

Reading to You, or the Aesthetics of Marriage

Dialogic Intertextuality in the Works of Siri Hustvedt and

Paul Auster

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Abstract

Using a methodological framework which develops Vera John-Steiner's identification of a 'generative dialogue' within collaborative partnerships, this research offers a new perspective on the bi-directional flow of influence and support between the married authors Siri Hustvedt and Paul Auster.

Foregrounding the intertwining of Hustvedt and Auster's emotional relationship with the embodied process of aesthetic expression, the first chapter traces the development of the authors' nascent identities through their non-fictional works, focusing upon the autobiographical, genealogical, canonical and interpersonal foundation of formative selfhood. Chapter two examines the influence of postmodernist theory and poststructuralist discourse in shaping Hustvedt and Auster's early fictional narratives, offering an alternative reading of Auster's work outside the dominant postmodernist label, and attempting to situate the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster's writing within the 'after postmodernism' period. The third chapter considers Hustvedt and Auster's transfictional exchange of the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan through dialogue, characterisation and plot, an approach which seems to indicate Auster's assimilation of Hustvedt's theoretical interests, alongside a shared affinity for Martin Buber's credo of mutuality. Continuing this discussion of self-other dialectics, Chapter four demonstrates how Hustvedt and Auster's visual representations encompass models of intersubjectivity informed by the phenomenological approaches of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, highlighting how Hustvedt and Auster utilise ekphrastic techniques to foreground the collaborative nature of creativity. Guided by Cathy Caruth and Dominick

LaCapra's alternative readings of Freudian traumatology, the closing chapter reflects upon the empathic authenticity of Hustvedt and Auster's post-9/11 narratives. Assessing Hustvedt and Auster's distinctive contributions to the knowledge formation in the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries, the conclusion identifies a powerful bond of mutuality defined by the 'uninterrupted conversation' of their marriage, embodied in a generative dialogue and emotionally-freighted intertextual mode which is entirely unique to contemporary literature.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore a literary marriage and collaborative partnership which began with an unexpected encounter almost forty years ago. In 1981, Siri Hustvedt, a student at New York's Columbia University, attended a poetry reading at the 92nd Street Y with a friend. After the reading, Hustvedt saw 'a beautiful man', whom her friend identified as Paul Auster, 'the poet'.¹ They began talking, spent the evening in deep conversation and, in her words, 'have been talking about books and ideas for a long time'.² Since this chance meeting, Hustvedt and Auster have collectively published over twenty novels, almost a dozen non-fictional works, including several books of poetry, essays, film scripts and works in translation, an extensive number of academic articles and lectures, op-ed pieces for national newspapers and literary journals, in addition to making countless media interviews and personal appearances at

¹ Siri Hustvedt, 'Extracts from a Story of a Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros* (London: Sceptre, 2006), pp. 195-228 (pp. 225-26).

² Siri Hustvedt, 'Interview with Tyler Malone', *Full Stop* (25 October 2012), <<http://www.full-stop.net/2012/10/25/interviews/tyler-malone/siri-hustvedt/>> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

literary events.³ As Hustvedt observes, ‘because we have shared the ups and downs of literary life together for so many years...it’s almost like breathing’.⁴

Hustvedt and Auster’s marriage and literary partnership is built upon an enduring emotional connection which transcends aesthetic influence or competition with the spousal other. In *Winter Journal* (2012) Auster writes of Hustvedt:

This morning, in the dimness of another January dawn, a scumbled, grayish light seeping into the bedroom, and there is your wife’s face turned toward your face, her eyes closed, still fast asleep, the covers pulled all the way up to her neck, her head the only part of her that is visible, and you marvel at how beautiful she looks, how young she looks, even now, thirty years after you first slept with her, after thirty years of living together under the same roof and sharing the same bed.⁵

³ As a couple, Hustvedt and Auster are notable for being among the most open and accommodating author-celebrities on the literary circuit, often committing to extensive promotional tours for new books and frequently allowing journalists to interview them at their home in Brooklyn. Hustvedt and Auster have been particularly willing to engage directly to the academic community about their work, welcoming me to their home in December 2016 to interview them for this thesis. The full transcript of this interview can be read in the Appendix to this thesis.

⁴ ‘Paul and I met twenty-one years ago and we were both completely unknowns. He was then writing *The Invention of Solitude*...And I was continuing to write poems and beginning to work on my dissertation. So we’ve shared his whole prose career...His whole prose career really corresponds with our marriage’. Siri Hustvedt, ‘Interview with Robert Birnbaum’, *Identity Theory* (3 May 2003) <<http://www.identitytheory.com/siri-hustvedt>> [Accessed 17 September 2013],

⁵ Paul Auster, *Winter Journal* (London: Faber, 2012), p. 4. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Journal* with page number cited.

Very few married writers openly describe their desire for each another without applying the perception-altering, privacy-concealing, prismatic persona of an alter-ego; fewer still perform this ritual of respect as frequently as Hustvedt and Auster. Auster notably inserted a fictional alter-ego into *City of Glass* (1984), the first part of *The New York Trilogy* (1987), alongside narrativised versions of his new wife, Siri, and his young son, Daniel. For Auster, this metafictional technique represented a statement of matrimonial avowal, effectively concretising his love for Hustvedt through narrative. He has said that ‘on the most personal level, I think of *City of Glass* as an homage to my wife...an attempt to imagine what life would have been like if I hadn’t met her’.⁶ Elsewhere, affection is literally inscribed in the pages of Hustvedt and Auster’s novels: Auster has dedicated two novels to his wife: *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) and *4321* (2017); Hustvedt has similarly dedicated two books to her husband: *The Blindfold* (1992) and *What I Loved* (2003).

In this thesis, I want to look at the development of Hustvedt and Auster’s undeniably unique literary partnership, one informed by what Vera John-Steiner identifies in *Creative Collaboration* (2000) as ‘a durable ‘we’-ness, built on shared vision, patience and careful planning, and a chance to be playful as well as critical with one another’.⁷ The marriage of Hustvedt and Auster is not limited to its legal status, its normative sensibilities or the symbolism of its public dimension, but as the embodiment of the tension between authorial independence

⁶ Paul Auster, ‘Interview with Joseph Mallia’, *BOMB* (23: Spring, 1988), 5-12 (p. 27).

⁷ Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9.

and emotional interdependence: the negotiated, co-existential duties and responsibilities of married life which both sustains and complicates the embodied process of aesthetic expression.⁸ As John-Steiner states, ‘building a resilient sense of identity is aided by a self that is stretched and strengthened in partnership’.⁹ Fundamental to the mythos of their marriage, Hustvedt and Auster perceive their relationship as a partnership between equals, one underpinned by mutual support during the creative process.

This thesis presents an opportunity to examine the mechanical constituency of Hustvedt and Auster’s writing relationship: each reads the work of the other prior to publication, offering constructive critical guidance; each tacitly acknowledges the influence of the other, while insisting upon the role of the unconscious in the embodied process of aesthetic expression. Hustvedt and Auster’s commitment to the ‘generative dialogue’ which exists between literary partners is further concretised by their dialogically intertextual fictional frameworks.¹⁰ In *The Blindfold* (1992), Hustvedt’s protagonist Iris Vegan reads a

⁸ Hustvedt and Auster repeatedly emphasise the embodied nature of the creative process. In *Winter Journal*, Auster states ‘writing begins in the body, it is the music of the body’ (S 224); Hustvedt has said, ‘it is necessary to think hard about the mental-bodily processes at work in creative work at all times...My strong feeling is that so-called cognitive functions cannot be so neatly separated from affective and motor-sensory functions...While I write about fiction I am not thinking about my cognitive-motor-sensory-affective abilities. They are there in me and I use them’. Sam McNerney, ‘Siri Hustvedt on Living, Thinking and Looking’, *Big Think* <<http://bigthink.com/insights-of-genius/siri-hustvedt-on-living-thinking-and-looking>> [Accessed 14 June 2017].

⁹ John-Steiner, p. 127.

¹⁰ John-Steiner, p. 16.

copy of *Unearth*, Auster's first book of poetry, which was published in 1974. In *Leviathan* (1992), Auster fictively appropriates Hustvedt's Iris as the fictional wife of his narrator, Peter Aaron, another metafictional technique which Auster referred to as a 'transfictional romance'.¹¹ Peter Aaron has been commonly interpreted as an Austerian alter ego, while Hustvedt has remarked of Iris, 'she and I aren't the same person, but she's close to me'.¹² For her novel *The Summer Without Men* (2011), Hustvedt's narrator, the poet Mia Fredricksen, relates the disjuncture between correlation and cause to 'the music of chance' as one prominent American novelist has phrased it'.¹³ *The Music of Chance* (1994) is the title of Auster's fourth novel.¹⁴ Chance – often represented by his characters' sudden movement between positions of financial and emotional security and uncertainty – has been a defining theme of Auster's work, with the author remarking: 'In the strictest sense of the word, I consider myself a realist. Chance is a part of reality: we are continually shaped by the forces of coincidence; the unexpected occurs with almost numbing reality in all our lives'.¹⁵ These

¹¹ Paul Auster, 'Interview with Michael Wood' in *Collected Prose* (New York: Picador, 2010), pp. 569-90 (p. 581).

¹² Siri Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 1-44 (p. 32).

¹³ Siri Hustvedt, *The Summer Without Men* (London: Sceptre, 2011), p. 166. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Men* with page number cited.

¹⁴ At the close of her novel, Hustvedt issues another ironic comment upon serendipitous fortune when one of her characters is bequeathed a significant sum of money: 'Let us be fair: This happens all the time in twentieth- and twenty-first-century LIFE; it just happens less often in twentieth- and twenty-first-century NOVELS'. (*Men* 198)

¹⁵ Paul Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, (New York: Picador, 2010), pp. 539-568 (p. 539). More recently Auster remarked 'I think I made a bit of a rod for my

intertextual exchanges signal the ongoing dialogue, transfictional romance and – for want of better terminology – narrativised affection between husband and wife, whose relationship was itself the product of a chance meeting. In John-Steiner’s terms, the transfictional discursivity which deepens and enriches Hustvedt and Auster’s intersubjective fiction mirrors the dialogic mutuality of their marriage.

However, the notion of a collaborative literary partnership between married writers is a problematic one: either writer may actively disavow any perceived spousal influence upon their carefully-crafted narratives and authorial identity. These impulses may be structural or aesthetic: possibly attributable to the residual effect of what David Henry Feldman labels ‘the century of the individual’,¹⁶ and the drive to preserve narrative ambiguity or protect one’s privacy. For John-Steiner, ‘when considering family life and creative work, couples face the challenge of overcoming traditional gender roles’.¹⁷ Where one writer is not only a woman, a wife and a mother, but also the less famous writer of the two, these gender roles become even more problematic. Hustvedt has spoken at length about ‘the sexism thing’, whereby her writing and academic interests are either held in lower regard than that of her husband, or attributed to him without

own back when, in the very first paragraph [to *City of Glass*], I wrote, ‘Later he would conclude that nothing was real except chance.’ Since then, the concept of chance has come to dominate my work in a way that I don’t think is entirely justified. So I have a new term for that now, which I would like to throw in the ring – the unexpected. This is really what I’m talking about: the infinite number of divergent possibilities that are pregnant at every moment of our waking lives’. (Alfred Hickling, ‘Stories are never finished – they keep going’, *Guardian* (28 March 2017), p. 17.)

¹⁶ David Henry Feldman, ‘Foreword’ to Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, p. ix.

¹⁷ John-Steiner, p. 7.

foundation.¹⁸ Indeed, almost all critical approaches to Auster's writing to date have overlooked Hustvedt's role in bringing a range of critical theories to his attention:

I have repeatedly been informed by all and sundry about Paul's expertise on the work of Jacques Lacan. Paul has read exactly one work by Lacan, 'The Purloined Letter', which he came across sometime in the late Sixties. That was it. I, on the other hand, have had an abiding interest in psychoanalysis since I was in high school and worked hard at understanding Lacan, who is often difficult and maddening, and for whom I have respect but also profound disagreements, and yet, I know well that whatever Paul knows about Lacan has come via his wife.¹⁹

Media depictions of their relationship have served to re-emphasise Auster's authorial autonomy and apparent influence upon his wife, with some even attributing her success as a novelist to his prior achievements. The emotional balance and reciprocal mutuality of Hustvedt and Auster's marriage is continually called into question by misrepresentations which genuflect to cultural constructions of gender. This significantly diminishes Hustvedt's considerable achievements as a novelist, academic and philosopher.

Recent studies have sought to reshape the frequently-gendered approach to authorial influence between spouses or partners. John-Steiner's methodology in

¹⁸ See Appendix.

¹⁹ Siri Hustvedt, 'Interview with Tyler Malone', *Full Stop* (25 October 2012), < <http://www.full-stop.net/2012/10/25/interviews/tyler-malone/siri-hustvedt/>> [Accessed 05 September 2015].

particular identifies the ‘dynamics of mutuality’ and ‘mutual appropriation’ fundamental to artistic partnerships, while delineating the ‘generative dialogue’ which frequently emerges between artists whose emotional lives are intertwined.²⁰ Exemplary biographical studies into literary partnerships include *A Dangerous Liaison* (2008), Carole Seymour-Jones’ study of the dialogical nature of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre’s writing relationship; alternatively, there have been a number of historical-cultural evocations of marriage within a given temporal period, such as Phyllis Rose’s *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (1993) and Katie Roiphe’s *Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles 1910-1939* (2008). John-Steiner’s framework is particularly useful for this research into Hustvedt and Auster’s writing relationship for a number of reasons. Firstly, it allows for the reassessment of Hustvedt’s work in relation to the work of her more commercially successful husband; it redresses mediatised approaches to their work which emphasise the gender split; and it allows for a closer alignment in the theoretical and thematic interests of Hustvedt and Auster, while still permitting the spatial and emotional separation required for artistic independence. Writing in 1992, Hustvedt observes:

Our work has been an intimate part of our love affair and marriage for twenty-three years, but what I read wasn’t then and isn’t now what I *know* when I’m with him. His work comes from the place in him I can’t know’.²¹

²⁰ John-Steiner, p. 3.

²¹ Siri Hustvedt, ‘A Plea for Eros’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 227.

In another essay, Hustvedt extends this unknowability of the authorial self to the erotic drives of two familiar people:

I don't think enduring love is rational any more than momentary love. I have been married to the same man for fifteen years, and I can't explain why he still attracts me as an erotic object...It is *not* because we are so close or know each other so well. That solidifies our friendship, not our attraction. The attraction remains because there is something about him that I can't reach, something strange and estranging...It must be between us – an enchanted space that is wholly unreasonable and, at least in part, imaginary. There is still a fence for me to cross and, on the other side of it, a secret.²²

This thesis is perhaps less concerned with the unconscious desires or carnal drives of two married writers, but these factors undeniably affect the embodied process of aesthetic expression, while inviting questions about the knowability of the spousal other.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will look at how Hustvedt and Auster have respectively attempted to establish distinctive authorial identities through their narratives. This chapter will focus on Hustvedt and Auster's strategies for coming to terms with the mutable and multiple nature of selfhood, and the interplay of conscious thought and unconscious process. This investigation will

²² Siri Hustvedt, 'Extracts from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 227. Here Hustvedt's insistence upon epistemological uncertainty and the unknowability of the unconscious permits us to glimpse the influence of poststructuralist and feminist theories upon her work.

first look at depictions of childhood self-consciousness in Hustvedt and Auster's non-fiction, specifically how each attempts to narrativise what the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has termed 'the autobiographical self'. The chapter will then expand to address the transgenerational structures of selfhood, with particular reference to genealogical and biological determinants of individual identity. I will then turn to the interpolation of authorial identities with the question of canonical influence, particularly how Hustvedt and Auster have responded to Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' paradigm. This section will focus on Hustvedt's nuanced recalibration of feminist interpretations of two alternative strands of literary tradition: Bloom's heavily masculinised model, and her ambivalence towards the 'confessional' strain of women's literature. Chapter one will close with an exploration of the reader function, and the essential role Hustvedt and Auster perform as the reader, or editor, of the other's work. Hustvedt and Auster share a common interest in storytelling and hermeneutics: the exegetic responsibility of writer and reader which, according to Wolfgang Iser, 'brings the literary work into existence', and facilitates the removal of the 'subject-object division that constitutes all perception'.²³ This chapter will attempt to establish Hustvedt and Auster as exemplars of the plasticity of the aesthetic mind, while drawing attention to the framing of self-subjectivity in Hustvedt and Auster's non-fiction.

²³ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach' in *Reader Response Criticism – From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1980), pp. 50-69 (p. 50).

The remainder of the thesis will seek to delineate ways in which Hustvedt and Auster negotiate influence, independence and interdependence through their narratives. Developing the narratives of autobiographical selfhood identified in the first chapter, I return to that chapter's brief discussion of the theoretical and critical context from which Hustvedt and Auster's work emerged. According to John-Steiner, 'constructed knowing', or 'situated, contextual and integrated modes of thinking', produces in literary partnerships aesthetically-grounded 'social selves', which are 'constructed and shaped by participation in the communities and culture' of their epoch.²⁴ Chapter two will look closely at Hustvedt and Auster's relationship to the theoretical positions of poststructuralism and postmodernist fiction. Early academic studies into Auster's *City of Glass*, the first part to *The New York Trilogy*, applied a range of deconstructive strategies to its interpretation. This connection continues to guide many approaches to Auster's writing. Fewer critical assessments of Hustvedt's relationship to poststructuralist theory, or her position within the postmodernist canon, have been attempted. Like that of Auster, Hustvedt's early fiction, particularly her debut novel *The Blindfold*, exhibits a number of the postmodernist traits identified by Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli: 'other-determination, desire, contingency, change, difference, and

²⁴ John-Steiner, p. 6. John-Steiner is particularly interested in the 'socially distributed cognition' identified by Russian Formalist Lev Vygotsky, who like Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin emphasised the dialogic interaction between self and other. According to John-Steiner, Vygotsky was particularly interested in what he termed 'zones of proximal development', whereby 'differences in modes of thought create opportunities for expansion'. (John-Steiner, p. 189.) Buber and Bakhtin's influence on Hustvedt and Auster's work will come under consideration in Chapter three.

absence (of self and meaning)'.²⁵ Hustvedt's continued resistance to epistemological faith, as evidenced in her recent essay 'The Delusions of Certainty' (2016), reflects an ongoing engagement with these critical approaches.

However, it is equally possible to situate the recent writing of Hustvedt and Auster outside the postmodern critical framework. Hubert Zapf connects Hustvedt to what he terms an overtly ethical 'after postmodernism' period.²⁶ Elsewhere Dennis Barone and James Peacock similarly stress the ethical impulses behind Auster's narratives.²⁷ Both Hustvedt and Auster are cited by Peter Boxall as being part of 'a world community' of literary practitioners, who reflect upon

²⁵ Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli, 'Introduction' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2002) pp. i-xii (p. xii).

²⁶ Hubert Zapf, 'Narrative, Ethics, and Postmodern Art in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*' in *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values Through Literature and Other Media*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes and Ansgar Nünning (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 171-94 (p. 171). A recent collection of essays on Hustvedt's work co-edited by Zapf in partnership with Johanna Hartmann and Christine Marks emphasises Hustvedt's contribution to transdisciplinary knowledge without recourse to postmodern critical frameworks. See Johanna Hartmann, Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf, 'Introduction' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Johanna Hartmann, Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2015), p. 1.

²⁷ 'Responsibility, old-fashioned as this may sound, is a virtue in Auster's works'. Dennis Barone, 'Introduction' in *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, ed. by Dennis Barone (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 1-15 (p. 15). For James Peacock, the dystopian allegory of Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008) is countered by the narrative's foregrounding of the 'solidarity and solace of loved ones to console us and keep us moving forward'. James Peacock, *Understanding Paul Auster* (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2010), p. 191.

the ‘Twenty-First Century predicament, or epoch or sensibility’.²⁸ The ‘fin de siècle mood’ described by Boxall draws into its orbit other approaches to the contemporary literary landscape, including ‘late postmodernism’ (Jeremy Green), ‘post-postmodernism’ (Jeffrey T. Nealon), and ‘metamodernism’ (Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker). While Green and Nealon’s models respectively stress the ‘decadence’ and ‘exhaustion’ of the postmodernist project,²⁹ metamodernism offers a cultural mode which ‘oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivety and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity’.³⁰ Under their model, Vermeulen and van den Akker identify a ‘both-neither’ dynamic in metamodernist aesthetics which they describe as ‘metaxis’, or the ‘between’: what the German philosopher Eric Voegelin terms ‘the language of tension’.³¹ Though this

²⁸ Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 3-7. Boxall’s inclusion of Hustvedt and Auster reaffirms their unique contribution to contemporary literature.

²⁹ Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.1; Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 150.

³⁰ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* (2, 2010), <<http://aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/5677/6306>> [Accessed 12 May 2015].

³¹ Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. Elizabeth Kovach attempts to place Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American* (2008) within this framework, and it is similarly possible to apply Auster’s more recent work to it. Indeed, Auster’s observation to Mark Irwin that he writes from a position of nihilistic despair or overwhelming joyfulness seems to echo the dialectical oscillations of metamodernism: ‘At bottom I think my work has come out of a position of intense personal despair, a very deep nihilism and hopelessness

language of tension, artists and writers establish what Vermeulen and van den Akker term a ‘pragmatic idealism’.³²

This notion of pragmatic idealism finds a symbiotic alternate in Hustvedt’s rejection of Cartesian dualism and certainty, which is conditioned by her engagement of scepticism and doubt. Moreover, in Voegelin’s ‘In-Between’ we can perceive echoes of Hustvedt’s affinity for philosopher Martin Buber’s concept of ‘the Between’; psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s notion of an imaginative ‘Tummelplatz’ (or playground, in Lytton Strachey’s translation); psychologist D.W. Winnicott’s potential or transitional space: a zone of transference bisecting consciousness and unconsciousness which sees a dialogic interplay of perception, memory, and the imagination.³³ Hustvedt’s identification of a disciplinary gap, split, or between-space where things get, in her words, ‘messy’, ‘mushy’ or ‘mixed’: what she has referred to an ‘enchanted space’, or a ‘zone of focused ambiguity’ where intellect and the imagination interact.³⁴ Elsewhere Hustvedt

about the world, the fact of our own transience and mortality, the inadequacy of language, the isolation of one person from another. And yet, at the same time, I’ve wanted to express the beauty and extraordinary happiness of feeling yourself alive, of breathing in the air, the joy of being alive in your own skin’. Paul Auster, ‘Memory’s Escape: Inventing *The Music of Chance* – A Conversation with Mark Irwin’ (qtd in Barone, p. 12).

³² Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’.

³³ See Siri Hustvedt, ‘Freud’s Playground’ in *Living, Thinking Looking* (New York: Picador, 2012) pp. 196-219 (pp. 200-01).

³⁴ ‘My ideas are continually evolving through my reading, and I am able to see the ‘truth’ of any number of theories, depending on their perspectives. My thought is that if no single theoretical model can hold human experience, then it is smartest to apply multiple models to a single problem and see what happens. One does not arrive at the same answer, but if one puts those answers together, it is possible to find a zone of what I call

proposes that ‘we are living in a secret place we make between us, a place where the real and unreal commingle’.³⁵ This oscillation between alternative positions is reflective of the metamodernistic ‘language of tension’ and ethical ‘pragmatic idealism’, while the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster’s narratives seems to indicate a move beyond the heavily ironic inflections of the postmodern canon. This intermingling or mixing of the real and imaginary, epistemological and ontological, conscious and unconscious is complicated further by the interaction of Hustvedt and Auster’s writing.

The third chapter will consider the alternative theoretical models which inform Hustvedt and Auster’s structuring of self-other dialectics, plot and characterisation in their writing. Hustvedt in particular, as Christine Marks observes, ‘conjoins personal experiences with philosophical, medical, aesthetic, and neurobiological discourses in her fictional and nonfictional works to shed new light on self-other relations and subjectivity’.³⁶ Both Hustvedt and Auster have expressed an admiration for Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogism, whose positive (*I-Thou*) and negative (*I-It*) philosophical registers overlap with the socially-grounded dialogism of Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin, and the objectifying cognitive mirroring described by the French psychoanalyst Jacques

‘focused ambiguity’. Out of that focused ambiguity one may discover a new question, which in turn may lead to another model and so on.’ Siri Hustvedt, ‘Interview with Tyler Malone’, *Full Stop*.

³⁵ Siri Hustvedt, ‘A Plea for Eros’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 61.

³⁶ Christine Marks, ‘Identity Formation at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century: Intersubjectivity, Art, and Medicine in Siri Hustvedt’s Works’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, September 2010), p. 4.

Lacan. This chapter will trace instances of the discursive negotiation between the psychical and the social in Hustvedt's *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (1996) and Auster's *Moon Palace* (1989), highlighting Hustvedt and Auster's attempt to negotiate the tension between the psychical and social construction of identity. Recalling John-Steiner's framework, one might propose that this interest in the credo of mutuality operates in symbiotic dialogue with the emotional and intellectual foundations of Hustvedt and Auster's marriage.

For the fourth chapter, I will consider how later fictional works by Hustvedt and Auster exhibit a familiarity with the phenomenological approaches of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Hustvedt and Auster have both penned narratives which are particularly self-conscious about the role of perception, and deploy a multiplicity of perspectives. Hustvedt and Auster have both spoken of their deep affinity for Merleau-Ponty's writing, and while Auster is less conversant with the models of intentionality espoused by Husserl, the intersubjective quality of Hustvedt and Auster's later fiction is undeniable. This indicates an intersubjective inflection to Auster's writing which has hitherto been overlooked, and which runs counter to readings of his work which stress its metafictional surfaces and his Lacanian approach to self-other dialectics. Focusing on Hustvedt and Auster's deployment of ekphrastic techniques in *What I Loved* (2003) and *The Book of Illusions* (2002), this chapter will identify and attempt to clarify the purpose behind Hustvedt and Auster's narrativisation of models of embodied subjectivity. In this, I will seek to establish how through their representations of the visual Hustvedt and Auster concretise the intersubjective relationship between subject and object, viewer and viewed, and writer and

reader. Further, it offers a form of dialogue between Hustvedt and Auster, and an invitation to the reader to experience the complexity of their subjective interiority.

The fifth and final chapter will open up this intersubjective modelling to address Hustvedt and Auster's representations of trauma in their fiction. This chapter will place recent novels such as Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American* (2008) and Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* (2006) within the canon of post-9/11 literature, while examining how Hustvedt and Auster have narrativised empathic self-other relations in the wake of the tragedy. The chapter will contend that Hustvedt and Auster's approaches to narrativising traumatic affect can be read through the psychological latency described by Cathy Caruth and the historiographic approach favoured by Dominick LaCapra. The divergent post-Freudian approaches of Caruth and LaCapra can be traced back to Sigmund Freud's division of trauma symptoms into melancholia and mourning. Hustvedt has spoken of her abiding interest in psychoanalysis, and has written and lectured on Freud, and psychiatry more generally. Auster's interest in psychoanalysis is less explicit, though there is some familiarity with Freud and Lacan. Given the generative dialogue of their collaborative relationship it is possible to argue that his exposure to Hustvedt's writing on this subject has informed his own narrative approaches.

In the conclusion, this thesis will propose Hustvedt and Auster as two major figures of late Twentieth Century and early Twenty-First Century literature. This can be identified in Hustvedt and Auster's critical and commercial success, the stylistic idiosyncrasy of their works, and their nuanced approach to certain philosophical questions. While the technical and stylistic differentiations in their

work are self-evident, Hustvedt and Auster's fiction can be read as consciously and unconsciously collaborative, characterised by a dialogic intertextuality which can only be found in the discursive, intersubjective spaces unique to their relationship. According to John-Steiner, 'generative ideas emerge from joint thinking, from significant conversations, and from sustained, shared struggles'.³⁷ For Auster, 'your language, your memories, your sense of isolation – every thought in your head has been born from your connection to others';³⁸ for Hustvedt, the unconscious nature of assimilation and influence reveals itself through the creative process:

I would think that with both of our works there are things like that that are happening...That's what happens. And especially with the intimacy that you have with someone else's texts. I mean how could it not?...Work that you care about becomes imprinted somewhere in your soul. But you know, you don't know about it anymore.³⁹

There is something in the notion of an explicitly collaborative partnership that Hustvedt and Auster disavow: both are fiercely protective of their own independent authorial identity, and the self-sufficiency of their embodied process of aesthetic expression. Hustvedt and Auster's married status has inevitably coloured critical approaches to their contribution to contemporary fiction. However, as married authors, Hustvedt and Auster's writing inevitably bears the

³⁷ John-Steiner, p. 3.

³⁸ Paul Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, pp. 539-68 (p. 560).

³⁹ See Appendix 1.

authorial imprint of the other; this is problematically reconfigured by media depictions of their relationship, and further complicated by instances of narrativised acknowledgement in Hustvedt and Auster's work.

Nevertheless, this thesis will seek to show how the dialogically intertextual exchange between Hustvedt and Auster's texts is reflective of a more broadly discursive structure: the institution of marriage. This shared emotional space can be viewed as stimulating Hustvedt and Auster's embodied process of aesthetic expression: each 'set the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses' within each other.⁴⁰ They live together, they write separately, they correct and edit collaboratively: a collaborative exchange which is consciously *and* unconsciously intersubjective, and a process which is aesthetically and intellectually rewarding for both Hustvedt and Auster, and for us, their readers.

⁴⁰ Iser, 'The Reading Process' in *Reader-Response Theory*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 51.

Chapter one: Constructed selves – autobiography, storytelling and the canon

Introduction

In this opening chapter, I want to explore the embodied basis of Hustvedt and Auster’s dialogical intertextuality, and how this has informed Hustvedt and Auster’s construction of an authorial self.¹ Hustvedt and Auster’s authorial identities are but one facet of a self which is multiple, mobile and frequently contradictory. Their authorial identities provide the means by which Hustvedt and Auster come to terms with the partial, multiple and indeterminate facets of selfhood. Before examining the dialogical intertextuality between Hustvedt and Auster’s fictional narratives, it is useful to look at their non-fictional texts which seek to establish an authorial self through a range of discursive approaches to narrativising the autobiographical self. The issues, concepts and theories related to selfhood that appear in Hustvedt and Auster’s fictional narratives are addressed more overtly in their non-fiction. In this chapter, Hustvedt’s essays and her interdisciplinary illness memoir *The Shaking Woman, or A History of my Nerves* (2010) will be compared with Auster’s variants on life-writing: *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), *Hand to Mouth* (1994), *Winter Journal* (2012) and *Report from*

¹ I use this definition in a different sense to Michel Foucault, whose author figure, or ‘function’, is the embodiment and channel of discourse. Both Hustvedt and Auster would refute Foucault’s conception of the author function, instead viewing the reader-author relationship as a collaborative partnership. For a more detailed discussion of Foucault’s work, and poststructuralist reconfigurations of authorship, see Chapter two.

the Interior (2013). Hustvedt and Auster's isolation of facets of their autobiographical selves throughout these texts exhibits a dialogic intertextuality which is both internalised and externalised: it speaks of itself both within and without itself. Inevitably, these texts contain multiple references to the shared narrative of their marriage, further highlighting the intertextual nature of Hustvedt and Auster's fictional narratives. This chapter will provide an entry point for a number of these, while delineating the dialogical foundation to the collaborative nature of Hustvedt and Auster's relationship.

The first section will consider Hustvedt and Auster's respective approaches to representations of consciousness through their narratives of autobiographical selfhood, which in turn underpin their construction of distinct authorial identities. Hustvedt and Auster are both cognisant of the otherness of consciousness, with the former writing that 'the art of autobiography, as much as the art of fiction, calls on the writer to shape himself as a character in a story, and that shaping requires a form mediated by language'.² According to Hustvedt, the art of autobiography is dependent upon 'what scientists call episodic or autobiographical memory': the process through which we create 'a coherent narrative sense of a self over time'.³ Auster, referencing the work of the late neurologist Oliver Sacks, observes: 'every whole person...every person with a coherent identity, is in effect narrating the story of his life to himself at every

² Siri Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (New York: Picador, 2012), pp. 93-115 (p. 103).

³ Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 102-03.

moment'.⁴ Qualifying this statement with the observation that we are 'made by others', Auster's understanding of subjectivity largely draws upon biological, phenomenological and psychological readings of the self.⁵ This is perhaps exemplified by his separation of the narratives of his body (*Winter Journal*) and psyche (*Report from the Interior*) into two distinct texts, as a reflection upon, or problematization of, Cartesian dualism.⁶ While Auster proposes that the two read in tandem may present 'a bigger picture' of autobiographical selfhood, there still remain 'holes in the memory': 'you grab on to some things, others have completely disappeared'.⁷

By contrast, Hustvedt's repeated deployment of the life sciences through her writing departs from Auster's approach to the mind/body split. *The Shaking Woman* in particular attempts to align the life sciences, specifically the fields of

⁴ Paul Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p.559. Given what Hustvedt and Auster have already revealed about their writing relationship, it is highly probable that their nuanced appreciation of Sack's neurological description of the subjective self is a product of the process of critical reading and intimate discussion that has characterised their married life.

⁵ 'Your language, your memories, your sense of isolation – every thought in your head has been born from your connection to others'. (Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 560.)

