

ADAPTATION AND AMPLIFICATION IN PAUL AUSTER'S CITY OF GLASS

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ABSTRACT

Paul Auster's meta-fictional detective story, City of Glass, involves a complex linguistic investigation into the nature, function, and meaning of language. Using a highly conventional literary genre, detective fiction, Auster, using deconstructionist principles, carefully structures the collapse of these conventions, ultimately a signifying structure, and with them the collapse of language.

Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli adapted from City of Glass a graphic novel, Paul Auster's City of Glass, extending Auster's interrogation of signifying structures to the signification of pictorial images. The novel offers a deliberate challenge to comics theorists such as Scott McCloud and Will Eisner who have made claims to the universality and culturally transcendent meanings of pictorial images. This thesis argues Karasik and Mazzucchelli establish the ambiguity of signification and the concept of deferral and difference in pictorial images thus employing the conventions of comics to collapse the signifying conventions of the comics genre and with it the collapse of comics pictorial-based language.

Paul Auster's City of Glass, I would like to suggest, creates an independently viable text that brings Auster's crisis of meaning full circle by indicating the ambiguity of signification on multiple levels of representation whether spoken written or drawn. Borrowing from Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation, this thesis explores the relationship of the graphic adaptation to its source text in order to propose that, rather than merely illustrating Auster's text, Karasik and Mazzucchelli add resonance to Auster's work, creating a new text that can be interpreted and understood with no prior knowledge of the source. At the same time, the adaptation lends validity and value to

alternate cultural forms such as graphic novels and adaptations, both of which have been historically marginalized in English studies.

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INTRODUCTION

In the good mystery, there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing. [...] Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end. (Auster 15)

Even at the end, it is possible that no circumference can be drawn. Paul Auster's meta-fictional detective story, City of Glass, involves a complex linguistic investigation into the nature, function, and meaning of language. Using a highly conventional literary genre, detective fiction, Auster carefully structures the collapse of these conventions, ultimately a signifying structure, and with them the collapse of language. Basing his detective novel on deconstructionist principles, Auster's novel defies centering. Each word and symbol is designed to defer meaning, even after the novel itself has finally come to a close.

Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli extend Auster's interrogation of signifying structures to the signification of pictorial images. Karasik and Mazzucchelli adapted City of Glass into a graphic novel, Paul Auster's City of Glass, which was later reprinted as City of Glass: The Graphic Novel. The novel offers a significant challenge to comics theorists such as Scott McCloud and Will Eisner who have made claims to the universality and culturally transcendent meanings of pictorial images. Karasik and Mazzucchelli are able to establish the ambiguity of signification and the concept of

deferral and difference in pictorial images. They employ the conventions of comics to collapse pictorial-based language.

Thus, Karasik and Mazzucchelli do not merely recreate Auster's ideas; they employ his strategies on a different plane—a plane of language that was perceived by some comics theorists as defying the structures of verbal language. As an adaptation, the graphic novel should not be conceived of and read as an illustration of the source text¹ or as secondary to the source text; Paul Auster's City of Glass amplifies the ideas in the source text while, at the same time, being independently viable. Scholar Linda Hutcheon, in A Theory of Adaptation, asserts that adaptations are “repetition without replication” (Theory 7). Adaptations are often treated as secondary works and evaluated by their faithfulness to the “original” text—a method she deems unproductive (Theory 7). Drawing on Hutcheon’s theories of adaptation, this thesis will argue that Karasik and Mazzucchelli (re)create a new text in Paul Auster’s City of Glass to engage with the themes of the source text using pictorial images in combination with verbal language to propose that no representation or signifying process is concrete. The graphic adaptation of the novel brings Auster’s crisis of meaning full circle by indicating the ambiguity of signification on multiple levels of representation whether spoken, written, or drawn. Hutcheon describes adaptations as having a “double nature” that informs and is informed by the source text. Similarly, I will argue that rather than a simplification of Auster’s prose novel or a retelling of Auster’s story, the adaptation, as Hutcheon argues about adaptations as a whole, is a text that works in conjunction with and separate from its source text (Theory 6). The relationship between Auster’s novel and Karasik’s and

¹ Hutcheon uses the term “source” to refer to a prior text to which adaptations “have an overt and defining relationship” (Theory 3). The term, which will be henceforth used in this paper, attempts to diffuse the loaded language of originality and derivation common to the study of adaptations.

Mazzucchelli's graphic adaptation creates a productive tension between text and image that draws attention to the visual elements of the narrative as well as the linguistic and rhetorical nature of the visual.

This tension is created using comics conventions and graphic storytelling.

Comics are, in fact, a unique and complex medium. Contrary to what some may assume, reading and interpreting comics actually requires advanced literacy and sensitivity to art and literature. It is this interaction of art and literature that makes comics such a dynamic and growing medium. In "asking us to read back and forth between images and words, comics reveals the visuality and thus materiality of words and the discursivity and narrativity of images," explains Marianne Hirsch in her editorial "Collateral Damage" (qtd. in Whitlock 966). Within comics, image and picture work together, adding to one another and, sometimes, productively disrupting one another; the images work as mimesis and the text as diegesis to create a medium in which text and image are constantly in dialogue. "Comics are not a hybrid of art and literature," explains Gillian Whitlock in "Autographics: The Seeing 'I' of Comics," "but a unique interpretation that transcends both and emerges through the imaginative work of closure that readers are required to make between the panels on the page" (968-969). Thus, it is important to understand that comics and graphic novels cannot be read and interpreted by simply borrowing tools from the study of literature. Scott McCloud, author of Understanding Comics, explains comics as a medium separate from other media such as text, music, video, film, theater, and art (6). While comics incorporates many aspects of existing media, this unique combination of text and visual art creates a new medium requiring its own critical examination (McCloud 6). So, while elements of literature can be useful and

informative to the study of graphic novels, there is a complex play between words and images that the study of literature alone cannot elucidate.

Utilizing tools from literature and art, this thesis will investigate the viability of an adaptation of City of Glass. I will examine what it means to be called an adaptation, how adaptations are viewed, and what adaptations can offer. Next, I will look at the genre conventions of both detective novels and comics. As signifying structures, genre conventions can add layers of meaning onto a text through the reader expectations. Changing genres can expose expectations and potentially lead the reader to entirely different themes and ways of reading. Finally, I will present several images from the graphic adaptation to demonstrate that the graphic novel presents and makes present Auster's themes in unique ways that adds meaning to Auster's source text while, at the same time, creating a new work that is viable and comprehensible without prior knowledge of the source text.

If this study were to evaluate adaptation based on traditional scholarship of fidelity to the source text, then it would suggest that Paul Auster's City of Glass follows the plot of the source text very closely but much has been cut and substituted with pictorial images. As Auster's novel begins, the main character, Daniel Quinn, is a detective novelist working under the pseudonym William Wilson. His fiction features the private investigator Max Work, a rough, masculine character who always solves the crime. A wrong number in the middle of the night asking for the "Paul Auster Detective Agency" soon has Quinn taking on yet another identity, that of private investigator Paul Auster, attempting to solve a case without a crime. The caller is Peter Stillman, Jr., a man damaged physically and mentally as a boy by his father's search for a language that

rejoins words with their essences. Stillman, Sr. associates this “pure” language with the prelapsarian state of adamic language in the Garden of Eden before “language had been severed from God” (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 39). Stillman attempts to recreate this state of connection with God through language by confining his young son in a darkened room, restricting all contact with the outside world, and periodically beating him over the course of several years. Through his lack of contact with the outside world and with corrupted language, Stillman hopes Peter will retain the innocence of an original language. Imprisoned for many years for the abuse and neglect of his son, Stillman is to be released. Peter and his wife, the ambiguously available Virginia, fear that the elder Stillman, upon his release, will search Peter out and attempt to kill him.

Quinn feels a unique connection to Peter and a desire to protect the once abused boy because his own now dead son had the same name. Appointing himself the task of trailing Stillman through the streets of New York City, Quinn, in the role of Paul Auster, follows Stillman everywhere and records each movement in a red notebook (the only text in the novel written by Quinn that bears his own name) with a pen, which he bought from a deaf mute, demonstrating sign language in images on its barrel. Stillman, Quinn discovers after much research and through direct contact with the aging, increasingly senile father, is still pursuing his life-long work: attempting to create his own “pure” language. Caught up in the meta-mystery of words and meaning, Quinn loses track of Stillman and of the center of the mystery in which he is caught.

With Stillman gone, Quinn finds himself unfocused—lacking a center around which to formulate his ideas and interpret clues. At a loss as to what to do next, Quinn enlists the help of Paul Auster, a man he assumes to be the real private investigator for

whom Peter was searching. However, Auster is only another writer and is unable to offer advice. Peter's search for the Paul Auster Detective Agency is only another unsolved conundrum in a detective novel that fails to offer the reader the genre's promised resolution. Still uncertain as to what his next move should, the multiplying mysteries overwhelm him. Quinn positions himself in an alleyway across from Peter and Virginia's residence in the effort to protect them. Yet, they also disappear. After taking possession of the empty apartment that once belonged to Peter and Virginia, Quinn himself slowly disappears from the pages of the book, and the mystery concludes with more mystery than it held at the beginning. The entire novel operates on progressively complex layers of meaning, none of which offer any solution and only serve to deepen book's more enigmatic elements.

