions of subjects in a passage that suits Auster's autobiographical enterprise perfectly: "Yes, there are subjects: they are grains dancing in the dust of the visible, and mobile places in an anonymous murmur. The subject is always a derivative. It gets born and vanishes in the thickness of what we say, of what we see"<sup>9</sup> (Deleuze 146, my translation).
- 18 *The Invention of Solitude* is thus a decisive step towards the creation of a subject whose name is first Paul Auster, Samuel's lonely and inconsolable son and Daniel's father, and then A., such a significant and literary initial for a forsaken subject who locks himself in an empty room and finds his own voice among the many that his memory has captured and sheltered. In the room/womb/tomb that Auster stays in for months, writing his seminal *The Invention of Solitude*, the poet dies and Paul Auster gets born, a memoirist ready for the games of fiction-writing.

## Exploring Paul Auster in the ambiguities of prose

- 19 In a 1990 interview, Auster presents his shift from poetry to prose in the following terms:

Poetry, for me, was always an attempt to seek what I would call a 'univocal expression.' By that I mean the search for essences, the desire to express exactly what I thought, at any given moment—to find the bedrock of an idea. Whereas fiction, at least as I practice it, has allowed me to embrace my own contradictions. I can talk out of the two sides of my mouth at once. (Benedetti 191). 35

- 20 His first texts indeed show Auster—the novelist brilliantly allowing several voices to coexist on the page, just as was already the case in *The Invention of Solitude* with the coexistence of the pronouns “I” and “He”. First by blurring the frontiers between real life and fiction and allowing the reader to identify and recognize multiple Barthian biographems: Paul Auster and his son Daniel appear in *City of Glass* in an apartment that looks like theirs in Brooklyn, while his wife’s identity is barely veiled by an obvious anagram (Siri/Iris); Auster’s mentally ill sister, Janet, mentioned in a few painful paragraphs in *The Invention of Solitude*, can be recognized in Fanshawe’s sister in *The Locked Room*, and Fanshawe, on his way to France, experiences the same menial jobs as Auster himself in the same situation; in *Moon Palace*, Auster also lends Marco Stanley Fogg his youth in the late 1960s, his studies in Columbia, his favorite places, his fascination for the events of the period, and an absent father; in *Leviathan*, he shares his initials with Peter Aaron. The paratexts (interviews, for instance, which multiply as Auster becomes more and more successful) help to underline the points of contact between the author and his characters, to the readers’ delight. This porosity between Auster’s life and his characters’ is strengthened by the fact that these fictional beings are all engaged in writing activities of some sorts: they are (former or apprentice-)writers (Quinn, Fanshawe, Aaron), journalists (the anonymous narrator of *The Locked Room*, Sam in *In the Country of Last Things*), scholars (Barber in *Moon Palace*), detectives who have reports to hand in (Blue in *Ghosts*), or again prisoners who feverishly confide their stories before a final catastrophe (Anna in *In the Country of Last Things*), and each one of them tells the story of a life, whether their own or that of another, only to discover in the latter case that the other’s life is nothing but a reflection of theirs. The hall of mirrors thus expands with every new novel and Auster’s reflections proliferate. The game develops outside of the novels also since Siri Hustvedt is part of it: in her first autofictional novel, her narrator, Iris, mentions “a volume of poems called *Unearth* by an American poet I had never heard of” (Hustvedt 110) and thus initiates an intertextual exchange with Auster; later, in *Leviathan*, Auster uses this same Hustvedtian character in his plot and marries her to one of his. It would be vain to try and exhaust the examples of the various ways life and fiction communicate and dialogue in Auster’s novels: the latest, *4321*, enables the reader to revisit the entire Austerian world with its major highlights, seminal anecdotes and striking characters.
- 21 But the extensive use of biographical elements and autoreferential situations is not the only way Auster has of “talk[ing] out of the two sides of [his] mouth at once”: a tight intertextual network also develops between the first autobiographical volume, *The Invention of Solitude*, and the novels which seem to result directly from the rich literary or philosophical musings that the first memoir contains. Indeed, Auster’s solitary fate in his bleak and empty room mirrors that of his brothers of infortune, Jonah or Pinocchio whose adventures are abundantly commented on in the memoir, and announces that of most of his characters whose womb-like cells will take the shape of a locked room in a Bostonian house or of a cave in Central Park: they, too, experience utter solitude, pitch darkness and extreme destitution before they find a new voice and identity. In the same way, Auster’s obsession, in *The Invention of Solitude*, for the