⁶ This phenomenological approach not only references Descartes, but also the *korper* (physical body) and *liebe* (living body) of Husserl's model of subjectivity, which draws upon Descartes mediations for its model of intentionality. For a more detailed appraisal of Husserl's ideas in relation to Hustvedt and Auster's writing, see Chapter three.

⁷ Paul Auster, 'Interview with Gaby Wood', *Daily Telegraph* (09 December 2013)

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/10498346/Paul-Auster-interview-theres-nothing-i-feel-humiliated-by.html>> [Accessed 01 January 2017].

neurobiology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, with the humanities through an autobiographical aesthetic where the boundaries of self and other are transgressed:

Questions about self and other have been central to psychoanalysis, but they also range beyond its borders in analytical and continental philosophy, other disciplines in the humanities, in psychiatry, and, more recently, in the neurosciences. *Subjectivity, intersubjectivity, mirroring, dialogue, and theory of mind* are all terms directed at the problem of the between.⁸

Jason Tougaw situates Hustvedt's text within a recent corpus of '*brain memoirs*' which investigate 'philosophical or abstract questions about the connections between body, mind, self, and world physically and experientially concrete'.⁹

Of the two writers, it is Hustvedt whose investigations into this subject are more overtly scholarly: with the publication of the *The Shaking Woman* it becomes possible to detect a shift in her self-positioning as a 'thinker' rather than a 'novelist'. As outlined in the introduction, the emotional grounding of Buber's self-other 'threshold of mutuality, or 'the between', is a concept Hustvedt frequently returns to in her texts. Her understanding of Buber's theory appears to

⁸ Hustvedt, 'Freud's Playground' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 196.

⁹ Interestingly, Tougaw also describes Sacks as the 'most influential progenitor' of what he terms 'nonfiction neurological narratives' which are more explicitly engaged with the 'social, scientific and philosophical implications' of neurological diagnosis and treatment. In this sense, we might read *Report from the Interior* as a brain memoir. Unlike that of Hustvedt, Auster's text lacks the 'explicit focus on the brain – and the writer as organism'. See Jason Tougaw, 'Brain Memoirs, Neuroscience and the Self: A Review Article', *Literature and Medicine* (30: 1, 2012), 171-192 (pp. 172-174).

predate her relationship with Auster, but it resonates with what Auster terms ‘the long, uninterrupted conversation’ of their marriage.¹⁰ (*Journal* 195) While Hustvedt’s own model of relationality links back to the Buberian principle of ‘‘I exists only in relation to ‘you’’,¹¹ she stands slightly apart from Auster’s reading of Sacks’ coherent identity conception, determining that subjectivity ‘is not the story of a stable, absolute ‘I’’. (*Shaking* 79) Hustvedt has further developed this argument to contend that autobiographical memory is:

Part of our consciousness, but that consciousness is also shaped by unconsciousness. What it means to be a thinking subject is an enormously complex philosophical and neurobiological issue’ which ‘remains unsolved.’¹²

Hustvedt’s approach to narrativizing the autobiographical self concretises the embodied interplay between consciousness and unconsciousness, body and mind. Memory, as Hustvedt argues, while frustratingly fragmentary or perpetually partial, is bodily felt and fundamental to the construction of autobiographical selfhood:

¹⁰ Interestingly, Lily Corwin applies a Buberian reading to Auster’s second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, ‘The Book of Memory’, to signal a text that uses Buber’s I-I relationship to ‘externalize internal dialogue and thus find purpose and meaning’. (Lily Corwin, ‘Is That All There Is?: Martin Buber, Sufficiency, and Paul Auster’s ‘The Book of Memory’, *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (30, 2011), 68-79 (p. 68).

¹¹ Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman, or A History of my Nerves* (London: Sceptre, 2010), p. 55. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Shaking* with page number cited.

¹² Hustvedt, ‘The Real Story’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 102-03.

Between those important events are fogs and lapses. I forget. I forget. I forget. And I sometimes displace, condense, project, and generally get things wrong about my life... Writing a memoir is a question of organising remembrances *I believe to be true and not invented* into a verbal narrative. And that belief is a matter of inner conviction: what feels true now.¹³

Place and space, in terms of the ordering of geo-spatial and genealogical traces of selfhood, are equally critical to Hustvedt and Auster's organisation of remembrances. With multiple references to childhood, youth, adolescence, parenthood, middle age and infirmity, Hustvedt and Auster's autobiographical texts tread the genealogical terrain of constructed selfhood while attempting to trace the psychological basis of their authorial selves. In the second section I will therefore address the apparent divide between what Hustvedt identifies as maternal (female) and paternal (male) spaces.¹⁴ In acknowledgement of Buber, some consideration will be given to the dialectical nature of subjectivity and emotional relationality, particularly the changing constitution of consciousness throughout these individualised processes of identity construction. The porous, unknowable boundaries of the self and its transgenerational foundation will also be addressed in this section. Representation enacts a continual exchange between the narrative of autobiographical selfhood, and the aesthetics of constructing an

¹³ Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 105.

¹⁴ There is an obvious parallel in conceiving of Hustvedt and Auster – as married writers, parents and co-creators of a collaborative aesthetic – as embodying maternal and paternal spatiality through the embodied process of aesthetic expression. It is a comparison which this thesis rejects as overly simplistic, and too narrow, in focus.

autobiographical narrative. Quoting Julia Kristeva, Hustvedt comments that '*what is experienced* gradually becomes *what is represented*'.¹⁵ Through the codification of autobiographical selfhood, Hustvedt and Auster attempt to represent the ontological problematic: living inside a body whose furthest origins are not always available to consciousness, but whose presence sets in train Hustvedt and Auster's interest in intersubjectivity, and the transgenerational determinants of selfhood.

The third section will look at the gendered nature of authorship, and Hustvedt and Auster's engagement with the literary canon. Hustvedt observes, 'every writer takes from the past';¹⁶ Auster argues that 'you have to read everything you possibly can, and try to forget it' in order to write.¹⁷ Feminism's response to the masculine tradition represented by T.S. Eliot and Harold Bloom, and the counter-tradition of women's writing, complicate this notion of a literary inheritance for Hustvedt. Hustvedt's relationship to feminism is highly nuanced, and the extent to which her writing can be read through the prism of a post-feminist aesthetic worthy of consideration. In a critical and commercial sense, she has been situated within a canon of women's writing, which she partially embraces and partially rejects. In one regard, Hustvedt approaches the authorial

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, p. 243 (qtd. in Hustvedt, 'The Real Story', in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 113).

¹⁶ Siri Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 65-87 (p. 83).

¹⁷ Paul: 'In *4321* – it's in a parenthesis in Ferguson 4 – his new uncle Gil Schneiderman says, 'you have to read everything you possibly can and then try to forget it'. What you can't forget is going to form the foundation of your work.' See Appendix.

identity from a feminist literary tradition which acknowledges embodied selfhood and the unconscious, while stressing the pluralistic and mobile selfhood espoused by poststructuralist feminist thinkers. However, her enthusiastic embrace of scientific empiricism indicates a distancing from more radical feminist approaches. Ultimately, she places herself between these differentiated positions, utilising ideas which align with preceding avenues of knowledge or which open up new and unfamiliar terrain.

Mediatized approaches to Hustvedt's work have on occasion been characterised by increasingly outlandish responses to her gender: her novels are less worthy of critical attention; he is the more cerebral writer; he taught her psychoanalysis; he writes her novels for her. Hustvedt and Auster are cautious when discussing their writing relationship: Hustvedt has likened this reading of her work to the cultural reputations of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. While Auster has never explicitly described himself as a 'feminist' or been a vocal proponent of LGBT issues, he aligns his position on issues of gender and sexuality with that of his wife.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the timbre of Auster's authorial voice is more explicitly masculine, reflective of his position within the male-dominated tradition of literature. 'The Book of Memory' in particular indicates the tangible presence of its literary precursors, with Auster describing his text as a 'collective work' written by 'dozens of authors [...] that's why that book is filled with so many references and quotations, in order to pay homage to all the others

¹⁸ 'I've learnt so much from her over the years. She's an ardent feminist and I agree with her in all her positions. They are mine as well.' Paul Laity, 'I've waited my whole life to write this book': Interview with Paul Auster', *Guardian* (21 January 2017), p. 4.

inside me'.¹⁹ A case can be made for arguing for an alternative or supplementary genealogy of authorial identity, one in which Hustvedt and Auster's influences are imprinted upon their genetic material through the process of reading, whereby culture 'literally becomes material in the brain'.²⁰

Hustvedt and Auster's respective responses to literary tradition illustrate the critical role that a reader, particularly of one another's work, has played in the construction of their authorial selves. The fourth section of this chapter will compare intertextual and reader response theoretical approaches to reading, and how these have informed Hustvedt and Auster's dialogically intertextual narratives. In a number of interviews, Hustvedt and Auster have emphasised the key role played by the reader as a co-creator of their texts. This operates symbiotically with the editorial role each plays for the other, their unconscious response to the text of the other, and the critical function the spouse-reader performs upon and within the spouse-author's text. Hustvedt says of Auster:

I had met the man before I read what he had written, but if I had not loved his work as I did or if he had not admired my writing, it would have changed things. Our work has been an intimate part of our love affair and

¹⁹ It is tempting to view this collective approach as a non-masculine model of aesthetic expression. Given the patriarchal foundation of the canon, this is not unproblematic: almost all the 'others inside me' described by Auster, perhaps inevitably, male. Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 560.

²⁰ Hustvedt: 'I've been hacking away at this thing about how culture becomes material, literally material in the brain – this kind of false dichotomy which has led to all kinds of terrible mistakes in the sciences and the humanities'. See Appendix 1.

marriage for twenty-three years, but what I read wasn't then and isn't now what I *know* when I'm with him. His work comes from the place in him I can't know.²¹

It is the tension between solipsism, intersubjectivity and the material objectivity of their autobiographical texts that offers an entry-point to the collaborative nature of Hustvedt and Auster's writing, and their distinctly unique contributions to contemporary literature. Read in totality, Hustvedt and Auster's autobiographical texts produce portraits-in-mosaic of selfhood, utilising a multiplicity of perspectives and implicating the reader in the discursive production of new forms of (self) knowledge. The episodic, fragmentary, vertiginous, plural and self-reflexive nature of these remembrances illustrates the means by which memory and identity are formulated. In this sense, they produce an alternative form of knowledge, one inherently dialogical and defined by ambiguity and intersubjectivity.

²¹ Hustvedt, 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 227.

Narrativising the autobiographical self

Using autobiographical narratives which foreground identity, memory and language, Hustvedt and Auster have produced works which actively construct an authorial identity. These multifaceted, multiple-perspective narratives examine the various structures which predicate selfhood: those biological, genealogical, social, cultural, philosophical, linguistic and so on.²² Moreover, these texts are deeply personal representations of the means by which they came into being first as a conscious being, and latterly as writers. In so doing, they exhibit varying degrees of affiliation and differentiation: where Auster's solipsistic texts are philosophically ruminative, Hustvedt's are notable for their literary-scientific hybridity. Auster considers his work to be principally concerned with 'the old mind-body problem. Descartes. Solipsism. Self and other, all the old philosophical questions'; for Auster, 'we know who we are because we can think about who we

²² Like much contemporary life writing, Hustvedt and Auster penned their autobiographical narratives in the shadow of Roland Barthes. According to Michael Sheringham, Barthes made a 'major contribution to the evolution of the autobiographical form', principally with the 'formal inventiveness' of his text *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1977): 'by abolishing overall coherence, perspective and fixity of point of view', the formal ingredients of Barthes' text serve not to abolish the notion of the individual self, but to enact a theatricalized subjectivity made up of multiple currents and constituencies'. By presenting subjectivity as 'a shifting, mobile realm marked by infinite gradations and degrees', Barthes' autobiographical text constructs a bridge between the realms of poststructuralism and life writing, while effectively restoring the Author figure from the *coup de grâce* delivered by Barthes a number of years previously (see Chapter two). Michael Sheringham, 'Roland Barthes' in *Encyclopaedia of Life Writing: Autobiography and Biographical Forms*, Vol. I, ed. by Margaretta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 93-5.

are'.²³ His early autobiographical texts bear a nihilistic preoccupation with mortality which is less evident in the more positivistic philosophical positions of Hustvedt. The first part of *The Invention of Solitude* details the unexpected death of his father, and reveals the murder of his paternal grandfather by his grandmother.²⁴ In *Hand to Mouth*, Auster's attempt to forge an authorial identity overlaps with his financially-precarious existence, and the end of his first marriage.²⁵ *Winter Journal*, written in the wake of his mother's death, marks Auster's commitment to documenting what he describes as the 'phenomenology of breathing', (*Journal 1*) a project underscored by his lachrymose observation that 'you have entered the winter of your life'. (*Journal 230*) *Winter Journal*, and its companion volume *Report from the Interior*, elicit a process of recovered memory: an attempt to fill in the existential blanks of his identity. Like *The Invention of Solitude*, both are written in the second person.²⁶ Read together, they

²³ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 559. Auster's texts might be situated what Tougaw describes as a 'long-tradition of autobiographical writing that chronicles mind-body relationships and their implications for selfhood, including the work of Augustine, Montaigne, Thomas De Quincey, Marcel Proust'. Hustvedt may counter Auster's statement with the observation that 'we do not truly know who or what we are despite being able to think about who or what we are'.

²⁴ Pascal Bruckner calls *The Invention of Solitude* the '*ars poetica* and the seminal work of Paul Auster. To understand him we must start here; all his books lead us back to this one'. Pascal Bruckner, 'Paul Auster and the Heir Interstate' in *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, ed. by Dennis Barone (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995), pp. 27-33 (p. 27).

²⁵ To the writer and translator Lydia Davis.

²⁶ Conveying what Sarah Churchwell identifies as a 'paradoxical effect...not to create intimacy but to estrange the reader'. Sarah Churchwell, 'Paul Auster has written a listless book, full of lists', *New Statesman* (13 September 2012) <<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/09/paul-auster-has-written-listlessbook-full-lists>> [Accessed 03 November 2016]. As evidenced by the headline, Churchwell's largely

convey a sense of democratic monism: in *Winter Journal* Auster observes ‘you have consciously decided to be everyone’, (*Journal* 117) a statement subsequently echoed in *Report from the Interior*: ‘you think of yourself as anyone, as everyone’.²⁷ Each describes intimate documents of Auster’s life in an empathic call-and-response with the reader: ‘Holding your infant children in your arms. Holding your wife in your arms’. (*Journal* 230)

The early autobiographical writing of Hustvedt is perhaps more explicitly ‘I’ centered, particularly the first-person documentation of her early essays ‘Yonder’, ‘Leaving Your Mother’, ‘Extracts from a Story of a Wounded Self’, and her brain memoir *The Shaking Woman*, the writing of which was triggered by

scabrous review of this text raises one of two pertinent points about the purpose of Auster’s project: ‘readers expecting much of anything will be disappointed...*Winter Journal* is eye-wateringly pointless’. However it is precisely Auster’s positioning of the mundane and overlooked as of equal value to the seismic and epistemic moments of existence that lends the book authenticity. As Churchwell concedes, it is Auster’s fluency and skill as a writer that grants his historical document of ontological mundanity a degree of authenticity and indeed authority over our contemporary era of instantaneity and hyperreality (and the compunction that literature must mine this seam). The phenomenological quality of boredom is continued in *Report from the Interior*, as an object which is not always available to consciousness and is consequently disregarded as a vital component within the narratives of our autobiographical selves. *Report from the Interior* is differentiated from Auster’s other autobiographical texts in its apparent disregard for formative epistemic breaks in the consciousness of its creator.

²⁷ Paul Auster, *Report from the Interior* (London: Faber, 2013), p. 4. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Report* with page number cited. Tempting, perhaps, to link this democratic monism to the creed of American exceptionalism: a creed which Auster instead critiques in a lengthy passage which concludes with the rueful, heavily ironic observation: ‘Never forget how lucky you are. To be an American is to take part in the greatest enterprise since the creation of man’ (*Report* 57). Just to be sure, this is followed by an account of bedwetting: ‘There was a flaw in you that had to be kept hidden from the world’. (*Report* 82)

Hustvedt's experiencing of a series of self-diagnosed hysterical episodes following her father's death. Without lapsing into overt solipsism, Hustvedt takes herself as the subject for a considerable number of her non-fiction pieces as she explores the multiple nature of identity and the unknowability of the embodied self. Like Auster, the mind-body problem is critical to Hustvedt's project: in *The Shaking Woman* she describes Descartes' principle as 'so vexing, so entrenched a duality that it becomes almost impossible to think without it. This split, after all, created the distinction between psychiatry and neurology: sick minds versus sick brains'. (*Shaking* 17) Hustvedt's autobiographical narratives utilise the formula 'memory is flux' to illustrate the centrality of consciousness to identity, alongside the difficulty of fixing a stable identity upon past memory:

To long for the immediacy and presence of what we have lost is human. What we retain from that former time in words, images and feelings is not stable. Only rarely can we measure our memories against documentary evidence, and even then our phenomenological perspective is missing. Memory itself exists only in the present.²⁸

Memory is also mutable, reconfiguring itself and reconsolidating as we navigate existence via a cognitive process that is as creative as it is nostalgic: 'memories are revised over time, and their meanings change as we age, something now recognised by neuroscience and referred to as the *reconsolidation* of memory'.²⁹ What we remember is not what we experienced: we remember our last

²⁸ Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 114.

²⁹ Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 94.

remembrance of that memory. Memory plays tricks on us and shapes our sense of who we are.

The recent autobiographical texts of Auster and Hustvedt present a composite portrait of the artist, but within that composite portrait gaps, uncertainties and inconsistencies remain. Much of what we know about consciousness is, as Hustvedt points out, unsolved. From a metaphysical perspective, consciousness, language and memory have preoccupied philosophers for centuries; in neuroscience, the organic essence of selfhood remains a puzzle: how the brain processes qualia to generate consciousness is referred to as ‘the hard question’.³⁰ Answering this question is fraught with conjecture and speculation, and characterised by both intra- and interdisciplinary divisions. Tougaw persuasively delineates the schism between neuroscientific and philosophical approaches to the dualism-monism dialectic.³¹ These, he proposes, are embodied by the ideas of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio and the philosopher Alva Noë. While Damasio examines ‘the experience of his patients through the lens of philosophical questions about consciousness, emotion and cognition’, Noë is adamant ‘that the neuroscience hype has taken the brain out of its context...to convince us that our brains contain the whole story of selfhood’.³² Consciousness

³⁰ Oliver Burkeman, ‘Why can’t the world’s greatest minds solve the mystery of consciousness?’, *Guardian* (21 January 2015) <<https://www.guardian.com/science/2015/jan/21/-sp-why-cant-worlds-greatest-minds-solve-mystery-consciousness>> [Accessed 3 April 2017].

³¹ Hustvedt addresses this problematic paradigm in her essay, ‘The Delusions of Certainty’, from her latest collection *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women* (London: Sceptre, 2016).

³² Tougaw, p. 178.

is either a ‘private, first-person phenomenon’,³³ or ‘something we do or make...something we achieve’. As Tougaw points out, both positions ‘complement each other’, with Damasio’s emphasis on brain and body physiology interlocking with the ‘environmental and social contexts of an organism’s brain and body’.³⁴

In Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain (2010) Damasio outlines a model of embodied consciousness which draws upon emotional memory and reasoning. Under this model, the self is organised into a hierarchy of three stages, all of which are governed by emotion: the first, the protoself, is a non-linguistic state shared by all organisms which detects and records responses to stimuli, or ‘feelings’, through neural patterns; core consciousness, which emerges from the emotional responses to these feelings logged by the protoself, thereby stimulating the recognition of selfhood by situating itself within the present; and the extended self, or autobiographical self, which senses movement away from the present into the past and future, and through which a linguistic sensibility and representational facility begin to emerge. Writing of the autobiographical self, Damasio observes that it ‘leads a double life’:

On the one hand, it can be overt, making up the conscious mind at its grandest and most human; on the other, it can lie dormant, its myriad components waiting their turn to become active. That other life of the autobiographical self takes place off-screen, away from accessible

³³ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 12 (qtd in Tougaw, p. 177).

³⁴ Tougaw, p. 179.

consciousness, and this is where and when the self matures, thanks to the gradual sedimentation and reworking of one's memory.³⁵

For Alfred Hornung, Hustvedt's affinity for Damasio's work in particular makes explicit her complex literary-theoretical approach to narrativizing the autobiographical self.³⁶ Hustvedt writes: 'we organise the past as explicit autobiographical memory...fragments are linked in a narrative, which in turn shapes our expectations about the future. There can be no autobiographical self without language'. (*Shaking* 58)

Nevertheless, Hustvedt writes, 'scientists in various fields would disagree with a reductionist formulation such as 'you are a vast assembly of nerve cells''. (*Shaking* 71) Implicit memory embraces both precognitive memory, and those repressed memories buried deep within the psyche. Noë argues that Damasio's model fails to account for, or indeed locate, the organic processes that stimulate the Freudian-Lacanian unconscious. Our desires and drives are equally vital in explaining selfhood, according to Hustvedt: 'around and beneath the island of the self-conscious storyteller is a vast sea of unconsciousness...There is much in us we don't control or will but that doesn't mean that making a narrative for ourselves is unimportant'. (*Shaking* 198) The art of autobiographical storytelling

³⁵ Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, p. 210 (qtd in Alfred Hornung, 'The Shaking Woman in the Media: Life Writing and Neuroscience' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf pp. 67-82 [p. 75]).

³⁶ Hornung in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 75. Likewise, Tougaw draws our attention to Hustvedt's use of Damasio's ideas alongside those of William James, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jaak Panksepp.

involves the representation of those implicit memories and feelings which shape us, alongside more revelatory experiential phenomena. As Tougaw observes, ‘brain memoirs are already asking the more nuanced questions’, something which recalls Auster’s reference in *The Invention of Solitude* to ‘the anecdote as a form of knowledge’.³⁷ an aesthetic negotiation of the schism between body and mind in pursuit of an authentic sense of selfhood. This quest for autobiographical authenticity is guided by the authorial personas Hustvedt and Auster assume.

This negotiation between body and mind, conscious thought and unconscious feeling, guides Hustvedt and Auster’s narrativisation of their autobiographical selves. Further, Hustvedt and Auster’s apprehension of these memories enacts the concretisation of authorial selfhood. In an early essay, ‘Yonder’, Hustvedt recalls her first memory, aged three: ‘I am walking through the door towards my mother, who is in the bath. I can see the bubbles’.³⁸ This representation of core consciousness in infancy continues: ‘the bubbles fascinate me, and the presence of my mother fills me with strong, simple pleasure’.³⁹ Early memories, according to Hustvedt, ‘float’ outside of the ‘greater narrative’ of our autobiographical self, and consequently ‘have more purity’.⁴⁰ This ‘purity’ is vital to the establishment of nascent selfhood, which effects a negotiation between these formative events and the more mundane moments which define our later lives: ‘when dailiness enters memory, repetition fixes places in the mind, but it

³⁷ Paul Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, pp. 1-150 (p. 54).

³⁸ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 23.

³⁹ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 23.

also burdens them with a wealth of experience that is often difficult to untangle'.⁴¹ This 'dailiness' is largely absent from early autobiographical essays such as 'Yonder' and 'Leaving Your Mother', where Hustvedt's urge to construct a strong authorial identity is stronger. In those essays, Hustvedt's sense of self is chiefly constituted of retrospective moments of revelation and emotional resonance. More mundane moments are retained by the conscious self through the implied presence of implicit memory: the things we ignore or overlook, or encounter unconsciously, can still be recalled from the mind's compendium of remembrances.⁴²

Auster's narratives of autobiographical selfhood similarly traverse the ambiguous divide between the revelatory and mundane. Having attempted to write the biography of his body in *Winter Journal*, for *Report from the Interior* Auster dedicates himself to recovering the inception of his core consciousness. In his move to represent the formation of core consciousness, Auster oscillates between joyous recollection - 'in the beginning, everything was alive' – and a solipsistic elegy for his lost youth. These observations reverberate in a deliberately dialogical fashion both between and within Auster's twin

⁴¹ Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 24.

⁴² These are revealed by Hustvedt through the experiential essays of *Living, Thinking, Looking*, which explore reading ('On Reading'), perception ('Notes on Seeing'), insomnia ('Sleeping/Not Sleeping'), headaches ('My Strange Head: Notes on Migraine') or empathy ('Flowers'). Here one can detect shared affinity for the essayistic tradition established by Michel de Montaigne, of whom Auster has said: 'There is no more honest writer...he set out to discover himself. And he discovered the human race'. (Chris Peachment, 'Give the man a cigar', *Independent* (7 March 1996), <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/give-the-man-a-cigar-1340694.html>> [Accessed 28 June 2017].)

autobiographical meditations. They are equal parts revelatory and mundane, something reflected in the elegiac language and ambulatory syntactical structure, and reinforced by the fragmentary nature of the narrative. Both books are arranged as a random collection of recollections which criss-cross the temporal-spatial horizon of experience, circumnavigating and cleaving to present and past:

Your earliest thoughts, remnants of how you lived inside yourself as a small boy. You can remember only some of it, isolated bits and pieces, brief flashes of recognition that surge in you unexpectedly at random moments – brought on by the smell of something, or the touch of something, or the way the light falls on something in the here and now of adulthood. You think you can remember, you believe you can remember, but perhaps you are not remembering at all, or remembering only a later remembrance of what you think you thought in that distant time which is all but lost to you now. (*Report 4*)

Like Hustvedt, Auster addresses the knotty question of how reconsolidation affects the construction of an autobiographical self. It also reveals in microcosm the purpose behind Auster's autobiographical project: to depict the multiple, mobile nature of selfhood.

The decision to separate body and mind into two parallel texts is not altogether successful, yet this seems to be precisely the point Auster is making: 'an attempt to capture the strange doubleness of being alive'. (*Report 192*) The process recalls the impact Merleau-Ponty's vision of embodied selfhood had on

the young Auster: ‘the world is in my head. My body is in the world’.⁴³ (*Report* 192) Two particular moments stand out. In *Winter Journal*, Auster writes: ‘Your bare feet on the cold floor as you climb out of bed and walk to the window. You are six years old. Outside snow is falling and the branches of the trees in the backyard are turning white’. (*Journal* 1) No further comment upon this temporal telescoping, with the winter snow embodying the familiar metonym of advancing age and mortality. In *Report from the Interior*, he describes experiencing at the same age of six years old ‘a feeling of happiness, an ecstatic, unbridled sense of well-being and joy’ after having dressed and tied his shoes, a moment ‘still blazing inside you fifty-nine years after that morning, undiminished in its clarity’, which he ascribes to ‘the birth of self-consciousness, that thing that happens to children at around the age of six, when the inner voice awakens and the ability to think a thought and tell yourself you are thinking that thought begins’:

Our lives enter a new dimension at that point, for that is the moment when we acquire the ability to tell our stories to ourselves, to begin the uninterrupted narrative that continues to the day we die. Until that morning you just were. Now you knew that you were. (*Report* 13)

⁴³ ‘1966-67. A year of much reading, perhaps more reading than at any other time in your life. Not just the poets but the philosophers as well. Berkeley and Hume... Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty... You can see traces of all four thinkers in those words of yours, but in the end it was Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology that said the most to you.’ (*Report* 192-93) For a detailed discussion of Hustvedt and Auster’s dialogical deployment of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in their work, see Chapter four.

In these two temporally-aligned passages, Auster acknowledges the embodied nature of consciousness, the intrusive otherness of the unconscious, and the moments when we lapse into an anhedonic state:

Every now and then...you would suddenly lose track of who you were. It was as if the being who inhabited your body had turned into an imposter, or, more precisely, into no one at all. And as you felt your selfhood dribble out of you, you would walk around in a state of stunned dissociation, not sure if it was yesterday or tomorrow, not sure if the world in front of you was real or a figment of someone else's imagination. (*Report 44*)

From time to time we all fall into these 'dream-like interludes' and lose the narrative thread of our autobiographical selfhood.

As if you were slipping into another dimension, a new configuration of time and space, looking at your own life with blank, indifferent eyes – or else rehearsing your death, learning what happens to you when you disappear. (*Report 45*)

At these moments, Auster suggests, our extended consciousness becomes suspended or disrupted, and our temporal-spatial orientation momentarily obliterated. Our conscious acknowledgement of this fact both problematizes and restores our sense of authentic selfhood.

In his 2010 novel *Sunset Park*, Auster refers to this condition as 'the strangeness of being alive', a term which he acknowledges he borrowed from

Hustvedt.⁴⁴ This strangeness, or sense of estrangement from one's own body, is possessed of both benign and malign characteristics. While lacking the negating nihilism of Auster's recollection above, Hustvedt similarly reads the concept of autobiographical self-narration as reflective of the otherness of the self:

We tell our memories and link them together, and these disparate memories gain an owner: 'the 'I of autobiography, who is no one without a 'you'. For whom do we narrate after all? Even when alone in our heads, there is a presumed other'. (*Shaking* 198)

The self's material and psychical otherness interact dialogically through a temporal-spatial *mise en abyme* of subjectivity which situates the subjective self within a zone of interstitiality, or *betweenness*. For the possessor of an authorial identity, apprehending this zone informs not only the ongoing narrative of the autobiographical self, but concurrently the concretisation of selfhood through the writing process. With their codified autobiographical narratives, Hustvedt and Auster signal their commitment to exploring the dialectical realms of consciousness and unconsciousness. This conceptualisation of selfhood is extended through the notion of a genealogically-grounded self, which is guided by Damasio's belief that autobiographical selfhood is guided by the ability of our core consciousness to situate itself within a spatio-temporal horizon. For Damasio, this process generates what he identifies as the self's extended consciousness;

⁴⁴ Paul Auster, *Sunset Park* (London: Faber, 2010), p. 309. Auster directly referenced his incorporation of Hustvedt's phraseology during our December 2016 interview. See Appendix 1.

extended consciousness enables the self to recognise its temporal situatedness.⁴⁵

This is illustrated by Auster's observation that 'becoming a parent connects you to a world beyond yourself, to the continuum of generations, to the inevitability of your own death. You understand that you exist in time'.⁴⁶ Parental space, and the genealogical constitution of selfhood, will come under consideration in the next section.

⁴⁵ It is worth noting again that Damasio's neurological model of self-other relations is distinctive to that of Freud and Lacan, though perhaps closer to that of Buber. While Hustvedt and Auster profess knowledge of Freud and Lacan, the usefulness of deploying a developed psychoanalytic reading to self-other relations as represented through the autobiographical writing of Hustvedt and Auster is negligible due to its virtual absence from these particular texts, save for sections of Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman*.

⁴⁶ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 553.

Maternal and paternal spatiality

In the autobiographical narratives of Hustvedt and Auster, self-identity is concretised through a nexus of biologically-determined intersubjective ontologies. 'I' coexists alongside a retinue of other 'I's: mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and distant relatives; beyond them, a network of ancestral communities, countries and nations. There is no self without the other, and identity formation is reinforced through this dialectical, transferential process between subjectivities, particularly between parents and children. For Hustvedt, 'a child's true independence is the product of a strong, reassuring parental presence'.⁴⁷ Her parents 'were like the ground beneath my feet'.⁴⁸ Through her recollections of place and family, Hustvedt reflects upon the establishment of nascent selfhood, observing the biological differentiation between the maternal spaces and paternal spaces which came to define her early life:

By its very nature, original space, maternal space, is nonsense; human experience there is undifferentiated and so can't be put into words. It lives on in our bodies, however, when we curl up to sleep, when we eat, when some of us bathe or swim. And surely it leaves its traces in our physical desire for another. Paternal space in an ideal sense is different. Although we are 'of' our fathers, just as we are 'of' our mothers, we were never 'in' our fathers. Their separateness is obvious.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Siri Hustvedt, 'Leaving Your Mother' in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 105-112 (p. 109).

⁴⁸ Hustvedt, 'Leaving Your Mother' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 9.

This is exemplified by an anecdote in ‘Yonder’, in which Hustvedt retraces the source of her enduring fascination with this Buberian concept of *betweenness* to a childhood conversation with her father:

My father once asked me if I knew where yonder was. I said I thought *yonder* was another word for there. He smiled and said, ‘No, yonder is between here and there.’ This little story has stayed with me for years as an example of linguistic magic: it identified a new space – a middle region that was neither here nor there – a place that simply didn’t exist for me until it was given a name.⁵⁰

For Hustvedt, the indistinct, interchangeable defining qualities of these binary positions – *here* and *there* – stimulates an early understanding of the mutability of place, the fluid constitution of consciousness, and the inconsistencies inherent within language and memory:

What fascinates me is not so much being in a place as *not* being there: how places live in the mind once you have left them, how they are imagined before you arrive, or how they are simply called out of nothing to illustrate a thought or story... These mental spaces map our inner lives more fully

⁵⁰ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 1. Hustvedt’s interest in *betweenness* can even be seen in the etymology of her patronym, which is rooted in the geo-spatial specificity of Norway: ‘high above the mountains above the town of Voss, in western Norway, lies the farm that gave me my name: Hustveit. At some point, the *tveit* became *tvedt*, a different spelling for the same word, which means an opening or clearing’. (Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 14.) The phonetic similarity of Hustvedt and Auster similarly finds itself embroiled in the drama of otherness, and the spatiality of ‘the between’.

than any ‘real’ map, delineating the borders of here and there that also shape what we see in the present.⁵¹

The geo-spatial grounding of her identity – the ‘real’ map which determines how she came to be *here* and not *there* – predetermines these maps of the imagination. Hustvedt proposes that the physical divide between her Norwegian and American families contributed to a complex and linguistically unique upbringing for her and her family:

When I was a child, the map consisted of two regions only: Minnesota and Norway, my here and my there...The two places intermingled in language. I spoke Norwegian before I spoke English. Literally my mother’s tongue, Norwegian remains for me a language of childhood, of affection, of food, and of songs. I often feel its rhythms beneath my English thoughts and prose, and sometimes its vocabulary invades both.⁵²

As a child in Minnesota, under the care of her visiting Grandmother Hustvedt learned to speak Norwegian before she spoke English. On repeated visits to Norway, this latent linguistic comprehension is strengthened and deepened until she and her sisters ‘played, thought and dreamed in Norwegian’.⁵³ Hustvedt later observes that ‘language is the most profound feature of any place’;⁵⁴ yet it is also

⁵¹ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 2.