The most prominent enigma, lack of resolution, reflects the mystery of the process of signification with which Quinn struggles. "Logocentrism, the term applied to uses and theories of language grounded in the metaphysics of presence is the 'crime' that Auster investigates," asserts Alison Russell in "Deconstructing the New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction" (72). City of Glass explores the nature of language, specifically the space between the signifier and the signified and potential ways in which that gap is bridged as well as the sheer impossibility of doing so as demonstrated by the ultimate "failure" of the main character of a detective novel to solve the crime.

A reader familiar with Auster's work may wonder how the graphic adaptation presents in pictorial form the problematics of linguistic signification. However, through innovative use of the comics conventions and intriguing illustrations, Karasik and

Mazzucchelli are able to capture the novel's major themes of fragmentation, decentering, and the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified.

For example, in a key scene from the graphic novel Paul Auster's City of Glass, Quinn is researching Stillman's theory of language. Founded on mythological origins of language, Stillman imagines a time when the bond between the word and the idea were unproblematic. The frames of the graphic adaptation show Adam walking across the earth and the word shadow following him everywhere, symbolizing a pure language in which the word and its concept are the same and inseparable. As Adam faces his eviction from the Garden of Eden, the authors, Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli, portray him hovering on the edge of a cliff. The ground beneath Adam's feet crumbles and the fall from innocence becomes a literal fall. The word shadow is drawn separated from Adam, forsaken as Adam falls away with the disintegrated mountainside (see fig.1). Wrenched apart, shadow hovers momentarily before it also falls from purity of meaning. The fall described in Genesis is used as inspiration to propose a schism between God and man, the word and its meaning, and the representation and its referent. The reader is launched with the characters on an investigation into the mystery of postlapsarian language.

Given this focus on language and signifying practice, one can assume that these panels demonstrate a major theme in the novel that hinges on the work of twentieth-century linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure describes the relationship between a signifier and a signified as arbitrary (67). The word and its concept are separate; there is no innate connection between the two. Neither does there exist a sign capable of capturing the essence of a referent. In the graphic adaptation, this separation between the



Fig. 1. Example of a montage panel that demonstrates the adaptors interpretation of prelapsarian and postlapsarian language. From page 39 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

signifier and signified is wrought by the fall of language made synonymous with humanity's fall from Grace. The unstable ground for representation put forward visually in the graphic adaptation indicates pictures are no more stable than their verbal counterparts—a rickety relationship that makes for some interesting play between text and pictorial image as well as some clever graphic puns.

The graphic novel can represent the play and inherent instability of language in a way the conventional novel cannot. Whereas a novel can layer meaning and suggest the slippery nature of language in words, a graphic novel can add an additional layer of meaning with pictures that amplify, detract, or conflict with conventional verbal text. In spite of this complex amplification of meaning, the adaptation, Paul Auster's City of Glass, has received virtually no scholarly attention. Auster's prose version has, unlike the adaptation, been highly acclaimed by academic critics. The graphic novel's status as a popular culture medium may dissuade some scholars from taking a closer look at the remarkable potential of such texts.

Negative value judgments against popular culture mediums and adaptations place limits on what texts such as Paul Auster's City of Glass offer to the study of literature and language. Hutzcheon states, "We tend to reserve our negatively judgmental rhetoric for popular culture, as if it is more tainted with capitalism than is high art. [...] I have been struck by the unproductive nature of both that negative evaluation of popular culture adaptations as derivative and secondary and that morally loaded rhetoric of fidelity and infidelity used in comparing adaptations to "source" texts" (31). Unfortunately, such unproductive and negative evaluations regarding popular culture adaptations still prevail (though the discipline of cultural studies examines and interprets such cultural value

judgments in order understand them and make them productive). In an article marking the first release of Paul Auster's City of Glass, Newsweek quotes literary scholar Sven Birkerts as calling the graphic novel project “absurd.” Birkerts compares the adaptation of Auster into a graphic novel to Mozart on Muzak: “If you took a particular movement of Mozart and got the basic melody and did it as Muzak, you could argue that the melody was all there … but it's still Muzak” (qtd. in Plagens and Chang). Birkerts condemns not only the project of adapting City of Glass but popular culture mediums overall. It is, unfortunately, an attitude that is all too prevalent in scholarship, and one that successfully undermines the potential literary contributions of graphic adaptations.

However, reading and interpreting pictorial images and visual rhetoric found in graphic novels is becoming increasingly important as Will Eisner, comics expert and author of Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative, notes: “Indeed visual literacy has entered the panoply of skills required for communication in this century. Comics are at the center of this phenomenon” (3). Comics and graphic novels have been stigmatized because pictorial storytelling, a concept often linked to cave paintings², is seen as regressive and subliterate. However, comics are rapidly evolving as both literary and art forms and, in doing so, struggle for recognition as a “legitimate” medium (Eisner 2). As both a graphic novel and an adaptation, Paul Auster's City of Glass is doubly marginalized; however, the text reaches outside the traditional readership, those accustomed to literature designated as high culture, to popular genres of comics and

² Both Eisner and Scott McCloud, author of Understanding Comics, connect comics' use of pictorial images to primitive cave paintings as an example of the long historical tradition of graphic storytelling. Both authors seem to feel that it is the relative “newness” of the medium that puts comics at a disadvantage and the cave painting as graphic storytelling negates the “new media” argument. While I applaud their attempts to legitimize the medium by grounding it in historical tradition, I have found from personal conversations on the topic of comics that such an association can be a dangerous one due to its associations with “primitive” life rather than historical tradition.

detective fiction, drawing new audiences, and complicating ideas present in Auster's prose version in ways useful and valuable to the study of language and literature.

Specifically, Paul Auster's City of Glass demonstrates in pictorial images the mystery of language. Forcing the reader into the role of detective, the graphic adaptation frustrates the reader's conventional expectations and deprives him/her of a resolution, instead refocusing the reader on the process of reading—the opportunity to become detective and search for clues within the text. The center of the prose novel is constantly shifting, a motion that informs and is further complicated by the adaptation's graphic novel form by the play between text and image where the meaning of a panel can be found in the text, the picture, or the play between them both. The arbitrary relationship between the sign and the referent exhibited and underscored in the prose version is not merely reinforced by the translation into visual art but reflected, (re)presented with new insight. By investigating the relationship between written text and image, the potential exists to better understand language in the various forms of representation it takes, additionally proving the importance and value to English studies of alternate cultural forms such as adaptations and comics.

ADAPTATION

In his introduction to the 2004 edition of City of Glass: The Graphic Novel, graphic novelist Art Spiegelman writes, “I couldn’t figure out why on Earth anyone should bother to adapt a book into...another book!” (ii). Comics is considered both its own genre and a unique medium. The concepts of genre and medium in comics are complicated given the fact that a graphic novel, though qualified differently, is still in the same medium and genre as Auster’s prose version, also considered a novel. Yet with its exclusive methods of organizing, structuring, and imparting information through the use of conventions such as panels, gutters, zip ribbons, speech balloons, and caption boxes, comics and graphic novels do not look like novels. Using images for narration as opposed to illustration, comics offers a unique mode of transmission that has the ability to drastically alter meaning thus qualifying Paul Auster’s City of Glass as a creative (re)interpretation of another work—an adaptation.

Hutcheon defines an adaptation as “an acknowledged transposition of recognizable other work or works, a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, and an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (Theory 8). She further points out that the word adaptation can refer to the process, the product, and the reception, all of which are secondary to the source text (Theory 7-8). As a process, the adaptation is a (re)interpretation; as a product, it is chronologically second (or after) its source text; as a reception, an audience views the adaptation through memory of the source text. All three variations of the definition of adaptation place it in a secondary position to the source text, a position often equated with inferiority, lack of originality, or imitation. However, Hutcheon does not conceive of adaptation as secondary. To

conceptualize the relationship between the source text and the adaptation, Hutcheon borrows a term from critic Michael Alexander, who refers to adaptations as “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts” (Theory 6). The source text is under erasure. It is not completely erased and gone from textual memory; traces still exist and inform the adaptation and the reader. Simply because the process involves constant consultation of the source text does not mean that adaptations as a product cannot or should not also be considered independent of the source text.

Additionally, adaptations are far from being imitations: “An adaptation has its own aura,” states Hutcheon, referring to Walter Benjamin’s theory of art (Theory 6).

Examining Paul Auster’s City of Glass in relation to its source text can be extremely informative; however, the adaptation can be studied independently without previous knowledge of the source. And thus, by examining the adaptation interdependently and independently, the study of adaptations is finally able to move beyond the limiting sphere of fidelity studies.