premature disappearances and/or deaths of innocent children through history (Walt Raleigh, Titus Rembrandt, Mur Tsvetayeva, Anne Frank, Anatole Mallarmé, Etan Paz...), finds fictional continuation in many of the novels which include abused or dead children; and his fascination, expressed in the same memoir, for trapped, walled-off women whose voices keep bringing life and truth into the world (Cassandra, Shehrzad, Emily Dickinson, Anne Frank...) obviously gives birth to Anna Blume, Auster's sole female narrator and one of his most powerful narrative voices, several years later—and these are just two examples among many. *The Invention of Solitude*, an autobiographical text published by an unknown poet and literary essayist, thus already contains many of the main themes and myths from which a whole fictional work is to develop; it also celebrates intertextuality, the repetition, the use and the quotation of previous texts which memory has sedimented, as central principles for writing. In his first memoir, at 32, Paul Auster therefore invents solitude which is nothing but an echo chamber in which his own life resounds with many others, both real and fictional, in which his own newly-born voice reverberates among other melancholy laments. "I felt as though I was looking at the bottom of myself and what I found there was more than just myself—I found the world," Auster once said about "The Book of Memory." "That's why that book is filled with so many references and quotations, in order to pay homage to all the others inside me. On the one hand, it's a work about being alone; and on the other hand, it's about community" (McCaffery and Gregory 301).

- 22 One of the consequences of this tight connection between the realm of autobiography and that of fiction-writing is the fact that, as seen in the beginning of this essay, Paul Auster has become a character of Paul Auster. Hence, perhaps, the necessity of going back to self-writing regularly.

## The recurrence of self-writing: returning to the stability of biographems

- 23 Four other memoirs followed the 1982 publication of *The Invention of Solitude*. In 1993, Auster published *The Red Notebook*, a short volume in which the eponymous section gathers true stories characterized by coincidence, what Auster describes as "the bare-bones truth about the unpredictability of experience" (Wood 576). The stories either happened to Auster himself or to others, friends or relatives, and he tells them in a simple, straightforward way, stating facts until unbelievable coincidences emerge, both stunning and delighting the Austerian reader: the volume somehow proves that the unexpected, improbable events which abound in Auster's novels also happen in "real life", that reality can indeed be even stranger than fiction, and that the frontier between facts and imagination is decidedly blurred. The last story in "The Red Notebook," for example, recalls the well-known anecdote that gave birth to *City of Glass*: Auster once received two calls for the Pinkerton Agency and hung up, then regretted not having pretended to be one of their detectives. But he now adds a sequel to this anecdote: ten years after the fictionalization of the regret in *City of Glass*, another phone call reached him and a man "in dead earnest" asked to speak to "Mr. Quinn". "I learned that books are never finished, that it is possible for stories to go on writing themselves without an author," Auster writes (*Notebook* 37), thus coming full circle and definitively reducing to rubble the walls between his characters and himself.