⁵² Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 2.

⁵³ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 4.

possessed of what she terms a ‘miraculous flexibility’,⁵⁵ one which underpins her understanding of the arbitrary and alterable constituency of language: ‘my childhood history of forgetting and remembering enacts in miniature the dialectic of all immigrant experience: here and there are in a relation of constant strain that is chiefly determined by memory’.⁵⁶

Maternal space is ‘at the centre’ of Hustvedt’s experiences of Norway, linked to her grandmother, or ‘*mormor*’ (meaning ‘mother-mother’ in the native Norwegian), and her mother, who left Bergen for America when she was thirty years old.⁵⁷ The word *mormor* elicits ‘an incantation of pregnancy and birth itself, of one person coming from another, and then its repetition in time’.⁵⁸ When Hustvedt herself became pregnant, she felt it was ‘the only time I had been physically plural – two in one. But of course, it had happened before, when I was the one inside that first place’.⁵⁹ Elsewhere she writes:

Because mothers are our first loves, because it is through them that we begin to find ourselves as separate beings in a new world, they have, for better or worse, immense power.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Hustvedt, ‘Leaving Your Mother’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 108.

If Hustvedt regards Norway as her ‘motherland’, the American Midwest – specifically Northfield, Minnesota – is an equivalent fatherland: a ‘little Norway’ founded in the nineteenth century by immigrant families ‘separated not only by miles but by culture’.⁶¹ Contrasting sharply with the initially idyllic childhood of her mother in Norway, the ‘primitive life on the prairie’ of Hustvedt’s paternal ancestors extends to their ‘antiquated diction and grammar’.⁶² This apparent antiquatedness is symbiotically equated to the hardships of Hustvedt’s father’s upbringing, particularly the effect of the Depression on her paternal grandparents and the community of little Norwegians. During the Second World War, Hustvedt’s father served in New Guinea and the Philippines, about which ‘he talked very little’.⁶³ While her father ‘was very much *there* in my life, and the lives of my sisters’,⁶⁴ paternal space for Hustvedt is possessed of a more discrete, indefinable ontology: ‘he has many stories about the people he grew up with, but his inner life and the pictures he carries with him, in particular the most painful ones, are hidden to me’.⁶⁵ Latent trauma is transferred across generations: while giving a talk in honour of her father at St. Olaf’s college in Minnesota, where he had been a professor for forty years, Hustvedt experiences a violent trembling episode:

⁶¹ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p.11.

⁶² Hustvedt fictionalises these experiences in the narrative of her fourth novel, *The Sorrows of an American*, which includes verbatim transcripts from her late father’s journal and a dedication to him as co-author in the acknowledgements.

⁶³ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Hustvedt, ‘Yonder’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 13.

I looked out at the fifty or so friends and colleagues of my father who had gathered around the memorial Norway spruce, launched into my first sentence, and began to shudder violently from the neck down. My arms flapped. My knees knocked. I shook as if I were having a seizure. (*Shaking* 3)

At first Hustvedt assumes that she has suffered a hysterical episode following the trauma of her father's death:⁶⁶ 'That could be it! I thought. My fit had been hysterical.' (*Shaking* 10) Later, Hustvedt describes a dissociative moment when she feels herself enter the body of her dying father:

⁶⁶ In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt describes how the etymology of hysteria is derived from the Greek word for 'womb', indicating a 'purely female problem connected to reproductive organs' which until the eighteenth century was 'regarded as a convulsive illness that originated somewhere in the body'. (*Shaking* 10-11) Hysteria has undergone a number of redefinitions during this period, and is currently classified in the DSM as conversion disorder: a somatoform disorder which indicates 'disturbances of the body and physical sensations'. Under this classification it is treated as a psychiatric, rather than neurological, disorder. However, this definition seems to run counter to the Freudian psychoanalytic position that 'hysteria was a psychic illness with no organic cause'. (*Shaking* 13) Additionally, for a period in the late Twentieth Century hysteria was grouped with dissociation disorders, which Hustvedt defines as 'a very broad term used in different ways to indicate some form of distance from or disruption of ordinary selfhood', such as 'when a person has an out of body experience' or 'is plagued by a sense that he or the world isn't real'. (*Shaking* 12) As Hustvedt points out, it was Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud who first used the term 'conversion' in *Studies in Hysteria* (1893): 'We adopt the term 'conversion' to designate the transformation of psychical excitement into the chronic somatic symptoms, which is so characteristic of hysteria'. (Breuer and Freud qtd in *Shaking* p.16.) For a detailed discussion of Hustvedt and Auster's dialogical approach to trauma theory in their literature, see Chapter five.

I felt the oxygen line in my nostrils and its discomfort, the heaviness of my lame leg, from which a tumor had been removed years before, the pressure in my tightened lungs, and a sudden panicked helplessness that I could not move from the bed on my own. (*Shaking* 124-25)

Through this psychical transgression of the borders of embodied consciousness, she encounters a ‘sensation’ she finds ‘overwhelming and awful’:

For however long it lasted, only minutes, *I was my father*...I felt the proximity of death, its inexorable pull, and I struggled to leap into my own body, to find myself again. (*Shaking* 125)

Auster’s own depictions of dissociated selfhood are worthy of comparison with that of Hustvedt. In *Winter Journal*, Auster describes suffering his own dissociative seizure following his mother’s sudden death from a heart attack. Auster’s loss of two parents to the same condition triggers a panic attack, which he mistakenly assumes is a heart attack triggered by a rush of existential angst at his own imminent mortality: ‘You wait for your body to drown in the deep black waters of death’. (*Journal* 128-29) Unlike Hustvedt, he does not feel himself entering the maternal space of his deceased mother, but ascribes it to an inability to ‘grieve in the way people normally do [...] Death freezes you and shuts you down, robbing you of all emotion, all affect, all connection to your own heart’. (*Journal* 129-30)

It is paternal space which dominates ‘The Invisible Man’, the first part of Auster’s memoir, *The Invention of Solitude*, a philosophical treatise upon ‘the

irreducible fact of our own mortality' triggered by the sudden death of his father: 'The news of my father's death came to me three weeks ago. It was Sunday morning and I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast for my son Daniel. Upstairs my wife was in bed'.⁶⁷ In contrast with the emotionally-charged presence of Hustvedt's father, Auster's immediate response to his father's sudden death and very existence is one of emotional ambivalence, leading him to observe 'my father had left no traces':

Even before his death he had been absent, and long ago the people closest to him had learned to accept this absence, to treat it as the fundamental quality of his being...In the deepest, most unalterable sense, he was an invisible man. Invisible to others, and most likely invisible to himself as well.⁶⁸

Initially Auster's inability to see his deceased father occludes his own sense of self. By writing about their relationship Auster embarks on a process of self-assessment as a means to address his apparent failings as a son, father and husband:

⁶⁷ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 3. The passage continues: 'Winter in the country: a world of silence, wood smoke, whiteness.' The parallels with *Winter Journal* are obvious.

⁶⁸ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 4. The text contains an interesting intertextual moment with Hustvedt's conceptualisation of *betweenness*. Auster says of his father: 'It was never possible for him to be where he was. For as long as he lived, he was somewhere else, between here and there. But never really here. And never really there'. (Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 15.)

I realize now that I must have been a bad son. Or, if not precisely bad, then at least a disappointment, a source of confusion and sadness. It made no sense to him that he had produced a poet for a son. [...] I must not have seemed very substantial to him, as if I were somehow a vapor or a person not wholly of this world. In his eyes, you became part of the world by working. By definition, work was something that brought in money. If it did not bring in money, it was not work. Writing, therefore, was not work, especially the writing of poetry.⁶⁹

This particular passage depicts a biography of mutual antipathy in miniature, an encapsulation of a fraught father-son dynamic characterised by intersubjective negation.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 53.

⁷⁰ This notion of being 'part of the world by working', and the concomitant use-value of art, haunts the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, 'The Book of Memory' and Auster's second autobiographical work, *Hand to Mouth*. *Hand to Mouth* is subtitled 'a chronicle of early failure' which documents Auster's 'late twenties and early thirties', a time characterised by a 'constant, grinding, almost suffocating lack of money' only alleviated when he receives a significant sum of money after his father's unexpected death, a fact he reflects upon in an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory: 'in some sense, all the novels I've written have come out of that money my father left me...It's a terrible question, finally. To think that my father's death saved my life.' (Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p.551.) In *Hand to Mouth* he writes, 'most writers lead double lives. They earn good money at legitimate professions and carve out time for their writing as best they can [...] My problem was I had no interest in leading a double life...the idea of punching a clock in some nine-to-five job left me cold, utterly devoid of enthusiasm'. Here Auster makes a conscious decision to represent his autobiographical authorial self as being crafted from a period of near-penury: the assumed persona of an existential hunger artist. See Paul Auster, 'Hand to Mouth' in *Collected Prose*, pp.151-242, (pp. 153-54.)

The paternal space problematic continues in ‘The Book of Memory’, Auster’s meditation on masculinity and monadology through the framework of memoir.⁷¹ Auster references Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s model of monadology in an instance of acute anomie:

Each man, therefore, is the entire world, bearing within his genes a memory of all mankind. Or as Leibniz put it: ‘Every living substance is a perpetual living mirror of the universe’.⁷²

This invocation of Leibniz encourages Auster to consider ‘the furtive microscopic cell that has fought its way up through his wife’s [Lydia Davis] body, some three years earlier, to become his son’.⁷³ We cannot speak of the universe without first speaking of the microcosmic, and inevitably this returns us to consciousness: To wander about in the world, then, is also to wander about in ourselves. That is to say, the moment we step into the space of memory, we walk into the world’.⁷⁴

⁷¹ In *Winter Journal*, Auster describes the time when *The Invention of Solitude* was written as a ‘transitional period’: ‘beginning with the breakup of your marriage and your father’s death, the nine months on Varick Street and the first eleven months in Carroll Gardens, a time marked by nightmares and inner struggle, alternating between fits of hope and no hope, tumbling into the beds of various women, women you tried to love but couldn’t, certain you would never marry again, working on your book, on your translations of Joubert and Mallarme, on your mammoth anthology of twentieth century French poetry, taking care of your confused and sometimes embattled three-year-old son.’ (*Journal* 96-97)

⁷² Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 95.

⁷³ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 142.

Intertwined with Auster's metaphysical concerns and intertextual engagements with the canon are a number of touching domestic moments with his young son, Daniel. These are freighted with the emotional implications of Auster's domestic difficulties during this time.⁷⁵ The book opens where 'Portrait of an Invisible Man' effectively closed: 'an image of Daniel now, as he lies upstairs in his crib asleep. To end with this'.⁷⁶ Auster's fragmentary meditation begins on Christmas Eve in 1979, and finds Auster separated from his wife and son Daniel, living in a small apartment in Varick Street, New York: 'He cannot call it home, but for the past nine months it is all he has had'. The financially and emotionally precarious predicament of Auster and his son is reflected in his musings on the transitory, inconsistent nature of memory. The philosophical considerations of Auster's text reflect a wider concern with what Auster describes as 'nostalgia for the present', another instance of Auster recording the suspension of his core consciousness:

⁷⁵ After their lengthy separation, Auster divorced his first wife Lydia Davis in 1982. In 1996, Daniel was alleged to have been present at the New York apartment where his friend Michael Alig murdered the drug dealer Andre 'Angel' Melendez. Daniel later admitted stealing \$3,000 from the deceased Melendez. There's no doubt that the Melendez affair would have been a painful period for Auster, and one he has, rightly, preferred not to discuss publicly. Hustvedt herself writes, 'Although divorce is commonplace enough and often benign – without open rancour between parents – going from here to there can become a form of being nowhere. The child finds himself yonder in a land between father and mother... Two homes inevitably contradict each other... And what does it mean for that child's relations to the symbolic world in general – to language itself as the expression of truth, of all meaning?' (Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 38). In 2002, Hustvedt received a critical mauling in *The New York Observer* for partially basing the narrative of her 2002 novel *What I Loved* on elements of the Melendez murder.

⁷⁶ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 60.

His life no longer seemed to dwell in the present...Even as he stood in the present, he felt himself to be looking at it from the future, and this present-as-past was so antiquated that even the horrors of the day, which ordinarily would have filled him with outrage, seemed remote to him, as if the voice in the radio were reading from a chronicle of some lost civilization.⁷⁷

In one regard, Auster is looking forward to the moment when his son ‘walks into the world’; in another, it terrifies him by signalling his hastening demise, like his father before him. The sense of loss presses in upon on Auster; yet it is self-consciously generated by his apparent nostalgia for the present. Likewise, his ruminations in the passages of ‘Portrait of an Invisible Man’ suggest that he too views himself as a ‘LOST CHILD’.⁷⁸ Lost children litter the textual landscape, ‘the children who will vanish, the children who are dead’: Stéphane Mallarmé’s dying son Anatole, and the poem-as-memorial Mallarmé writes for him; Anne Frank, whose house in Amsterdam Auster visits, and whose birthday Daniel shares; Etan Patz, who vanishes from the streets of New York around the time that Auster and his wife separate.

Then there is Daniel: another lost child.⁷⁹ There are moments when ‘The Book of Memory’ enacts a moving reworking of the father-son dialectic. Further, these representations of nascent consciousness prefigure the explorations of

⁷⁷ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 61.

⁷⁸ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 84.

⁷⁹ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 62.

Auster's own interiority in *Winter Journal* and *Report from the Interior*. He writes:

It is a lost world. And it strikes him to realise that it will be lost forever. The boy will forget everything that has happened to him so far. There will be nothing left but a kind of after-glow, and perhaps not even that. All the thousands of hours that A. has spent with him during the first three years of his life, all the millions of words he has spoken to him, the books he has read to him, the meals he has made for him, the tears he has wiped for him – all these things will vanish from the boy's memory forever.⁸⁰

The process of coming into being through language is deployed in a mimetic and metonymic sense. Linguistic and physical play are conflated with Auster's self-construction as a writer co-existing with Daniels own emergence into the world of language: 'it sometimes seems to A. that his son's mental perambulations while at play are an exact image of his own progress through the labyrinth of a book'.⁸¹ Much like Auster's literary project, his son's cognitive processes takes the form of a solitary pursuit that occurs within the internalised world of self-consciousness:

Another time, the boy went into the bathroom, closed the door and did not come out. A. asked through the closed door: 'What are you doing in there?' 'I'm thinking,' the boy said. 'I have to be alone to think.'⁸²

⁸⁰ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 142.

⁸¹ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 142.

⁸² Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 110.

Citing Freud, Auster reflects that play and creativity are self-referential and fundamental to the development of the core and extended consciousness identified by Damasio:

You will not forget that the stress laid on the writer's memories of his childhood, which perhaps seem so strange, is ultimately derived from the hypothesis that imaginative creation, like day dreaming, is a continuation of and substitute for the play of childhood.⁸³

Despite the profession of 'play', there is much at stake in the book. The author asks himself at the close of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man': 'To wonder what he will make of these pages when he is old enough to read them'.⁸⁴

Auster's anthropological depictions of Daniel are at times mannered and distanced, with Auster referring to himself throughout as A., distancing himself from his authentic identity, and that of his son. The otherness of children, and the nascent consciousness of childhood, is fundamental to Auster's conception of autobiographical selfhood. Despite this, there remains a significant amount of emotional warmth in 'The Book of Memory'. Book Eight describes Auster and his son reading Collodi's *Pinocchio* together as a process of reconciliation: 'little by little, they both began to gravitate toward one book [...] For A. and his son, so often separated from each other during the past year, there was something deeply satisfying in this passage of reunion'.⁸⁵ It is these resonant moments which lend

⁸³ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 60.

⁸⁵ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, pp. 110-11.

meaning to ‘The Book of Memory’: the image of the son saving the father in Collodi’s version of *Pinocchio* ‘gives the story meaning’ to Daniel.⁸⁶ For Auster, the excursions into Daniel’s imagination have saved him – and his book – from dissolute fragmentation:

The son saves the father. This must be fully imagined from the perspective of the little boy. And this, in the mind of the father who was once a little boy, a son, that is, to his own father, must be fully imagined. *Puer aeternus*. The son saves the father.⁸⁷

In one sense, the reading of *Pinocchio* gives shape to the text, a reflection upon and record of preservation of their limited time together. They reference and refocus Auster’s representation of his father in ‘Portrait of an Invisible Man’. Similarly, they look to an exterior world beyond their own, inscribing ‘The Book of Memory’ with a transgenerational materiality:

When the father dies, he writes, the son becomes his own father and his own son. He looks at his son and sees himself in the face of the boy. He imagines what the boy sees when he looks at him and finds himself becoming his own father. Inexplicably he is moved by this. It is not just the sight of the boy that moves him, nor even the thought of standing inside his father, but what he sees in the boy of his own vanished past...Inexplicably, he finds himself shaking with both happiness and

⁸⁶ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 113.

⁸⁷ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 113.

sorrow, if this is possible, as if he were going both forwards and backwards, into the future and into the past.⁸⁸

There are gradations of paternal helplessness here: from Auster's relationship with his father, to the transference encounters with Daniel, and his sorrow at his self-perception as a 'lost child'. However, the need by the writer-as-father to express this conflict between love, passivity and desolation is driven by an irresistible impulse to represent the truth of this transitional period: 'He finds a fresh sheet of paper. He lays it out on the table before him and writes down these words with his pen. / It was. It will never be again. Remember'.⁸⁹

In *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster's recognition that he has to memorialise his late father triggers a process of self-preservation through an autobiographical aesthetic: 'I thought: my father is gone. If I do not act quickly, his entire life will vanish with him'. By contrast, Hustvedt believes her 'stories and pictures I make for the lives of the people closest to me are the forms of my empathy'. This sense of shared responsibility and ethos of mutuality extends to the spousal other. Hustvedt's relationship to her parents, which she describes as being remarkable, is the polar opposite of Auster's fraught relationship with his father. Both Hustvedt and Auster have described their relationship as a lifelong friendship or enduring conversation, thus emphasising the credo of empathic other-recognition that underpins the romanticised ideality of a marriage. Here one recalls Hustvedt's description of the yonder-land between father and mother that

⁸⁸ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 66.

⁸⁹ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 148.

the children of divorced parents enter into, and their concomitant response to language as a conveyor of truth, meaning and trust.

In turn, Hustvedt's love releases Auster from a sense of isolation and loss 'so great, and so suffocating, that he thought it would never let go'.⁹⁰ Auster pays his own homage to Hustvedt in *Winter Journal*, describing her as 'The One', (*Journal* 98), 'subject, not object', (*Journal* 198) and 'a brilliant woman, one of the best minds you have ever met', (*Journal* 198) while valorising her commitment to completing her PhD and rebuffing his offer to support her financially. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, Hustvedt's detachment from socially and culturally constructed gender distinctions and feminist readings of patriarchal power is drawn from the empathic mutuality of a marriage founded on respectful admiration for the mind, and the art, of the other. Further, perhaps this in some way accounts for the strength of Hustvedt and Auster's mutual bond: acknowledgement of the highly charged emotional realm of the other, refracted through the narrative of autobiographical selfhood.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 84.

⁹¹ Hustvedt even suggests that she sees something of her father in her husband: 'I like his voice, and I like the warmth, the tenderness...I didn't think it then, but now I wonder if I wasn't hearing something familiar. My father had that when he was alive. He was alive then. My father's voice changed inflection when he spoke about someone he loved.' (Hustvedt, 'Extracts from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 226.)

Authorship, influence and the canon

The conceptualisation of Hustvedt and Auster's consciously-constructed authorial identities posited in this thesis extends to the inflections of their intertextual dialogues with the Western canon.⁹² In the simplest sense, to become a writer one must first become a reader; to be a reader, one will inevitably encounter the literary canon; these encounters are frequently culturally structured and hierarchical; for some feminist thinkers, the canon perpetuates patriarchal power structures and gender inequality.⁹³ The notion of a canon is patrolled by a range of competing cultural forces. This presents a problematic paradigm, which Hustvedt reflects upon with a note of irritation:

There is this assumption that much of what I write is about my life and that simply is not true. I've wondered if there's some sort of sexual stereotyping because some academics have claimed that all of Paul's truly autobiographical books – *The Invention of Solitude*, *Hand to Mouth* – are invented. The man is so clever everything is a kind of Derridean deconstruction and everything a woman writes is confessional? The only

⁹² John Searle defines the Western canon as 'an intellectual tradition that goes from, say, Socrates to Wittgenstein in philosophy, and from Homer to James Joyce in literature'; yet even within this narrow conception there lies 'a certain set of tentative judgements about what had importance and quality' which were 'being constantly revised'. (John R. Searle, 'The Storm Over the University', *New York Review of Books* (6 December 1990) <<http://www.nybooks/articles/1990/12/06/the-storm-over-the-university>> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

⁹³ See Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), p. 8.

book I've written which could be construed as confessional was 10% about me and 90% disciplinary approaches to a diagnostic problem.⁹⁴

This narrowly-defined and frequently media-driven interpretation of Hustvedt and Auster's relationship informs, complicates and at times undermines the intertextual reciprocity of their writing. However, what appears to be a simple, gendered reflection of the pursuit of an independent authorial identity discloses a collaborative working relationship underpinned by dialogic intertextuality. There are three formative elements to consider here: firstly, Hustvedt and Auster's exposure to literature in early childhood and their development as readers; secondly, the theoretical grounding of their education at Columbia and their discursive appropriation of these elements; thirdly, their sharing of the ideas and concepts gleaned from reading in a domestic context.

Hustvedt and Auster's autobiographical narratives carry frequent references to the role reading played in the establishment of their authorial identities. For Hustvedt, literature occupies a parental space which is possessed of both masculine and feminine characteristics. In 'Yonder', Hustvedt recounts visiting St Olaf college library with her father; elsewhere her mother brings her a number of texts from the library: the poems of Emily Dickinson, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, David

⁹⁴ Hadley Freeman, 'Siri Hustvedt: my life and other fiction' in *Guardian* (25 March 2011), <<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/mar/25/siri-hustvedt-life-fiction>> [Accessed 22 November 2016]. The 'book' she refers to is *The Shaking Woman*. The subheading reads as follows: 'Siri Hustvedt's new novel, *The Summer Without Men*, deals with many women's worst fear: your husband leaving you in middle age. Just don't ask her if she and Paul Auster are having marital problems'.

Copperfield, Jane Eyre and *Wuthering Heights*.⁹⁵ The library, *ergo* literature as an art form, comes to embody a collaborative paternal and maternal space, a zone of intersubjective ambiguity and dialogue between those influences:

The idea of literature belonged to both my father and my mother, and my literature, the English language books I had read at eleven, twelve, and thirteen, were my mother's choices for me. I read under the auspices of two polestars, one paternal and remote, the other maternal and closer.⁹⁶

Auster's literary upbringing could not be more different from that of Hustvedt. His engagement with the literary canon materialises from a largely autodidactic childhood. According to Auster, neither of his parents 'had any interest in reading', and consequently there were 'few books' at home. (*Report 24*) Like Hustvedt, he 'acquired the habit of reading novels, for the most part mediocre ones' from frequent trips to the library. (*Report 24*) A birthday gift from his grandmother, the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, grants him a 'first glimpse into the hidden wheelworks of literary creation, the mystifying process by which a person can leap into a mind that is not his own'. (*Report 26*) The encounter with Stevenson in particular triggers the construction of a self-consciously poetic identity in the adolescent Auster:

A pity that your rhymes were so impoverished, but what counted then was the impulse, the sense of who you were and how deeply you felt you

⁹⁵ 'It is fair to say that to this day I have not recovered from a single one of those novels'. (Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 27.)

⁹⁶ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 82.

belonged to the world around you as your pencil inched across the page and you eked out your miserable verses. (*Report 27*)

In late adolescence, Hustvedt and Auster's encounters with the canon, and their putative formation of authorial identities overlap with a period as students of literature at Columbia in New York. Separated in their studies by almost a decade, both responded to the city with a sense of awe-struck awakening.⁹⁷ In *Report from the Interior*, Auster calls New York, 'the centre of the world', (*Report 181*) while Hustvedt describes the city as 'another world':

New York City struck me as more brilliant and alive than anywhere else on earth...Columbia is in and of the city, and I can't separate one from the other...both the city and the school were part of a new crazy rhythm of things.⁹⁸

Both view their younger selves with a degree of distanced amusement and mild disdain: Auster calls himself a 'fledgling incarnation', 'a stranger' and a 'floundering boy-man'; (*RTFI 181-2*) Hustvedt describes a 'romantic heroine' who as an undergraduate in Minnesota 'walked around dreaming she was a

⁹⁷ Auster attended from 1965-69, Hustvedt from 1978-86. Auster's graduate thesis, titled 'The Art of Hunger' is reproduced in his *Collected Prose*, and consists of a close reading of Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* and Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist* notable for its absence of any methodological framework; Hustvedt's PhD thesis, completed in 1986, was titled 'Figures of Dust: A Reading of *Our Mutual Friend*', and draws upon the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, Emile Benveniste, Roman Jakobson, Mikhail Bakhtin, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Mary Douglas, Paul Ricoeur and Julia Kristeva.

⁹⁸ Hustvedt, 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 227

combination of George Eliot and Nora Charles in *The Thin Man*'.⁹⁹ Both expect to be stimulated intellectually and emotionally by 'the urban wilds of Manhattan', as opposed to a 'rural backwater' of the Midwest. (*Report* 184) This is the 'guiding fiction' of their adolescent selves and their nascent authorial personas.¹⁰⁰

In *Hand to Mouth* Auster records that by the time he arrived at Columbia, his 'only ambition' was to write.¹⁰¹ Describing 1966-67 as 'a year of much reading, perhaps more reading than at any other moment in your life', (*Report* 192) by spring 1967 Auster had 'started writing a novel', but, like his great influence Samuel Beckett, 'failed, failed again and again'. (*Report* 194) From those notebooks emerged 'the nascent germs of three novels you would later manage to finish (*City of Glass, In the Country of Last Things, Moon Palace*).'¹⁰² (*Report* 194) Remembering her second year at Columbia, Hustvedt describes writing 'derivative' or 'weak' poems that yield to prose in a frenzied night of automatic writing: 'something had broken in me and I wrote like a person possessed'.¹⁰² Yet she appears to have begun writing seriously much earlier, at St Olaf college in Minnesota, during the mid-1970s: 'I read and I wrote. I wrote

⁹⁹ Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 30. In another essay she writes: 'I turned to look at myself in the small mirror over the sink. I knew the person I was looking at was myself, and yet there was an alien quality to myself, an otherness that brought with it feelings of exuberance and celebration. All at once, I was looking at a stranger'. (Hustvedt, 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 221.)

¹⁰⁰ Hustvedt, 'Yonder' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Auster, 'Hand to Mouth' in *Collected Prose*, p. 153

¹⁰² Hustvedt, 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 227.

stories and poems...The college literary magazine rejected everything I had to offer.’¹⁰³

‘When I write’, Hustvedt states, ‘I am always moving towards the unarticulated, the dangerous, the place where the walls don’t hold. I don’t know what’s there, but I am pulled towards it’.¹⁰⁴ Auster describes the process of writing ‘The Book of Memory’ in similar terms: ‘I felt as though I was looking down to the bottom of myself, and what I found there was more than just myself – I found the world’.¹⁰⁵ Hustvedt and Auster’s deployment of the trope of movement (‘toward / down’) within the largely static process of writing elicits a process of self-surrender: from the stable spatiality of consciousness towards the unknown realms of the psyche; or, alternatively, a paradigm shift from the reality of quotidian existence towards an ideality of authorial selfhood. Auster has also stated that ‘the deeper I get into my work, the less engaging theoretical problems become’;¹⁰⁶ he also suggests that ‘I haven’t had much of a scholarly approach to reading’.¹⁰⁷ Passages of *Report from the Interior* illustrate the partially-disingenuous nature of that claim. In the book he describes the Columbia Freshman Humanities reading list, which began with Homer and culminated with Dostoyevsky,¹⁰⁸ as being ‘without question the most invigorating intellectual

¹⁰³ Hustvedt, ‘Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁴ Hustvedt, ‘Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁵ Auster, ‘The Invention of Solitude’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 560.

¹⁰⁶ Auster, ‘Interview with Joseph Mallia’, *BOMB*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Auster, Michel Contat and Alyson Waters, ‘The Manuscript in the Book: A Conversation’, *Yale French Studies* (89, 1996), 160-87 (p 161).

¹⁰⁸ The reading list is described in Auster’s latest novel, *4321* (London: Faber, 2017).

challenge of your life so far, a high-dive plunge into a universe of marvels, revelations, and all-encompassing joy'. (*Report* 184-5)

It is possible to read Auster's relationship to the canon through the framework of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), which outlines a poetic ancestry that literary practitioners are compelled to rewrite, or 'misread', 'so as to clear imaginative space for themselves'.¹⁰⁹ The creative act embodies this struggle with a 'strong precursor', symbiotically reflected in the extra-literary process of authorial-identity construction:¹¹⁰ what Bloom terms 'the melancholy of the unified mind's desperate insistence upon priority'.¹¹¹ Bloom's Freudian reading of the Oedipal relationship between poets and their precursors offers a partial rebuttal to what he terms 'antithetical criticism', as exemplified by T.S. Eliot's essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919).¹¹² Like Bloom, Eliot suggests that 'no poet, no artist of any sort, has his complete meaning alone' and the 'significance' of his artistry lies in the 'appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists' of tradition; unlike Bloom, Eliot contends that 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice'

¹⁰⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Morris, p. 48.

¹¹¹ Bloom, p. 13.

¹¹² Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 135

and ‘process of depersonalisation’ as he assumes the ‘consciousness of the past’.¹¹³

A number of Auster’s narratives appear to acknowledge this struggle.¹¹⁴ However, unlike Bloom and Eliot’s models, Auster’s approach to the canon can be read not so much as one of wrestling with a strong precursor, nor genuflecting before his literary lineage, but of homage and acknowledgement of those myriad predecessors through active appropriation. ‘The Book of Memory’ in particular indicates the tangible otherness of its literary precursors, with Auster describing his text as a ‘collective work’ written by ‘dozens of authors’:

I felt as though I was looking down to the bottom of myself, and what I found there was more than just myself – I found the world. That’s why that

¹¹³ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ in *Debating Texts: A Reader in 20th Century Literary Theory and Method*, ed. by Rick Rylance (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), pp. 6-11 (p. 8).

¹¹⁴ The parabolic deployment of the overlapping motifs of fatherhood and literary inheritance present in *The Invention of Solitude* could be said to exhibit some knowledge of Bloom’s Freudian approach. Dimovitz reads *The New York Trilogy* as Auster’s response to Beckett’s *Trilogy*, highlighting Auster’s self-confessed difficulty of writing after reading Beckett (see Scott A. Dimovitz, ‘Public Personae and the Private I: De-compositional Ontology in Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*’, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* [52: 3, 2006], 613-33 [p. 629]). Brevity prevents a detailed reading of Auster’s texts in light of their alliterative materiality and canonical referentiality. Mark Ford in particular persuasively outlines Auster’s appreciation for the transcendent democratic poetics of the American Renaissance, particularly Auster’s reconfiguration of the solitude of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* in the second part of the *Trilogy*, ‘Ghosts’, while outlining a multitude of intertextual motifs. (Mark Ford, ‘Inventions of Solitude: Thoreau and Auster’, *Journal of American Studies* [33:2, 1999], 201-219.)

book is filled with so many references and quotations, in order to pay homage to all the others inside me.¹¹⁵

Elsewhere Auster states that ‘you have to read everything, and forget everything’, prefiguring this position in a *Paris Review* interview with Michael Wood:

At one time or another, I tried to write like each one of the novelists I was reading. Everything influences you when you’re young... You unconsciously imitate the writers you admire... Dozens of writers are inside me, but I don’t think my work sounds or feels like anyone else’s.¹¹⁶

According to this Austerian model, final authority is retained by the author through the process of organising, choosing and inserting a given selection of predecessors into the body of his or her text.¹¹⁷ However, the overwhelming majority of these texts have been penned by male authors.

¹¹⁵ Auster, ‘Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 560.

¹¹⁶ Auster, ‘Interview with Michael Wood’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 573.