Inherently intertextual, an adaptation’s relationship with its source text cannot be wholly ignored. In both 1994 and 2004 publications of the graphic adaptation, the title overtly announces to the reader its repetition of another text—Paul Auster’s City of Glass and City of Glass: The Graphic Novel—even as it announces its difference. The graphic novel pays homage to its source while at the same time reveling in its status as an adaptation. The reader is asked to experience the text as an adaptation whether or not he/she is familiar with the source text. Hutcheon claims the unknowing reader will experience an adaptation as he/she experiences any other work (120). The knowing reader, the reader familiar with the source, will experience the adaptation through the

memory of the source (Hutcheon 121). “In the process, we inevitably fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text,” explains Hutcheon (121).

Though the knowing and unknowing audience will receive the adaptation differently, that it is an adaptation sets up reader expectations as well. Knowing audiences expect to experience “the adaptation’s enriching, palimpsestic doubleness” (Hutcheon 120).

Unknowing audiences expect a text that does not rely too heavily on the reader’s existing knowledge so that he/she may experience the adaptation as a complete work in its own right.

In creating a complete, independent, new work, adaptors do not merely seek to impose their authority over or their interpretations onto the source text. Depending on the adaptors intentions, adaptations can be done in numerous ways. According to Julie Sanders, author of Adaptation and Appropriation:

Adaptation can be a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself. It can parallel editorial practice in some respects, indulging in the exercise of trimming and pruning; yet it can also be an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, accretion, and interpolation. Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a sourcetext. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original’, adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating. (18-19).

Paul Auster's City of Glass uses many of these processes in various combinations. "The process of writing for graphic narration concerns itself with the development of the concept, then the description of it and the construction of the narrative chain in order to translate it into imagery. The dialogue supports the imagery—both are in service to the story. They combine and emerge as a seamless whole" according to Eisner (111). So, finding an appropriate combination of words and pictures means reducing the source text down to a concept.

Distilling the language play and abstract concepts down to a concept without reinforcing the notion that adaptations are reductive presents some interesting challenges for the adaptors. In an interview with by Bill Kartalopoulos, Paul Karasik comments on the challenges of adapting Auster's text to graphic form: "City of Glass only appears initially impossible to do because it is so non-visual, because it is largely about the nature of language, because its subject matter is text itself, and the writing supporting that theme is so present and precise." As static images, comics don't easily convey abstractions or complex thoughts, which is most of what Auster's work is. Yet one of the methods Auster suggests in the his prose version for bringing words closer to their true meanings is using a language of symbols, most obviously demonstrated by the pen with which Quinn writes, bought from a deaf mute, with basic sign language represented on its side. It is with this pen that he fills the entirety of his red notebook, which becomes one of the texts the reader is interpreting. Significantly, Quinn fails to recreate an adamic language, in spite of his use of the pen and the privileging of visual signals and the "essential" language it represents. It is precisely this privileging of the visual over the verbal that

threatens to undermine Auster's carefully structured collapse of words and conventions; the protagonist, and with him the reader, must be trapped in a void of signification.

Karasik and Mazzucchelli engage with this potential difficulty in their graphic adaptation by challenging the reliability of visual representations of words and undermining the reliability of their own graphic representations. Visual symbols and metaphors are the primary methods the authors use to amplify Auster's logocentric interrogation rather than losing it in the process of adaptation.

Omission and Loss

Unfortunately, adaptation cannot always be amplification. Something must be eliminated in the process of adapting 203 pages of City of Glass to 138 pages in Paul Auster's City of Glass. As Hutcheon claims, "Usually adaptations, especially from long novels, mean that the adaptor's job is one of subtraction or contraction; this is called 'a surgical art' for a good reason" (19). And while much of this graphic adaptation follows Auster's prose version word for word in dialogue or captions, much of it has indeed been eliminated from the graphic novel version. However, the loss, more often than not, is improved or enhanced by a visual substitution.

In the opening scene of the graphic adaptation, three panels at the bottom of the third page indicate that the view moves slowly across the room, a visual panning across the setting of Quinn's bedroom and small New York apartment. It begins with a view of a bookcase and the exposed, wallpapered wall next to it. The view moves slightly to the right, leaving much of the bookcase behind, the wallpapered wall in the middle, and the frame of a window on the far right. Again, the view moves to the right. The reader sees the window, the view of the opposite side of a city street, and the rooftops beyond:

bricks, windows, and cornices. Once the page is turned, the view changes. It stops moving to the right. Instead it pauses and zooms in on the view; the reader, by making a connection from the previous frames through a process called closure, knows he/she is looking out the window. The lines of bricks, mortar, and windowpanes become increasingly blurry over the next two panels until the reader can no longer distinguish the shape of bricks or buildings. Instead, the lines have become a maze with numerous dead-ends. The zooming view reverses and begins to move out. The maze becomes smaller and in the next frame, it takes on an oval shape. It becomes a fingerprint smudged on the window glass of Quinn's New York apartment. In the final frame of the page, the focus is on Quinn's foot appearing to step out of the frame (see fig. 2).

The accompanying text of these frames reads:

More than anything else, what Quinn liked to do was walk. New York was a labyrinth of endless steps and no matter how far he walked it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Each time he took a walk, he felt he was leaving himself behind. By giving himself up to the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape thinking. All places became equal, and on his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself and he had no intention of leaving it again. (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 3-4)

In this passage, the adaptors chose to retain much of the text in this passage, yet they eliminate quite a bit from it as well. The text from Auster's prose version follows:

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its

neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal, and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again. (Auster 8-9)

A brief visual comparison of the length of the two passages makes it clear that the artists chose to remove several sentences from the text, demonstrating Hutcheon's description of the process of adapting as a "surgical art". The line "lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well" has been removed from the text of the adapted version. Considering that this passage greatly develops Quinn's character, it may seem a vital line to lose. Another line lost is "the world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long." Again, Quinn's isolation from the world seems to be essential to understanding

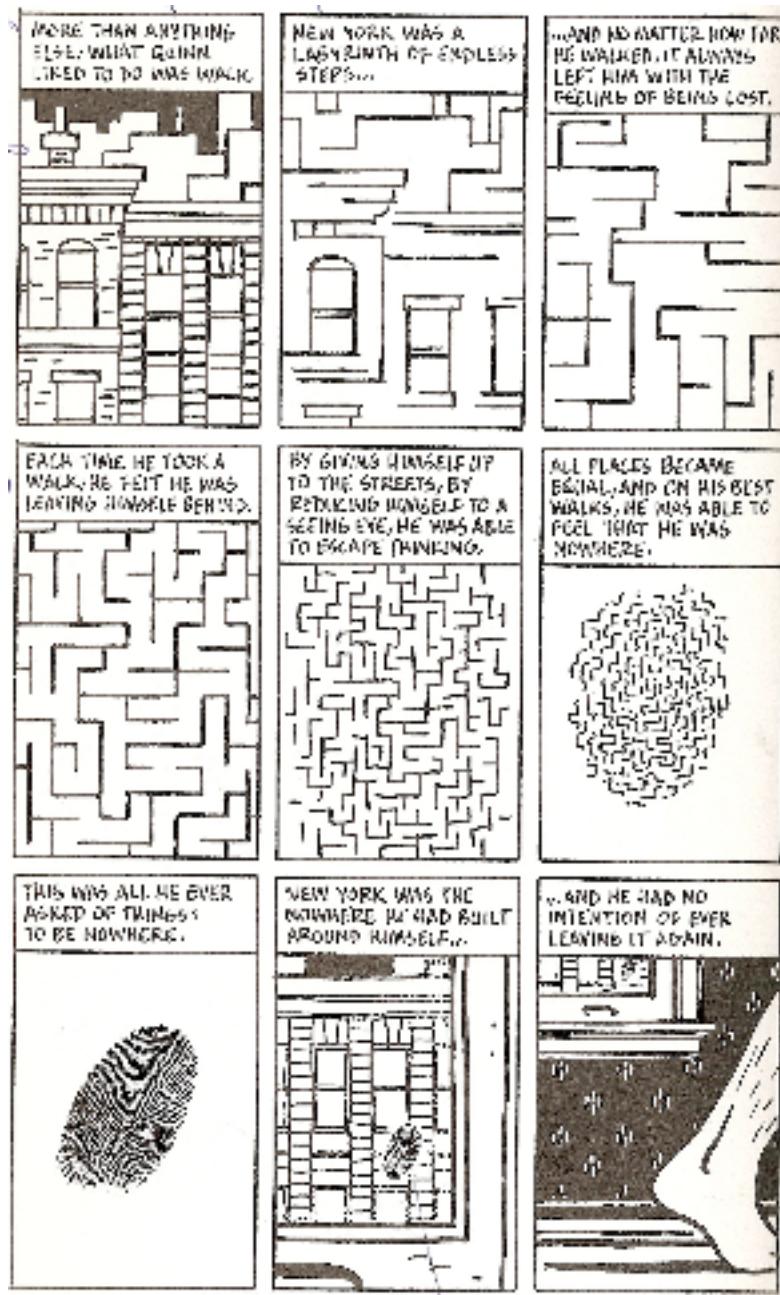


Fig. 2. Example of visual narrative. From page 4 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

his character. Auster has a very sparse writing style; it is difficult to understand why the adaptors choose to reduce it further and lose vital text.