- 24 Four years later, he goes back to memoir-writing with *Hand to Mouth. A Chronicle of Early Failure* (1997). In an interview, he explains that for years, he had had the project of writing a serious essay on the experience of being poor and even had the working title in mind (*Essay on Want*), but that once started, the philosophical essay turned “into the story of [his] own problematic dealings with money” as well as into an evocation of many “colorful characters” he met in his life, people who had no money whatsoever, often very little education and who were yet remarkably resourceful and witty (Woods 582). The volume first humorously analyzes his parents’ radically opposite relationships with money and the resulting tensions in the family, then his own contempt for money-making, steady, white-collar jobs, his many ways of keeping afloat as a careless student and then his anxieties as a husband and father who was barely able to take care of his family. Once again, the reader learns more about these periods in his life which Auster has so often included in his fictions: his years in France where he met poets and writers and survived as a penniless translator, then the rough patch which he tried to get past by publishing a detective novel under a pseudonym, or again the baseball card game that he once invented in the hope of making a fortune... The memoir casts a new light, from a different perspective, on this life which has now undoubtedly become an object of interest for his readers as much as a source of writing.
- 25 Significantly, in 2000, Auster co-published “The Story of my Typewriter,” a brief text illustrated by Sam Messer, an artist who, he explains, once came to see him and fell in love with his typewriter to the point of painting several canvasses of the thing, included in the text. Although Auster insists on Messer’s having triggered off the whole affair that gave birth to the book, his typewriter was already famous before it was so lovingly painted. Indeed, Auster has often explained his rejection of computers and his old-fashioned habits as far as writing goes: he writes by hand, revising his texts again and again before he feels satisfied with a paragraph and types it on the 1962 manual Olympia portable typewriter that he bought from a friend in 1974. His readers know how attached he now is to this object which has never left him, to the point that some of them reportedly send him ribbons whenever they come across them, knowing how precious they have become since the company stopped manufacturing them. Auster’s typewriter is therefore as legendary today as is his passion for Clairefontaine notebooks, and both are regularly mentioned in countless interviews which never fail to recall those elements that belong to the “ethos préalable”<sup>10</sup> (Amossy) of the writer. Messer’s artistic declaration of love to the typewriter, a passion which Auster relates in “The Story of my Typewriter,” thus comes as a consecration of both the object and the paratextual discourse Auster has as lovingly developed about his “old companion”.
- 26 In 2012, after a few novels which were sometimes harshly criticized, Auster came back to memoir-writing with *Winter Journal*, immediately followed by 2013 *Report from the Interior*. Those two major opuses were framed by two other publications which strengthened the importance of Auster’s nonfiction work: in 2010, a new edition of *Collected Prose* came out, gathering *The Invention of Solitude*, *Hand to Mouth*, *The Red Notebook* and many essays, prefaces, occasional pieces never before collected; and in 2013, Auster’s correspondence with J. M. Coetzee was published under the title *Here and Now. Letters (2008-2011)*. In four years, therefore, four volumes were offered to the amateur of Auster’s nonfictional voice.

- 27 *Winter Journal* opens on a few fragmented pages in which Auster, suddenly addressing himself in the second person, evokes the present moment and his coming sixty-fourth birthday, and then briefly mentions various other ages ("You are bare feet on the cold floor as you climb out of bed and walk to the window"; "You are ten years old, and the midsummer air is warm [...]"; *Winter 1*) before launching his project in the imperative form: "Speak out before it is too late," he orders himself. "Perhaps it is just as well to put aside your stories for now and try to examine what it has felt like to live inside this body from the first day you can remember being alive until this one. A catalogue of sensory data. What one might call a *phenomenology of breathing*" (*Winter 1*). And the entire book sets out to recapture every physical sensation the memory has kept traces of from the earliest age. Having reached a moment in his life when age, health impairment and the conscience of death can be part of everyday life, Auster keeps going back and forth between his youth and the moment of writing, remembering the "physical pleasures and physical pains" (*Winter 2*) branding each step along the way, marveling at the myriad of sensations which the human body experiences and archives throughout a lifetime: playing outside when a child, toying with insects or running around in the snow, endlessly tasting the unequalled joys of baseball, of course, discovering sexuality, and then feeling one's body fully mature, functioning without having to think about it before age starts to slow it up, and sometimes to bring it down. The text contains long, eclectic lists à la *Perec* (one of Auster's favorite French writers) in which he draws from his memory and juxtaposes bodily sensations and experiences; or anecdotes which are precisely dated, in which the body went through different kinds of accidents, crises or shutdowns, events which left scars, ailments or fears; a whole sixty-page long section is also devoted to the various permanent addresses Auster has been living at since his birth, in the United States or abroad, 20 houses or apartments in which his body lived, grew, ate, made love, was happy or not, and wrote in various rooms before settling down in his present Brooklyn home.
- 28 In this fragmented text which mixes the past and the present and which allows the child, the young man, the writer on the rise and the now mature writer aware of having "entered the winter of [his] life" (*Winter 230*) to coexist on the page, the body is, of course, the prism through which Auster revisits his life, but there is also a more specific guiding thread: as if the volume was the counterpart of *The Invention of Solitude*, it is the mother's life, old age and death in 2002 which Auster evokes in small touches. If Queenie Auster was almost absent from her son's first memoir, it comes as no surprise that she should occupy the center of this new text organized around a reflection on the body: *The Invention of Solitude*, indeed, recalls Auster's fragile health in his early years and the way his mother doted on him, taking him to countless specialists, always present whenever some wound, bruise or scar needed tending. She has no real space in *The Invention of Solitude* which focuses on Auster's quest for identity and legacy, both paternal and literary, but she naturally fits into this new meditation devoted to her son's *physical* presence in the world, to the thickness of corporeal life, to the mysteries of bodily existence which cannot be envisaged without including whatever comes into contact with your skin, that exterior barrier which both separates and connects you to your environment—be it the others, the weather, the material limits of a room or the pleasures and aggressions of daily life. And sometimes this outside world violently collides with your body (as is the case in the car accidents Auster relates), and sometimes this outside world even penetrates your body and pierces your heart, reaching the interior in breathtaking ways. *Winter Journal* thus closes on two memories