¹¹⁷ This is a problematic notion given Foucault’s position on the author function, and Kristeva and Roland Barthes’ approaches to intertextuality. The latter will come under discussion in the next section. However, the focus of the responses that Auster gives in his interviews with Joseph Mallia, Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Michael Wood, and Michel Contat indicate an individual author possessed of the utmost dedication to his personal process of aesthetic expression. The physical aspect of this process is particularly important to Auster, as he explains to Michael Wood: ‘I’ve always written by hand. Mostly with a fountain pen, but sometimes with a pencil... You feel the words are coming out of your body, and then you dig the words into the page. Writing has always had that tactile quality for me. It’s a physical experience.’ Auster, ‘Interview with Michael Wood’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 569.

As a writer whose cultural reputation has been determined not only by her gender but her marital status, Hustvedt's relationship to the canon is more complex, drawing upon both the male and female traditions of writing.¹¹⁸ In 'My Father / Myself', she writes:

I read the canon, as I perceived it. Great books signified achievement and mastery, but also apprenticeship. I wanted to get a fat mind, and that mind, as it turns out, is mostly made of men.¹¹⁹

A number of feminist writers contend that the male-centered canon reflects the 'acquired cultural gendered identity' of patriarchal power-structures.¹²⁰ Eliot and Bloom are particularly complicit in this: Eliot equates poetic tradition with masculinity, while Bloom divides literary lineage into fathers ('precursors') and sons ('ephebe'). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in particular offer the following critique of the anxiety of influence paradigm:

¹¹⁸ Hustvedt, 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 222-3.

¹¹⁹ Hustvedt, 'My Father / Myself', in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 82-83. Perhaps this is this is what finally distinguishes her writing from that of Auster: while he positions himself as a writer in the masculine, Anglo-European tradition, she positions herself as a 'critical thinker' in the post-feminist mode. However, these positions still carry a binary inference in relation to gender which in Hustvedt's avowal of multiple selfhood would likely reject.

¹²⁰ Morris describes the patriarchy as a 'pervasive systematic form' of gender-based inequality, characterized by 'institutionalized male dominance, operating through social structures like the law, education, employment, religion, the family and cultural practices', while acknowledging the problematic nature of the term, and its overuse and oversimplification as a signifier of biological essentialism and passive victimhood (Morris, pp. 3-4).

The emergence of modern male literary discourse, exemplified by theoretical and canon-forming works...can be seen as an attempt to construct *his* story of a literary history in which women play no part.¹²¹

In its attempt to establish an alternative canon, gynocriticism enacts a 'mode of resistance' and a means of 'challenging traditional critical value judgements'.¹²²

This gynocritical approach focuses upon '*appropriation* in the sense of creative *transformation*',¹²³ or what Elaine Showalter describes as:

The feminist study of women's writing, including readings of women's texts and analyses of the intertextual relations between women writers (a literary tradition), and between women and men.¹²⁴

Gilbert and Gubar propose that the absence of a gender-based tradition, coupled with their pursuit of an authorial identity, may have triggered feelings of unfemininity among many women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.¹²⁵ Further, Gilbert and Gubar propose that rather than experiencing an anxiety of influence, women writers endure an alternative anxiety of influence: 'a

¹²¹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 154.

¹²² Belsey and Moore, 'Introduction' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, pp. 6-7.

¹²³ Toril Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, pp. 104-16 (p. 105).

¹²⁴ Elaine Showalter, 'Feminism and Literary Theory', p. 189 (qtd in Allen, p. 141).

¹²⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 49.

radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate and destroy her'.¹²⁶

Hustvedt has her own precursor in the form of Auster, a more famous and commercially successful author. However, Hustvedt adopts an alternative perspective to that of Gilbert and Gubar. While acknowledging the Freudian influence upon 'Bloom's blanket declaration that literature is the domain of men duking it out', she instead argues 'it is too easy to say the canon is patriarchal, that casting out John Milton for George Sand is a solution to the problem, but that is to ignore quality in the name of parity'.¹²⁷ For Hustvedt, the attempt to establish a tradition of women's writing is no less problematic. Indeed, Hustvedt herself resists the easy classification of that particular definition: 'I have discovered that out there in the world, "woman writer" is still a brand on a writer's forehead, not easily erased'.¹²⁸

While the intertextual presence of a tradition of women's writing legitimates, facilitates and perpetuates authorship,¹²⁹ the problematic oppositionality of alternative discourses complicates and frustrates it.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 49.

¹²⁷ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 83.

¹²⁸ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 83.

¹²⁹ Allen, p. 146.

¹³⁰ This inability to adequately reconcile the aesthetics of empowerment with the aesthetics of suffering can be traced to poststructuralist discourse, particularly Derridean *différance* and Lacan's reading of Freudian psychoanalysis. Diane Elam suggests that 'theory, as we all know but are afraid to admit, is sexy', arguing that postmodernism 'reminds us that the one desire that knowledge cannot replace with a truth is the desire for knowledge itself: the seductions of theory'. (Diane Elam, 'Feminism and the Postmodern: Theory's

Hustvedt's arguments imply the presence of an authorial identity steeped in feminist thought: we might conceive of Hustvedt as straddling the multiple positions outlined by Toril Moi.¹³¹ *The Summer Without Men* in particular playfully engages with the women's literary tradition, along with the theories of Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, in offering a critical apprehension of the 'psychical, physical and intellectual' otherness of women.¹³² Hustvedt similarly describes the writing self as 'multiple and elastic',¹³³ while acknowledging the role of the unconscious in stimulating creativity. Hustvedt's

Romance' in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 182-200 (pp.182-83).) Not only are most poststructuralist theoreticians male, and therefore reading female identity through the prism of their masculine subjectivity, but, according to Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, poststructuralism's emphasis on the absence of knowledge beyond the patriarchal culture within which it is situated places feminist in a double bind. What they identify as the substitution of 'culture for nature', and the concomitant 'politics of separatism', is established upon a contradictory and unstable cultural foundation, one in which feminine identity is culturally constructed and therefore 'unnatural'. (Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, 'Introduction: The Story so Far' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, pp 1-15 (pp. 7-8).)

¹³¹ Moi highlights the conflation of 'feminism' ('a political position'), 'femaleness' ('a matter of biology') and 'femininity' ('a set of culturally defined characteristics') within the broader church of women's writing. Moi's discussion of these three positions offers a critical reworking of Showalter's identification of three equivalent historical phases of women's writing in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). While Moi dismisses femininity as a 'cultural construct' of limited authenticity, she describes how the pluralistic and political impulses of feminist discourses oppose and provoke the 'politically naïve and theoretically unaware' experiential narratives of women-centered writing (Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, pp. 104-07). However, even pluralistic approaches like the subversive, non-gendered *écriture féminine* of Helene Cixous are implicated in the binary oppositionality and biological essentialism that defines discourse across the gender divide.

¹³² Belsey and Moore, 'Introduction' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, p. 10.

¹³³ Hustvedt, 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 228.

authorial persona is possessed of an emotional and erotic sensibility which Showalter or Moi might identify as feminine:

When I am writing fiction, I am concerned with what *feels* right and *feels* wrong. I see images in my mind as I work, just as I do when I remember. I am directed by the story, by the creation of a narrative that resonates for me as *emotionally*, rather than literally, true. The novel develops an internal logic of its own, guided by my feelings.¹³⁴

Much of her fictional and autobiographical writing largely distances itself from Cixous and Irigaray's stress upon the 'irrationality and textual anarchy' of women's writing.¹³⁵ Instead, Hustvedt pursues an aesthetic which is less 'reflectionist', and perhaps more concerned with what Rita Felski describes as 'a form of meaning production, a construction of gendered identity which draws upon intersubjective, cultural and ideological frameworks rather than more or less truthful representations of an unproblematically given female reality'.¹³⁶ While Hustvedt states 'I am the shaking woman', (*Shaking* 199) she also observes 'I have written as a woman, and as a man. I have written as a father. I have written

¹³⁴ Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 177.

¹³⁵ Belsey and Moore, 'Introduction' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, p. 10. A notable exception to this strand of thought being her most recent novel *The Blazing World*, which presents the alphabeticised notebooks of the protagonist Harriet Burden as a study in 'irrationality and textual anarchy...the ground where her conflicted anger and divided intellect could do battle on the page'. (Siri Hustvedt, *The Blazing World* [London: Sceptre, 2014], p. 7)

¹³⁶ Felski, p. 9.

as a son'.¹³⁷ Through this approach, Hustvedt's depoliticised *écriture féminine* enacts a highly personalised 'mode of resistance' to the patriarchy, but also to what she describes as 'puritanical' radical feminism and binary gender definitions.¹³⁸

This qualified oppositionality draws upon her openness to a variety of theories and disciplines alongside the literary canon. Indeed, Hustvedt claims she is comfortable feeding her 'fat mind' with the masculinised discourse of hard science and empiricism: what Moi outlines as a 'masculine rationality that has always privileged reason, order, unity and lucidity' by 'excluding the irrationality, chaos and fragmentation' of radical feminism.¹³⁹ In 'Extract from a Story of the Wounded Self' Hustvedt recalls arriving at Columbia in 1978, where 'the graduate department I had come to study teemed with critical theory':

Foucault, Derrida, Althusser, Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari and Kristeva were authors I'd never heard of much less read [...] The ideas were our weather. We lived in them and they lived in us.

¹³⁷ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 84. By contrast, almost all of Auster's narrators or protagonists have been men, with the exception of the female narrator of *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), and the (male) canine protagonist of *Timbuktu* (1999). However, the multiple perspectives of later novels such as *The Brooklyn Follies*, *Invisible* (2009), *Sunset Park* and *4321* indicate Auster's development literary aesthetic which is more closely aligned to the nuanced post-feminism of Hustvedt.

¹³⁸ 'Feminism was good for me...but as I developed as a thinking person, the truisms and dogmas of every ideology became as worn as [a] book's cover'. Hustvedt, 'A Plea for Eros' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 46-7.

¹³⁹ Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, p. 115.

Citing the writing of men such as Buber, Bakhtin, Winnicott and Freud, she states 'I will fall in love with the ideas that articulate what happens between us'.¹⁴⁰

Writing and reading for Hustvedt not only constitute a form of liberation from gendered spatiality, but also gendered temporality: a fluid movement from the gradations of power-politics ingrained in patriarchal past, present and future. Here one is reminded of Susan Sontag's call for an 'erotics of art',¹⁴¹ against the 'perennial, never consummated project of interpretation'.¹⁴² As Hustvedt proposes:

Every writer takes from the past [...] Literary mingling. Sexual mingling. Language isn't owned by anyone. It is inside and outside. It belongs to men and women.¹⁴³

Language and narrative enter us bodily through a dialogic exchange, where a text becomes the site of conflict, disagreement, collaboration and resolution.

Ownership of the text outside of authorial influence will be considered in the next section on Hustvedt and Auster's relationship to reader-response theories.

¹⁴⁰ Hustvedt, 'A Plea for Eros' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 223. This particular observation presages an account of the evening when she meets her future husband for the first time: 'We eat, we talk. We walk in the streets and talk. We sit in a bar and talk...He is looking at me, listening to me. I can tell that he likes me' (Hustvedt, 'A Plea for Eros' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 226).

¹⁴¹ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 14.

¹⁴² Sontag, p. 5. Sontag's thesis will be covered in more detail in the next section.

¹⁴³ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 83-84.

Reader-writer collaboration

In the previous section I discussed Hustvedt and Auster's apparent commitment to the resurrection of the author and their engagement with the canon. However, in this section I wish to address their complication of authorial identity through their espousal of a contract with the reader. As noted in the previous section, both view reading and writing as dialogical processes which implicate the presence of the other. Differentiated from canonical influence, reader-response theories implicate non-writerly readers in the construction of a text.¹⁴⁴ The poststructuralist approaches of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes reconfigure Eliot's antithetical 'tradition' as 'intertextuality', whereby modernism's identification of the presence of canonical influence upon (male) authors is reconceptualised as the material, rhetorical and ideological structures of a text.¹⁴⁵ Kristeva's approach to intertextuality, which informs that of Barthes, draws from Saussurean linguistics and Bakhtinian dialogism. For Kristeva, a text is a 'permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text' where

¹⁴⁴ Jane Tompkins proposes that reader response theory destroys the objectivity of the text, installing in its place 'a way of conceiving texts and readers that reorganizes the distinctions between them'. (Jane Tompkins, 'Introduction' in *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*, ed. by Jane Tompkins [London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980], pp. ix-xxvi [p. x]).

¹⁴⁵ Allen offers a succinct and useful definition of intertextuality, whereby literature consists of 'the systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature' and 'other art forms and of culture in general...meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates' (Allen, p. 1). Similarly, Allen believes that Barthes and Kristeva retain a residual commitment to a Modernist aesthetic of the 'New', thereby complicating their relationship to postmodernism, in addition to that of Hustvedt and Auster (Allen, p. 199).

‘several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another’.¹⁴⁶ Under her model of intertextuality, literature is treated as a practice or productivity, where each word embodies a dialogic ‘*intersection of textual surfaces*’, not a point of fixed meaning or authorial intention.¹⁴⁷ Following Kristeva, Barthes’ theory of textuality argues that authorial authority is stymied by the intertextual plurality of meanings; or, as Barthes writes, ‘the text is experienced only in an activity of production’.¹⁴⁸ Both believe that the hierarchical and unidirectional flow of authorial influence can be undone through what Barthes terms ‘the *stereographic plurality*’ of the text.¹⁴⁹ Equally, both approaches emphasise what Allen terms the ‘disruptive, unsharable, playful dimension of writing’, to which the reader approaches the work from his or her own disruptive, unstable, playful dimension.¹⁵⁰

Barthesian intertextuality problematizes the reader-writer dichotomy: meaning is produced by interpretative *jouissance* of the reader rather than the identification of the author intention. Meaning is therefore multiple: this offers an alternative stance to the phenomenological process of reading described by Wolfgang Iser, who likewise notes the ‘inexhaustibility of the text’,¹⁵¹ but who believes meaning is concretised through the reader’s ‘entanglement’ with its

¹⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva, ‘The Bounded Text’, p. 36 (qtd in Allen, p. 35).

¹⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue, Novel’, p. 65 (qtd in Allen, p. 38).

¹⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *Image – Music – Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 157.

¹⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *Image – Music – Text*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁰ Allen, p. 66.

¹⁵¹ Iser, ‘The Reading Process’ in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 55.

virtuality.¹⁵² For Iser, it is the text's very 'incompleteness' which lends it 'its productive value'.¹⁵³ The relationship between authors and readers is further complicated through Stanley Fish's conception of culturally-embedded 'interpretive communities'. For Kristeva the ideological construction of a text stimulates a politically-motivated positioning and interpretation reflective of the patriarchal structure.¹⁵⁴

For Hustvedt and Auster the question of interpretation is important, and holds significant implications for their construction of independent authorial identities. Both believe in the contract with the reader, but equally both are disdainful of misreadings of their work. Like Barthes, Sontag believes the process of interpretation presupposes a 'discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers', which it attempts to resolve through a destructive process of excavation 'to find a sub-text which is the true one'.¹⁵⁵

Where Barthes views the text as a virtual palimpsest of latent textuality that resists

¹⁵² Stanley Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, pp. 70-100 (p. 74).

¹⁵³ Fish, 'Literature in the Reader' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 70.

¹⁵⁴ By logical extension, according to Moi, all readers and critics position texts along gender lines: 'We produce texts as marginal by situating them in relation to other, dominant structures; we chose to read only texts by women as pre-feminist work; we decide to work on 'female' texts' (Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Belsey and Moore, p. 116).

¹⁵⁵ Sontag, p. 6. She continues: 'Interpretation must itself be evaluated within a historical view of human consciousness...To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set upon a shadow world of meanings. It is to turn *the* world into *this* world' (Sontag, p. 7). This position appears to imply that feminist and poststructuralist theory deliberately misread the world: postmodernism, she believes, is motivated by this 'flight from interpretation' into the parodic form (Sontag, p. 10).

meaning, Sontag describes the act of interpretation ‘as a radical strategy for conserving an old text’.¹⁵⁶ This is a very different approach to the affective stylistics of Fish, which treat the text as ‘no longer an object, a thing in itself, but an *event*, something that *happens* to, and with the participation of, the reader’.¹⁵⁷ What these approaches appear to have in common is a debt to Roman Ingarden’s conception of textual *konkretisation* (‘realisation’), which Iser describes as ‘the artistic and esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization of the text’.¹⁵⁸ Differentiation seemingly takes place when one school of thought treats the text as an object to be interpreted; the other as an affect, or event, which stimulates a response.¹⁵⁹ In either case, according to

¹⁵⁶ Sontag, p. 6. This sense of the conservation of an old text refers back to Eliot’s conception of the canon, while offering an inversion of Bloom’s later take on literary tradition: ‘the new poem’s achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor’s characteristic work’ (Bloom, p. 16). Her approach to interpreting a work of art is more indebted to Husserlian phenomenology than Barthesian textuality, where ‘transparence is the highest, most liberating value’ involving ‘experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are’. Similarly, she is less concerned with Kristeva’s concept of positionality, instead arguing for the experience of art in phenomenological terms, where we ‘learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more’ (Sontag, p. 13).

¹⁵⁷ Fish in Tompkins, p. 72. Unlike Sontag, Fish believes that viewing the text as an object generates an illusory, ‘false and dangerously self-validating objectivity’ (Fish, ‘Literature in the Reader’ in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 87).

¹⁵⁸ Iser, ‘The Reading Process’ in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 50.

¹⁵⁹ As Allen points out, this is rendered more complex by Barthes’ distinction between *lisible* (readerly) and *scriptable* (writerly) texts. Readerly texts are ‘oriented towards representation’ and direct the passive reader towards ‘a meaning’ which is ‘presumed to lie *behind* the narrated events’. Readers thus become detectives sifting the text for clues to the narrative outcome: truth is therefore ‘delivered by an author to a reader’. By contrast, writerly texts hold a plurality of infinite meanings, where the reader’s interpretation is continually frustrated. This, for Barthes, is what installs the opposition between ‘work’ and ‘text’ (Allen, pp. 78-80).

Elisabeth Freund, the privileged position and authority of the literary work is challenged, and at times usurped.¹⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, given Hustvedt's affinity for what she terms 'zones of focused ambiguity', her approach to the reading process transcends these alternatives in a typically interstitial fashion. She displays some alignment with Sontag's ideas, albeit through the application of an embodied phenomenology which owes more to Merleau-Ponty than his predecessor Husserl. Reading, Hustvedt observes, is 'perception as translation', a transactive process underpinned by the intertwining of consciousness with imaginative thought:

Reading is a particular human experience of collaboration with the words of another person, the writer...Books are literally animated by the people who read them because reading is an embodied act...When I read, I engage my capacity for inner speech. I assume the written words of the writer who, for the time being, becomes my own internal narrator, the voice in my head...The text is both inside me and outside me.¹⁶¹

Echoing Sontag, for Hustvedt the act of reading involves an empathic intentionality towards the consciousness and imagination of the other through the

¹⁶⁰ Elisabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 2. According to Freund, reader response theory 'challenges the privileged position of the work of art and seeks to undermine its priority and authority not only by displacing the work from the centre and substituting the reader in its place, but by putting in doubt the autonomy of the work and, in certain cases, even causing the work to 'vanish' altogether'.

¹⁶¹ Siri Hustvedt, 'On Reading' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 133-40 (p. 134).

givenness of the aesthetic object: ‘openness to a book is vital, and openness is simply a willingness to be changed by what we read’.¹⁶² The process of reading is inherently dialogical: as we read, something within us changes either consciously or unconsciously; this change is guided by the consciousness, and indeed the unconsciousness, of another. The book, in this sense, becomes an event under Fish’s model; under Iser’s approach, it enacts a transfer of subjectivities. Reading, she concludes, is ‘intersubjective’, the words of the absent writer part of the reader’s ‘inner dialogue’.¹⁶³

Auster shares this belief in what Barthes terms ‘writerly texts’, and the creative capacity of the reader, stating in a 1988 interview:

The one thing I try to do in all my books is to leave enough room in the prose for the reader to inhabit it. Because I finally believe that it’s the reader who writes the book and not the writer...I think this probably has a lot to do with one’s relation to language, how one responds to words printed on a page. Whether the words are just symbols or whether they are passageways into our unconscious.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Hustvedt, ‘On Reading’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p.138.

¹⁶³ Hustvedt takes a similar view of visual art: ‘Producing art includes a drive to make something, an embodied *intentionality*...Art necessarily establishes a relationship between the artist and an imaginary reader, viewer or listener: it is inherently dialogical. Therefore, *all visual art implies a spectator*’ (Siri Hustvedt, ‘Embodied Visions: What Does it Mean to Look at a Work of Art?’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 336-54 (p. 342).

¹⁶⁴ Auster, ‘Interview with Joseph Mallia’, *BOMB*, p. 27.

In contrast with Hustvedt, Auster appears to situate the interpretive responsibility more firmly in the hands of the reader. His final sentence, moreover, implies an approach that combines the linguistic, intertextual and phenomenological. In one regard this implicates Fish's textual model of affective stylistics, which argues that 'the reader is the informed reader', a 'hybrid' with experience of literary discourses, devices and genres.¹⁶⁵ Auster's position does not quite align with that of Iser, who suggests that the 'identification' of the reader with the text is 'a stratagem by which the author stimulates attitudes in the reader',¹⁶⁶ unless of course this is a stratagem to elicit affinity with his literary project in order to develop an interpretive community of readers. While describing his metafictional approach to writing his first novel, Auster remarks that he had a 'desire to implicate myself in the machinery of the book':

I don't mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self, the mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books... I wanted to open up the process, to break down walls, to expose the plumbing. There's a strange kind of trickery involved in the writing and reading of novels.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Fish, 'Literature in the Reader' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, pp. 86-7. Fish goes on to describe his theory as a 'monism of effects, in which meaning is a (partial) product of the utterance object, but not to be identified with it' (Fish, 'Literature in the Reader' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 97).

¹⁶⁶ Iser, 'The Reading Process' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 65.

¹⁶⁷ Auster continues: 'It's as though no one has really written the words you are reading. I find this 'no one' terribly fascinating – for there's finally a profound truth to it. On the one hand it's an illusion; on the other

As Fish writes, ‘an author hazards his projection...because of something he assumes to be in his reader. The very existence of the ‘marks’ is a function of an interpretive community’.¹⁶⁸ For Iser, by contrast, the reader is left to create their own experience through a horizon of expectations derived from the ‘virtuality’ of the work, which lends it its ‘dynamic nature’ and acts as a ‘precondition’ for the effect of the work, which is released by the reading process in a sequence of ‘schematised views’.¹⁶⁹ The self-avowed absence of Auster’s authentic consciousness from the book his readers experience is such a precondition.

Like Hustvedt, Auster views identity as multiple and mobile; he too is unconvinced by the Cartesian notion of a coherent, stable self. Hustvedt and Auster’s approach to the writer-reader relationship seems to run counter to their establishment of authorial identities. Their inscription of the narratives of their autobiographical selves through their autobiographical texts and essays further highlight its problematic ideality. The resistance to interpretation and meaning which runs through the thread of Hustvedt and Auster’s autobiographical and fictional narratives seems to reinforce this. Conversely, there is an awareness of

hand it has everything to do with how stories are written. For the author of a novel can never be sure where any of it comes from. The self that exists in the world – the self whose name appears on the covers of books – is finally not the same self who writes the book.’ Auster, ‘Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 555.

¹⁶⁸ Stanley Fish, ‘Interpreting the Variorum’ in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, pp. 164-184 (p. 183).

¹⁶⁹ Iser, ‘The Reading Process’ in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, pp. 50-51.

the authoritative otherness of their authorial selves within their empathic acknowledgement of the role of the reader:

A novel is the only place in the world where two strangers can meet on terms of absolute intimacy. The reader and the writer make the book together. No other art can do that. No other art can capture the essential inwardness of human life.¹⁷⁰

The nuanced differential between the positions of Hustvedt and Auster in respect of the reader function are both reaffirmed and complicated by the role each plays as the first reader of their respective texts. In a 1996 interview with Michel Contat, Auster observes:

I trust her completely, her judgement, her sense of things. She understands what I'm trying to do. You can't talk to someone who doesn't share your ideas about the world, or who doesn't at least try to understand what you are trying to do...She always has comments. Some of them are miniscule prose questions, and once in a while she asks a bigger question. But I don't think I've ever taken her advice on a big question.¹⁷¹

In an interview with Michael Wood published in *Paris Review* in 2003, Auster appears to revise this position:

¹⁷⁰ Auster, 'Interview with Michael Wood' in *Collected Prose*, p. 587.

¹⁷¹ Auster, Contat and Waters, 'The Manuscript in the Book', *Yale French Studies*, p. 175.

She's my first reader, and I have total faith in her judgments. Each time I write a novel, I read to her from it every month or so...Then Siri makes her comments...I can't think of a single instance when I haven't followed her advice.¹⁷²

In the *Paris Review* interview Auster re-emphasises the reciprocal nature of their role as the other's first reader:

What she does for me, I try to do for her. Every writer needs a trusted reader – someone who has sympathy for what you are doing and wants the work to be as honest as it can possibly be. But you have to be honest.¹⁷³

By contrast, Hustvedt has rarely addressed the shared responsibilities of the reader-writer function, but in this 2012 interview for *Full Stop* offered the following:

Paul and I rely on each other absolutely as first readers of each other's work. We read each other's books in progress and then when a book is finished, we each become an editor. Admittedly, these editorial suggestions are often tiny — on the level of the sentence, removing an adjective, noting an infelicitous repetition, etc. — but every once in a

¹⁷² Auster, 'Interview with Michael Wood' in *Collected Prose*, p. 586.

¹⁷³ Auster, 'Interview with Michael Wood' in *Collected Prose*, p. 586. It's an illuminating moment of inconsistency, one which implies a lapse in judgment or miscommunication on Auster's part in the earlier interview for *BOMB*. This is interesting not simply because it appears to present a shift in the gendered power-politics between writer husband and reader wife; by 2003 Hustvedt's own reputation as a writer was gaining some critical and commercial recognition, and she had just published her third novel, *What I Loved*.

while one of us has made a substantive comment to the other, and we have always heeded the other's advice.¹⁷⁴

By 2013 Hustvedt and Auster's position on the importance of the reader function – and the editorial responsibility each performs upon the other's work – are more closely aligned. When considering the collaborative relationship between Hustvedt and Auster, we might begin to conceive of the textual space each leaves the reader to occupy is, in the most immediate sense, a space for the spousal reader to occupy. With this in mind, Fish's observation that 'the structures of the reader's experience' are more important as the object of description than 'any structures available on the page' holds an implication for the relationship between Hustvedt and Auster.¹⁷⁵ The inherently dialogical act of reading, or writing a text, becomes inherently collaborative: Hustvedt and Auster's marriage becomes, in effect, a microcosmic, emotionally-guided interpretive community for each other. Fish defines an 'interpretive community' as constituted of 'those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions'.¹⁷⁶

In a letter to J.M. Coetzee, Auster restates his belief that 'marriage is above all a conversation', and married couples must 'become friends' for a marriage to survive; elsewhere he deploys the trope of marriage being a 'continual work in progress', where one must 'reach down into one's depths and reinvent

¹⁷⁴ Hustvedt, 'Interview with Tyler Malone', *Full Stop*.

¹⁷⁵ Fish, 'Interpreting the Variorum' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 167.

¹⁷⁶ Fish, 'Interpreting the Variorum' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 182.

oneself in relation to the other': observations that recall statements he and Hustvedt have made about the creative process.¹⁷⁷ Hustvedt similarly regards her thirty years plus marriage to Auster as a 'literary friendship', stating that 'we've been talking about books and ideas for a long time, and I've never been bored... boredom ends conversations well before conflict'.¹⁷⁸ In the case of Hustvedt and Auster, this conversation flows through the narratives of their autobiographical selves. They have located in each other the intended, or ideal, reader described by Fish: 'the reader whose education, opinions, concerns, linguistic competences, etc., make him capable of having the experience the author wished to provide'.¹⁷⁹ The intersubjective nature of their writing relationship can be traced back to the early stages of their emotional relationship, to their education at Columbia, and beyond to their infancy and parental lineage. In *Winter Journal* Auster recalls how he and Hustvedt read fairy tales to each other during the early stages of their relationship, which culminated in her penning her long prose poem *Reading to You*. In the books, Auster quotes at length from the closing section of Hustvedt's poem:

*I whisper like the birds in the stories I read to you, repetitions in the room
where you took me. The parts are the same, but changing, always in
movement, altering imperceptibly like the expression on your face from a*

¹⁷⁷ Paul Auster and J.M. Coetzee, *Here and Now: Letters 2008-2011* (London: Vintage, 2014), pp. 8.

¹⁷⁸ Hustvedt, 'Interview with Tyler Malone', *Full Stop*.

¹⁷⁹ Fish, 'Interpreting the Variorum' in *Reader Response Criticism*, ed. by Tompkins, p. 174.

*smile to seriousness leaning over me in the thin light. So I wish you a story
in the reading of it, in the writing of it. (Journal 98-99)*

In this explicit yet discrete moment of intertextuality, both writers are, paradoxically, at once present *and* absent within Auster's text. Here the notion of reader and writer sharing a spatial zone of consciousness embodies a metonymic moment of mutuality within the text, representing the collaborative nature of their literary partnership and marriage.

Conclusion

The non-fictional writings of Hustvedt and Auster offer an explicit condensation of the theoretical positions explored in their fiction. Through Hustvedt and Auster's autobiographical writing it is possible to perceive the influence of various disciplines: philosophy, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, poststructural linguistics and, for Hustvedt in particular, neurobiology. Equally, this discipline can be still applied to interpretations of Auster's autobiographical writing. Selfhood is fragile and tenuous. Consciousness represents the objective world to the subjective individual. Memory, or the processes of recording, recalling and interpreting past experiences, stimulate the process of meaning-making and imbue within us a sense of temporal-spatial awareness. Nevertheless, memories can be misremembered or revised over time, through a process Hustvedt identifies as '*reconsolidation*', which Auster also describes in *Report from the Interior* (*Report 4*). The conscious memories we hold comprise a mere fraction of the implicit and unconscious memories that lie dormant with us. As Hustvedt elsewhere writes, subjectivity 'is not the story of a stable, absolute 'I''. (*Shaking 79*) Writing about selfhood marks an attempt to consolidate something that is plural and mobile, irrespective of gender distinctions. Yet despite their truth claims, Hustvedt and Auster's autobiographical narratives are partial, and sometime inaccurate: inconsistencies, gaps or absences plague them from conception to conclusion. Autobiography is perhaps no more real, or indeed truthful, than fictional representation; yet the authenticity of an autobiography is not simply what the reader assumes to be 'the real story', but the multifaceted,

empathic transference from reader and writer through which we share the perception of another.

Both Auster and Hustvedt have taken a deliberately metalinguistic approach to representing the constructed self, one informed, to some degree, by the genealogy of experience, a youthful interest in writerly pursuits, and the theoretical condensation of their education. Their conscious disavowal of co-authorial collaboration or intertextual influence upon the other can be partially traced to their scholarly cognition of theoretical responses to the literary canon, and gendered inflections of authorial power and ethical responsibility. Moreover, they are fundamental to our understanding of their respective conception of authorship and authorial identity, and the development not only of their careers as writers. However, while both are careful to disavow intramarital influence upon their respective texts, both act as the first reader of the other's writing. Hustvedt also concedes, 'I have discovered my own borrowings from texts through rereading books. These liftings, never exact, were always done unconsciously'.¹⁸⁰ Their collaboration in a literary sense can therefore be interpreted as consciously *and* unconsciously dialogical. This interpretation of their writing as a collaborative literary enterprise owes as much to reading as it does to writing. As Hustvedt puts it: 'reading is internal action. It is the intimate ground where, as my husband says, 'two consciousnesses meet'. I would add two unconsciousnesses as well'.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 82.

¹⁸¹ Hustvedt, 'My Father/Myself' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 82.

In the mythologised autobiography of marriage, love conquers the losses and traumas of nascent selfhood. Nevertheless, the unrevealed, repressed or forgotten moments of Hustvedt and Auster's shared narrative is partial precisely because there are unrevealed moments. Our autobiographical selves are as imaginative and fictive as they are credible and real.

My husband and I, who have now been living together for almost thirty years, often recall the same event differently...A memory I am convinced belongs to me alone, is, according to my husband, his private mental property. He remembers it perfectly and is sure I must be mistaken. One of us is in error. What this anecdote clarifies about memory is that when we listen to a person tell a story, perhaps especially a person with whom we are intimate, that tale can spawn a mental image so vivid, it enters the mind as a subjective experience that originated outside the mind, not within it.¹⁸²

What we are able to discern of the interior worlds of Hustvedt and Auster from their autobiographical narrative are not the real story. The real story lies elsewhere, between them and beyond the boundaries of individual perception.

¹⁸² Hustvedt, 'The Real Story' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 94-95.