However, vital text is not lost. In the panels, the images complicate the words, react with the words, and create a discursive relationship with the words. McCloud notes, “Generally speaking, the more is said with words, the more the pictures can be freed to go exploring and vice versa” (155). According to McCloud, words may be burdened with the clarity of a scene, yet, in doing so, the pictures may explore more abstract concepts (157). Or the pictures may clarify a scene while the words describe something philosophical. The variety of relationships that words can have with pictorial images creates opportunities unavailable to conventional text or art. In many panels, the images replace much of the narrative. In the scene above, the artists do not eliminate the idea that Quinn is lost within himself; they choose to focus in on it. The two especially visual elements in the source text’s passage are the city and the labyrinth. The adaptors retain these two visual elements for the adaptation into graphic form. By transforming the cityscape seen through Quinn’s window into a labyrinth and then into a single fingerprint, the artists are able to convey not only the visual elements of the source text, but also the non-visual elements of Quinn’s identity confusion, being “lost within himself,” and his isolation. Quinn’s separation from the world is that his identity, the fingerprint, imprinted on the glass of the window—the print lies over the city and yet is separated from it. The “world” spreads out around, before, and outside Quinn’s apartment window. The text is not lost nor is it illustrated. The text (re)presented with a different emphasis than the words alone can suggest.

In the process of adapting Auster's prose novel, Karasik and Mazzucchelli did not simply condense the text by eliminating what, perhaps, they perceived to be extraneous information or words that were not essential to their particular interpretation. Instead, they employ the same literary elements, metaphors and symbols, in a visual way. While many of the words have been eliminated, the narrative is not incomplete in any way. Stories become stories because they are arranged in a purposeful order, whether the principle of narration is oral or visual (Eisner 5). In fact, Auster's prose version, the source text, is expanded by the powerful use of this visual figurative language. Pictorial graphics stand in for many phrases, sentences, or even entire paragraphs taking on the function of narrative. Many readers complain that they do not enjoy a particular conventional text because they have trouble envisioning the narrative. Eisner explains that texts work on a "word-to-image conversion [...]. Comics accelerates that process by providing the image. When properly executed, it goes beyond conversion and speed and becomes a seamless whole" (5).

However, other key passages of the source text are lost with no immediately obvious corresponding pictorial narrative in the graphic adaptation. Auster gives the reader a very important clue as to how to approach and read his novel:

The detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. The reader sees the world through the detective's eyes, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. (15)

This passage does not appear in the graphic adaptation; yet, its significance should be noted—Auster is telling his reader how to read his book. It is a clue. While reading, the passage could easily become just more words on a page; the reader, as detective, must determine what is ordinary and what is a clue that will unravel the mystery of the text. It is the job of the writer to create a world that the reader can perceive through the detective's eyes. In the adaptation, it becomes the job of the artist. While Quinn is frequently the object of many of the panels, the reader visually traces Quinn's path through the mystery, seeing what Quinn sees as he sees it. Again, the loss of text from the source is not truly a loss; however, neither is its adaptation to the graphic novel restricted to only a panel or two. Instead, it becomes an overarching visual theme of the entire graphic novel. Panels are the way readers interpret and read comics and graphic novels, and, as the conventional form of comics, they structure the way a reader's eye moves. In Paul Auster's City of Glass, the conventions of this form become extremely important to how this graphic adaptation is read and understood.

GENRE CONVENTIONS

Think of Sam Spade from The Maltese Falcon by Dashiell Hammett when his own partner dies, and the death does not evoke grief or deter him from the case. Or think of Raymond Chandler's detective, Philip Marlowe from The Big Sleep, unafraid of risking physical harm to himself and resistant to the seductions of devious femme fatales. The modernist gritty private eye has rugged, chiseled features, a sharp, witty intellect, and physical prowess. He penetrates mysteries to discover the Truth. Confrontational and unemotional, a typical private eye of a detective novel has little known past and no known goals for the future. He attracts women with his self-assured manner and evokes the jealousy of men with his arrogance.³ He is, according to Oscar De Los Santos, an "updated [version] of the chivalric, heroic knights who do their best to uphold a trace of justice in a chaotic, unjust world" (77). Raymond Chandler agrees:

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in [the modern mystery] must be such a man. He's the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it and certainly without saying it. (18)

Just, selfless, highly rational, and logical, the traditional private eye, above all, always gets his man and solves his crime.

³ American hard-boiled detective fiction of the early 20th century traditionally featured a heterosexual male detective. Also, male authors dominated detective fiction until the late 1970's. For more information on the role of women in detective fiction, see Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition by Pricilla M. Walton and Manina Jones.

A private investigator (whether professional or amateur), a crime or potential crime, the discovery of clues, and an explanation of the solution are all primary conventions of the detective fiction genre. The idea of using conventions to label a text as belonging to a particular genre has been around since Aristotle's Poetics; conventions include setting, character roles, organizational methods, and events. Genre conventions are not universal nor are they static: they fluctuate, bend, and change based on audience preference. And while the assigning of texts to specific genres is an arbitrary endeavor, publishers, libraries, and bookstores classify texts according to their conventions for purposes of organization or marketing. "Genre fiction," as a term, is diametrically opposed to "literary fiction," which often defies conventions and presumably has a greater artistic or cultural value. However, the borders of genres, as previously mentioned, are very fluid and a text, even one that defies particular conventions or assumes an elevated style (itself a convention of "literary" fiction), may fall into one or more genres.

Detective fiction, a term used interchangeably in some libraries and bookstores with mystery, is usually classified as genre fiction along with romance, westerns, fantasy, horror, science fiction, and comic books. There are numerous types of mysteries: murder mystery, hardboiled detectives, crime drama, psychological thrillers, and many others⁴. Detective fiction, however, focuses on a central character, usually a detective, and that character's quest to solve a crime or mystery. Furthermore, detective fiction involves the reader on a parallel quest to order, arrange, and rationalize a fictional world and, in turn, the real world. The mystery and its solution are the most important elements

⁴ There are many more types of mysteries: police procedurals, "locked room" mysteries, historical mysteries, crime reconstructions, inverted mysteries (where the protagonist is the criminal), inside jobs, heist stories, suspense, horror, ghost stories, literary detectives, and other emerging forms of mystery.

of detective fiction because they are the meaning of the text. Donald Westlake describes the wide variety of detective fiction in his introduction to the anthology Murderous Schemes stating:

Society and crime are in unending opposition, but the individual is in a shifting relationship to the other two, depending on how this individual feels about this crime in this society. That's why there are detective stories about cops, but also detective stories about robbers; detective stories in which virtue is triumphant, and detective stories in which virtue is trampled into the dust; detective stories hinged on professional expertise, and detective stories hinged on amateur brilliance; detective stories in which we root for the hero, and detective stories in which we root for the villain. (4)

While the individual is the centering element, the individual's quest to order the world and make sense of events is the action that propels the text forward. The ultimate goal of the mystery is to provide the reader with a satisfying sense of closure. The reader perceives this satisfaction as a reward for reading and also for his/her participation in the unraveling of the mystery. The reader's expectations and perceptions of detective fiction are very important to how detective fiction is read and understood. The expectation of these conventions along with the failure to incorporate many of them into the text of City of Glass becomes extremely important the novel's structure and interpretations.

As detective fiction, City of Glass uses many conventions of detective and mystery fiction yet disregards others. An amateur private investigator, a potential crime, and the discovery of clues are all conventions of detective fiction genre. City of Glass

features a mystery and a detective but does not continue to adhere to the generic conventions and expectations for such a hero. For example, Daniel Quinn, Auster's main character, is hired to determine the whereabouts of Peter Stillman, Sr., and to prevent Peter Stillman, Jr., from being murdered. Quinn pursues Stillman through the streets of New York, assumes different roles to obtain information, and promises to protect the voluptuous Mrs. Stillman from harm. However, Quinn is not a detective. Quinn is a writer of detective fiction and is hired under false pretenses; the Stillmans believe he is Paul Auster, a private investigator. Furthermore, the crime Quinn is attempting to solve is really no crime at all. It is a crime that hasn't happened; it has only been anticipated. Virginia and Peter fear for Peter's life upon the release of Stillman from prison. Stillman has not yet murdered Peter. Modernist detective fiction often begins with a crime and what must be discovered is a motive. Quinn is investigating is a motive without a crime. The initial mystery, the whereabouts of Stillman, is confusing enough as Quinn has trouble distinguishing between two remarkably similar men, both of whom could be Stillman, in the confusion of people and trains in Grand Central Station. But Auster entangles Quinn and the reader even further in ever changing and ever deepening mysteries. Most importantly, Quinn never solves the mystery; he himself becomes the mystery⁵:

Quinn put the red notebook on the floor, removed, the deaf mute's pen from his pocket, and tossed it onto the red notebook. Then he took off his

⁵ De Los Santos states, "First of all, in the modern detective story, the 'surface mystery,' the puzzle which the detective or character doing the investigating is asked to solve, is everything (or just about everything), whereas in the postmodern mystery, the 'surface mystery' is of far less importance. Instead, Auster uses it to approach some of the 'deeper mysteries,' which he wishes to explore in his text" (75). De Los Santos makes a useful point, but his labels are extremely problematic in the context of his discussion of the characteristics of modernism and postmodernism. Modernism's focus on depths and postmodernism's focus on surfaces and surface play, is more commonly accepted. For a contrast between the characteristics of modernism and postmodernism see Ihab Hassan's "Towards a Concept of Postmodernism."

watch and put it in his pocket. After that he took off all his clothes, opened the window, and one by one dropped each thing down the airshaft: first his right shoe, then his left shoe; one sock, then the other sock; his shirt, his jacket, his underpants, his pants. He did not look out to watch them fall, nor did he check to see where they landed. Then he closed the window, lay down in the center of the floor, and went to sleep. (Auster 193-194)

Rather than ordering and rationalizing the confusion of the world, Quinn becomes engulfed by mystery and irrationality. Furthermore, as the individual at the center of the detective novel, Quinn's ultimate disappearance from the text leaves the reader without a solution and without a center.