in which a physical experience opens on a mental experience which is so powerful that is not even accessible to thought.

- 29 The first one begins with a simple reflection on how many crossings he has done between Manhattan and Brooklyn where he has lived since 1980. "[S]urely it is the trip that you have taken more often than any other in your life" (*Winter* 225), he writes before focusing on the Brooklyn Bridge, on the world-famous view of Southern New York that it offers, on its dazzling architecture that one of his novels once recalled<sup>11</sup>, on the pleasure he has always felt riding on the bridge, always expecting his favorite spot: "the exact point where you could simultaneously see the Statue of Liberty in the harbor to your left and the downtown skyline looming in front of you" (225-226). And in the same, almost two-page long paragraph, "the Towers" suddenly enter without any unnecessary indication of their precise identity, as well as the day "the suicidal murderers visited New York", and the "dead," "the ashes," "the stench" that followed the destruction of the Towers. In a single paragraph, in a single breath, pre-9/11 and post-9/11 days are evoked without the date being even mentioned, and Auster continues the crossing of Brooklyn Bridge, regularly accomplishing a journey that is both the same and irremediably alien, surrounded by the dead ("the dead are still there"), both in awe and in disbelief at the event which once punched "a empty hole in the sky" (226).
- 30 The second experience, which almost closes the book, is the visit he once made to what remained of the camp, in Bergen-Belsen, where Anne Frank and her sister (among many) died. Because the buildings were demolished and because the site is now empty, he could not "feel the presence of the dead" until he stood on a patch of grass "the size of a large room" (*Winter* 228) which, slightly elevated, contained "the bodies of 50,000 Russian soldiers," as he reads on the explanatory sign. Unable to imagine how so many corpses could be packed in such a space ("so much death concentrated in such a small patch of ground" *Winter* 229), Auster is suddenly and literally *traversed* by the voices of the dead:
- [...] and a moment later you heard the screams, a tremendous surge of voices rose up from the ground beneath you, and you heard the bones of the dead howl in anguish, howl in pain, howl in a roaring cascade of full-throated, ear-splitting torment. *The earth was screaming*. For five or ten seconds you heard them, and then they were silent. (*Winter* 229)
- 31 The passage ends here. Auster does not try to find a meaning to the moment when he actually heard the naked and the dead howling beneath his feet. He continues his fragmented narrative, adds a paragraph on his father who regularly visits him in his dreams, one last Perecquian list, one last question ("How many mornings are left?"), one last physical sensation ("Your bare feet on the cold floor as you climb out of bed") and one last statement ("You have entered the winter of your life," 230). But nothing more on the trauma of 9/11 or of Bergen-Belsen, no analysis. Perhaps because the narrator in *Winter Journal*, just like his French counterpart in Daniel Pennac's contemporary *Journal d'un corps* (2012), scrupulously endeavors to "distinguish the body from the mind" (Pennac 22, my translation), and sticks to his plan. Which also possibly explains the immediate publication of *Report from the Interior*: the body once probed in its most intimate recesses, the mind appeared as another continent, as unknown but perhaps less approachable as the body.

## **Report from the Interior or the latest gesture of the lithographer**

January 3, 2012, exactly one year to the day after you started composing your last book, your now-finished winter journal. It was one thing to write about your body, to catalogue the manifold knocks and pleasures experienced by your physical self, but exploring your mind as you remember it from childhood will no doubt be a more difficult task—perhaps an impossible one. Still, you feel compelled to give it a try. Not because you find yourself a rare or exceptional object of study, but precisely because you don't, because you think of yourself as anyone, as everyone.  
(Report 4)