Chapter two: Points of origin – postmodernism and beyond

Introduction

Academic approaches to literature of the late Twentieth Century frequently focus upon its place within the postmodern cultural moment; the writing of Hustvedt and Auster is no exception: the temporal location and duration of their respective careers, coupled with the stylistic mode and linguistic register of their chosen aesthetic, has seen the application of postmodern critical frameworks to their work, albeit to varying degrees. Auster is treated as an exemplar of literary postmodernism, while Hustvedt is viewed as a more peripheral figure within the canon. Numerous approaches to Auster's writing have focused upon the relationship of his fiction to postmodernist theory and poststructuralist discourse, either as a proponent or critic of those ideas. Brendan Martin believes Auster's fixation with chance and contingency positions him as a 'self-consciously postmodern author', for whom the reception of his 'most famous work...has formalized Auster's reputation', ensuring his subsequent novels fall into lockstep with its thematic and theoretical concerns.¹ Auster's association with poststructuralism, according to Scott A. Dimovitz, can be traced to an early critical appreciation by Alison Russell, which 'exhaustively and compellingly

¹ Brendan Martin, *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 99. Auster, however, takes issue with Martin's delineation of his 'postmodern autobiographies' in this volume, particularly the assertion that Auster 'invariably blurs elements of fact and fiction within his narratives, and the majority of his fictional protagonists appear to be versions of Auster' (Martin, p. ix). See Appendix 1.

reads *The New York Trilogy* from an earnest poststructuralist paradigm'.² The deconstructed narratives of *The New York Trilogy* are described by William G. Little as 'postmodern potboilers';³ while David Lodge holds that 'these three stories subject the clichés and stereotypes of the gumshoe detective story to postmodernist scepticism about identity, causality and meaning'.⁴

By contrast, limited critical consideration has been given to Hustvedt's relationship to postmodernism and poststructuralist discourse.⁵ This is partly due to the paucity of critical readings of her fiction, a fact exemplified by Kristiaan Versluys' observation that her debut novel (*The Blindfold*, published in 1992) has undergone 'critical neglect'.⁶ Versluys' essay on *The Blindfold*, however, makes explicit the connection of her fiction to postmodernism, as does Christian

² Dimovitz, p. 615. At the close of his persuasive article, Dimovitz concludes: 'Though he misread Lacan, claims he never read a word of Derrida, and was only apparently familiar with structuralist-era Barthes, Auster nevertheless effects a critique of those theorists by his rejection of their inspirations' (Dimovitz, p. 629).

³ William G. Little, 'Nothing to Go On: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*' in *Contemporary Literature* (38, 1997), 133-63 (p. 137).

⁴ David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 38.

⁵ Hustvedt's exclusion from the postmodern canon could possibly be linked to the cultural distancing between feminist fiction and postmodernism identified by Patricia Waugh: 'The relationship of women writers to postmodernism (and, indeed, to modernism) [is] ambivalent despite the fact that postmodernism is usually presented as an art of the marginal and oppositional [...] Authors may, it seems, be male or female, but postmodernist authors are, actually or necessarily, male' (Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* [London; Routledge, 1989], pp. 3-5).

⁶ Kristiaan Versluys, 'New York as a Maze: Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*' in *Postmodern New York City: Transfiguring Spaces – Raum – Transformationen*, ed. by Gunter H. Lenz and Utz Reise (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), pp. 99-108 (p. 99).

Knirsch's study of chronology in her debut, which notes that appreciations of Hustvedt's debut novel 'focus exclusively on the question of gender and the problem of developing a female identity in a postmodern world'.⁷ As discussed in the opening chapter, Hustvedt has recorded her exposure to poststructuralist theory during her time as a student at Columbia in the late 1970s:

The graduate department I had come to study teemed with critical theory. Foucault, Derrida, Althusser, Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari and Kristeva...By the time I arrived, structuralism had come and gone and the hipsters who populated the graduate schools in the humanities were deep into its postincarnation. The ideas were our weather. We lived in them and they lived in us.⁸

It is therefore possible to conceive of Hustvedt's approach to the process of aesthetic expression drawing upon some of these positions, as per the work of her husband Auster.

However, Hubert Zapf associates Hustvedt with what he terms an overtly-ethical 'after postmodernism' period.⁹ Zapf, along with Christine Marks and Johanna Hartmann, reads Hustvedt's work as a form of transdisciplinary

⁷ Christian Knirsch, 'In a Time-Warp: The Issue of Chronology in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*', *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* (11: 2010) <<http://copas.uni-regensburg.de/article/viewArticle/122/146>> [Accessed 12/05/2015].

⁸ Siri Hustvedt, 'Extracts from a Story of the Wounded Self' in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 222-23.

⁹ Hubert Zapf, 'Narrative, Ethics, and Postmodern Art' in *Ethics in Culture*, ed. by Erll, Grabes and Nünning, p. 171.

knowledge predicated upon intersubjectivity and intermediality.¹⁰ Elizabeth Kovac goes further, periodizing Hustvedt's post-9/11 narratives within what Timothy Vermeleun and Robin van den Akker label 'metamodernism', a new temporality which in their view exhibits features of both modernist and postmodernist sentiment: a 'structure of feeling' oscillating between 'modern commitment' and 'postmodern detachment'.¹¹ The theoretical landscape has shifted where Auster is concerned. Little, Martin, Dimovitz and Barone,¹² have already spoken of an ethical quality to Auster's writing which transcends the self-reflexivity of postmodernism. According to Madeleine Sorapure, his characters 'struggle within and against the postmodern condition. What fuels the struggle is an ethical imperative'.¹³ Auster's more recent fiction, such as *Invisible* (2009), *Sunset Park* (2010) and *4321* (2017), deploys a multiplicity of empathic positions, bringing his work into closer alignment with that of his wife. The author himself, meanwhile, has distanced himself from poststructuralist thought and metafictional

¹⁰ Johanna Hartmann, Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf, 'Introduction' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2015), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

¹¹ Elizabeth Kovach, 'Violated Securities: Symptoms of a post-9/11 Zeitgeist in Siri Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American*' in *eTransfers: A Postgraduate eJournal for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies* (Issue 2: 2012) <<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/cagcr/etransfers/issues/current/86154.pdf>> [Accessed 11 May 2015].

¹² Barone in particular points to Auster's synthesis of 'postmodern subjectivities, explications of premodern moral causality and a sufficient realism'. Barone, 'Introduction' in *Beyond the Red Notebook*, ed. by Barone, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Madeleine Sorapure, 'Paul Auster' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 19-24 (p. 24).

trickery, arguing ‘I consider myself a realist’,¹⁴ and rejecting Russell’s imposition of a deconstructive framework to his early fiction.¹⁵ As addressed in the first chapter, Auster’s exposure to various theoretical positions is partly the product of his construction of an authorial self during and following his formative years at Columbia, and latterly the partial product of dialogic interaction with Hustvedt.

This chapter will examine how the process of aesthetic expression utilised by Hustvedt and Auster have become intertwined with broader debates relating to the influence of poststructuralism on late Twentieth Century US fiction, coupled with the apparent fading of postmodernism as a ‘literary historical category’ into the ‘after postmodernism’ period.¹⁶ As Linda Hutcheon points out in the second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002), the postmodern ‘moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and ideological critiques have moved on’.¹⁷ This second chapter will consist of a detailed exploration of Hustvedt’s writing and its relationship to the discursive approaches of her husband as framed by these debates. I will first explore the poststructuralist discourses of Roland

¹⁴ Paul Auster, ‘Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 539.

¹⁵ ‘I’ve never read a word of Jacques Derrida, I don’t know his stuff at all. I know who he is and basically what he writes about, but it is of so little interest to me, and my work comes from a place so different, that I was just astonished. But that’s what a lot of criticism is at the highest level. It’s taking somebody’s system and taking somebody’s book and glomming that book onto that system to see if it works out. But it [Russell’s article] is more about Derrida than about me’ (Paul Auster, ‘Unpublished Interview’, 26 February 1993, <<http://www.bluecricket.com/auster/links/secret.html>> [Accessed 12/05/2015]). Dimovitz’s debunking of the Derrida connection seems to pivot upon this particular interview.

¹⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 181.

¹⁷ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 181.

Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, to establish the defining features of poststructuralism's relationship to literature. I will then look at what Linda Hutcheon terms 'the postmodern problematic': the difficulties of concretely defining literary postmodernism as a paradoxical movement which is, according to Hutcheon, 'critical and complicitous, outside and inside' the cultural dominants of 'liberal humanism and capitalist mass culture'.¹⁸ Thereafter, I will briefly consider the recent proliferation of 'after postmodernism' theories, and how these relate to the development and evolution of Hustvedt and Auster's respective embodied process of aesthetic expression. My subsequent reading of Auster and Hustvedt's debut novels, *The New York Trilogy* and *The Blindfold*, will seek to delineate not only the ways in which both novels exhibit the characteristics of postmodernist narrative and theoretical engagement with poststructuralism in their texts, but, most crucially for this particular piece of research, where we can begin to see moments of dialogic intertextuality between them. My contention is Hustvedt and Auster's occupation of a shared literary, theoretical and emotional space emerges within this postmodernist context, which has an explicitly ethical grounding and is partially defined by intertextuality within and between their novels. The remainder of the thesis will seek to examine the extent to which their writing has moved beyond the postmodern moment towards a metamodernistic structure of feeling.

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 222-25.

Vive la différence: deconstructing poststructuralism

For a movement which stresses the absence of points of origin, that postmodern fiction can be traced back to poststructuralist approaches to literary theory simply re-emphasises the genre's complexities. Poststructuralism can be read as what James A. Steintrager terms a 'syncretism', a body of thought in which 'fields as diverse as phenomenology, linguistics, anthropology, and theoretical mathematics mingle with psychoanalysis, creating a complex and evolving amalgam'.¹⁹ Bertens and Natoli record:

Postmodernism stresses other-determination, desire, contingency, change, difference, and absence (of self and meaning). The major sources of this theoretical postmodernism are to be found in French poststructuralism.²⁰

This depiction chimes with Fredric Jameson's summation of what he identifies as 'contemporary theory':

Today, increasingly, we have a kind of writing simply called theory which is all or none of those things [academic disciplines] at once. This new kind

¹⁹ James A. Steintrager, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 211-17 (p. 211). Here Steintrager refers directly to the discourse of poststructuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (whose work will come under consideration in Chapter three), but the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster's fiction is possessed of an equivalent syncretic quality.

²⁰ Bertens and Natoli, 'Introduction' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli p. xii. Jeremy Green also argues that poststructuralist approaches to 'history, language, desire and different' helped to produce the ideology behind postmodernism (Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005], p. 1).

of discourse, generally associated with France and so-called French theory, is becoming widespread and marks the end of philosophy.²¹

Fredric Jameson, like Bertens and Natoli, directly connects poststructuralist discourse to postmodernism – but unlike Bertens and Natoli, he deems it ‘among the manifestations of postmodernism’, blurring the distinction between causation and correlation.²² Much like postmodernism’s belated response to modernism, poststructuralism finds its basis in the intensification, extension and radicalization of the body of literature and theory from which it emerged: the structuralism of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Sturrock, Saussurean linguistics were appropriated, assimilated and reconfigured by five key proponents: Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida.²³ John Sturrock’s description of structuralism as ‘a method of investigation’ holds true for poststructuralism: a heterogeneous, anti-humanist dictum which continually questions textual a-symbolia, cultural structures and hierarchies of power.

²¹ Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (Verso: London, 1998), pp. 1-20 (p. 3).

²² F. Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Culture’ in *The Cultural Turn*, p. 3.

²³ John Sturrock, ‘Introduction’ in *Structuralism and Since*, ed. by John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 1-18 (p. 2). It is an irony of history that structuralism – and its ‘post-incarnation’ – came to be disavowed by those whose work established it as a ‘meaningful’ discourse. This development presents a similar problematic to that of postmodernism: how to locate the unifying precept behind a body of theory built upon resistance to meaning and critical distancing from the culturally-structured exegesis.

Structuralism was first codified in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1906) under the core principle that 'in language there are only differences without positive terms'.²⁴ According to Rick Rylance:

Saussurean linguistics posits a 'diacritical' conception of meaning. Meaning is a function not of reference, but of the differential relationships in the language system. Meaning is thus not anchored in the 'real world' but is a product of the particular language or discursive structure of which its units are part.²⁵

Difference is fundamental to poststructuralism, providing the tautological grounding for the shifting and divergent discourses of a complex branch of philosophical scepticism. Under poststructuralism, the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified identified by Saussure is further problematized, and the links between language, identity and meaning become increasingly insecure, unstable and relational. The linguistic differences which are believed to determine the structures of a society fold back in on themselves, and the epistemological basis of humanism and the history of knowledge are shown to be without teleological basis.²⁶

A useful entry-point for understanding poststructuralism's impact on the writing of Hustvedt and Auster is to focus not on its conflicting approaches to the disappearance of the stable subject, the impossibility of establishing meaning and

²⁴ Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 8.

²⁵ Rick Rylance, 'Developments after Structuralism' in *Debating Texts*, ed. by Rylance, pp. 111-16 (p. 112).

²⁶ Belsey, p. 37.

the critiques of the hierarchies of knowledge and power – although, as Bertens and Natoli show above, these are crucial to postmodernist theory, and will come under discussion later in the chapter – but to centre upon poststructuralism’s relationship to writing as a creative act, and the impact of the concept of intertextuality upon postmodern literature. Previously addressed in Chapter one, intertextuality is critical to the poststructuralist project, redefining the relationship between authors, texts and readers. Rylance defines intertextuality as ‘the process whereby meaning is produced from text to text, rather than, as it were, between text and world’; a process in which ‘meaning is passed along indefinitely like the baton in a relay race that never ends’.²⁷ Textual play within a text generates ‘an endlessly plural signifying practice which defeats analytic restatement or description’,²⁸ while intertextuality between and throughout texts engenders the continual deferral of meaning from text to text. By granting greater critical and aesthetic responsibility to readers, the converse consequence of this intertextual deferral (alternatively labelled ‘*différance*’ by Derrida) is the problematization of the role, responsibility and authority of the author. In his essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968), Barthes outlines his belief that ‘it is language which speaks, not the author’:

Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the

²⁷ Rylance, ‘Developments after Structuralism’ in *Debating Texts*, ed. by Rylance, p. 113.

²⁸ Rylance, ‘Developments after Structuralism’ in *Debating Texts*, ed. by Rylance, p. 112.

negative where all identity is lost, starting with the identity of the body writing.²⁹

The author becomes a mere ‘scriptor’, stripped of ‘passions, humours, feelings, impressions’, with writing existing ‘only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred’.³⁰ Barthes further develops this idea in subsequent writings. ‘From Work to Text’ (1971) Barthes argues that ‘the text is plural...entirely woven of quotations, references, echoes: cultural languages...traverse it through and through’,³¹ while *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) develops this approach to outline the unchallenging pleasure of what Barthes terms ‘readerly texts’ (*scripte lisible*) and the intersubjective *jouissance* (or ‘bliss’) of ‘writerly texts’ (*texte scriptible*).³² In both these texts, Barthes distinguishes between active and passive engagement with a given text, while proposing a degree of prior knowledge or interpretative cognition on the part of the reader.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ in *Image – Music – Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-48 (p. 147). More prosaically, the biographical details of an author become irrelevant when interpreting a text: a fact partially acknowledged by Auster’s referral to ‘the mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books...It’s as though no one has written the words you are reading. I find this ‘no one’ terribly fascinating – for there’s finally a profound truth to it’ (Auster, ‘Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 555).

³⁰ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ in *Image – Music – Text*, p. 147.

³¹ Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 56-68 (p. 60).

³² Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 14.

Responding to Barthes, the nature of originality and the inevitability of meaninglessness were later reappraised by Foucault:

The notion of writing, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing, nor the indication...of a meaning...The notion of writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity.³³

Foucault's author performs no more than a functional role in the structural preparation of a text, while the interpretative process takes place without acknowledgement of the author's original intention. Under the culturally-structured system of signification, authorial authority is reduced to an invisible 'I', a voice without an identity, while the reader is elevated from interpreter to co-creator.³⁴ Derridean deconstruction pushes this role reversal to its 'logical' conclusion: the boundary between writer/reader, subject/object and work/text are blurred almost to extinction by a linguistic structure without centre. Instead there exists a language-based signifying space from which authorless texts emerge, where 'the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification indefinitely'.³⁵

³³ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume Two: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Richard Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 205-22 (p. 208).

³⁴ Belsey, p. 19.

³⁵ 'It was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre 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. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the

This dialogic exchange between Barthes, Foucault and Derrida in itself problematizes Foucault's concept of 'transcendental anonymity' and the negotiation of definitive meaning: their discourses float free of authorial authority, but their dialogue – cultural, institutionalised, temporally-located – inadvertently restore and reconcile 'text' with 'writer'. However, Sturrock emphasises poststructuralism's affinity with writing and, in particular, imaginative writing: 'self-conscious about the form of what they write, and knowledgeable about the devices and effects of rhetoric...they refuse to be imprisoned within the narrower stylistic bounds of orthodox academic discourse'.³⁶ The trope of transcendental absence Foucault and Derrida refer to explicitly (and Barthes implicitly) offers an opportunity to situate Hustvedt and Auster in closer critical alignment. For if poststructuralism denies the existence of binary, delineated opposites such as

absence of a centre of origin, everything became discourse...that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences' (Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass [London: Routledge, 2001], pp. 278-94 [p. 280]).

Much like Derrida, Jacques Lacan's apparently impregnable texts challenge the authority of proscribed knowledge and traceable meanings. (Steintrager, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, p. 152.) Steintrager's observation that 'Lacan writes works which displace and deconstruct themselves as they are produced' prefigures Russell's application of Derridean deconstruction to Auster's *City of Glass*. Steintrager also notes that despite Derrida's critique of psychoanalysis as a discipline which 'only sees itself', Derrida and Lacan deploy linguistics to question notions of authority and autonomy while attempting to establish their own authoritative conceptual models of language.

³⁶ Sturrock, p. 17. Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy also comment upon the 'dual function' of Lacan's work, which enacts a 'literary performance' showcasing the 'disintegration of language' while conversely offering the 'prospect of a solution to the 'lack' that it expresses' (Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* [London: Free Association Books, 1986], p. 17).

writer/reader, subject/object and work/text (or husband/wife), instead favouring a proliferation of decentred plurality where the presence of otherness is inscribed on the subject by its absence,³⁷ it is possible to conceive of their marriage not only as a discursive inter-relational exploration of these theories through their respective fictions, but also as a reflection of dialogic intertextuality, where the boundaries of reader-writer distinction collapse into coexistent textual coproduction. The next section of this chapter will address the postmodern problematic of cultural indeterminacy, which embodies Hutcheon's belief that 'postmodern differences, or rather differences, in the plural, are always multiple and provisional'.³⁸

³⁷ Belsey, p. 87.

³⁸ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

Incredulity towards incredulity: the postmodern condition

Green describes postmodernism as ‘hyperbolic and conceptually fuzzy’, a nebulous concept whose very indeterminacy complicates and even frustrates attempts to delineate its defining characteristics.³⁹ Brian McHale states, ‘nothing about this term [postmodernism] is unproblematic’,⁴⁰ while Hutcheon concurs: ‘the postmodern is a problematizing force in our culture: it raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common sensical’.⁴¹ Bertens and Natoli define postmodernism as a ‘wholly self-reflexive, anti-referential, and apolitical movement in literature and the arts’, a system whose capaciousness not only reflects and engenders ‘a wide and rather heterogeneous variety of phenomena’, and which makes isolating and unpicking its knotty defining characteristics difficult.⁴² The polymorphous nature of postmodernism can be traced to its self-reflexivity: for the literary form, a proliferation of cultural phenomena provokes in authors a curious detachment from the aesthetics of commitment, and the embrace of the tropes of pastiche, irony and ambiguity. Furthermore, postmodernism’s centrifugality and differential relationality draw a multitude of theories, disciplines and ideas into its theoretical orbit, all of which serve to emphasise its slipperiness.

³⁹ Green, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London; Methuen, 1987), p. xii.

⁴¹ Hutcheon, p. xi.

⁴² Bertens and Natoli, ‘Introduction’ in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, p. xi.

This slipperiness extends to tracing the emergence of postmodernism as a cultural dominant. Bertens and Natoli, for example, trace the ‘point of origin’ of postmodernism to three sources: the anti-humanist tropology of French poststructural linguistics; the historical-political culture-shocks of the late 1960s; and the socio-cultural critiques of mass consumer capitalism which emerged in the 1980s.⁴³ Vermeulen and van den Akker similarly argue that the theoretical response to postmodernism has been more critical to its proposed existence than those cultural-material characteristics that defined it:

The initial heralds of postmodernism, broadly considered to be Charles Jencks, Jean- François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson and Ihab Hassan, each analysed a different cultural phenomenon – respectively a transformation in our material landscape; a distrust and the consequent desertion of metanarratives; the emergence of late capitalism, the fading of historicism and the waning of affect; and a new regime in the arts.⁴⁴

Both Fredric Jameson and Jean- François Lyotard highlight the culturally-compromised aesthetic, theoretical and political paradigm under the cultural logic of late capitalism, within which ‘meaningful’ or ‘authentic’ art is produced and critiqued. Where Lyotard offered an ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ and the

⁴³ Bertens and Natoli, ‘Introduction’ in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, p. ix.

According to Green, Craig Calhoun identifies four ways of using the concept of postmodernism which centre upon poststructuralism, philosophical anti-foundationalism, social theory, and as a stylistic trend.

⁴⁴ Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’.

limits of historical knowledge,⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson's work has been particularly important in two respects: firstly in attempting to establish postmodernism as a periodizing concept which correlates 'the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order';⁴⁶ and secondly in stressing the material conditions of postmodernism.⁴⁷ Under Fredric Jameson's theoretical microscope, postmodernism deepens and intensifies the social and productive relationships of capitalism, while commodity production absorbs and assimilates postmodern culture through pluralistic proliferation and the aesthetics of imitation: 'the transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents'.⁴⁸

Most crucially, postmodernism – *ergo* postmodern literature – is defined by its relationship to modernism. As Jameson contends, 'the unity of it [postmodernism] is given not in itself, but in the very modernism it seeks to

⁴⁵ 'I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse...making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth' (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi with foreword by Fredric Jameson [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984], p. xxiv).

⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in *The Cultural Turn*, p. 3. Reading postmodernism as a periodizing concept is no less problematic than postmodernism's material and theoretical indeterminacy. This problematic will be addressed in the next section.

⁴⁷ Sean Homer, 'Fredric Jameson' in Bertens and Natoli, *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 180-88 (p. 188).

⁴⁸ F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Culture' in *The Cultural Turn*, p. 20.

displace'.⁴⁹ Green similarly describes postmodernism as a 'term of belatedness...succeeding or superseding the earlier formation'.⁵⁰ Not only is it a periodizing concept linked to what Jameson believes to be clearly demarcated cultural crisis points within the history of Western humanism, but the creative responses to this 'collapse' of modernism in art are sited within a self-reflexive temporal-philosophical space. *Contra* Fredric Jameson, Hutcheon observes:

There is no dialectic in the postmodern: the self-reflexive remains distinct from its traditionally accepted contrary – the historico-political context in which it is embedded. [...] The postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge.⁵¹

For Hutcheon, postmodernism's paradoxes 'call to our attention both our continual postulation of that difference and also a newer epistemological doubt. (*Do we know the difference?*)'.⁵² Yet questions remain over the ideological basis and ethical possibilities and limitations of a movement inscribed by the cultural domination of mass consumer capitalism: one where we have 'multiculturalism, pluralist sexual identities, minority rights and single issue politics' operating within an 'aggressive entrepreneurial capitalism and an intense and prolonged wave of self-examination'.⁵³ What Hutcheon terms 'dark postmodernism',

⁴⁹ F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Culture' in *The Cultural Turn*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Green, p. 1.

⁵¹ Hutcheon, p. x; p. xii.

⁵² Hutcheon, p. 255.

⁵³ Bertens and Natoli, 'Introduction' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, p. xv.

exemplified by the nihilistic simulacra described by Jean Baudrillard, threatens to flatten and obliterate these ethical prerogatives.⁵⁴

In their respective studies of the poetic mode of production under the conditioning principle of postmodernity, Green, Hutcheon and McHale separately describe the difficulty for authors in resolving the postmodern problematic. For Green, postmodern fiction reflects ‘a process, a perpetual questioning’: an aesthetic mode of sceptical enquiry and narrative ambiguity,⁵⁵ wherein motifs of endings, exhaustion, waste, entropy and used-upness’ recur in a variety of reconfigurations.⁵⁶ According to Bertens and Natoli, postmodernism reflects a rejection of Cartesian dualism and the Enlightenment values of empiricism, rationality and self-determination; and latterly by the extension and radicalization of modernism’s epistemological self-reflexive modes of enquiry.⁵⁷ Hutcheon’s limited model isolates ‘historiographic metafiction’ as an exemplar of the postmodern literary project.⁵⁸ These consist of novels ‘whose self-reflexivity works in conjunction with their seeming opposite (historical reference) in order to

⁵⁴ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 224. Barone too separates Auster’s work from this ‘nihilistic view of the postmodern’, with its closed systems of simulation and hyperreality. Hustvedt similarly places little value on ‘simulacra, baby’ (Siri Hustvedt, *The Sorrows of an American* [London: Sceptre, 2006], p. 217. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Sorrows* with page number cited.)

⁵⁵ Green, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Green, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Bertens and Natoli, ‘Introduction’ in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli p. xii. Hustvedt and Auster’s scepticism towards epistemological certainty derives from this position, but their ethically-grounded quests for other forms of imaginative knowledge have taken them beyond the problematic postmodern paradigm.

⁵⁸ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 223.

reveal both the limits and powers of historical knowledge'.⁵⁹ The ideological subtexts which shape cultural practices also control the conditions of aesthetic meaning production.⁶⁰ For McHale, postmodernist poetics shift from the modernist concern with epistemology to issues of ontology. Postmodernist literature embodies and reflects a cultural 'dominant' which questions 'the ontology of the literary text itself or the ontology of the world within which it projects'.⁶¹ McHale calls postmodernist fiction 'above all an illusion breaking art; it systematically disturbs the air of reality by foregrounding the ontological structure of texts and of fictional worlds'.⁶²

This is the aesthetic, theoretical and temporal space into which Auster and Hustvedt began publishing fiction: Auster's first part to *The New York Trilogy*, *City of Glass*, was published in 1984; Hustvedt's, *The Blindfold*, in 1992. Auster's links to the meta-textual deconstructions of postmodernism, as we have already

⁵⁹ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 223. Hutcheon leans quite heavily on the work of Michel Foucault here, defining postmodernism as 'not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge'. Hutcheon, p. xii.

⁶⁰ 'Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within' (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp. xii-xiii).

⁶¹ McHale, p. 10. McHale's model recalibrates the historiographic preoccupations of Hutcheon: 'intractable epistemological certainty become at a certain point ontological plurality or instability; push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions – the system is not linear and unidirectional but bidirectional and reversible' (McHale, p. 11).

⁶² McHale, p. 221.

seen, are well-documented, but problematic. While Auster's novels do not adhere strictly to the frameworks emphasised by Green, Hutcheon and McHale, they are implicated in the hybrid forms of postmodern culture. By contrast, while Hartmann, Marks and Zapf seek to usher Hustvedt's writing into a new 'after pomo' period, it remains possible to read her fiction as a product of the postmodern cultural dominant. A further complication can be found when considering in the ways in which Hustvedt and Auster's writing has evolved not only in acknowledgement of a changing temporal-spatial, cultural and theoretical landscape, but also in reflection of personal, professional and political developments in their lives.

Illegibility and sincerity: beyond postmodernism

In the early Twenty-First Century, writers like Hustvedt and Auster find themselves writing within and responding to cultural conditions to which the term ‘postmodern’ no longer appears appropriate. Nealon in particular outlines what he terms the ‘changed cultural and economic situation’ of ‘just-in-time capitalism’,⁶³ revisiting Jameson’s earlier writings on postmodernism to isolate the intensified ‘speed and penetration’ of late capitalist praxis in contemporary culture.⁶⁴ For Boxall, the material conditions of the early Twenty-First Century retain the ‘disjunct quality’,⁶⁵ or ‘illegibility of the present’, which defined aesthetic responses to earlier modern/postmodern periods;⁶⁶ what differentiates our contemporary present is a sense of gathering speed, intensified by the ‘instantaneity’ of electronic communication.⁶⁷ This foregrounds the acute sense of untimeliness, or ‘belatedness’, intertwined within our responses to contemporary cultural phenomena, and the difficulty of unpicking the temporal fabric of this

⁶³ Nealon, p. xi-xii.

⁶⁴ Nealon, p. 150.

⁶⁵ Boxall, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Boxall, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Boxall, p. 11. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks, by contrast, distinguish between a ‘forever accelerating’ modernity, with its concomitant belief that ‘the contemporary world is bereft of time or history’, and what they perceive to be the ‘thickness’ of time and temporality in the contemporary world’ (Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks, ‘Hurry Up Please Its Time: Introducing the Contemporary’ in *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks [Harlow: Longman, 1999], pp 1-10 [p. 1; p. 10]).

epoch from the texture of the last.⁶⁸ For Boxall, our cultural experience is possessed of ‘a peculiar double vision’, being ‘extraordinarily old, and impossibly young’.⁶⁹ Accordingly, one finds ‘this absence from the present, this estrangement from a time that seems to pass’. According to Boxall, in narrative terms the ‘shifted temporality’ and ‘texture of the contemporary present’ are intertwined with a ‘preoccupation with embodiment’ and a sense of self-estrangement.⁷⁰

For Green, these new cultural conditions ‘shape the readership, the literary and political ideologies, the self-understanding, and the aesthetic choices available to writers’.⁷¹ Literature’s uncertain future, and the existential crisis facing contemporary authors such as Hustvedt and Auster, foregrounds what Boxall and

⁶⁸ ‘The history of the later Twentieth Century came to being under the sign of a general lateness or belatedness, a vast historical gloaming, a gathering agedness’ (Boxall, p. 22).

⁶⁹ Boxall, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Boxall, pp. 10-11. This estrangement can perhaps be linked with the dissociative strangeness described by Hustvedt and Auster in their non-fiction and discussed in Chapter one, although they seem to link this to a universal problematic, rather than a temporal condition. It is equally possible to contend that temporality, and the critical frameworks imposed by postmodernity and its later incarnations, have stimulated Hustvedt and Auster’s perception of the essentially disordered ontology of the human subject. Of course, this is a chicken-and-egg scenario worthy of an entire thesis.

⁷¹ Green, p. 3. Green also points to the how the shift from reading to viewing has become culturally embedded, and seems to presage a ‘future without books’ (Green, p. 5). According to Green, ‘with the shaping of audiences in the media age, the growth of knowledge and information processing as an integral part of advanced capitalism, and the redistribution of symbolic forms of value, literature’s place has become increasingly uncertain’ (Green p. 7). Here one recalls Barthes’ observation in ‘From Work to Text’ that ‘the reduction of reading to consumption is obviously responsible for the ‘boredom’ many feel in the presence of the modern (‘unreadable’) text, the avant-garde film or painting: to be bored means one cannot produce the text, release it, *make it go*’ (Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 63).

Green both identify as a ‘fin de siècle’ moment in cultural history.⁷² The challenge to literature cannot be overstated: as Green persuasively argues ‘the legitimating function of culture has been overtaken by the uses of culture as commodity. Capital has to an increasing extent penetrated the cultural realm, making it over in its own image’.⁷³ The ‘perceived marginality’ of writers, and the notion of writing ‘as a form of resistance’ to cultural commodification and political philistinism,⁷⁴ are thrown into sharp relief next to the ‘superficiality, passivity and information overload that undermine the reflective capacities of the citizen subject’.⁷⁵

It is therefore interesting that Hustvedt and Auster have chosen this moment to simultaneously publish books which require considerable commitment from the reader: a 560 page collection of interdisciplinary essays, including a 200 page critique of Cartesian dualism titled ‘The Delusions of Certainty’ (Hustvedt’s *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women* [2016]), and a 890 page variation on the *bildungsroman* which draws upon multiple intersubjective positions (Auster’s *4321* [2017]).⁷⁶ Both texts rely upon an amalgamation of hybrid spatiality, temporal liminality and intersubjective reciprocity. In this regard, neither can be classified as overtly postmodern: indeed, the prosaic density of Auster’s *4321* in particular gestures towards a ‘realism reinvigorated and newly

⁷² Boxall, p. 4; Green, p. 13.

⁷³ Green, p. 34.

⁷⁴ Green, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁵ Green, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Negative reviews of both books complained of their ‘longwindedness’, ‘verbosity’ and ‘difficulty’.

relevant to these confessional times'.⁷⁷ While, as Vermeulen and van den Akker point out, 'literary historical categories like modernism and postmodernism are, after all, only heuristic labels that we create in our attempts to chart cultural changes and continuities',⁷⁸ numerous cultural theorists have attempted to find a new 'heuristic label' to classify and characterise our contemporary epoch.⁷⁹

Metamodernism, the model Vermeulen and van den Akker propose, is particularly useful when considering Hustvedt and Auster's work, as it identifies

⁷⁷ Green, p. 28. Auster's latest novel, which returns to the territory of his earlier novel, *Moon Palace*, and the meditative autobiographical diptych of *Winter Journal* and *Report from the Interior*, reflects what Boxall describes as a 'new historicity'. In *4321* Auster depicts four 'identical but different' lives of the same protagonist, Archie Ferguson, detailing the microcosmic and quotidian experiential structure of the four variations alongside the macrocosmic socio-cultural narratives of American post-war history (Paul Auster, *4321* [London: Faber, 2017], p. 863. Hereafter referred to in the text as *4321* with page number cited). Frequently, *4321* seems to negotiate what Boxall terms 'historical persistence' and 'the mutability of the past', gesturing towards a 'new sense of responsibility to material historical forces that constrain or shape the fictional imagination' (Boxall, pp. 40-42). As Auster writes, 'the real also consisted of what could have happened but didn't...God was nowhere, he said to himself, but life was everywhere, and death was everywhere, and the living and the dead were joined'. (*4321* 863)

⁷⁸ Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism'.