The conventions of detective fiction are designed to pull the reader into the text, entangling and embroiling him/her in the suspenseful plot. Depending on the text, the reader may discover some clues before the narrative voice tells him/her it is a clue; yet, more frequently, the detective, at the end, makes sense of all the confusion by presenting some evidence that has been withheld, explaining the clues, and organizing the clues into a cohesive pattern. Auster draws on detective fiction conventions to raise readers' expectations for a solution. When the individual at the novel's center, Quinn, fails to offer answers or solve the crime, but instead carries it even further, the hero and the text itself become mysteries. In fact, Alison Russell in "Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction" calls City of Glass "anti-detective fiction," placing emphasis on Auster's "parodic forms and subversions of the end-dominated detective story" (71). The presentation of instability, the asking instead of

answering of questions, and the lack of closure in an “anti-detective” text like City of Glass is representative of the postmodern crisis of meaning and subjectivity that extends from a failure of language that Auster’s narrator describes:

Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter “I,” standing for “investigator,” it was “I” in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. For five years now, Quinn had been living in the grip of this pun. He had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real. (Auster 16)

The consistent deferral of meaning Auster creates reveals the instability and fragmentation of the postmodern subject and the language used to identify that subject.

“Anti-detective fiction” operates against the reader’s expectation of an eagerly anticipated final solution through this deferral and fragmentation. This undermining of reader expectations is characteristic of postmodernism as Hutcheon explains in “Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism”: “Postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges” (243). Auster’s open ending offers an overt challenge to structures and forms that seek to enclose the reader and the writer in established patterns. Auster’s rejection of traditional conventions is an overt challenge to modernist forms that Jean-François Lyotard theorizes as postmodern:

The postmodern would be that which [...] denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (qtd. in De Los Santos 79).

Employing the form of detective novel, Auster focuses the reader's attention on the end of the text. The reader, based on reading experiences of modernist detective fiction, gets caught up in the text expecting all will be explained in due time. Unfortunately, the reader only experiences a profound sense of loss when the novel concludes without offering any solution to the mysteries and, in fact, closes the book with more questions than he/she had at the beginning. The narrator plays with the reader to disseminate meaning, not distracting but detracting from the value the reader places in end-motivation of the text. With each mystery Auster adds to the text (the Stillman case, Quinn's identity, the nature of language), meaning, in the form of the ultimate solution—the center—is constantly deferred. Says Alison Russell: "Auster reinforces this deconstructive effect through the use of other language games, such as intertextual references, mirror images, and puns, thereby exploding the centering and unifying conventions of detective stories" (72). This intellectual twist on an old form breaks down boundaries between genres and demolishes genre conventions and in the process places the text squarely in the postmodern, post-structuralist camp⁶.

⁶ According to some critics, post-structuralism is a theoretical wing of postmodernism. Ihab Hassan in "Towards a Concept of Postmodernism" indicates that "postmodernism [...] requires both a historical and theoretical definition" (278). That theoretical definition, according to Hassan, is a reaction to "hieratic, hypotactical, and formalist" aspects of modernism (278). He states further, "Postmodernism strikes us by contrast as playful, paratactical, and deconstructionist" (278). Thus, Hassan defines postmodernism as a

As Russell points out, Auster deconstructs his own texts in a number of ways. In addition to their open-endedness, they also encompass a multiplicity of narrators and authors. At the beginning of the text, the narrator relates the story in first-person plural. It appears that the narrator's use of "we" and "us" is escorting a willing reader through the text. However, the narration changes and, throughout much of the text, the author uses a consistent third-person narration with the exception of relating Quinn's writing in his red notebook, in which case the first person is used to represent Quinn as the "I." Finally, at the end of the text, the first-person is used again; it is not used to represent Quinn. The first person refers back to the narrator with whom the book began. The first-person plural is used again, this time indicating the narrator and Paul Auster, the character, are the "we" rather than the narrator and the reader. By the end of the novel, the narrator that seemed to originally invite the reader into the text is now excluding the reader from participation in the text, again denying access to the center.

Roland Barthes discusses similar narrative confusion in "The Death of the Author":

Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside the very enunciation that defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together, suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it. (1467)

A text is often seen as a product of an author, a voice of origin and thus of stability. Barthes asserts that the narrative voice is simply that, a construction of language that has

reaction against the structuralist ideals of modernism and associates post-structuralism as a theoretical foundation for postmodernism.

no point of origin. The author is not an authority but merely a “scriptor.” As Auster’s voices proliferate in the text, the notion of an originary voice, a knowing voice, or a voice of authority, is lost.

These multiple voices appear everywhere, once again detracting the reader from finding a foundation on which to base meaning. Quinn involves himself in the Stillman case because of a phone call searching for “Paul Auster. Of the Auster Detective Agency” (Auster 13). Later, having run out of options and uncertain as to his next move, Quinn decides to contact “Paul Auster.” Yet Paul Auster the character is only a writer; he has never heard of another Paul Auster or of the Auster Detective Agency. There is also Paul Auster, the author. What is the reader to do with such a proliferation of authors? According to Steven Alford in “Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster’s The New York Trilogy,” “We have three Austers, not two: author, narrator, and character, each ontologically distinct. The twinning [of Auster the author and Auster the character] uncover[s] a triad, which has its corollary in City of Glass” (21). Adding to Alford’s interpretation, the reader actually encounters four Austers: author, narrator, character, and Quinn as Auster. Quinn also has multiple voices: he writes under the pseudonym William Wilson, associates himself with his own created character, Max Work, and adopts the identity of “Paul Auster,” a detective who is not a detective at all but in fact another author. Quinn, as author, tells the story of his experience with the Stillman case in his red notebook. A narrator created by the author, Paul Auster, mediates Quinn’s story, which is, in turn, mediated by the novel itself. This complex weaving of meta-text, narratives, and frames invites only fragmentation and confusion rather than a totalizing wholeness. Separating reality from the text becomes increasingly difficult in spite of the

fact that the text constantly reminds the reader that it is a construct. By creating multiple voices, the notion of one originary voice is removed. There is no ultimate authority to which a reader may refer to find the “true” meaning or seek a solution. As the author, Auster could be turned to for explanation. As the knowing voice, the narrator could be turned to for an explanation of the events of the novel and of the mystery. As the protagonist, Quinn could be turned to for an explanation. However, the interweaving, appearing, and disappearing of these voices from the text leave no center on which the reader can focus. Instead, the reader is left with no alternative but to focus on his/her own voice and process of reading.

In addition to the many narrative voices of City of Glass, an adaptation itself brings with it multiple voices—a profusion authors, artists, and adaptors each playing a vital role in the creative process. With City of Glass and Paul Auster’s City of Glass or City of Glass: The Graphic Novel, the addition of authors through the process of adaptation further removes the reader from a source of textual authority. Romantic notions of origination, individuality, and uniqueness dominate Western thought (Hutcheon 21). However, as Barthes points out, “The modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in so way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*” (itl. in org. 1468). The concept of what is originary being thus destroyed, the adaptation of an existing text, such as Paul Auster’s City of Glass, progresses the concept of the text being continuously written and read and still furthers the deconstructive effects of the source text by the additional authorship and the movement of a potential center from Auster as author to

Karasik or Mazzucchelli as author. As I have suggested before, Auster's novel is considered a *source* text rather than an *original* text. By making the choice to adapt City of Glass, the adaptors has amplified its themes. While the proliferation of authors, narrators, and texts, as well as the confusion of genre conventions appear, at first glance, to be difficult subjects to portray visually, comics frequently absorb other genres proving they are capable of encompassing a range of literature.

Not Just for Kids Anymore: Comics Conventions

Both City of Glass and its graphic adaptation rely heavily on the conventions of their respective genres and of literary convention to complicate the relationship between the word or image and its concept. Auster's novel uses the genre of detective fiction to frustrate readers' search for the ultimate solution to indicate that the motive does not match the crime, the paramount signifier and signified of the detective novel. He also denies the centering influence of the detective character by creating a proliferation of voices. Taking these themes in a different direction, Karasik and Mazzucchelli faithfully adhere to Auster's novel yet use the conventional forms of comics to draw attention from the teleological approach to solving the mystery to a process orientation that forces the reader to reflect on his/her motivations for a solution.