- 32 This paragraph is to be found on the second page of Auster's fifth memoir and clearly presents it as the natural sequel to *Winter Journal*, its logical counterpart. Auster's new challenge ("exploring your mind as you remember it from childhood") demands, once again, a return to the origins, a recommencing of the whole autobiographical enterprise through a new prism. During one of his interviews, Auster was once presented with the idea that his five autobiographical books could be compared to the patient process of lithography: each book goes back to the same starting point but each time, decisive technical variations are effected and each time (the choice of the personal pronoun governing the narrative voice, for instance), a new color is applied, which means that the same image/story is going through a new filter (the death of the father and the theme of solitude, then the lack of money, then the unexpected, then the body and finally the mind). "Yes, I think you're absolutely right, and that's why I feel they all go together in the end," Auster replied (Cochoy and Vallas np) before describing the successive stages which gave birth to his fifth and latest memoir: the first section, the narrative about childhood, was first supposed to be published as such, but then he felt the need to write about movies and those passages, too long, could not fit in the first section; so the second section, presenting a long analysis of the lasting impact which *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* produced on his young mind, was written; then, because he wanted to include stills from the movies but does not like pictures included in books ("I feel that the pictures diminish the words, and the words diminish the pictures, and it doesn't work," Cochoy and Vallas np), he finally put together a whole section including stills from the aforementioned movies as well as many other images in different ways related to the first section; and finally, as the book was coming together, Lydia Davis, his first wife, wrote to him about his letters which she was on the verge of giving to a library, among other documents, as an archival collection. Reading his letters to her in order to judge whether or not they should be given, Auster had "the strange experience of encountering a stranger who happened to have been [him] once upon a time. It was an eerie feeling"; and a fourth and last part was thus added to *Report from the Interior*, focused on "late childhood [...], early adulthood" (Cochoy and Vallas np).
- 33 The plurality at the heart of this *Report from the Interior*, its material and visual heterogeneity as well as its original voice were at the origins of the decision of several researchers belonging to the same Research Unit at Aix-Marseille University (the LERMA) and more particularly to the same Programme within the LERMA's general structure (entitled "Le sujet comme objet/ The Subject as an Object"), to work together on Auster's fifth memoir. Some are linguists, some are visual art experts, and some are specialists of literature and their research fields usually bring them to work on genres,

forms, periods even which are not Auster's. How would all those researchers approach *Report from the Interior* and develop their respective analyses? How would their individual interests (the epistolary genre; the underlying structures of the fairy tale in modern fiction; the presence of images in a prose text; linguistic analysis of pronouns and voices in self-narratives; the confusion and divisions at the heart of modern self-writing...) lead them to read such a multi-faceted work? And what would emerge from this joint venture in terms of the shared interest of its participants in "the subject as an object"?

- 34 First of all, the memoir's strange title gave rise to several readings: while Richard Phelan is musically attracted to its "double 'or'" which gives it "a discreet internal rhyme and final lingering signifier which rings out the idea of an alternative," Nicolas Pierre Boileau insists on its double reference to an exterior and an interior reflecting the "division of the self" which the whole volume highlights. As Monique De Mattia-Viviès further contends, this title which "bears the trace of a conflict whose issue is the person itself" must be carefully analyzed in the way it opposes an exterior and an interior which the use of a deictic article ("the interior") turns into anaphoric notions; besides, the puzzling absence of any article before the noun "report" ("a report," for instance) opens the possibility of reading it as a verb in the imperative, in which case, the title sounds like an urgent order, given by the author to himself, to "report from the interior," to write as a reporter which, as De Mattia-Viviès underlines, implies some sort of time delay separating the reporter from the reported upon, and thus raises delicate issues of objectivity versus subjectivity.
- 35 Where indeed does the report come from? From Paul Auster, the sixty-five-year old writer in search of his lost past, or from the child-Auster before "the boundary of twelve" which the former set as a limit for his text when devising his project (*Report 5*)? Remembering how impressed he was when he read Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* at age eight, Auster recollects his admiration at the way Stevenson, "a grown man when those poems were written," as he knew, nevertheless "deftly and persuasively [...] employed the first person throughout the book, pretending to write from the point of view of a small child" (26). And then, under the reader's eyes, another level of understanding emerges: addressing himself on the very page where he has just been writing about this early realization, thanks to Stevenson, of what point of view and pronominal voice could be, Auster goes through a second revelation prompted by this first illumination in the present of writing: "and you understand now, suddenly, that this was your first glimpse into the hidden wheelworks of literary creation, the mystifying process by which a person can leap into a mind that is not his own" (26). The reader's attention is therefore twice attracted to the way writers (Stevenson and Auster) circumvent the difficulty, inherent to self-narratives, induced by the age-difference between the child of the memories and the author in the present of narration. But where Stevenson (simply) shifted the point of view and pretended to speak in his child's voice without materializing the separation between the two instances by a change in personal pronouns, Auster turns the child he used to be into another whom he addresses as "you," thus widening the gap between the narrator and the narratee. Indeed, thanks to some magical power, the use of "you" "literally makes the subject 'I' disappear and replaces it with the addressee of the text" (Boileau). It literally "dislodges the 'I' from its traditional autobiographical central position," as Sandrine Sorlin suggests, and creates a reflection with which this autobiographical 'I' engages in a dialogue. Even more than that, De Mattia-Viviès argues, the original and