⁷⁹ No small irony that there is a proliferation of potential cultural terms to define this era: an aftermath of postmodernism's pursuit of heterogeneity. Alongside their own term, 'metamodernism', Vermeulen and van den Akker also list Gilles Lipovetsky's 'hypermodern', Alan Kirby's 'digimodernism' or 'pseudomodernism', Robert Samuels' 'automodernism'. To these we may also add Green's 'late postmodernism', Nealon's 'postpostmodernism', Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid modernity' or Adam Curtis' 'hypernormality'. What distinguishes these from Vermeulen and van den Akker's own model is their intensification and radicalisation of postmodernism to focus on 'cultural and (inter)textual hybridity, 'coincidental' consumer (enabled) identities, hedonism' and a 'focus on spatiality rather than temporality'. Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism'.

an oscillation between modernism and postmodernism which enfolds the dialectical quality of the epistemological-ontological divide identified by Hutcheon and McHale, without giving predominance to either. Critical to Vermeulen and van den Akker's model is the German philosopher Eric Voegelin's concept of metaxis, or 'betweenness', which establishes a politically-charged philosophical model which 'consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility': 'as if' there is a positivistic teleological outcome in the history of humanity, despite its implausibility.⁸⁰ Here Vermeulen and van den Akker draw upon what they term 'Kantian negative idealism' to propose that 'both the metamodern epistemology (*as if*) and its ontology (Between) should thus be conceived of as a 'both-neither' dynamic'.⁸¹ While this implies a degree of philosophical negation or latent nihilism, Vermeulen and van den Akker believe metamodernism manifests itself through an aesthetic approach which oscillates between the certainties of modernism and the scepticism of postmodernism,

⁸⁰ Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism'. Voegelin's conception of betweenness is quite different to that of the German philosopher Martin Buber, a major influence on Hustvedt and Auster's approach to self-other dialectics. Buber's notion of the 'between' is founded on dialogism, intersubjectivity and mutuality, while Voegelin's metaxis is more closely positioned to the existentialist positions of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus: 'Existence has the structure of the In-Between, of the Platonic Metaxy, and if anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness, between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence' (Eric Voegelin, 'Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History' in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Volume 12*, ed. by E. Sandoz [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989], pp. 119-20, [qtd in Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism'])).

⁸¹ Vermeulen and van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism'.

thereby establishing a ‘narrative of longing’ characterised by ‘pragmatic idealism’:⁸²

Ontologically metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern...between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity...One should be careful not to think this oscillation as a balance, however; rather it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles.⁸³

It is tempting to think that Vermeulen and van den Akker’s pendulum hinges upon the indeterminacy of our recent postmodern past, and that metamodernism is little more than a logical extension of the cultural inflections of late capitalism. Indeed, given the brevity of their essay Vermeulen and van den Akker’s model inevitably relies upon reductive representations of two complex cultural movements, while insisting on a separation between the two which is contentious and possibly misleading.

⁸² Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’.

⁸³ Vermeulen and van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’. These binary distinctions are more than a little reductive and not entirely unproblematic. However, this sense of oscillation and negotiation between modernism and postmodernist positions chimes with Boxall’s description of the ‘peculiar double vision’ of contemporary cultural life (Boxall, p. 23). Metamodernism also aligns with Luckhurst and Marks’ observations about the accelerated and thickened constitution of our contemporary epoch, that in order ‘to think the contemporary, it is necessary to think remembering and forgetting *together*, rather than sliding into simple assertions of dystopian loss’ (Luckhurst and Marks, ‘Hurry Up Please It’s Time’ in *Literature and the Contemporary*, ed. by Luckhurst and Marks, p. 6).

Nevertheless, we might conceive of the metamodernistic mode of investigation as reflecting an oscillation from negating ambivalence towards a more positivistic ambiguity, both of which are present in the writing of Hustvedt and Auster. In another regard, the development of Hustvedt and Auster's writing careers reflect the 'return to transparency and representation' that Green argues is required to move beyond the 'decadence and decline' of postmodernism.⁸⁴ Both are conceivably present in the 'postmodernist' Austerian observation that 'I'm not exactly sure why I write. It's not simply to create beautiful objects or entertaining stories. It's an activity I seem to need in order to stay alive',⁸⁵ or Hustvedt's empathic reflection that 'openness to a book is vital, and openness is simply a willingness to be changed by what we read'.⁸⁶ This bidirectional movement from commitment to scepticism, certainty to doubt, modernist tropes to postmodernist tropes, more consistently defines Hustvedt and Auster's early narratives than more overtly deconstructive approaches would have us believe. The next section will attempt to address the narrative complexity of their early novels, and this oscillation between commitment and irony to forge new forms of knowledge.

⁸⁴ Green, p. 25; Green, p. 22.

⁸⁵ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 539.

⁸⁶ Hustvedt, 'On Reading' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p.138.

Narrativising the (post)modern: intertextual strategies

With their localised, contingent and indeterminate narratives, the surface textures of Hustvedt and Auster's early fiction appears to embrace postmodernist critiques. The explicitly ethical approaches to plot, structure and characterisation present in their later novels are implicitly expressed in their more overtly ambivalent postmodern debut novels. This differentiates the self-reflexive paradoxes of the deconstructive opening to *The New York Trilogy*, and the temporally-disordered power-dynamics of *The Blindfold*, from the empathic multiple-perspective narrative of Auster's *4321* and Hustvedt's polyphonic *The Blazing World* (2014). In their early novels, Hustvedt and Auster utilise unreliable narrators, shifting perspectives and intersubjective identities as a means of critically appraising the postmodern condition. These narratives partially adhere to the postmodern poetics outlined by Hutcheon and McHale, while illuminating Hustvedt and Auster's nascent commitment to an alternative epistemology of the present founded on dialogism and mutuality. The limited possibility of establishing definitive meanings through Auster's text is derived from his treatment of linguistic instability, the blurring of identities and the disruption of linear time; Hustvedt similarly engages in this narrativised play. For the rest of this chapter, I will seek to identify moments of intertextual synchronicity within Hustvedt and Auster's examinations of identity, liminality and authority in the fragmented and self-reflexive postmodern epoch.

1. Identity and language

Hustvedt and Auster's early writing appears to examine the 'death of the subject' by problematizing the identities of their protagonists. Delineating what he terms 'the poststructuralist position' in relation to identity, Fredric Jameson proposes that postmodernism is predicated upon the death of the subject:

Not only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth; it never existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather, this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they 'had' individual subjects and possessed some unique personal identity.⁸⁷

This, according to Jameson, presents artists with an 'aesthetic dilemma': 'one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment of the past'.⁸⁸ For Jameson, postmodern art – in all forms – enacts a kind of collapse, an aesthetic implosion. Under this rubric, representation moves away from modernism's epistemological and psychological constructions, towards the irony, pastiche and historiographic metafiction identified by Hutcheon, and the ontologically-focused cultural

⁸⁷ F. Jameson, p. 6. Jameson's reading of postmodern culture allows little room for the dialogism of Martin Buber (see Chapter three), and the intersubjective phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (see Chapter four). Given Hustvedt and Auster's interest in these theories, this indicates a major discrepancy in postmodern approaches to their work. Contra the imploding aesthetics of postmodernism, the hybrid spatiality of their texts gesture towards an aesthetic of ethical commitment, foregrounded by an imaginative epistemology, or transdisciplinary knowledge.

⁸⁸ F. Jameson, p. 7.

dominant cited by McHale. Barone writes: ‘in postmodern investigations of human subjectivities, the self can be split into selves to probe into the peculiarities of self’.⁸⁹ Sorapure writes that for Auster:

A question of identity is repeatedly the site of profound struggle for characters whose postmodern sense of themselves and of their place in the world shifts, multiplies, disintegrates, and must be reconstituted, if only provisionally.⁹⁰

Sorapure, like Alison Russell, applies a Derridean reading to Auster’s debut novel: her observation that characters ‘search for patterns and meanings in the signs they encounter and events they experience’,⁹¹ only to be thwarted by ‘the postmodern overload of potentially significant information and by the force of chance, coincidence, the arbitrary and the implausible’ recalls Derrida’s deconstructed, centreless systems of signification: ‘the entire history of structure [meaning] must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre’.⁹²

These ‘forces of chance, coincidence, the arbitrary and the implausible’ frame the narrative and frustrate the linearity of *The New York Trilogy* and *The Blindfold*. Both novels open with a central mystery: a case of misplaced identity and a chance encounter which are foregrounded by ambivalence, implausibility and the ambiguity of the narratives’ barely glimpsed prolepses. A feminist

⁸⁹ Barone, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Sorapure, ‘Paul Auster’ in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, p. 20.

⁹¹ Sorapure, ‘Paul Auster’ in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, p. 22.

⁹² Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ in *Writing and Difference*, p. 279.

narrative, *The Blindfold* interrogatively dissects the representative possibilities of realism, the epistemological possibilities of modernism and the ontological possibilities of postmodernism. Alise Jameson proposes that Hustvedt ‘problematizes straightforward interpretation’ in her narrative, isolating the ‘ambiguity of power and its relation to notions of speech/silence and seeing/blindness’.⁹³ Hustvedt’s narrative opens upon a moment of uncanny misrecognition:

Sometimes even now I think I see him in the street or standing in a window or bent over a book in a coffee shop. And in that instant, before I understand that it's someone else, my lungs tighten and I lose my breath.⁹⁴

Within this short paragraph, the structural shape of Hustvedt’s novel opens up: revelatory, affirmative, embodied. The repeated ‘I’s push the reader towards a psychological and phenomenological reading of the narrative, but they also suggest identity exists in Voegelin’s between-space of affirmation and negation. Hustvedt’s narrator is a Columbia graduate named Iris Vegan, whom Versluys and Alise Jameson propose undergoes a series of identity crises throughout the narrative.⁹⁵ This crisis also applies to the identity of the ‘him’ Iris believes she

⁹³ Alise Jameson ‘Pleasure and Peril: Dynamic Forces of Power and Desire in Siri Hustvedt’s *The Blindfold*’, *Studies in the Novel* (42: 4, 2010), 421-442 (p. 422).

⁹⁴ Siri Hustvedt, *The Blindfold* (Picador: New York, 1992), p. 1. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Blindfold* with page numbers cited.

⁹⁵ Versluys, p. 100; A. Jameson, p. 440.

sees, which remains unresolved throughout the narrative.⁹⁶ Iris' erotically-charged and phenomenologically-grounded preoccupation with masculine identities unfolds as the narrative progresses:

Through my barred window, across the narrow airshaft, I looked into the apartment opposite mine and saw the two men who lived there wander from one room to another, half dressed in the sultry weather. On a day in July, not long before I met Mr. Morning, one of the men came naked to the window. It was dusk and he stood there for a long time, his body lit from behind by a yellow lamp. I hid in the darkness of my bedroom and he never knew I was there. That was two months after Stephen left me, and I thought of him incessantly, stirring in the humid sheets, never comfortable, never relieved. (*Blindfold* 1)

Iris' language is determined by lust, love, loss, absence and possible betrayal: the adjectives 'comfortable', 'sultry' and 'relieved' palpably loaded with erotic tension. She vicariously involves herself in the embodied narratives of the two men living opposite her apartment by secretly observing them; yet she maintains her distance, and her invisibility is reaffirmed by its denial of linguistic exchange.

⁹⁶ Knirsch contends that, 'the signifier 'him' is what Derrida calls an 'empty signifier', eluding any fixed meaning and therefore representing the opposite of the 'full signified' which is restricted to one fixed meaning or definition' (Knirsch, 'In a Time-Warp: The Issue of Chronology in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*').

She is caught between the binary and the plural: active and passive, absent and present; each state of being inscribed upon the other.⁹⁷

The first section of Hustvedt's beguiling and bewildering gothic-romance brings Iris into a chance encounter with the enigmatic Mr. Morning, a bachelor writer possessed of what Iris describes as a 'beautiful voice'. (*Blindfold* 10) Upon arriving at his apartment for the first time, Iris recounts:

I can still see his intent face in the doorway. He was a very pale man with a large, handsome nose. He breathed loudly as he opened the door and let me into a tiny, stifling room that smelled of cat. The walls were lined with stuffed bookshelves, and more books were piled in leaning towers all over the room. (*Blindfold* 10)

Like that of Auster, Iris' narration deploys language in a scrupulous, precise manner: 'intent face', 'very pale man', 'smelled of cat' suggest Iris's linguistic limitations, possibly owing to her lack of emotional development. Conversely, these descriptions signal her control of form and putative feminist apprehension of patriarchal modes of existence. By contrast, Mr. Morning's plenitudinous writings

⁹⁷ There is also an overt intertextuality here: an echo of Auster's *Ghosts*, the second part of *The New York Trilogy*, in which a character named Blue is confined to a room to observe and write down the actions of his ontological double, Black. Iris recalls: 'I would read, write, and smoke into the morning, but on some nights when the heat made me too listless to work, I watched the neighbors from my bed'. (*Blindfold* 9) Unlike Auster's characters, Iris's ecriture is not the surface paraphrasing of observable action: in her world intent is latent, concealed and psychological – like a strangulated plea for eros lodged against the thanatic impulses of Auster's *Ghosts*.

have appeared in a number of magazines, indicating the multivocal ability of patriarchal linguistics to dominate a range of genres, theories and identities:

I write about everything for every taste,' he said. 'I've written for *Field and Stream*, *House and Garden*, *True Confessions*, *True Detective*, *Reader's Digest*. I've written stories, one spy novel, poems, essays, reviews – I even did an art catalog once. (*Blindfold* 12)

Hustvedt deploys Mr. Morning as a Barthesian blank, a Derridean mass without centre, a mess of linguistic contradictions, who, nevertheless, declares to Iris without apparent irony: 'I am behind everything I write, Miss Davidsen'. (*Blindfold* 12)

Mr. Morning invites Iris to record, in 'painstaking description', a series of objects which belonged to a dead young woman: 'I need an ear and an eye, a scribe and a voice...I'm in the process of prying open the essence of the inanimate world. You might say it's an anthropology of the present'.⁹⁸ (*Blindfold* 13) Mr. Morning's project produces within the narrative an exploration of poststructural linguistics, patriarchal power and the constriction of the feminine voice:

I imagined my descriptions as pithy, elegant compositions, small literary exercises based on a kind of belated nineteenth-century positivism. Just for

⁹⁸ The phrase 'anthropology of the present' not only recalls the structuralist writings of Claude Levi-Strauss, but it is eerily similar to a phrase Auster uses in the second part of *The Invention of Solitude – The Book of Memory* – where he ascribes his predicament of financial penury, emotional isolation and temporal dislocation to a personal sense of anomie: a 'nostalgia for the present' (Paul Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 61).

the moment, I decided to pretend that the thing really can be captured by the word. I drank coffee, ate a glazed doughnut, and was happy.⁹⁹

(Blindfold 15)

While attempting to describe the first object in a formally linguistic fashion, much like the Barthesian author-figure Iris finds herself once again linguistically powerless, unable to accurately render its defining characteristics:

The more I wrote, the more specific I was about the glove's characteristics, the more remote it became. Rather than fixing it in the light of scientific exactitude, the abundance of detail made the glove disappear. In fact, my minute description of its discolorations, snags, and pills, its loosened threads and stretched palm seemed alien to the sad little thing before me.

(Blindfold 11)

Hustvedt's narrator perceives the glove, but, much like the personal history of the woman who wore it, remains indeterminate and unavailable to perception. In this short exposition Hustvedt apprehends and interrogates linguistic paralysis and the unknowability of language, a deconstructive critique of the limitations of Saussurean logocentrism. We might equally contend that the difficulties of depiction under poststructuralism's proliferation of pluralities cause it to disappear; equally, we can perceive a critical appraisal of the imaginary

⁹⁹ Hustvedt's inclusion of the disposable commodities 'coffee' and 'glazed doughnut' – signifiers of a disposable, consumerist, postmodern society – align with the surface emotional response their consumption incurs – 'was happy' – stimulates a playful engagement with an early structuralist text, Barthes' *Mythologies*, alongside Fredric Jameson's critiques of consumer capitalism.

possibilities and limitations of formalism. Yet within Hustvedt's narrative of focused ambiguity the object is simply and repeatedly referred to as a 'glove', thereby complicating its essential linguistic knowability.

The difficulties of depiction deepen when Iris is confronted with the second of Mr. Morning's boxed objects, a cotton ball:

I held the cotton ball with a pair of tweezers up to the light, trying to find words that would express it, but the thing was lost to language; it resisted it even more than the glove. And when I tried metaphors, the object sank so completely into the other thing that I abandoned making comparisons.

(Blindfold 25)

Iris' observation that 'the thing was lost to language' recalls the comment she made before eating her donut and drinking her coffee: 'I decided to pretend that the thing really can be captured by the word'. Patriarchal linguistics – institutionalised, formalist, masculine - have made it almost impossible for her to adequately describe what she sees before her: 'the object sank so completely into the other thing'. These limitations are structurally, culturally and existentially located within Iris: perhaps it is her identity which is sinking into Mr. Morning's objects, while attributing these 'ownerless' objects to him confers an ownership embedded in power. Iris' investigations into the nature of objects and otherness under the tutelage of Mr. Morning offer a comment on the interlocking structure of linguistics and phenomenology, a condensation of the varying approaches to literary classification and critique. Iris' apparent inability to describe what she sees – even with the discursive and apt deployment of 'discolorations', 'snags'

and ‘pills’ – connotes a sense of disorder under system of signification imposed by Mr. Morning and thereafter controlled by him *in absentia*.

As a multivocal genre writer and patriarchal trope, Mr. Morning deploys a number of pseudonyms, emblematic of the slippery, sinister and controlling individual Hustvedt constructs for Iris to encounter. When she first meets Mr. Morning, Iris’ unease at his ‘lecherous or merely curious’ gaze compels her to change her own name, adopting an alternative pseudonym:

When he asked me my name, I lied. I did it quickly, without hesitation, inventing a new patronym: Davidsen. I became Iris Davidsen. It was a defensive act, a way of protecting myself from some amorphous danger, but later that false name haunted me; it seemed to move me elsewhere, shifting me off course and strangely altering my whole world for a time.

(Blindfold 12)

Iris’ tenuous grip on her own sense of feminine identity is further effaced and desexualised by the random letters Mr. Morning doodles on a notepad at their next meeting:

There were several letters written on the paper—what looked like an I, a Y, a B, an O, an M, and a D. He had circled the M. If those markings were intended to form some kind of order, it was impossible to make it out, but even then, before I suspected anything, those letters had a strange effect on me. They stayed with me like the small but persistent aches of a mild illness. *(Blindfold 22)*

For Iris, the key to uncovering the ‘biography’ Mr. Morning claims to be writing is to discover who the objects belong to without his knowledge. This biographical approach, too, is doomed to failure: we perceive through Iris’ narration her linguistic, psychological and philosophical inferiority to Mr. Morning. To all intents and purposes the objects ‘belong’ to him: dialogically (in their conversations), and differentially (through the descriptive process), Iris is continually confronted by his power over language:

‘You enjoy hiding behind masks?’

‘I revel in it. It gives my life a certain color and danger.’

‘Isn't danger overstating it a bit?’

‘I don't think so. Nothing is beyond me as long as I adopt the correct name for each project. It isn't arbitrary. It requires a gift, a genius, if I may say so myself, for hitting on the alias that will unleash the right man or woman for the job.’ (*Blindfold* 12)

Mr. Morning is a creature of exegesis: his explanation about the formalistic-hermeneutic reasoning behind his descriptive task reaffirms his existence as a cypher of theoretical exposition:

I hired you precisely because you know nothing. I hired you to see what I cannot see, because you are who you are. I don't pretend that you're a blank slate. You bring your life with you, your nineteenth-century novels, your Minnesota, the fullness of your existence in every respect, but you didn't know her. When you look at the things I give you, when you write

and then speak about them, your words and voice may be the catalysts of some undiscovered being. Knowledge of her will only distract you from your work. (*Blindfold* 25)

Alise Jameson persuasively argues that Iris and Mr. Morning can be read as a gendered refraction of Foucault's critiques of structured power and knowledge, masculine dominance and feminine masochism. Further, it gestures towards an antagonistic father-daughter relationship, which may hold implications for Iris' attempt to establish a feminist aesthetic beyond the boundaries of her gendered identity, and the patriarchal confines of Mr. Morning's apartment.

Like Hustvedt's treatment of Mr. Morning's task for Iris in *The Blindfold*, Auster appears to examine the conflict between Saussurean linguistics and its poststructuralist offspring in his debut novel. In *The New York Trilogy*, the father-son relationship between Peter Stillman Jnr and Snr is not simply a literary appropriation of child abuse narratives, but it can also be perceived as a critical investigation by Auster into the cultural-societal root of linguistically-defined identity. Stillman Snr can be conceived as embodying structuralism's anthropological explorations of meaning within a given language structure. Stillman Snr's project is to discover a prelapsarian, pure language where the arbitrary link between name and thing are restored. Stillman Jnr, the product of this investigation, embodies the poststructuralist proliferation of plurality, where the link between sign and signified has been fractured to the point of dissolution. Auster's protagonist – a writer by the name of Daniel Quinn – meets Stillman Jnr early in the narrative. During this meeting, the young man launches into a stream-of-consciousness monologue which teeters on the brink of self-reflexive collapse:

This is what is called speaking. I believe that is the term. When words come out, fly into the air, live for a moment, and die. Strange is it not? I myself have no opinion. No and no again. But still, there are words you will need to have. There are many of them. Millions I think. Perhaps only three or four...If I can give you the words you need to have, it will be a great victory.¹⁰⁰

Self-generated language systems provide the epistemological basis for the ontologically-decentered identity of Stillman Jnr's identity, giving function to his dehumanised form: 'I am only poor Peter Stillman, the boy who can't remember. Boo hoo. Willy nilly. Nincompoop. Excuse me'. (*Trilogy* 16) Stillman Jnr's linguistic development as a child, and his exposure to the structures governing language, has been interrupted by his father but rescued by his speech therapist wife, Virginia. As the subject of two different linguistic systems, Peter now speaks in accordance with his own unique linguistic system – a kind of inverse monadology, or pluralistic univocalism – but one which is rendered meaningless to those, like Quinn, who are situated outside its system of signification. Stillman Jnr's liquid enunciations continually shift, like Auster's text, from impregnable abstraction to fleeting meaning: 'Wimble click crumblechaw beloo. Clack clack bedrack. Numb noise, flacklemunch, chewmanna. Ya, ya, ya. Excuse me. I am the only one who understands these words'. (*Trilogy* 17) Despite his early years outside the culturally-structured system of signification, when he speaks it is

¹⁰⁰ Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber, 1987), p. 16. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Trilogy* with page numbers cited. Here one can see the influence of linguistic circularity and negation in the Beckettian mode identified by Dimovitz, and discussed in Chapter one.

within his own arbitrary linguistic structure. In a passage which presages Iris' difficulties of description in *The Blindfold*, Stillman Jnr recalls his father's experiment upon him:

There was this. Dark. Very dark. As dark as very dark. They say: that was the room. As if I could talk about it. The dark, I mean. / Dark, dark. They say for nine years. Not even a window. Poor Peter Stillman. And the boom, boom, boom. The caca piles. The pipi lakes. The swoons. Excuse me. Numb and naked. (*Trilogy* 16)

Stillman's existence recalls Derrida's absent centre, 'a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-submissions came into play'.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, irrespective of his disordered ontology and fractured selfhood, Stillman Jnr remains a man.

Within Hustvedt and Auster's debut novels, the individual can be read as a linguistic unit – a phoneme – embodying the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, and subject to the changing meanings and contexts within a linguistically-structured world. At the opening of *The Blindfold* Iris describes her lungs tightening, causing her to lose her breath. Breathlessness has two outcomes: an inability to communicate, to speak, to tell; and death, the end of one's life. Hustvedt, like Auster, seeks to locate words – the point of origin – within the corporeal body of the writer. Speechlessness in *The Blindfold* constitutes a proto-death, while multivocal logocentric verbosity in *City of Glass* represents a form of annihilation by multiple-signification: in the case of Peter Stillman Jnr, who

¹⁰¹ Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, p. 280.

exhausts himself verbally before disappearing from the narrative, while Quinn's thanatic inscribing appears to write himself out of existence: 'The last sentence of the red notebook reads 'What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook'. (*Trilogy* 132) It is true that the death of the writer closes the book in *City of Glass*, but the narrative endures in the mind of the nameless narrator: 'my thoughts remain with Quinn. He will be with me always. And wherever he may have disappeared to, I wish him luck'. (*Trilogy* 133)

In the early fiction of Hustvedt and Auster, identities and relationships are constituted and reconstituted by language in self-reflexive exchange within spatio-temporal zone of stasis and flux. The boundaries between self and other are transgressed, and subjective identities shift and blur. This indicates not only Hustvedt and Auster's narrativisation of poststructuralist theory and postmodernist tropes, but also points towards the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster's later fiction, which is more explicitly oriented around self-other dialectics (see Chapter three), phenomenologically-grounded transcendent subjectivity (see Chapter four) and traumatic affect (see Chapter five). It is further reified through the dialogic discursivity between the novels discussed here. The teleological link between temporality, epistemology and language in *The New York Trilogy* and *The Blindfold* will be considered in the next section.

2. Temporality and liminality

According to Hutcheon, postmodernism can be read as an ‘ahistorical’ movement.¹⁰² Sean Homer has described what he terms postmodernism’s ‘pervasive flattening of space and displacement of diachronic time with synchronic immanence’.¹⁰³ For Marxist theorists such as Fredric Jameson, this ‘displacement of diachronic time’ is the ‘major theme’ of postmodernism:

The disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions.¹⁰⁴

Hutcheon counters Jameson’s anti-postmodernist position with the observation that postmodernism – and poststructuralism – teaches us that ‘history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past’; the meaning and shape of events and facts are structurally determined, ‘an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs’.¹⁰⁵ Hutcheon describes how postmodernism ‘reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge’.¹⁰⁶ In this sense, postmodern literature acknowledges the Foucaultian paradigm that ‘writing has freed itself from the theme of expression, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority,

¹⁰² Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 87.

¹⁰³ Sean Homer, ‘Fredric Jameson’ in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, p. 183.

¹⁰⁴ F. Jameson, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Hutcheon, p. 89.

¹⁰⁶ Hutcheon, p. 89.

writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority'.¹⁰⁷ Postmodern narratives often appear to plunge into a vortex of atemporality, where the linear storytelling of realism combines with the fragmentary liminality of modernism to create an anti-teleological *mise en abyme*.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, Barthes construes the 'Author' as being 'always conceived of as the past of his book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and *after*'.¹⁰⁹ Rather than embarking on a linear journey through a text, we instead descend into a cascade of images, surfaces, labyrinths and dead ends: progress is impeded by a paradoxical paradigm, but the narrative is propelled by a hermeneutic compulsion to unpick and resolve the paradox.

This structured play between language and temporality are intrinsic to the shape and form of Hustvedt and Auster's debut novels, whose temporal and spatial linearity is conspicuously disrupted.¹¹⁰ Auster's treatment of time in his debut novel inspired Russell to insist upon its denial of 'linear movement, realistic

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, p. 206.

¹⁰⁸ The liminal structures of postmodern literature are equally reflective of the Barthesian concept of 'the modern scriptor' who, shorn of all defining characteristics, is 'born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing', and that there is 'no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is externally written here and now' (Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image – Music – Text*, p. 145).

¹⁰⁹ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image – Music – Text*, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ This disruption constitutes an exploration of the disjunct between the Foucault's apprehension of historically-constructed selfhood, with the Barthesian conception of writer and text being born simultaneously.

representation and closure',¹¹¹ depicting it instead as a Derridean deconstruction of logocentrism: a principal concern of Derrida's, for whom spoken 'deconstructive discourses' are 'trapped in a kind of circle',¹¹² and from which writing seems to offer a semblance of escape: 'language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique'.¹¹³ Referencing Beckettian negation, Little records that 'nothing happens again and again', and that the novel 'subverts the teleological notion of progress'.¹¹⁴ Lavender similarly suggests *City of Glass* 'deconstructs the form of the novel, the canons of criticism, theory and tradition, and it deconstructs itself, as it literally falls apart in its progression' before going on to observe 'it clears a space where representation can once again close with politics and society'.¹¹⁵

This postmodern instability is exemplified in Auster's existential opening to *City of Glass*, a narrativised descent into a decentred, decontextualized and destabilised world:

It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not. Much later, when he was able to think about the things that had

¹¹¹ Alison Russell, 'Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction', *Critique* (31: 2, 1990), 71-83 (p. 72).

¹¹² Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, p. 280.

¹¹³ Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, p. 284.

¹¹⁴ Little, p. 133.

¹¹⁵ William Lavender, 'The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*', *Contemporary Literature* (34:2, 1993), 219-39 (p. 220, 235).

happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that was much later. In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell. (*Trilogy 3*)

The texture of the paragraph elicits negation and negotiation, delimited possibilities and lost causes, and negligible cause and effect. The telephone's noise piercing 'the dead of night' perhaps exemplifying the crisis of representation which predicates Lyotard's postmodernity,¹¹⁶ and Derrida's 'rupture and redoubling' which predicates deconstructive discourse.¹¹⁷ A vestige of atemporal location remains: 'dead of night', 'in the beginning' and 'much later' imply that time exists and will pass in this narrative, but nothing further is offered in the way of temporal specificity. Auster's protagonist, Quinn, is a man without a past whose scant existence is barely inscribed within the frame of the novel: 'As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance'. (*Trilogy 3*) 'Nothing was real except chance', records the narrator, positioning contingency, happenstance and the randomness of existence as empirical and ontological obstacles to teleological epistemology,

¹¹⁶ 'Capitalism inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery' (Jean-François Lyotard 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', trans. by Régis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition*, pp71-82 [p. 74]).

¹¹⁷ Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, p. 278.

by impeding linear thought, self-determination and movement through the temporal-spatial landscape.

Nevertheless, as the narrator observes, ‘the question was the story itself’: the story being the individual’s quest for authentic selfhood in the wake of personal tragedy. Auster’s *Trilogy* thus proceeds inexorably from one section to the next, with prescient and retrospective intertextual tensions. The plot of each part concludes in the loosest possible sense, with a final, enfolding closure of sorts offered in the destruction (or deconstruction) of Fanshawe’s red notebook at the climax of *The Locked Room*, the final part of the *Trilogy*. The narrative therefore deploys a degree of foreshadowing and backshadowing, while at its centre rests a continual deferral of progress. Yet the anti-teleological ‘close’ to *City of Glass* leaves the frame of that particular narrative open, with the enduring mystery of what happened to the protagonist left agonisingly unresolved: ‘it is impossible for me to say where he is now’. (*Trilogy* 133) The location of the subsequent parts to the *Trilogy* within different temporal zones serves to deepen the structural and thematic *mise en abyme* constructed by Auster.¹¹⁸

Hustvedt deploys a similarly disordered textual strategy for *The Blindfold*: four temporally reconstituted sections which act as episodic narratives-in-miniature, but within which are embedded references to the others. According to Knirsch, ‘*The Blindfold*’s narrative structure is comprised of four loosely

¹¹⁸ Quinn and Iris emerge from and disappear into the textual fabric of these apparently deconstructive novels, yet both ‘reappear’ in later fictions: Quinn in Auster’s *In the Country of Last Things* and *4321*; Iris in Hustvedt’s *The Blazing World* (as I.V Hess) and Auster’s *Leviathan*.

connected episodes which are ordered anachronically, almost as in a time warp', while the time structure of the novel 'remains open', without two clearly identifiable moments of inception or closure.¹¹⁹ Upon first reading, the first episode performs as a prologue for the remainder, with Iris' linguistic power play with Mr. Morning casting a narrative shadow over everything that follows. Consequently, according to Alise Jameson, Iris experiences 'nothing less than a self-shattering, a dangerous destabilization of any sense of personal identity';¹²⁰ this destabilisation is signalled by the air of ambivalence towards her earlier descriptive difficulties under the control of patriarchal linguistics, and the submissive hope of encountering her tormentor once more: 'Mr. Morning had my telephone number, after all, and there was nothing to prevent him from finding me. I waited for months, but I never heard from him. When the telephone rang, it was always someone else'. (*Blindfold* 38) The 'Stephen' fleetingly referred to in Iris' opening narration reappears as a major character in a later section, a reflection of Hustvedt's exploration of the preoccupation of postmodern fiction with its own unfolded exteriority. Antje Dalmann attempts to restore linear time to the novel's 'unchronological representation',¹²¹ concluding:

¹¹⁹ Christian Knirsch, 'In a Time-Warp: The Issue of Chronology in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*'.