The genre and medium chosen for the adaptation assist in this reorientation of the reader. Hutcheon states, "Stories do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genres). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and communicate narrative meaning to someone in some context, and they are created by someone with that intent" (Theory 26). As combinations of words and pictures, comics creates a unique mode of

engagement for the reader that involves both reception and perception. The reader is encouraged to actively participate in the graphic adaptation of City of Glass. The medium and genre of comics is fluid enough to accommodate other genres; the graphic adaptation is still able to retain the conventions of anti-detective fiction while at the same time adopting the conventions of comics. Of the novel, the reader expects linear movement, verisimilitude, and closure. The choice to adapt Auster's novel to a graphic novel, plays on all three of these expectations: the teleological structure, the realistic representation, and the desire for the end-motivated solution. Karasik and Mazzucchelli prove that such expectations can be manipulated and undermined visually as well as verbally.

In Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud defines comics as “juxtaposed static pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9)⁷. McCloud is careful to note that comics are pictorial because words can also be understood as juxtaposed static images in a deliberate sequence (8). Images and text are structured and operate in remarkably similar ways; even so, the idea of a graphic novel seems to work against Auster's text as a postmodern narrative; Lyotard claims the object of a postmodern narrative is to “impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.” A graphic novel seems to present; the very nature of Auster's text seems to defy adaptation.

However, Karasik and Mazzucchelli use the adaptation to destabilize the notion that pictorial images may be more fixed in meaning than their verbal counterpart. What

⁷ McCloud's definition excludes single-panel comics (examples include The Far Side, Family Circus, and most political cartoons). Instead, single-panel illustrations are classified as cartoons, while many comic strips, commonly labeled as cartoons such as those that appear in newspapers, are comics according to McCloud's definition because of their sequentiality.

seems presentable, may not, in fact, be so. McCloud refers to the pictorial graphic images in comics as icons⁸, “images used to represent a person, place, thing, or idea” (27). He asserts, “Words are totally abstract icons” (28). Comics, however, range over a wide plane of abstraction, including non-iconic abstraction, pictorial images that are not meant as representations but as art (McCloud 50-51). Though the relationship between the pictorial signifier may seem more received than the perceived word (McCloud 49), Karasik and Mazzucchelli prove that may not be the case.

Furthermore, the graphic adaptation takes advantage of the comics reader’s expectations of “universally understood images” (Eisner 2). Universality is a trait of comics imagery, according to Eisner who claims that comics artists rely on “universally valid” stereotypes to develop characters (19). McCloud also claims that comics’ “visual iconography may finally help us realize a form of universal communication” (58). While the image may be universally acknowledged, the meaning is not⁹. Karasik and Mazzucchelli are able to carry Auster’s investigation of logocentrism into the world of comics to indicate that relationship between the pictorial signifier and its signified may, in fact, be no more concrete than conventional language.

Since comics is neither art nor writing, it should not be judged solely by the standards of either. As McCloud notes, “The art of comics is many centuries old, but it’s

⁸ McCloud chooses to use the word “icon” over “symbol” because “symbol is a bit too loaded for [him]” (27). I agree noting that Saussure states, “It is characteristic of symbols that they are never entirely arbitrary. They are not empty configurations” (68). The word “icon” with its religious, venerable, and even computer connotations is also a very complicated word choice. However, “icon” is the accepted word choice among comics scholars and should be viewed in terms of McCloud’s definition as a pictorial representation.

⁹ McCloud himself later goes on to describe the vastly different styles of comic art founded in Japan that have only recently begun to be introduced to Western audiences. These comics rely, according to McCloud, on the use and interpretation of negative space, a concept not yet fully evolved in Western comics. Cultural differences in art influence understanding and interpretation of comics; McCloud’s and Eisner’s claims to the universality of the comics language of pictorial images may be idealistic.

perceived as a recent invention and suffers the curse of all new media, the curse of being judged by the standards of the old" (151). One of the unique potentials of comics as a medium is its art can vary from photo-realistic to extremely abstract. Greater detail implies objectivity; simplification indicates reader identification (McCloud 36). Combined with words, comics have the ability to distill meaning or to expand meaning making it a particularly suitable medium for adapting Auster's City of Glass.

Yet adapting a verbal text to an image based text poses a unique dilemma—a careful balance that must be maintained between mimesis and diegesis—showing and telling. Comics attempts to present the narrative in visual images without repeating it in verbal text captions. As David Coughlan attests:

Many comics [...] are criticized for what is perceived as an artistic failing, a formal redundancy resulting from a tendency to show and tell the same thing [...]. Yet this criticism must, at least in part, be motivated by a frustration, hardly unique to comics, over the sometimes unrealized potential of the form, though in truth it would be difficult for a single work to exhaust the possibilities inherent in an art form that allows for the simultaneous presentation of two strands of information, and involves reading within each strand and between both strands. (835)

In the graphic novel, the text that is given to the reader in captions and word-balloon dialogue while the images provide many of the details that would otherwise be conveyed in words: setting, character descriptions, comparisons, and actions. The pictorial image may reiterate the verbal text; however, comic art frequently reaches beyond illustrations. As McCloud notes, there are an infinite variety of ways words and images can be

combined (152). Primarily, comics use what McCloud calls an “inter-dependent” combination “where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone”; the balance between word and picture is constantly shifting (155). “No one really knows for certain whether the words are read before or after viewing the picture,” explains Eisner. “We have no real evidence that they are read simultaneously. There is a different cognitive process between reading words and pictures. But in any event, the image and the dialogue give meaning to each other—a vital element in graphic storytelling” (59). Through use of visual metaphors and symbols, the graphic adaptation avoids the risk of redundancy while at the same time leading the reader on the detective like quest for visual cues, clues, and links that will help him/her make sense of the ideas presented in the text. The weight of the narrative in the graphic novel is redistributed from telling to showing, presenting two separate levels of information independently and simultaneously. Thus, the very nature of the medium chosen for the adaptation recreates the complex layers of meaning depicted in the source text.

PANEL ANALYSIS

Clear As Black and White

Paul Auster's City of Glass demonstrates the intricate, layered form of comics and the possibilities, as opposed to loss, offered by adaptations. In the shift from telling to showing, setting, description, tone, and narrative must be translated into visual images. Karasik and Mazzucchelli begin on the most basic level with black and white inked drawings lending the text a cultural reference to the black and white crime dramas and film-noir of the 1940s and 1950s. The lack of color and the heaviness of the inked lines prepare the reader for a complex mystery—relying on the cultural notion of good and evil represented as white and black. There are no attempts at shades of gray even through cross-hatching. The ink is thick and heavy on the page, portraying a somber mood. The opening page is a large, single black panel with white courier font, a font readers associate with typewriters; it states, “It was a wrong number that started it...” (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 1). The simple design of white font on the black background is a reversal from a conventional novel, which has black font on a white page. The combination is startling and instantly creates a visual impression preparing the reader for the rest of the novel, hinting that this particular novel may not follow the expected conventions. Already, the image, a single black block on the first page, has complicated the word.

From the very beginning of this adaptation, the artists are attempting to deconstruct the signifying process of pictorial images. The opening white-on-black page is followed by the image of a telephone, which, in subsequent frames, is shown to be only a picture of a phone on a phonebook on which rests a “real” phone; the “real” phone is

represented in slightly more detail; however, as Alex Shakar notes in “Nowheresville,” the reader can easily envision this phone being one in another series of phones—a hierarchy of representations (see Fig. 3). As a result, the adaptation asserts that no representation, either verbal or iconic, can be trusted. The graphic adaptation of the novel brings Auster’s crisis of meaning full circle through the ambiguity of signification whether spoken, written, or symbolic.

In subsequent frames, the reader delves further into Quinn’s world, a world that is anything but black and white. The lack of color, even gray, creates a stark contrast to the confusion and blurring that occurs in throughout the narrative. As it does in the source text, Quinn’s identity becomes confused with that of his pseudonym William Wilson, his creation Max Work, the character Paul Auster, and the author of the source text Paul Auster himself. Furthermore, the reader becomes part of the blurring identities in that the representation of the character of Quinn is abstract and without strong defining characteristics inducing the reader to connect with the character. McCloud explains this connection: “When we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential ‘meaning,’ an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t” (30). McCloud breaks it down further by stating, “When you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face—you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon—you see yourself” (36). Quinn’s features are deliberately minimized to encourage the reader to connect with the character, further fragmenting Quinn’s and the reader’s respective subjectivities. Additionally, Quinn exists as little more than a foot upon the reader’s introduction to him on the second page. All the reader sees is Quinn’s



Fig. 3. Example of pictorial deferral of meaning. From page 2 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

naked, left foot and ankle as he walks across a wood floor. He remains nothing more than a foot for the next three pages. It isn't until the final panel, three pages after Quinn's introduction, that the image of his face appears, thus encouraging the reader to step into Quinn's shoes, or at least follow in his footsteps.