sacred status of the "I" suddenly crumbles as "the 'I' steps out of himself and dissociates from his self: 'you' is a person who is addressed, whereas 'I' is nothing but the origin".

- 36 All the authors of this collection of essays have felt the obligation to resort to various labels in order to make this distinction between the two Austers visible in their texts, as I myself have done from the outset of the present essay by distinguishing between "Auster-the detective," "Auster-the writer" and "Auster-the real" in *City of Glass*. If most authors tend to alternate "the young Paul Auster" and "Auster" to underline the difference between the object of the narrative and its author, Sara Watson nicely opts for "Young Auster" and "Current Auster," capitalizing the adjectives and cutting out the articles, while De Mattia uses "PA" for "young Paul Auster,". In any case, the use of "you" creates a gap which is both temporal (almost half a century separates the child from the writer) and spatial (Boileau shows that it is the space where the profound division of the subject can appear). More surprisingly, perhaps, it is also visual, as Phelan contends: indeed, the double nature of *Report from the Interior*, made both of words and images, seems to mirror the original division of the self, as if the play "between the verbal and its other, the visual" was another way of reproducing the central "play between self and former self, between self and other".
- 37 The "you" at the center of *Report from the Interior* is dazzlingly Protean and impersonates every possible instance in turn: it embodies Auster as a child and Auster as the retrospective narrator, but also sometimes Lydia Davis in the letters her lover sends her, and then, at other times, "the representative of a larger entity, [...] you as anyone" (Sorlin), including the reader. Indeed, using Arnaud Schmitt's definition of autobiography as "a collusion of two desires: 'the will to tell and the will to know,'"<sup>12</sup> Sandrine Sorlin shows that the "you" operates as a "space opener": by allowing Auster to find the perfect "intermediary 'distancing-immersing' effect," the pronoun "allows writer and reader to meet halfway" in "a willing ethical act of caring (for one another)". De Mattia-Viviès offers a darker reading of Auster's second-person subject: focusing on every possible type of occurrence of the "you", she concludes that because it "keeps oscillating between the specific and the generic," this pronoun of the lost past breaks free from linguistic norms and becomes an "anti-shifter" which sows discord as far as the other personal pronouns as well as the different levels of discourse (direct, indirect, free indirect speech) are concerned: Auster's multiple uses of "you" finally throw off the linguistic and existential magnet and disturb the entire narrative. "You" becomes considerably obscure, De Mattia-Viviès argues, and even points phonetically to the Jew (*Jude*) young Auster knew only confusedly he was at the time. Boileau, tackling *Report from the Interior* from a Lacanian point of view, develops a similar analysis and reads this text, which presents itself as a portrait of an ordinary kid growing up in the 50s United States, as "an example of what is *not* common in the experience of an(y) American, Jewish boyhood". Basing his analysis on the photo album and the role it plays in the general economy of the memoir, Phelan also highlights the way *Report from the Interior* raises the issue of "Jewish identity both in terms of the history of World War 2 and of the invisibility of Jews in American life," and he underscores Auster's variations on the same theme: the hero of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* becomes "no longer visible" (*Report* 173; the *Fugitive from the Chain Gang* who is irremediably trapped in jail; the people whom the Martians make disappear in *War of the Worlds*; Afro-Americans and Native Americans embodying the "Vanishing American". Phelan thus shows how young Auster, identifying with all these outcasts,

regularly experiences absences to himself which he calls "daze," moments during which he temporarily disappears, moments "of non-being, moments of ontological disappearance" (Boileau) which, in order to be related, demand from Auster "a poetic use of language [...] so as to make them his own" (Boileau).