¹²⁰ A. Jameson, p. 422.

¹²¹ Antje Dallman, 'ConspiraCities and Creative Paranoia: Ellis's *Glamorama*, Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*, and Whitehead's *The Intuitist*', *Anglophonia* (19: 2006), 67-87 (p. 73).

The narrative time (thought scrambled) is neatly restorable. The narrated time is exactly three academic years, while the time of narration is eight years after Iris's second summer at Columbia.¹²²

Knirsch links the 'migrane-induced scotomas' Iris undergoes throughout the course of the narrative to Derridean poststructuralism, with 'form and content becoming one': each section refers to the other, without offering causational or correlative points of origin or closure.¹²³

Hustvedt and Auster's narratives acknowledge McHale's ontological dominant and Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction' – writing which signals a break with the epistemologically-grounded, humanistic 'truths' of realism and modernism by 'rethinking and reworking the forms of the past...in order to subvert them' –¹²⁴ but Hustvedt and Auster's engagement with canonical literature, and social and cultural history, proliferates through the prism of temporal disordering and immanence within their narratives. This idea of the present state of language in relation to its development over time is critical to Auster's narrative, and his depiction of Stillman Snr's linguistic crusade. Smith perceptively argues that Stillman Snr's restorative quest overlooks the 'slippages and ambiguities of language that give it life'; that language is 'conventional, arbitrary and culturally entrained'.¹²⁵ In *City of Glass*, following his encounter

¹²² Dallman, p. 104.

¹²³ Knirsch, 'In a Time-Warp: The Issue of Chronology in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*'.

¹²⁴ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Hazel Smith, 'A Labyrinth of Endless Steps: Fiction Making, Interactive Narrativity and the Poetics of Space in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*', *Australasian Journal of American Studies* (21: 2, 2002), 33-51 (p. 43).

with the disintegrated Stillman Jnr, Quinn is tasked by Virginia Stillman with tracking down Stillman Snr. This quest is framed and mediated by his reading and interpretation of the historian Stillman Snr's academic tract, *The Garden and The Tower: Early Visions of the New World*, a distillation and condensation of the history of Western thought 'in two parts of approximately equal length, 'The Myth of Paradise' and 'The Myth of Babel''. (*Trilogy* 41) Stillman's historical-theocratic investigation into the mythology of language – linguistic collapse (Eden/Tower of Babel) presaging prelapsarian restoration (the New World/The New Babel) – refers obliquely to Foucault's identification of the structured nature of language, knowledge and history:

Later in the Book of Genesis there is another story about language. According to Stillman, the Tower of Babel episode was an exact recapitulation of what happened in the Garden, only expanded, made general in its significance for all mankind...This is the very last incident of prehistory in the Bible...The Tower of Babel stands as the last image before the true beginning of the world. (*Trilogy* 43)

Stillman Snr's divided text – as with Auster's *Trilogy* – is ironically unified under the rubric of its materiality (as a written critique of structuralism, and a published object), recontextualised by deconstruction's fragmentary pluralism and postmodernism's provisionality:

After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had

been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, not only records the fall of man, but the fall of language. (*Trilogy* 43)

Stillman Snr has been driven ‘crazy, absolutely insane’ by his ambition to restore the referential binary connections which determine linguistic meaning. Hazel Smith depicts Stillman Snr’s book as ‘a parody of the structuralist idea that language makes the world’,¹²⁶ and his historical-theological preoccupation with Edenic-linguistic essentialism – when ‘a thing and its name were interchangeable’ – is mirrored in the mythology of the Tower of Babel: ‘And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech’. Stillman Snr seeks to resurrect the utopian quest for a prelapsarian language from the ruins of the deconstructed present:

You see the world is in fragments, sir. Not only have we lost our sense of purpose, we have lost the language whereby we can speak of it. These are no doubt spiritual matters, but they have their analogue in the material world. My brilliant stroke has been to confine myself to physical things, to the immediate and tangible. My motives are lofty, but my work now takes place in the realm of the everyday. (*Trilogy* 76)

Stillman Snr’s theological dissection of the problematized nature of epistemological and ontological existence mirrors Auster’s own examination of co-dependence and conflict between arbitrary systems of signification: the diachronic (the evolution of language over time) and synchronic (the condition of language in the present); *langue* (the language system) and *parole* (the speaking of that system); the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes; the spatio-temporal and

¹²⁶ Smith, p. 42.

the socio-historical; the epistemological and ontological. Auster's fiction investigates how these systems evolve and what happens when they disintegrate, as evidenced by the extreme destabilisation of Stillman Jnr as a consequence of his father's abusive treatment:

The body acted almost exactly as the voice had: machine-like, fitful, alternating between slow and rapid gestures, rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation were out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it. (*Trilogy* 15)

When Quinn finally catches up with Stillman at New York's Riverside Park, Auster uses their meeting to further dissect the way in which formalist, structural and poststructural theoretical positions encircle each other within the postmodern problematic. Deploying labyrinthine language and a sequence of paradoxical paradigms, Auster invites a hermeneutic response to these dialogic negations ('I'm sorry, but it won't be possible for me to talk to you') and negotiations ('I could tell you were a man of sense right away, Mr. Quinn. If you only knew how many people have misunderstood me'), (*Trilogy* 73; 75) before revisiting and reconfiguring Stillman's theocratic search for linguistic truth:

A new language that will at last say what we have to say. For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same. They have not adapted themselves to the

new reality. Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent. (*Trilogy 77*)

Stillman Snr's linguistic quest doubles as a geo-spatial traversal: physically transporting him across the city 'the most forlorn of places, the most abject', while he painstakingly shuffles over the surface of the streets in search of 'broken objects...the chipped to the smashed, from the dented to the squashed, from the pulverised to the putrid', (*Trilogy 78*) objects severed from their meaningful place within history and through which he will erect his postlapsarian utopia.

Versluys' reading of Hustvedt's depiction of New York City as a maze in *The Blindfold* is equally true for Auster's novel. The experiences of Quinn and Iris take place in a landscape which verges on the dystopian: their identities are subjected to the postmodern contingencies of surviving within vertiginous, dehumanizing cities of glass, while their responses to this predicament are primarily ambivalent. Smith believes that Quinn's trailing of Stillman Snr on his unconscious urban perambulations and conscious re-naming of things enacts the performative process of writing, whereby:

Body and city continuously transform each other, because neither body nor city is a unified, autonomous object. The hyperscape [a site characterised by multiple oppositions] is activated by the process of walking, and the dynamic relationship it creates between body and city.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Smith, p. 47.

The maps of Stillman Snr's peripatetic wanderings which Quinn cribs in his red notebook flatten the perplexity of these hyperscapes, revealing shapes which seem to spell 'OWER OF BAB', hieroglyphs that prophesise the arrival of Stillman Snr's postlapsarian utopia. Much like the seemingly random markings Mr. Morning makes in his notepad in *The Blindfold*, their actual meaning is inscrutable and unattributable to the symbols Quinn has scribed:

The letters continued to horrify Quinn. The whole thing was so oblique, so fiendish in its circumlocutions, that he did not want to accept it. Then doubts came, as if on command...he had imagined the whole thing. The letters were not letters at all. He had seen them only because he had wanted to see them. And even if the diagrams did form letters, it was only a fluke. Stillman had nothing to do with it. It was all an accident, a hoax he had perpetrated on himself. (*Trilogy 71*)

Motifs of perception, and representations of seeing and assimilating visual objects, frequently slow the narratives of Hustvedt and Auster's fiction. Much like Auster's narrative, *The Blindfold* contains instances of time being manipulated, sped up or slowed down, or compressed, so that events which should endure happen in the space of a sentence ('I waited for months'), while events which occur instantaneously move at a crawl. Here Hustvedt compares Iris' apprehension of the exterior urban landscape with the stultifying, antiquated interior world of Mr. Morning's apartment:

I ran into the street and began to walk toward Broadway. When I reached the corner, I paused. It had stopped raining and the sky was breaking into

vast, blank holes of blue. I watched the clouds move and then looked into the street. The sidewalk, buildings, and people had been given a fierce clarity in the new light; each thing was radically distinct, as though my eyesight had suddenly been sharpened. (*Blindfold* 38)

Elsewhere Iris recalls her first visit to Mr. Morning's den of antiquity: 'The walls were lined with stuffed bookshelves, and more books were piled in leaning towers all over the room'. (*Blindfold* 10) The 'leaning towers of books' in Mr. Morning's apartment proliferate with hermeneutic connotations, suggesting the patriarchal formalism of literary tradition, Foucault's hierarchies of structured knowledge, Stillman's Tower of Babel – the fall of Adamic language detailed in *City of Glass* – and the spatial structure of the city of New York, the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Hustvedt's Mr. Morning acts as the Peter Stillman Snr to Auster's Quinn, a man who asserts his control over language through the patriarchal structures of language and knowledge embedded in history:

'What does that mean?'

'It means exactly what the words denote.'

'Those words, Mr. Morning,' I said, 'are liturgical. You've gone into a religious mode all of a sudden. What am I to think? You seem to have a talent for saying nothing with style.'

'Be patient, and I think you'll begin to understand me.' He was smiling.
(*Blindfold* 23)

Iris's recollection of the space in which their first meeting was held ('a narrow ray of light that had escaped through a broken blind fell to the floor between us, and when I looked at it, I saw a haze of dust') (*Blindfold* 11) metonymically constitutes a reflection of her relationship with Mr. Morning, an allegorical embodiment of institutionalised literary antiquity and canonical patriarchy: a single sentence in which time, movement and space are momentarily inscribed – much as they are in the single name 'Mr. Morning'.

In *The Blindfold* and *The New York Trilogy*, Hustvedt and Auster address the teleological limitations of temporally-grounded epistemology within an ontologically-disordered paradigm. The possibility of narrative progress is problematized through the fragmentary constitution of the text, and negation of self-determination through the dissolution of boundaries between self and other. Hustvedt's narrative resolution, like that of Auster, remains open, but unlike that of Auster it displays an ambivalence which, according to Alise Jameson, shows 'that Hustvedt's work does not express a definitive stance on power relations' or hierarchies of historical knowledge.¹²⁸

3. Authorial authority

¹²⁸ A. Jameson, p. 422.

Postmodernism and poststructuralism critique authorial authority, and the possibility of establishing stable meanings within texts. The ability of the writer to pen an original piece of work is compromised by intertextuality (Barthes), the cultural-historical exchange between knowledge and power (Foucault) and the unrestricted play of signification (Derrida). Barthes believes that ‘it is language which speaks and not the author’, and critiques criticism which seeks to assert meaning and authorial intent by focusing on biographical-historical considerations:

The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always, in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us [...] The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and *after*.¹²⁹

For Barthes, textual engagement necessitates the recognition and reconfiguration of ‘the relations of *scriptor*, reader and observer’, and that writers are born and die with their books.¹³⁰ Foucault shares this view: ‘The author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses’; for Foucault, indifference to authorial intention ‘is one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing’.¹³¹ Derrida contends

¹²⁹ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ in *Image – Music - Text*, p. 145.

¹³⁰ Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 57.

¹³¹ Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’ in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, p. 205.

that linguistic play impedes the ability of writers to write responsibly, but instead encourages them to embrace the ethical possibilities of writing joyously:

Play is the disruption of presence [...] The joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.¹³²

Reading and writing, for Barthes and Derrida, exist within a mutually-reaffirming signifying system of continual exchange where the ‘pleasures of the text’, or rather, the difficulties of meaningful apprehension, are crucial to this dialogue between reader and writer (and critic): these are what ‘produce the text, play it, release it, *make it go*’.¹³³ Foucault, by contrast, situates explicit and latent textual meanings within the body of the author as a ‘variable and complex function of discourse’,¹³⁴ but observes:

The author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, recomposition of fiction.¹³⁵

¹³² Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ in *Writing and Difference*, p. 292.

¹³³ Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 63.

¹³⁴ Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’ in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, p. 221.

¹³⁵ Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’ in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, p. 221.

For Foucault, the author is little more than an ‘ideological product’, a means of marking our ‘fear of the proliferation of meaning’.¹³⁶ Yet while postmodernist and poststructuralist theory problematize definitive meaning-making and authorial authority, novels – and debut novels in particular – can often be read as a discursive declarations of intent with a manifesto-like quality: an expression of intellectual will to power, or meaning-making. The fragmentary nature of temporality, space and signification within socio-cultural structure of postmodernism, and the epistemological and ontological implications for the individual’s existence constitute the postmodern frame within which Hustvedt and Auster attempt to critique and subvert these competing contexts. Their embrace and repudiation of Lyotard’s crisis of representation, while seeking to find a way out of the postmodern problematic, both stimulates and inhibits their apprehension and expression of its textures. Hutcheon reminds us, ‘difference is multiple and provisional’, while Barthes notes that ‘the text is plural’:

It can be text only in its difference...its reading is semelfactive...and yet entirely woven of quotations, references, echoes: cultural languages...traverse it through and through, in a vast stereophony.¹³⁷

The debut novels of Hustvedt and Auster are distinguished by a mode of presentation, or ‘production’ under the Marxist dictum: both reflect and respond to the tropological conditions, contradictions and contradistinctions of

¹³⁶ Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’ in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, p. 221.

¹³⁷ Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 60.

postmodernism, attempting to restore the authorial voice through the conscious deployment of metafictional and metaphysical tropes.

Brian McHale defines metafiction, the ironic foregrounding of the process of writing, as a central technique of postmodern fiction: ‘No longer content with invisibly exercising his freedom to create worlds, the artist now makes his freedom visible by thrusting himself to the foreground of his work’.¹³⁸ Lavender’s detailed reworking of Seymour Chatman’s model of narrative structure identifies three ‘Paul Austers’ at play in *City of Glass*, suggesting ‘allegorically, a hopelessly complex, paradoxical, self-referential system of geneses’.¹³⁹ And yet, Auster’s characters subvert the poststructuralist concept of the ‘dead author’, presenting an alternative, performative rendering of authorial immanence, one in which it is Auster pulling the strings:

The artist represented in the act of creation or destruction is himself inevitably a fiction. The *real* artist always occupies an ontological level superior to that of his projected fictional self, and therefore *doubly* superior to the fictional world.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ McHale, p. 30.

¹³⁹ Lavender, p. 224.

¹⁴⁰ McHale, p. 30. Auster’s own analysis of his self-insertion into the narrative frame of *The New York Trilogy* corresponds with McHale’s diagnosis: ‘It stemmed from a desire to implicate myself in the machinery of the book. I don’t mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self, the mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books...I wanted to open up the process, to break down walls, to expose the plumbing. There’s a strange kind of trickery involved in the writing and reading of novels’ (Auster, ‘Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory’ in *Collected Prose*, p. 555).

Like the spectral Mr. Morning in *The Blindfold*, Auster's decentred protagonist is a writer: Daniel Quinn, a man whose identity has been shorn of definition and physicality in the wake of the death of his wife and son: 'Who he was, where he came from and what he did are of no great importance'. (*Trilogy 3*) Quinn's writer-identity provides the basis for his subjugation to the textures of the postmodern condition and the shifting identities of a number of alter egos and hypothetical doubles: his literary pseudonym William Wilson, Wilson's private eye protagonist Max Work, and the narrativised embodiment of Paul Auster, the 'author' of the book. The continual tension between realism's compositionality, Saussurean referentiality and deconstructive multiplicity are metonymically embodied in the spectral Quinn and his ghostly *confrères*. As Lavender records, this constellation of narrative identities is further complicated by the revealing, near the close of *City of Glass*, of a disembodied, nameless narrator: the omniscient God-like author the entire narrative discourse has hitherto overlooked.¹⁴¹ What we are presented with, much like the narrative of *The Blindfold*, is another first person narrative by an unreliable narrator. However, unlike Hustvedt's distillation of Iris Vegan's psychological terrain through a system of first person narration, Auster's narrator speaks for the writer-protagonist Quinn on a number of occasions. In particular, the narrator records Quinn's enjoyment of mystery novels due to their economy of language and linguistic 'truth':

¹⁴¹ Lavender, p. 221.

What he liked about these books was their strict sense of plenitude and economy. 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. (*Trilogy 8*)

Here, the mask slips slightly: the narrator's refraction of the psychological attitudes of his protagonist, Daniel Quinn, depicts Auster's ambivalence towards totalizing language structures. One facet of the postmodern canon is exemplified in an act of ventriloquism, of God-like assertion, under the pretence of metafiction. The narrator's subsequent reflection that 'the centre, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end' (*Trilogy 8*) ironically delineates poststructuralism's negation of narrative linearity, a concession to the possibilities, limitations and contradictions contained within deconstructive discourse: 'The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre *elsewhere*. The centre is not the centre'.¹⁴² However, Auster's disavowal of Derridean discourse negates this interpretation, alternatively offering an affirmation of the linguistic power of the writer in determining the narrative. For in spite of this supposed lack of centre, Quinn, the writer character, is the individual around whom the circumference of Auster's narrative encircles, a multiplicity of alternative identities circulate, and narrativised rival individuals oppose diametrically.

¹⁴² Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, p. 279.

Hustvedt and Auster's novels indicate their appropriation of Beckett's technique for granting characters cratylic names that allude to meaning without wholly granting it (Watt, Moran, Malone, Clov, Hamm and so on), reflecting the structural implication of William H. Gass's statement that 'characters are those primary substances to which everything else is attached'.¹⁴³ Like those of Beckett, Hustvedt and Auster's protagonists struggle to establish single and unified selves within a sphere of signification characterised by confusing, intrusive and fragmentary spatiality. Derridean logocentrism posits that the 'history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies', whereby language, names and identity progress ever onwards in a chain of reflexive signification.¹⁴⁴ In *The Blindfold*, Iris recounts working for a medical historian indexing recognisable diseases such as 'bubonic plague, leprosy, influenza, syphilis, tuberculosis' in addition to 'more obscure afflictions that I remember now only because of their names – yaws, milk leg, greensickness, ragsorter's disease, housemaid's knee, and dandy fever' (*Blindfold* 10). The specificity of each implicates the others in their progression; the obscurity of the diseases suggests their unknowability: they have become dislocated from their point of origin. However, while these arbitrary binary links between names and

¹⁴³ William H. Gass, 'The Concept of Character in Fiction' in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction: Third Edition*, ed. by Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (London: Duke University Press, 2005) pp. 113-120 (p. 116).

¹⁴⁴ 'All the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence – eidos, arch, telos, energia, ousa (essence, existence, substance, subject), alethia, transcendiality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth' (Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*, p. 279-80).

things is fundamental to Saussurean linguistics, and the dissolution of the link equally critical to Derridean deconstruction, Hustvedt and Auster seem instead to subvert the idea of names being completely dislocated from the object that they represent.

Quinn's patronym is scrutinised by Stillman Snr, who pushes the linguistic possibilities of his name into abstraction and absurdity in a passage which recalls the dialogue of his damaged son:

I see many possibilities for this word, this Quinn, this...quintessence...of quiddity. Quick for example. And quill. And quack. And quirk. Hmmm. Rhymes with grin. Not to speak of kin. Hmmm. Very interesting. And win. And fin. And din. And gin. And pin. And tin. And bin. Even rhymes with djinn. Hmmm. And if you say it right, with been. Hmmm. Yes, very interesting. I like your name enormously, Mr. Quinn. It flies off in so many little directions at once. (*Trilogy 74*)

As Stillman notes, there is logocentric logic to Quinn's essentially arbitrary name, even as it engenders a number of increasingly absurd referents: 'Rhymes with twin, does it not?' (*Trilogy 74*) Iris Vegan's name is a hybridization of Hustvedt's first name reversed (or *mirrored*), and her mother's maiden name. Intentional or otherwise, the surname *Vegan* suggests to this particularly *omnivorous* reader on the one hand a degree of fragility, weakness, submissiveness; ethical assuredness and moral superiority; or paradigmatic cypher, an authorial mouthpiece, a ventriloquist's dummy. Pushing the linguistic possibilities of Iris' patronym in this Austerian way, we might argue that it rhymes with *began*, the past tense to

begin – which is precisely what Hustvedt is doing with her debut novel:

beginning.

Conclusion

While Auster in particular resists this interpretation, it is nevertheless possible to argue that Hustvedt and Auster engage with postmodernism and poststructuralist discourse in their debut novels. These early texts address the end of essentialism under the postmodern problematic identified by Hutcheon, and attempt to explore and subvert the postmodern frame from within. Equally, their texts reflect the complexity of existence and limitations of discursive possibility in the postmodern epoch. While clearly distinctive in terms of style, narrative and rate of productivity, their novels share moments of commonality in a structural, thematic and ethical sense, and their deployment of dialogic intertextuality can be perceived early in their writing relationship. The closing line to the first part of *The Blindfold* – ‘When the telephone rang, it was always someone else’ – offers a tantalising hermeneutic connection to the first line of *The New York Trilogy*: ‘It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not’. Iris’ experiences in *The Blindfold* seem at times to speak back to Auster’s earlier novel, and the two coexist in subtle dialogue.

The influence of postmodern theory and poststructuralist discourse – conscious or otherwise – on their fiction provides the basis to begin thinking of their writing as a collaborative project. For outside the confines of the postmodernist schema of self-reflexivity, theoretical loops and puzzling contradictions, self-other dialectics find a more stable home within the common literary project of Auster and Hustvedt, as married writers whose texts constitute an intertextual matrix which transcends the metalinguistic frameworks of

postmodern fiction. This notion of dialogue between self and other, and the theoretical basis thereof, is predicated upon their relationship as married writers and the discursive exchange of ideas engendered by sharing their life together. In Chapters three and four I will examine the effect of empathic and emotional relationality through depictions of self-other dialectics and intersubjectivity in their work, an interdisciplinary interrogation which moves beyond the deconstructive theoretical frameworks of postmodernism towards a new 'after postmodernism' moment.

Chapter three: Structures of subjectivity – self-other dialectics

Introduction

The previous chapter considered the relationship of Hustvedt and Auster's narratives to the postmodern paradigm, with particular reference to Hustvedt and Auster's apprehension and critique of poststructuralist theory. I looked at Hustvedt and Auster's responses to Barthes, Foucault and Derrida's critiques of the textual and cultural constitution of the subject: how language, history and knowledge-power structures shape individual consciousness. There I also mentioned what Steinrager identified as the syncretic nature of Jacques Lacan's theory: how the psychoanalyst's re-reading of Sigmund Freud's work is critical to understanding the poststructuralist – *ergo* literary postmodernist – preoccupation with the fragmentary nature of identity and the instability of the self. To understand the unconscious and social structuring of selfhood, an appraisal of Lacan's influence on their writing is useful. This chapter will therefore delve deeper into Lacan's conception of the 'mirror stage', which has informed a number of early critical interpretations of Auster's novels, in particular *The New York Trilogy*.

In an early interview, Auster reflects upon the effect of Lacanian linguistics on self-other dialectics:

Everything we are comes from the fact that we have been made by others.

I'm not just referring to biology – mother, father, uterine birth, and so on.

I'm thinking about psychology and the formation of the human personality. The infant feeding at his mother's breast looks up into the mother's eyes and sees her looking at him, and from that experience of being seen, the baby begins to learn that he is separate from his mother, that he is a person in his own right. We literally acquire a self from this process. Lacan calls it the 'mirror stage'...we can only see ourselves because someone else has seen us first.¹

Auster's interpretative description of the mirror stage, which Scott A. Dimovitz believes misreads Lacan's concept,² is drawn from Hustvedt's own personal interest in psychoanalysis, an interest which pre-exists their relationship:

I have repeatedly been informed by all and sundry about Paul's expertise on the work of Jacques Lacan. Paul has read exactly one work by Lacan, 'The Purloined Letter', which he came across sometime in the late Sixties. That was it. I, on the other hand, have had an abiding interest in psychoanalysis since I was in high school and worked hard at understanding Lacan, who is often difficult and maddening, and for whom I have respect but also profound disagreements, and yet, I know well that whatever Paul knows about Lacan has come via his wife.³

¹ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 560.

² 'The repeated ontological motif of identity as a function of the other's gaze arises from Auster's Sartrean misreading of Lacan [...] Auster's misreading (deliberate or otherwise) problematizes all of the imagery arising in the texts' (Dimovitz, p. 624).

³ Siri Hustvedt, 'Interview with Tyler Malone', *Full Stop*.

While this does not undermine the veracity of pre-existing readings of Auster's work through the prism of Lacanian theory, it strongly indicates his adoption and adaptation of Hustvedt's philosophical interests, something which has, to date, been overlooked or ignored. Nevertheless, it does suggest that Auster's cognition of Lacanian psychoanalysis has been overstated by the critical community.

More apposite is how Hustvedt and Auster interpret the Hegelian drama of self and other through the framework of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogism.⁴ Marks in particular traces Hustvedt's investigation of self-other dialectics back to the master-slave dichotomy outlined in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), with the Other posited as the 'formative and necessary element of identity formation'.⁵ Buber, like Hegel before him, focuses on the dialogical interaction between consciousnesses; unlike Hegel, according to Marks, Buber's philosophy is more explicitly oriented around encounters of 'mutual completion' than the relation of domination commonly applied to Hegel's dialectic.⁶ In *I and Thou* (1923), Buber formulates a philosophy of dialogue possessed of positive and negative registers which overlap with the linguistics of Lacan and the discourse of Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin. Buber's philosophy circulates around two positions: I-Thou, where two subjectivities meet under the conditions of reciprocity and mutuality; or the I-It position, where the encounter is determined

⁴ Marks, p. 22. In a personal interview with Marks conducted on 9 December 2005, Hustvedt also confirmed her dedication to Hegel's philosophy: 'You can go back to the Greeks and talk about dialogue, but I think the modern foundation of this for me is Hegel and self-consciousness.'

⁵ Marks, p. 22.

⁶ Marks, p. 17.

by concealment, objectification or control.⁷ While Auster has since disavowed any direct exposure to Lacan's ideas, he has professed an admiration for Buber, stating in a 2001 interview 'I read Buber constantly'.⁸ Similarly, in *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt expands Buber's observation that 'You has no borders':⁹

'I' exists only in relation to 'you'. Language takes place between people, and it is acquired through others, even though we have the biological equipment necessary to learn it. If you lock a child in a closet, he will not learn to speak. Language is outside us and inside us, part of a complex dialectical reality between people. Words cross the borders of our bodies in two directions, outside in and inside out, and therefore the minimal requirement for a living language is two people.¹⁰ (*Shaking* 55)

⁷ Marks, p. 33.

⁸ Paul Auster, 'Personal interview 2001' (qtd in Andreas Hau, *The Implosion of Negativity: The Poetry and Early Prose of Paul Auster* [Norderstedt: Books on Demand and GmbH, 2010], p. 63). Hau connects Auster's poem 'Unearth' to Buber's theory of mutuality, proposing that Auster seeks to establish an 'I-Thou relation between humans' (Hau, p. 70). Auster says of his poem 'it's about establishing an other...it works out of the imprisonment; the enclosure is a kind of solitary confinement. And this poetic voice, whatever it is trying to achieve, is looking for an other to address. And a very important influence on me in that was Martin Buber, *I and Thou*' (Hau, p. 63). Elsewhere Lily Corwin persuasively applies Buber's model of mutuality to 'The Book of Memory'. See Lily Corwin, 'Is That All There Is?: Martin Buber, Sufficiency, and Paul Auster's 'The Book of Memory'', *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (30, 2011), 68-79.

⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 55 (qtd in Marks, p. 31).

¹⁰ Hustvedt's comment about 'locking a child in a closet' recalls to Auster's invention of the curious case of Peter Stillman Jnr, whose decentred enunciations were addressed in the previous chapter.

Buber and Bakhtin identify this dialectical relation between self and other as ‘the smallest unit of life – identity without relation and dialogue is basically impossible’.¹¹ According to Sue Vice, ‘Bakhtin detects an ‘other’ in language, Lacan in the psyche...Bakhtin’s other is social, Lacan’s is psychological’.¹² For Bakhtin, language is a ‘concrete living totality’ and not ‘the specific object of linguistics’.¹³ Buberian otherness, as a philosophy of interhuman interaction, appears to offer a hybrid of these two positions. Language, according to Marks, is positioned by Hustvedt on the ‘threshold of self and other relations’,¹⁴ with the Buberian *between* offering a space ‘where the limits of subjectivity are dismantled’.¹⁵

The ‘both/and’ poetics of postmodern literary production detailed by Hutcheon, and the both/neither aesthetics of metamodernism, envelop poststructuralism’s differential modelling alongside Buberian *betweenness* and the social aspects of Bakhtin’s dialogic heteroglossia.¹⁶ According to Galin Tihanov, for example, Bakhtin’s theories were first incorporated within the postmodern

¹¹ Marks, p. 18.

¹² Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 4.

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics’, p. 181 (qtd in Vice, p.55).

¹⁴ Marks, p. 10. As Marks’ extensive work on Hustvedt denotes, these questions have implications for the phenomenological grounding of intersubjectivity, something I will look to develop further in Chapter three.

¹⁵ Marks, p. 34.

¹⁶ ‘What postmodern aesthetic practice shares with much contemporary theory (psychoanalytic, linguistic, analytic philosophical, hermeneutic, poststructuralist, historiographical, discourse analytic, semiotic) is an interest in interpretative strategies and in the situating of verbal utterances in social action’ (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 53).

theoretical camp through critical interpretations by Julia Kristeva, and thereafter critiqued by Paul de Man.¹⁷ McHale argues that postmodern fiction draws on Bakhtin's ideas by 'heightening the polyphonic structure and sharpening the dialogue', thereby elevating 'the ontological dimension among discourses'.¹⁸ Auster has offered the following comment on Bakhtin: 'Of all the theories of the novel, Bakhtin's strikes me as the most brilliant, the one that comes closest to understanding the complexity and the magic of the form';¹⁹ however, Auster has also admitted to not reading Bakhtin beyond the translator's note.²⁰ By contrast, the first written evidence of Hustvedt's interest in Bakhtin can be traced back to Hustvedt's PhD dissertation on Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*.²¹ It was Hustvedt who introduced Auster to Bakhtin's ideas, and consequently we may surmise that Auster's admiration for Bakhtin stems chiefly from Hustvedt's influence.

¹⁷ Galin Tihanov, 'Mikhail Bakhtin' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. by Bertens and Natoli, pp. 25-31 (pp. 26-27).

¹⁸ McHale, p. 166. Vice appears to counter this proposition with the observation that dialogism is the 'characteristic epistemological mode' of our mode, in an especially concentrated form within a literary text and the reader's understanding of it' (Vice, p. 49). Of course, McHale may well respond that the epistemological concentration is contingent upon the ontologically dominated culture of our postmodern epoch.

¹⁹ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory', in *Collected Prose*, p. 552.

²⁰ See Appendix.

²¹ 'She names Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage and M. M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogical Imagination* as two of the major influences in her interpretation of Dickens—both thinkers have continued to influence Hustvedt in her later writings' (Marks, p. 5). Hustvedt also cites Bakhtin as a major influence in the *Full Stop* interview of 25 October 2012.

This third chapter will develop the notion of Auster and Hustvedt's literary marriage reflecting the embodiment and representation of the discursive relationship between self and other through the interplay of intersubjective positions. This representation finds its basis partially in the poststructuralist theories explored in Chapter two, partially in the tension between the philosophical positions of Buber/Bakhtin and Lacan, and finally by being underpinned by the 'real world' experience of the authors as married writers. The chapter will open with a brief description of the principal foundations of social and psychological otherness, situating their work against that of the wider poststructuralist canon. Subsequently, I will look at two early novels – Auster's *Moon Palace* (1990) and Hustvedt's *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (1993) – to examine the ways in which both novelists cleave a limited apprehension of these ideas through their fiction. As highlighted above, Hustvedt takes a different critical approach to Auster, but both writers seek to move beyond the confines of the postmodern paradigm. It is possible to speculate that this discursiveness finds its symbiotic basis in the actuality of being married writers who share the same existential, theoretical and ethical impulses, if not a commitment to a precisely-matching aesthetic mode of production.

Dialogue and mutuality

Marks proposes that Buber and Bakhtin ‘share a positive approach to the presence of the other, both addressing possibilities of complementation and reconfirmation’.²² In *I and Thou*, Buber’s conception of selfhood is predicated upon a dialogical relation with the world. Under the positivistic *I-Thou* position, this ‘unmediated’ relation takes place in a zone of ‘hybrid spatiality’, where two subjects engage dialogically with a tacit, unspoken affirmation of respective otherness.²³ For Buber, ‘nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination, and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity to wholeness’.²⁴ Buber’s co-existent and intersubjective framework rests upon the sharing of utterances between subject and subject, ‘where meaning is to be found neither in one of the partners, nor in both together; but only in the dialogue itself, in this ‘between’ where they live together.’²⁵

Buber’s model of mutual contribution informs Bakhtin’s distinctive approach to dialogism, which treats dialogue as ‘both a universal property of language and a specific property to be found only in certain instances of

²² Marks, p. 23.

²³ Marks, p. 33.

²⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 62.