Reading Between the Lines: Panel Structure

It is this final panel on page five, the panel showing Quinn's face for the first time in the graphic novel, that the panel structure is finally broken. Most of the novel adheres to a very rigid nine-panel structure. Panels and gutters are the structural conventions of comics. They control time and motion (McCloud 65). "Like all formal conventions," states Hutcheon, "this grid both constrains and enables; it both limits and opens up new possibilities" (35). In Paul Auster's City of Glass, the grid is a reflection of the structured isolation of Quinn's own life; the repetitive layout of the panels on the page offers a visual metaphor for Quinn's lifestyle. When it is broken in this image, it is done so that what would be the final two panels are joined to create one large panel dramatizing the first glimpse of Quinn. Varying panels in this way emphasize specific visual moments as well as create a dramatic pause. A larger panel takes more time to read, regardless of the amount of text within it, so the panel structure controls the pace of the visual narrative as well.

Eisner believes panels that are standard and regularly formed do not graphically interrupt the narrative. Instead, they enhance the rhythm and flow of the narrative so that the concentration of the reader remains on the actors (128). However, when that regular panel structure is repeated again and again within the panels themselves, the panel structure becomes more than just pacing. As previously noted, the nine-frame grid

appears repeatedly throughout the graphic novel. After Quinn's face is finally shown, the following page shows Quinn involved in the telephone conversation—Peter Stillman's wrong number sending Quinn off on his adventure. As Quinn stands in the room, he is by a desk in front of a window consisting of an odd nine panes of glass. This image is also repeated in the first panel of the following page in a similar image. Even as the reader is invited to walk in Quinn's footsteps, the reflection of the panel structure within the images indicates the structure is representative of something more. The reflection of the panels' layout in a window in the images themselves indicates a separation, a divider between the reader and the character. A window may seem to be clear and to offer a clear view of the world, yet it is still an obstruction; it limits the visual range, confining the reader to a specific view of the window's object—in this case, Quinn and the narrative. The structure calls attention to the narrative function of the image. In the same way savvy readers have come to recognize the distortions of a conventional narrator in a novel, the reflection of the panel structure in the windows of Quinn's apartment questions the objectivity of visual narrative.

The most stunning display of this complex layering of visual images occurs at a key moment in the narrative. As Peter speaks to Quinn on the phone, believing Quinn to be the detective Paul Auster, he explains why the services of a detective are needed. There in center panel, in the middle of the page, Quinn is sitting at his desk looking out this nine-panel window with this back to the reader. His head is imposed over the window like a shadow (see fig. 4). More broadly, the reader's head becomes a shadow imposed over the “window” of the page, the window-like structure of the panels. It is



Fig. 4. Window as an Example of Visual Motif. From page 11 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

oddly voyeuristic; it creates the sensation of a chain of windows through which a different character can be seen going on indefinitely. As Quinn sits in front of his window speaking to Peter on the phone, he is glimpsing Peter's life even as the reader glimpses Quinn's, each layer perhaps becoming more or less real if presented on a linear scale.

The recurrence of the panel structure in the pictorial images themselves serves as a consistent reminder that the images are not presented objectively and that the reader approaches the text with preconceived generic expectations and that the comics and postmodern detective fiction forms structure how the icons and the text are read. This becomes an extremely important idea at the very end of the novel when the narrator is given the chance to speak. The narrator of Quinn's tale takes on a distinct presence of his own, forcing the reader to question the objectivity of everything that came before. The reader realizes that the story of Quinn, seemingly told from a third-person limited omniscient, is overlaid with a first-person narrator, who is much less reliable. McCloud asserts that the gutters between panels allow for the comics reader to imaginatively construct a whole out from the different fragments (89). It becomes the reader's job to connect the pieces and make meaning. As Quinn's world, identity, and case fall apart, Karasik and Mazzucchelli, through the consistent use of the grid-like panel structure, draw attention to that fragmentation as well as to the reader's conventional desire to construct a cohesive whole from those fragments.

The recurrence of that panel structure within the panels themselves becomes increasingly sinister as the novel progresses. During Quinn's personal interview of Peter Stillman, the narrative runs through a series of symbolic images concluding Peter's

monologue with two striking full-page panels on opposing pages. The gutters suddenly become the white bars of a cell door, the panels themselves black and blank with a white lock in the middle panel on the right side and a speech balloon emanating from somewhere off the page (see fig. 5). During Virginia Stillman's speech, as she clarifies Peter's story, the frames become highly abstracted and extremely iconic. The black inked panels with the intervening white gutters become the locked and covered window barring the young Peter Stillman from a view of the world outside and from the sounds of language the senior Stillman thought were corrupted (see fig. 6). It is unclear whether the narrative and the reader become locked in the form or out of the form. However, the imagery of locks and bars certainly indicates an intriguing situation.

Later, as Quinn does his own research on Stillman's history, he finds and reads Stillman's book The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 38). The same nine-panel "window" is reflected in the panels that explain the birth and life of Henry Dark, a character Quinn later discovers was simply invented by Stillman. The panel describing Dark's birth shows the image of a mother holding a baby in a rocking chair imposed in black over nine white squares on a black background. The white squares of "window" frame the image, which is, in turn, enclosed by the panel itself, which, in turn, is framed by the page. These layers of framing appear over and over again. As Quinn makes the connection between the story of Henry Dark and the abuse of Peter Stillman, the nine black panels with white gutters appear in the final panel of the page alone, without words, framed by the panel itself, and the larger framing of the page. The preceding panel has Quinn making the connection between

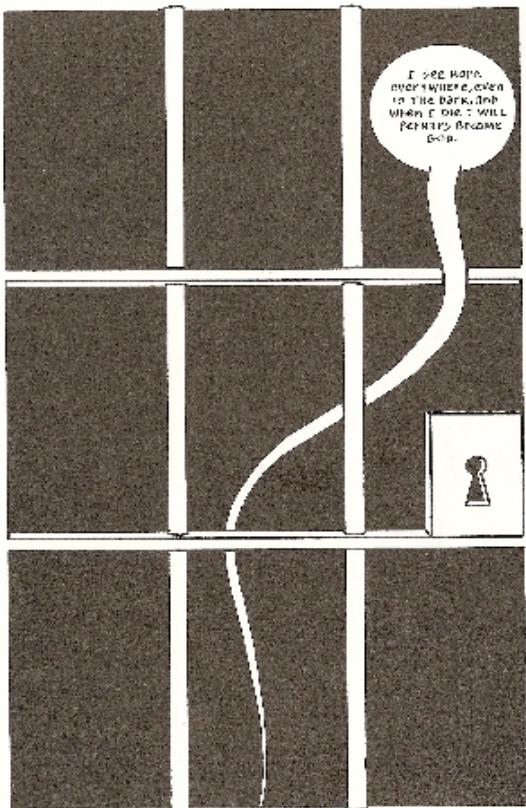


Fig. 5. Prison Door as an Example of Visual Motif. From page 22 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

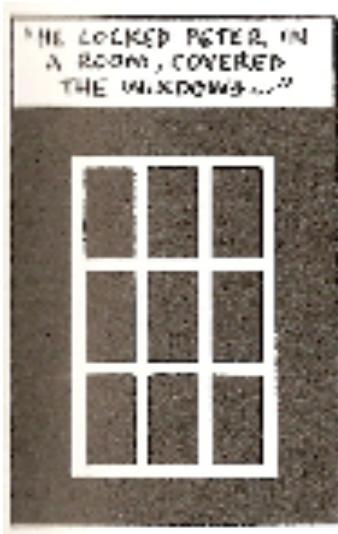


Fig. 6. Locked Window as an Example of Visual Motif. From page 27 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

what he has just read and what he has been told by Peter and Virginia. “The year Stillman locked up Peter” was predicted by Henry Dark (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 45). The structure again reflects the bars of a cage and the locked, covered window. The overarching structure reflected in the panels themselves becomes a way of framing Stillman’s lies and crimes, yet also becomes associated with Virginia, Peter, Quinn himself, and the narrator.

Visual Motifs

In addition to the repetitive panel structure, Karasik and Mazzucchelli also repeat other pictorial images to underscore Auster’s conceptions of identity and authorship. The doubling of authors, names, and characters create interesting visual opportunities for the adaptors, which they do by creating visual emphases. The adaptors do not merely illustrate the dilemma of visual doubles taking place in the novel, such as Quinn’s confusion in New York’s Grand Central Station, where he goes to find Stillman as he gets off the train recently released from prison. Quinn holds a picture of a young Stillman given to him by Virginia, but he sees two men in the station who appear to look as Stillman might twenty years later. Though this is beautifully recreated in the adaptation with the visual likeness Quinn perceives underscored by being made into pictures, the adaptors choose to also represent the more subtle doubling that takes place in Auster’s novel by creating visual links between characters; Quinn’s similarities to Peter is represented by both Quinn and Peter being visually rendered as puppets. Peter is shown as a marionette while Quinn becomes the ventriloquist dummy for William Wilson, his pseudonym. This image is further complicated by the incorporation of an image of Stillman as a wind-up toy, demonstrating the adaptors’ conception of the

relationship not merely between Peter and his father or Peter and Quinn, but among all three, a visually disturbing trinity.