- 38 In her analysis of the influence of fairy tales on Auster's imagination and writing, an influence that he has often acknowledged in his interviews, Marie Gourrut underlines the way the typical fictional Austerian character inevitably goes through a period in which they are made to disappear or, more often, in which they make themselves disappear, experiencing a form of death before coming back to life as new beings. She analyzes Auster's telling of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and of the impact the movie had upon him when he saw it as a child ("a metaphysical shock," *Report* 106) using the well-honed tools forged by the great specialists of fairy tales and other initiatory narratives, and shows that watching the movie amounted for young Auster to a rite of initiation in which he was as transformed as poor Carey himself, left to rely on his own resourcefulness in order to overcome ritualistic ordeals and to survive the insurmountable. *Report from the Interior* is, she contends, "like *Arabian Nights*, a book of metamorphoses," a "modernized" version of archetypal stories belonging to "the most ancient forms of literature".
- 39 Two essays specifically focus on the last section of *Report from the Interior*, in which 107 images are presented to the reader, captioned with italicized passages taken from the previous sections. Jean-Louis Claret analyzes the original "dialogue" which Auster establishes between words and images, noticing for instance that the captions do not always provide a limpid insight into the illustrations, sometimes working like those "cryptic Renaissance emblems whose meaning was driven home by the close connection between a few words [...] and an image". What comes first, in certain cases, Claret wonders, between the "literary image" created by the writer on the page on the basis of his memories, which prompted him to carry out a search for a visual representation of it, and the "image the grown-up Paul Auster came across years later and regarded, in retrospect, as a good example of the childish enchantment he was striving to recapture?" And what is the impact of these images gathered thus at the end of the book, on the reader's mind? "They show what the reader had endeavored to remember so far," Claret suggests, thus taking the risk of "annihilat[ing] the process that may be regarded as the salt of fiction reading," i.e. "the private projection of mental images on the screen of our minds". As Phelan remarks, these "medium-quality images" have the impossible task of mediating memory and perhaps, also, of standing as "surrogates for missing or non-existent personal images," since Auster explains, in *Report from the Interior*, that almost no trace of his childhood survived: "No drawings... no class pictures from grade school, no report cards, no summer camp pictures, no home movies, no team pictures... For a person born in the mid-twentieth century... your life is the least documented of anyone you have ever known" (177), he writes, thus sending the reader back to a striking passage in *The Invention of Solitude* which shows him in his recently dead father's house, opening a "blank photograph album, This Is Our Life: The Austers" (*Invention* 68). But, as Phelan points out, if the images to a certain extent "serve to mediate with the viewer, enabling the latter to imagine the story's particulars while finding with respect to a general one a story close to his own," they might also include their own failure, or at least their inherent incompleteness, and his essay offers perspectives for "Album," in *Report from the Interior*, to be seen as a

"concept" à la *Sophie Calle* or à la *Warhol*, waiting for a performance, a soundtrack or a voice.

- 40 A voice, that of the author as a young man, is precisely what Sara Watson listens to and deconstructs in her essay devoted to "Time Capsule," the section in which Auster acts as "a biographer of his own life sources" (Sorlin), "as an editor of a past version of himself" (Watson). This epistolary corpus gives him access to abundant "unpublished juvenilia" which contrast with the disappeared sources belonging to childhood. Watson playfully analyzes the way Auster edits his love letters written while in France, quotes himself in two languages, translates himself, cuts, provides footnotes and comments upon his tone, voice and various poses. Auster's editorial voice, "which almost seems like a voice-over" and which, in this respect, echoes his voice in the section devoted to the movies, "constantly strives to create narrative coherence and to impose an overarching theme on the fragments: the birth of a writer, with a crescendo of mastery which finds its apex at the end of the chapter" (Watson).
- 41 Archie Ferguson, the main protagonist of *4321*, shares Auster's most salient biographems but enjoys several fates: early in the novel, his life indeed branches into four parallel plots, resulting in four different versions of a single existence coexisting side by side. After giving them the same genetic and family background, Auster projects the four Archies into dissimilar childhoods and teenagehoods, and if they retain a few common points (their falling in love with Amy Schneiderman, for instance, or their longing for writing, or their naturally generous attitudes in life), they nevertheless develop differently both physically (their respective bodies are scarred and marked by various events, they do not have the same sexualities...) and mentally (social and historical events do not influence them in the same ways, they do not have the same intellectual formation nor development...). In an interview, Auster explained that he wanted to capture "the nature of the havoc roiling inside" a child growing up in the 1950s and inside an adolescent going through the 1960s, and went on: "I wanted to give a sense of what it felt like to grow up then [...] and I worked hard thinking about the different stages" of the life of a young person (Laity np). *Winter Journal* and *Report from the Interior*, as well as Auster's previous memoirs, no doubt served as preparatory studies for this "elephant" of a novel (Auster in Laity np) in which Auster revisits his own lifeline and begets four reflections, identical, coexistent and alien at the same time. His own, brilliant version of the mesmerizing trick photograph of his father in the Atlantic City studio.