An additional visual cues that links ideas and themes throughout the text is the highly abstracted image of a stick-figure child drawn in crayon. It appears multiple times in the text during key scenes (See fig. 7). It appears, depending on the scene, woeful or angry. Its first appearance occurs between panels depicting Quinn, linking the figure of the crying child to the workings of Quinn's unconscious mind. Later in the text, it occurs in connection to Peter and then to Stillman reinforcing, in a truly dynamic way, the connection between the unconscious motivations of the different characters.

The constructedness of meaning and identity is also brought to the reader's attention through recurring images of bricks and brick structures. The rectangular, black ink panels with the white gutters between them appear as bricks and mortar: meaning is piled on top of meaning. Before Quinn's face is ever presented, we are given the face of Max Work in front of a brick wall and the name of William Wilson. In the moment-by-moment structures of these panels, Quinn walks across the room in front of a window through which a view of the opposite side of the street and the city beyond can be seen. All these buildings are made up of bricks on which the panels zoom in closer and closer until the lines of mortar between the bricks becomes nothing more than paths through a maze. The frames zoom out again to reveal that the maze is a fingerprint on the glass of the window with the view of the city—the bricks become Quinn's identity imprinted over the city. The image of Max Work and a brick wall and William Wilson segue into the construction of Quinn's own identity through use of the brick imagery.



Fig. 7. Crying Child as an Example of Visual Motif. From page 33 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

The association of bricks with identity continues throughout the novel. The cityscape overwhelms the subjects, and ultimately, they dissolve into it; the characters are lost to the city. This is provocatively demonstrated when Quinn loses Stillman. Just when Quinn thinks he might have closed the critical distance between himself and Stillman enough to break the case, Stillman disappears. Quinn is unable to find him: “Stillman was gone now. He had become part of the city, a brick in an endless wall of bricks” (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 86). The panel shows a view of the New York skyline, the buildings made of nothing but bricks. The impossibility of finding Stillman is created visually by a proliferation of bricks. There are no people, no windows, no lights, and no rooftop gardens. It is an ocean of bricks of which Stillman is just one. There are millions of possibilities and millions of meanings; the likelihood of finding it is the same as the likelihood of finding Stillman in New York City.

Eventually, Quinn himself becomes a mere brick as he stakes out Virginia and Peter’s apartment and takes to living in the alleyway across from the entrance to their building. Bricks slowly begin to encroach upon Quinn as he sits in the alleyway on a wooden crate leaning against building; the image portrays Quinn as being absorbed into the wall and being made up of nothing but bricks (see fig. 8). “It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city” (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 111). The following frame shows a towering building of bricks with a head and a face. While Quinn, or even Stillman, becomes the city, the city becomes him. Corey Andrews compares the novel’s source text to the nineteenth century *flâneur* in “The Subject and the City: The Case of the Vanishing Private Eye in Paul Auster’s City of Glass.⁷ The *flâneur*, according to Andrews, found the excitement of the city in the threat of losing one’s ego in the crowd



Fig. 8. Brick Wall as an Example of Visual Motif. From page 111 of Paul Auster's City of Glass by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli.

(62). Yet Andrews makes a distinction between the modern city and the postmodern city. “Amid the frantic, bewildering new crowds and strange new shape of the postmodern city, the postmodern subject may begin to doubt its own ego, its own ability to think doubtfully,” explains Andrews (63). With his fragmented subjectivity and the proliferation of false names and identities, Quinn, becomes part of the city around him, represented in the graphic adaptation by Quinn’s becoming part of the bricks and literally constructed as the city that surrounds him. He is made up of the same bricks as the text. The text becomes part of the cityscape as well—all bricks. The identities are lost on one another, inform one another, their meanings blending together and building on one another. Speaking to Stillman in the park, Stillman tells Quinn, “Most people think of words as unmoving stones.” “But,” Quinn replies, “Stones can change. They can erode” (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 68). Both characters made of the bricks and stones of the city can change and erode. The text made of bricks can change and erode.

The visual motif of the window and of the bricks offers no clarification or objectivity at all; it simply becomes increasingly complex and layered with meaning. The panel structure constantly substitutes one symbolic or metaphoric meaning for another. As Jacques Derrida asserts in Writing and Difference:

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the *for* of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. [...] The absence of the transcendental signified [or a presence] extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (280)

The postmodern nature of the text makes it impossible to find a center and an eventual, ultimate meaning for the novel as a whole. The very same image that was just a window operates also as a locked window, the bars of a cage or prison cell, and frames the entire novel, holding it together. The reader is told, “What Quinn liked about mysteries was their economy. There is no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not, it has the potential to be so. Everything becomes essence: the center of the book shifts, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the end” (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 7). In the source text, City of Glass by Paul Auster, those lines are followed by additional explanation:

The reader sees the world through the detective’s eyes, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. (Auster 15)

By structuring their panels in a particular way and then repeating that structure within the panels themselves, Karasik and Mazzucchelli show this “proliferation of its details.” The novel is a mystery unto itself; the authors provide the reader with visual clues as to how to solve, or at least approach, reading the mystery. All the while, the meaning is constantly shifting, as the reader was warned it would.

There is no center, even in trying to focus on the main character himself as modernist detective fiction does. Quinn himself shifts characters and becomes William Wilson, Max Work, Paul Auster, and Peter Stillman. These narrative shifts leave the reader uncertain if it is Quinn who is telling us his story through his red notebook, or

whether it's William Wilson, Paul Auster, or the mysterious owner of a typewriter. Even as the rigidity of the nine-panel structure locks the reader into a certain way of viewing the text and the expectations of adherence to particular form, Karasik and Mazzucchelli neatly and subtly undermine their own structure and encourage the reader to break away from the restrictions, dividers, and walls that the text has built around them. Even while encouraging the reader to step into the role of detective by following Quinn's footsteps, the text draws attention to both the constructed nature of the role of detective and the limitations on the perspective it offers. The graphic adaptation in the use of this repetitive nine-panel grid-like form reinforces the reader's role as *reader* rather than as the character. Instead, the adaptors choose to structure their novel to spotlight the reader as part of the greater mystery of language.

CONCLUSIONS

The most “visual” moment of Auster’s City of Glass comes as Quinn, from his records of Stillman’s movements kept in his red notebook, decides to trace Stillman’s movements through the city. As he traces Stillman’s travels on a map of the city streets, Quinn realizes that Stillman is physically writing a message on the city as he walks. “Stillman seems to iconically enact the problem of representing “reality,” a process which requires the transformation of the world of objects in to signs,” explains Christina Ljungberg in “Constructing New ‘Realities’: The Performative Function of Maps in Contemporary Fiction” (161). Stillman’s paths along the streets of New York spell out a different letter each day. Quinn puts these letters together to decipher Stillman’s message: “ower of Bab” which he completes to be “Tower of Babel” (Auster 111).

Stillman is writing his way across the city. Once his message is completed, he disappears from the text. Quinn rewrites Stillman’s message into his notebook and attempts to complete it as he does so. He is reading a text, Stillman’s message, and producing a new text, his red notebook. He is, in a sense, creating an adaptation. Quinn writes over Stillman’s message, utilizing the memory of his text, yet creating a new, text in the process.

Even more importantly, Quinn ponders the problem of signification as it relates to the adapted images. Tracing the letters out on paper:

This picture made Quinn think of a bird, a bird of prey perhaps, with its wings spread hovering aloft in the air. A moment later, this reading seemed far-fetched to him. The bird vanished, and in its stead there were

only two abstract shapes, linked by a tiny bridge. [...] It seemed to him he was looking for a sign. (Auster 108)

Quinn recognizes in the shapes resulting from his traces of Stilman's movements, the ambiguity signification in pictorial images. He also recognizes in the shapes the visuality of letters and words. Quinn is "iconically enact[ing] the problem of representing 'reality'" (Ljungberg 161). Karasik and Mazzucchelli must also do this in the process of adaptation. The comics medium interacts with Auster's texts in unique ways; as Ljungberg points out, representing the world whether verbally or in pictorial images involves translating objects into signs and those signs, whether verbal or pictorial, act on the same arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. The instability of meaning found in the iconic images extends Auster's theme of the slippery nature of language to the slippery nature of representation as a whole. Additionally, the comics form allows Karasik and Mazzucchelli to refocus the reader's attention on the act of reading, effectively shifting the focus of the text from the expectation of meaning to a reflection on the process of creating that meaning.

Instead of writing modernist detective fiction, seemingly so assured that order can be restored, Auster creates an interrogation of language in the form of a detective novel with no resolution. The graphic adaptation extends this concept with the introduction of the slippery nature of pictorial representation--the pages fall apart and burn, the fingerprint becomes a maze, the man becomes a marionette. As an adaptation, Paul Auster's City of Glass (re)creates Auster's struggle with the failure of language and meaning; however, the adaptation also works independently also to question the reliability of iconic representations.

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