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## NOTES

1. Paul Auster, *Report from the Interior*, 16.
2. Auster published five volumes of poetry: *Unearth* in 1974, *Wall Writing* in 1976, *Fragments from Cold* in 1977, *White Spaces* in 1980 and *Facing the Music* in 1980. A selection of poems was published in *Disappearances: Selected Poems 1970-1979* (1988), then in *Ground Work* (1990) and in *The Art of Hunger* (1992).
3. For an analysis of Auster's poetry, see Chénétier.
4. L'écrivain : « celui qui, toujours, laissera une trace pour l'absent » (Greene 41).
5. Le texte de Nietzsche « n'est pas autobiographique parce que le signataire raconte sa vie [...] mais parce que cette vie, il se la raconte, il est le premier sinon le seul destinataire de la narration » (Derrida 56).
6. Nietzsche tire son identité « du contrat inouï qu'il a passé avec lui-même » (Derrida 46-47).
7. Un homme qui « met en jeu son nom-ses noms- et ses biographies » (Derrida 40).
8. « [...] ce n'est pas du tout la constitution d'un sujet, mais la création de modes d'existence, ce que Nietzsche appelait l'invention de nouvelles possibilités de vie. [...] Nietzsche y voyait l'ultime dimension de la volonté de puissance, le vouloir artiste » (Deleuze, *Pourparlers* 160).
9. « Oui, il y a des sujets : ce sont des grains dansants dans la poussière du visible, et des places mobiles dans un murmure anonyme. Le sujet, c'est toujours une dérivée. Il naît et s'évanouit dans l'épaisseur de ce qu'on dit, de ce qu'on voit » (Deleuze 146).
10. Amossy's expression could translate as "Pre-existing ethos".
11. See the story of the construction of the bridge in *Moon Palace*.
12. Arnaud Schmitt, *The Phenomenology of Autobiography. Making it Real*.

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## ABSTRACTS

This essay analyzes the way *Report from the Interior*, Auster's fifth autobiographical text, fits in his production which can be seen as largely autobiographical not only because Auster uses many biographems in his fiction, but also because his whole work (poetic, fictional and non-fictional) seems to originate in a global autobiographical project which he has been developing from his very first texts onward. It also presents the work done by several researchers of the LERMA Research Unit, at Aix Marseille Université, on *Report from the Interior* which they have analyzed in its autobiographical, literary, linguistic, visual or epistolary dimensions. Their exploration of this strange memoir, described by Auster as "four things in one," gave birth to the essays published in this issue of *E-rea*.

Cet article analyse la place de *Report from the Interior*, cinquième récit de soi publié par Paul Auster, dans l'ensemble de son œuvre qui peut être vue comme largement autobiographique, non

seulement parce qu'elle utilise de nombreux biographèmes avec lesquels Auster aime à jouer, mais parce qu'elle semble naître dans un véritable projet autobiographique qu'Auster développe depuis ses tous premiers textes. Ce texte présente également le travail de plusieurs chercheurs du LERMA (Aix-Marseille Université) sur *Report from the Interior*, analysé dans ses dimensions autobiographique, littéraire, linguistique, visuelle ou encore épistolaire. Leur exploration de cet étrange ouvrage, décrit par Auster comme "four things in one", a donné naissance aux articles publiés dans ce dossier d'*E-rea*.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Paul Auster, Report from the Interior, self-narrative, autobiography, memoir

**Mots-clés:** Paul Auster, Report from the Interior, récit de soi, autobiographie, autofiction

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