²⁵ Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman*, trans. by Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith, ed. by Maurice Friedman (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), p. 75 (qtd in Marks, p. 31). The dialogue between the young Hustvedt and her father described in her essay ‘Yonder’, addressed in the Chapter one of this thesis, perfectly outlines Buber’s ideality. It similarly aligns itself with Voegelin’s position.

language'.²⁶ Bakhtin's concept refers to the 'ceaselessly shifting power-relations between words, their sensitivity to each other, and the relativizing force of their historically motivated clashes and temporary resolutions'.²⁷ It is, in one regard, the means through which heteroglossia – the 'differentiated speech', or multiplicity of voices, of social life – enters literary texts.²⁸ Bakhtin identifies dialogism as the organising principle of heteroglossia, engendering polyphonic texts relativized through the chronotope: the layers of history, memory and narrative chronology embedded in a literary text.²⁹ Supporting Vice, Lodge describes Bakhtin's language system as a 'linguistics of *parole*',³⁰ foregrounding the 'ideologically saturated' language of culture against the unitary, arbitrary and differential signifying structure erected by Saussure and thereafter critiqued by poststructuralism. In Bakhtin's cultural theory, the Saussurean formula of signifier over signified is compressed into a singular system of signification which stresses the socio-ideological awareness of language:³¹

The words we use come to us already imprinted with the meanings, intentions and accents of previous users, and every utterance we make is directed towards some real or hypothetical other.³²

²⁶ Vice, p. 5.

²⁷ Vice, p. 5.

²⁸ Vice, p. 5.

²⁹ Vice, p 45. In the chronotope we see the grounding for Kristeva's model of intertextuality discussed in Chapter one.

³⁰ Lodge, p. 21.

³¹ Vice, p. 11.

³² Lodge, p.21.

Vice perceives an ambiguity in Bakhtinian dialogism, where its appreciation of ‘popular instances of language, perceptible in novels and popular speech’ shrouds its establishment of ‘a defining quality of language itself, and in its most fundamental sense-making capacities’.³³ Like Vice, Hirschkop identifies the complex and contradictory nature of Bakhtin’s theories, which describe culture as ‘an activity with political and moral ends and objectives’.³⁴ This is because dialogism materialises only at ‘very specific textual moments, when linguistic structures – syntactical, lexical, or generic – appear as the expression of particular, delimited ‘points of view’’:³⁵

When heteroglossia enters the novel it becomes subject to an artistic reawakening. The social and historical voices populating language, in all its words and forms [...] are organised into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch.³⁶

Moreover, while Bakhtin’s dialogism may imply an ethically-charged democratic exchange within and between heterogeneous cultures, it remains subject to the rules which oversee the hierarchical structures of those cultures:

³³ Vice, p. 45.

³⁴ Ken Hirschkop, ‘Introduction: Bakhtin and Cultural Theory’ in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 1-38 (p. 5).

³⁵ Hirschkop, ‘Introduction’ in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Hirschkop and Shepherd, p. 5.

³⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’ in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 300.

The living utterance, having taken on meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.³⁷

Bakhtin's theory 'of language in *use*' is embedded in the concrete condition of structured, conscious social discourse, delimited by a cascade of specific cultural-historical contexts.³⁸ While Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy's assessment that 'the [Lacanian] subject is a slave to the authority of language [*langue*] rather than to society' points to Lacan's antithetical positioning against the many-voicedness of Bakhtinian theory, it also isolates and elevates one possible moment of reconciliation between the two theorists.³⁹ Writing on Bakhtin, McHale describes the Formalist's reality as 'first and foremost linguistic and discursive... experienced in and through discourse'.⁴⁰ Hirschkop also records:

The concrete meaning of an utterance, intonation and all, is said to depend on a context which is first of all composed of an immediate speaker and an

³⁷ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 276.

³⁸ In this sense, it is possible to argue that it anticipates an ideological and rhetorical enfolding of poststructuralist thought, particularly Foucault's knowledge-power structures, Derridean *différance*, Kristeva and Barthes' approaches to intertextuality and Lacan's model of the structured unconscious.

³⁹ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 109.

⁴⁰ McHale, p. 165.

immediate listener; dialogue in a rather everyday sense is offered as a paradigm for all discourse.⁴¹

Bakhtinian aesthetics, under Hirschkop's reading, is less a mode of experience than a form of activity and therefore more concerned 'with the production and reproduction of literary works', something supported by Bakhtin's own description of literary production, which insists upon a dialogic accord between self and other:⁴²

For the prose artist the world is full of other people's words, among which he must orient himself and whose speech characteristics he must be able to perceive with a very keen ear. He must introduce them into the plane of his own discourse, but in such a way that this plane is not destroyed.⁴³

By writing a novel, Bakhtin argues, the author 'speaks not *about* a character, but *with* him',⁴⁴ participating in the dialogue 'without retaining for himself the final word'.⁴⁵ Like Lacan, Bakhtin identifies a double-voicedness in discourse which gestures towards the utterances of the other alongside and within those of the subject – what Vice describes as 'the presence of two distinct voices in one utterance...the mixing of intentions of speaker and listener, and the constant need

⁴¹ Hirschkop, 'Introduction' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Hirschkop and Shepherd, p. 15.

⁴² Hirschkop, 'Introduction' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Hirschkop and Shepherd, p. 10.

⁴³ Bakhtin, 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics', pp. 200-01 (qtd in Lodge, p. 91). Bakhtin's balanced approach to the canon seems to align more closely with Hustvedt and Auster's response to the anxiety of influence paradigm than the master-slave dichotomies of Eliot and Bloom.

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics', p. 63 (qtd in Vice, p. 56).

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics', p. 72 (qtd in Vice, p. 113).

for utterances to position themselves in relation to one another’;⁴⁶ and yet, unlike Lacan – and Foucault, to whom Bakhtin’s theories have been compared by Allon White –⁴⁷ subject and other are not engaged in a zero-sum signifying game which divests each of their identity, but are instead engaged in a culturally and linguistically structured exchange of imaginary discursiveness. Otherness, under the Lacanian conception, continues to suggest an (absent) unitary form and an (absent) unitary structure of linguistics. By contrast, Bakhtinian otherness is a celebration of otherness in all its forms, critically prefiguring Lacan’s mirror stage:

Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-levelled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available for a single language or a single mirror.⁴⁸

Bakhtin favours a heteroglot language which stimulates mobile, multiple and mutual selfhood as the cornerstones of identity.

This is a position shared not only with Buber, but with additionally Hustvedt and Auster, as their polysemantic approach to narrativizing selfhood

⁴⁶ Vice, p. 45.

⁴⁷ ‘Heteroglossia implies dialogic interaction in which the prestige languages try to extend their control and subordinated languages try to avoid, negotiate, or *subvert that control*.’ Allon White, ‘Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics, Deconstruction’ in *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing: Collected Essays and an Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 137.

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’ in *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 414.

highlights. Similarly, the authorial autonomy of Hustvedt and Auster, which Chapters one and two attempt to isolate, dovetail in part with Bakhtin's theories of the novel. Ann Jefferson's reading of Bakhtin's essay 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' (1920-24) leads her to conclude that 'Bakhtin sees life largely in terms of the literary metaphors of 'author' and 'hero'', with self-other relations defined by the subject's visualisation of himself as an object (or 'hero') and the other cast as 'author'. Vice concurs, suggesting that Bakhtin views the author 'as the centre of intention and achievement behind even the freeing up of characters' voices'.⁴⁹ Lodge believes Bakhtin's theory has restored the imaginative autonomy of writers, by reaffirming 'the writer's creative and communicative power' against Saussurean structuralism's quest for a unified structure of linguistics and the destabilising, decentered anti-subjectivity of poststructuralist thought.⁵⁰

Instead of trying desperately to defend the notion that individual utterances, or texts, have a fixed, original meaning which it is the business of criticism to discover, we can locate meaning in the dialogic process of

⁴⁹ Vice, p. 126.

⁵⁰ David Lodge, *After Bakhtin – Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 7. As both novelist and critic, Lodge's appraisal of the appeal of Bakhtin's theory to writers of fiction is supported by a useful critique of postmodernism: 'Novelists are and always have been split between, on the one hand, a desire to claim an imaginative and representative truth for their stories, and on the other a wish to guarantee and defend that truth-claim by reference to empirical facts: a contradiction they seek to disguise by elaborate mystifications and metafictional plays such as framing narratives, parody and other kinds of intertextuality and self-reflexivity' (Lodge, p. 18).

interaction between speaking subjects, between texts and readers, between texts themselves.⁵¹

Contra Barthes, the role of speaker and listener (*ergo* writer and reader) is reoriented around an ongoing process of ‘dialogic friction’ where communication and interpretation sustain the discursive equilibrium and generate meaning.⁵²

Lodge describes Barthes’ ideas as being ‘very similar to that of Bakhtin and antithetical to him’:

Barthes says: because the author does not coincide with the language of the text, he does not exist. Bakhtin says: it is precisely because he does not so coincide that we must posit his existence.⁵³

Under Lodge’s argument, the Lacanian ‘lack’ within the existential identity of the decentered subject is applied to authorship in more positivist terms, with the presence of the author assured by his very absence. This counters Jefferson’s conception of a unidirectional flow of influence (from Author to Hero), where the superiority and supremacy of otherness points to an erroneous proximity between Bakhtin and Lacan’s ideas. In the novel, meaning is derived from dialogic interplay, not from the identification of authorial intention or the satisfaction of the reader’s response. This chapter will further show how Auster and Hustvedt utilise Bakhtinian dialogism in combination with poststructuralist theory (in

⁵¹ Lodge, p. 86.

⁵² Vice, p. 49.

⁵³ Lodge, p. 99.

particular Barthesian intertextuality and Lacanian self-identification) to facilitate a discursive exchange within their narratives and between their texts.

Otherness and objectification

Auster and Hustvedt's critical engagement with Buber and Bakhtin's theories of dialogism is counterpointed by an apparent interest in the psychoanalytic approach of Lacan, with Hustvedt's interest stronger and more long-standing than that of Auster. Lacan and Buber's modelling of self-other relations are possessed of a degree of theoretical equivalence. Like Lacan, the negative aspect of Buber's philosophy, which he refers to as *I-It*, considers the separation between subjectivities. Under the *I-It* condition, Buber's *I-Thou* model of reciprocal mutuality gives way to a tendency towards objectification or alienation in self-other relations. The self no longer participates within the world but experiences it; the individual constructs a protective psychological barrier to guard itself against the objectifying gaze of the other.⁵⁴ For Buber, positive self-other reciprocity is transitory and exists in a position of permanent flux, but equilibrium between two consciousnesses remains achievable through the process of movement from an *I-It* position to *I-Thou*:

Consider man with man, and you see human life, dynamic, twofold, the giver and the receiver, he who does and he who ensures, the attacking force and the defending force, the nature which investigates and the nature which supplies information, the request begged and granted – and always

⁵⁴ Marks, p. 35.

both together, completing one another in mutual contribution, showing forth man.⁵⁵

Lacan presents a more pessimistic picture of selfhood, focusing on the unconscious alongside the linguistic structures governing subjectivity to propose that the subject is continually denied a reconciliation of its identity with that of the other. According to Lacan, ‘the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition’,⁵⁶ a predicament elucidated by Steintrager:

Lacan’s subject thus comes into being as the subject of language – subjected to language – and then only as a split subject – finding the direction of its desire only in language and yet separated even further from language by the original and now repressed quest for unity.⁵⁷

Otherness is inscribed on the subject’s identity from birth; post-infancy, our fleeting imagined unity rapidly cedes to a pre-existing linguistic structure, the Symbolic order, which governs nature, society and culture: ‘language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it’.⁵⁸ Our desire to return to what Lacan terms ‘the Real’ is thwarted by this ‘extrinsic and alien’ system of signification which underpins the Symbolic (defined by difference, disjunction and

⁵⁵ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*. trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith. (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), p. 205 (qtd in Marks, p. 32).

⁵⁶ Lacan, p. 172.

⁵⁷ Steintrager, p. 214.

⁵⁸ Lacan, p. 148.

displacement), and subsumes and subverts the Imaginary (defined by identity, resemblance, and unification).⁵⁹

Lacan's conception of otherness as determined by the Real is defined in his 1960 essay, 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious'.⁶⁰ The Real constitutes what Benvenuto and Kennedy aptly term the 'domain of the inexpressible'.⁶¹ Contra Buber and Bakhtin's philosophies of dialogism, Lacan's subject is unable to truly speak, for enunciation, identification and self-determination rest within this domain of otherness. In the Real, the mother figure is the absolute embodiment of the unattainable and unknowable Other-space which prefigures birth and signification: the space, according to Benvenuto and Kennedy, 'where the subject is born, not only as a biological entity, but as a subject with a human existence'.⁶² Lacanian psychoanalysis attempts to negotiate a rapprochement with the Real by slipping between a given subject and its subjective knowledge in those instances when its behaviour unconsciously channels the Real through confused thought and expression. These blips, glitches or slips in signification constitute '*La Linguisterie*': moments of '*méconnaissance*' (misunderstanding, or misrecognition) when the subject unknowingly speaks using the words of the

⁵⁹ Malcom Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Structuralism and Since*, ed. by Sturrock, pp. 116-53 (p. 133).

⁶⁰ Lacan's application of Saussurean linguistics to remodel Freudian psychoanalysis radically reshaped how the unconscious was perceived, while creating a unique branch of poststructuralist thought which carried significant implications for linguistics. The flexible quality of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and the alternative interpretations of Freud's work, will come under further consideration in Chapter five.

⁶¹ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 166.

⁶² Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 174.

absolute Other. Lacan's own writing, filled with 'puns, jokes, metaphors, ironies and contradictions', aspires towards the automatism of the unconscious:⁶³

The contents of the unconscious with all their disappointing ambiguities give us no reality in the subject more consistent than the immediate; their virtue derives from the truth and in the dimension of being.⁶⁴

'The unconscious' Lacan summarises, 'is the discourse of the Other'.⁶⁵ Discourse is conducted through the 'inter-said' (*inter-dit*) and 'intra-said' (*intra-dit*) between subjects: 'what comes out between the words...in speech, or between the lines, in the connections between words'.⁶⁶ While Lacan believes that this inter-subjective zone constitutes 'the very space in which the transparency of the classical subject is divided and passes through the effects of 'fading'', the discursive possibilities of this gap stimulate this poststructuralist thinking.⁶⁷ Much like Derrida's notion of '*différance*', it is this irretrievable and indefinable separation which points to the origin of subjectivity.

Reinforcing Foucault's identification of the anti-positivist relationship between subject and knowledge, Lacan's subject is created by a desire which remains unknown to him. Knowledge lies neither within nor without the subject, nor within the objects of the biological world. Human beings are separated from the biological world as speaking subjects. Self-other relations are determined by a

⁶³ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Lacan, p. 166.

⁶⁵ Lacan, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Lacan, p. 299.

‘signifying game’ between the ‘refusal of the signifier and a lack of being’.⁶⁸ This signifying game is fruitlessly pyrrhic: the subject comes to recognise its own lack in the lack of the Other. Consequently, the subject’s moment of self-recognition as being a ‘lacking object’ inculcates further objectification, alienation, narcissism and aggression:

The Other *cannot* be fulfilling and will never exhaust the subject’s appeal for being. The Other, who is supposedly giving the subject everything, is deceiving him, and this produces anguish in him.⁶⁹

Both subject and Other are absented from this empty centre – or centre without concreteness – resulting in the creation of what Lacan terms, ‘the barred Other’: the oppositional entity rejected by the subject as a ‘lacking object’.⁷⁰

Consequently, the absent body of the Other comes to represent nothing more than the body of a lost object, and language exists solely as the margin beyond life where the individual is ‘only represented’ in the most limited sense:⁷¹

Desire takes shape in the margin in which demand is torn apart from need: this margin being that which is opened up by demand, the appeal of which can be unconditional only in regard to the other, under the form of a

⁶⁸ Lacan, p. 166.

⁶⁹ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 175.

⁷⁰ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 176.

⁷¹ Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 171.

possible defect, which need may introduce to it, of having no universal satisfaction.⁷²

Fundamental to Lacan's notion of the 'lacking' subject is the concept of the 'mirror stage'. This refers to an '*identification*' by the subject in infancy of an assumed 'image' of unitary, embodied selfhood in the reflection of a mirror; a total form ('*Gestalt*') or '*exteriority*' which 'symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienation':⁷³

This form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only re-join the coming into being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical synthesis with his own reality.⁷⁴

This imagined ideal ego, according to Malcom Bowie, constitutes a 'surrogacy', or otherness, for the 'lack (*manqué*), absence and incompleteness in human living':⁷⁵ what Lacan records as the psychological reconstruction of a 'fragmented body-image...to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity'.⁷⁶ The subject, in other words, can only recognise their own identity as an object, or

⁷² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil), p. 311 (qtd in Benvenuto and Kennedy, p. 174).

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (London; Tavistock Publications, 1971), p. 2.

⁷⁴ Lacan, p. 2. There is an interesting distinction here between the unconscious structures of selfhood outlined by Lacan, and the core and extended consciousness of Damasio's autobiographical self.

⁷⁵ Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Structuralism and Since*, ed. by Sturrock, p. 122.

⁷⁶ Lacan, p. 2.

projection, not only to the other, but to themselves.⁷⁷ As Marks succinctly asserts, ‘in its focus on the child’s wish to fill the hole of perception gaping in its own visual field, Lacan’s theory stresses intersubjective identification as the motor of the imaginary register’.⁷⁸ Moreover, from birth the subject’s existence is bound up and implicated in the reaffirmation of a signifying structure (Symbolic order) which positions objectification, alienation, narcissism and aggression as the psychological cornerstones of self-identification. Escaping the mirror stage prompts what Paul Jahshan paraphrases as a ‘*mis en abyme*’ of spatial significations,⁷⁹ which can only be closed when the subject comes to identify with the other in the form of a ‘dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations’.⁸⁰

Auster and Hustvedt’s appropriation of Lacanian poststructuralism can be perceived in their discursive approach to their narrativisation of negative, or intrusively objectifying, self-other relations. Auster’s pronouncements on the mirror stage theory, coupled with Hustvedt’s interest in other philosophical approaches and disciplines, highlight that Lacanian poststructuralism constitutes but a minor element of Hustvedt and Auster’s respective aesthetic mode of production. The collapsing narratives of *The New York Trilogy* and the lacking

⁷⁷ Lacan, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Marks, p. 62. In Hustvedt’s novel *What I Loved*, Leo Hertzberg similarly identifies selfhood as a ‘hole in perception’ (see Chapter four).

⁷⁹ ‘The mirrors facing each other can only produce a *mise en abyme*, a virtual kaleidoscoping of signification, where no substantial signified can be pinpointed’ (Paul Jahshan, ‘Paul Auster’s Spectres’, *Journal of American Studies* [37: 3, 2003], 389-405 [p. 400]).

⁸⁰ Lacan, p. 5.

objects of *The Blindfold* (as discussed in the last chapter) are indebted to Lacanian theory. As we shall see, other novels seek to explore the ‘tension between mutuality and objectification’ embodied by the different theoretical approaches of Buber, Bakhtin and Lacan.⁸¹

⁸¹ Marks, p. 35.

Narrativising self and other

Hustvedt and Auster's early novels appear to pursue the discursive relationship between self and other through their deployment of Buberian, Bakhtinian and Lacanian approaches to discourse. Dimovitz delineates the de-compositional ontology of Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, observing that 'three major ontological dimensions operate, each of which is offered as the origin of the others at one point of another: consciousness, subjectivity for itself, and subjectivity for others. Auster constantly works the boundaries between these aspects'.⁸² As discussed above, Marks traces Hustvedt's investigation of self-other dialectics back to Hegel's identification of self-consciousness.⁸³ This part of the chapter will seek to identify moments of apparent engagement with Bakhtin and Lacan's ideas in Auster's *Moon Palace* (1989) and Hustvedt's *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (1993). In so doing, I hope to show how the oscillation between social and psychical otherness operates as a structuring framework to plot, characterisation and dialogue within their narratives. This critical approach will reveal the ways in which both writers have moved their fiction beyond the confines of the postmodern paradigm towards a new discursive mode, and will anticipate the next chapter on phenomenology and intersubjectivity (see Chapter four). I will contend that these representations gesture towards a co-productive approach to their fiction which draws upon mutual recognition, emotional

⁸² Dimovitz, p. 626.

⁸³ Marks, p. 22.

dependence and critical receptivity to poststructuralism and dialogism, alongside other theoretical paradigms.

1. Objectification and affirmation

Marks believes that ‘defiance of the Cartesian self lies at the centre of Hustvedt’s writing project, as she consistently discloses the self’s relatedness to the world and others’.⁸⁴ This ‘negotiation of relational identity and the boundaries of the self’ Marks illustrates is equally evident in Auster’s early fiction.⁸⁵ The narrative of *Moon Palace* (1989), Auster’s third novel, demonstrates his critical interpretation of the problematic self and other dialectic. A deconstruction of the *bildungsroman* set in the late 1960s, Auster’s novel loosely centres on the early life of Marco Stanley Fogg, a ‘bookish man, an intellectual’, an orphan, and a socially isolated subject whose quest for self-knowledge ironically recalls Charles Dickens’ novels *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*.⁸⁶ The narrative offers an extended meditation on ‘the follies of adolescence’, memory and melancholia: in an interview of 1989, Auster explains that Fogg is ‘telling the story of youth from the distance of middle age’; a first person narrative initially, the novel, according to Auster, ‘veers off into the third person. There are long passages in that book

⁸⁴ Marks, p. 6.

⁸⁵ Marks, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Paul Auster, *Moon Palace* (London: Faber, 1989), p. 282. Hereafter referred to as *Palace* with page numbers cited in the text. *Moon Palace* also includes references to *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*. Auster returns to the psychic territory of this period for the novel *4321*.

where Fogg literally disappears'.⁸⁷ As it unfolds, Auster's narrative engages in a dialogical exploration of the Lacanian unconscious in relation to Buberian and Bakhtinian dialogism, with the travails of the Fogg persona metonymically representing the subject in search of the other.⁸⁸

Evidence of these theories take their metaphorical cue from Fogg's orphan status and precarious existence, which, much like Dickens' hero Pip, propel him into a series of encounters which trigger the process of self-recognition. Fogg's point of origin is questionable: his mother – before her violent death in an automobile accident – tells him his father is dead, and is prone to dissociative bouts of melancholia:

She was capable of telling jokes that sent me into fits of raucous giggling...More often than not she was dreamy, given to mild sulks, and there were times when I felt a true sadness from her, a sense that she was battling against some vast and internal disarray. (*Palace* 4)

Her death, and the enduring absence – described as a 'blank', or lack – of his father catalyses Fogg's search for self-recognition in the eyes of the Other. Fogg's very name further gestures to a sense of psychic confinement within the Symbolic order: the metonymic quality of the word 'fog' implies insubstantiality and indefinability, an identity shrouded and imperceptible. Fogg's Uncle Victor concocts an 'elaborate, nonsensical' theory about his nephew's name:

⁸⁷ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, pp. 565-66.

⁸⁸ Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Structuralism and Since*, ed. by Sturrock, p. 143.

Marco naturally enough was for Marco Polo, the first European to visit China; Stanley was for the American journalist who had tracked down Dr Livingstone ‘in the heart of darkest Africa’; and Fogg was for Phileas, the man who had stormed around the globe in less than three months. It didn’t matter that my mother had chosen Marco simply because she liked it, or that Stanley had been my grandfather’s name, or that Fogg was a misnomer, the whim of some half-literate American functionary [as a substitution for ‘Fogelman’]. (*Palace* 6)

Fogg’s physical and psychological existence seems to be perpetually under threat from the forces of friction, oscillation and centrifugality that impede and interrupt what is presumed to be a linear process of self-development. However, much like Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, otherness is shown to be multiple and encircling, rooted in the social. The individuals Fogg encounters during the course of the narrative trigger a process of mirroring and mixing, where the boundaries of his identity are blurred or reaffirmed. According to Kanae Uchiyama, Fogg’s narrative is determined by ‘an inescapable and ethical response to the other’,⁸⁹ and his early life under the care of his clarinetist Uncle Victor proves to be defining. According to Fogg, ‘Uncle Victor found meanings where no one else would have

⁸⁹ Kanae Uchiyama, ‘The Death of the Other: A Levinasian Reading of Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*’, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* (54:1, 2008), 115-139 (p. 129). Uchiyama’s application of Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of alterity to Auster’s novel views Fogg’s narrative as a form of ‘ethical pursuit’ of the other (p. 129). Brevity prevents a detailed comparison of Levinasian alterity with Buberian mutuality here; suffice to say Buber and Levinas were friends and associates, and their relationship can be construed as implicitly dialogical, despite their differences. See Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco and Maurice S Friedman, *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference* (Dusquesne: Dusquesne University Press, 2004).

found them', (*Palace* 6) and these meanings are often expressed dialogically. Uncle Victor attempts to restore Fogg's sense of self-identity by first grounding his destiny within that of American history, then latterly by donating his possessions to him. Prior to his death, in anticipation of a tour with his band The Moon Men, Uncle Victor presciently transfers his possessions to Fogg: 'the books, the chess set, the autographs, the miscellaneous, the suit'. (*Palace* 13) Uncle Victor's identity literally becomes embedded within that of Fogg, reconfiguring his interior terrain and physical appearance. After Uncle Victor's disappearance from the narrative, Fogg's wearing of his suit enables him 'to stay in spiritual contact' with him; (*Palace* 14) after Uncle Victor dies, the suit gradually disintegrates, until it becomes impossible to wear. His sudden death severs Fogg from the Imaginary order: 'He was my only relative, my one link to something larger than myself. Without him, I felt bereft, utterly scorched by fate... At that point, my life began to change, I began to vanish into another world'. (*Palace* 2-3) Fogg's initial impulse is one of negation and total self-objectification:

With all the fervour and idealism of a young man who had thought too much and read too many books, I decided that the thing I should do was nothing: my action would consist of a militant refusal to do anything at all. This was nihilism raised to the level of an aesthetic proposition. I would turn my life into a work of art. (*Palace* 20)

This passive-aggressive frustration of desire, with its 'exquisite' paradox of making an artwork of his identity-less invisibility and isolation, proves fruitless: it is only through the ethical and empathic embrace of otherness that Fogg is able to

regain his subjective identity. Fogg attempts to initiate this process by reading the books his uncle left for him: 'That was how I chose to mourn Uncle Victor...Each time I opened a box, I was able to enter another segment of my uncle's life'.

(*Palace* 21) By entering the shared psychic space of his uncle's mind through his library, Fogg is initially able to retain spiritual contact with his nurturing otherness even after his death. However, his drive for self-actualisation is both frustrated and exacerbated by his lack of fiscal security. Faced with a financial impoverishment to match his growing social isolation and psychological disintegration, Fogg's sale of his uncle's books metaphorically gestures to the developing instability of his psyche and his near-total subjugation into the Symbolic order:

My life had become a gathering zero, and it was a thing I could actually see: a palpable, burgeoning emptiness. Each time I ventured into my uncle's past, it produced a physical result, an effect in the real world...I was both perpetrator and witness, both actor and audience in a theatre of one. I could follow the progress of my own dismemberment. Piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear. (*Palace* 24)

Fogg's relationship with Uncle Victor can be partially read as Austerian critique of Lacanian thought, one where the inconsistencies and contradictory nature of Fogg's behaviour reflect the author's interpretation of the mirror stage and the hero's thwarted desire to return to the Other. After Uncle Victor's permanent departure, Fogg's life is eventually saved by the nurturing otherness of his friend David Zimmer and lover Kitty Wu. Again, the names Auster deploys are metonymically important: Zimmer, the German word for 'room', also

connotes a medical walking frame for the elderly, infirm or physically disabled; while Kitty's surname, Wu, connotes Oriental otherness and shamanism. Fogg says of Zimmer, 'he literally kept me on my feet', (*Palace* 74) while Kitty is referred to as his 'twin sister', who at the first meeting feeds him and reintegrates him into society: 'Kitty came to the rescue, gesturing for me to sit between her and the person on her right. I promptly wedged myself to the spot, planting one buttock on each chair'. (*Palace* 35) Their appearance in the narrative offers a moment of restorative possibility; yet despite their interventions Fogg continues his descent into the unconscious Real, triggering an ontological and epistemological disordering to the point of self-abasement. Both Zimmer and Kitty Wu vanish into the texture of the narrative: Kitty Wu temporarily, Zimmer permanently when Fogg begins his life in the service of Thomas Effing.⁹⁰

Thomas Effing's arrival in the narrative is no less fundamental or transformative than the departure of Uncle Victor, which effectively facilitates a transferral of responsibility for Fogg from his uncle to Effing. The assumed name of a former artist called Julian Barber ('A sissy name...I've always detested it') Effing is a mentally sharp, physically withered and apparently blind invalid ('the frailest person I had ever seen') who recruits Fogg as his assistant and

⁹⁰ A chance encounter with Zimmer later in the narrative prompts this observation from Fogg: 'The important thing, quite simply, was that I had seen him' (*Palace* 103). A transgressive character from Auster's earlier novel, *In the Country of Last Things*, Zimmer reappears as the protagonist of Auster's *The Book of Illusions* and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006). Like Fogg, Zimmer has a cameo in Auster's recent novel *4321*.

amanuensis.⁹¹ (*Palace* 96) Effing is barely a man: a specular subject surrounded by a world of things: ‘All bones and trembling flesh, he sat in his wheelchair covered in plaid blankets, his body slumped to one side like some miniscule broken bird’. (*Palace* 96) His physical ‘lack’ is both countered and reinforced by the ‘dense, Victorian clutter’ and ‘plenitude of objects’ in his ‘enormous West Side’ apartment. (*Palace* 96) Fogg’s response to Effing’s behaviour is one of objectification, with the old man’s caustic interrogation (‘Emmett Fogg...what kind of a sissy name is that?’) compelling Fogg to confront the ‘lacking’ centre of his self-identity: ‘My name and I have been through a lot together, and I’ve grown rather fond of it over the years’. (*Palace* 98) Effing’s psychological constituency is as slippery and indefinable as a Lacanian signifier: despite his apparent physical weakness, his enigmatic possession of an antagonistic and narcissistic persona challenges and reaffirms Fogg’s commitment to self-identification:

He was no longer a comatose semi-corpse lost in a twilight reverie; he had become all sinew and attention, a seething little mass of resurrected strength. As I eventually learned, this was the real Effing, if real is a word that can be used in talking about him. So much of his character was built on falsehood and deception, it was nearly impossible to know when he was

⁹¹ There is a degree of mixing between Effing’s identity and that of Mr. Morning in Hustvedt’s *The Blindfold*, from Effing’s method of recruitment to his demand that Fogg describes everything he sees down to the finest detail on their daytime perambulations. Effing’s persona also recalls Hamm from Samuel Beckett’s 1957 play *Endgame*, with Fogg in the role of Clov, his servant. According to Sandra Raponi, *Endgame* can also be read through the prism of psychoanalytic theory (See Sandra Raponi, ‘Meaning and Melancholia in Beckett’s *Endgame*’, *Journal of Social and Political Thought* [1:4, 2003], 1-22)

<<http://www.yorku.ca/jspot/4/beckett.html>> [Accessed 05 September 2003]).

telling the truth. He loved to trick the world with his sudden experiments and inspirations, and of all the stunts he pulled, the one he liked best was playing dead. (*Palace* 98)

Effing, like Fogg, is brought to life – both within the texture of the novel and via Auster’s Bakhtinian authorship – by discourse. In Fogg’s case, it is only through the process of self-other dialogue that he begins to recognise an empathic need in Effing, his spectral, oppositional Other-figure; alternately, Effing enters the objectifying gaze of Fogg by inviting him to give an empirical explanation for his blindness and paralysis. This process of observation and explication leads Fogg to observe that ‘such a man is more dependent on others than he would like to be’. (*Palace* 100) The complex and contradictory nature of Effing’s identity eludes Fogg under the pre-existing system of signification. It is only through dialogue – through observation, reception and enunciation – that Fogg and Effing develop some level of mutual understanding of their shared inconsistency and dependency, leading Fogg to observe:

Effing was a difficult case, but it would be wrong to define him in terms of difficulty alone... The old man was too elusive for that. If he was difficult, it was largely because he was not difficult all the time, and for that reason he managed to keep one in a constant state of disequilibrium. Entire days would go by when nothing but bitterness and sarcasm poured from his mouth, but just when I was persuaded there was not a particle of kindness or human sympathy left in him, he would come out with a remark of such devastating compassion, a phrase that revealed such a deep understanding

and knowledge of others, that I would be forced to admit I had misjudged him. (*Palace* 113)

In an inverted echo of Fogg's relationship with his Uncle Victor, Effing insists that Fogg read to him from his extensive library of books, in a process recalling Uncle Victor's earlier reading to Fogg, and his nephew's subsequent sale of those books to stay alive. It is as if they have been phantasmagorically transferred into the possession of Effing, Fogg recalls:

These reading sessions were probably when I felt in greatest harmony with him [...] There were times when I became so engrossed in what I was reading that I hardly knew where I was anymore, that I felt I was no longer sitting in my own skin. (*Palace* 108)

Auster encourages us to imaginatively render Effing's body, hear his dialogic voice and interpret his actions through the inscribed otherness of Fogg's first person narration. Later in the narrative, Effing decides that Fogg will write his obituary, initiating a major shift – what Auster refers to as Fogg's disappearance – in the narrative with a dialogic switch from Fogg's narration to that of Effing. Comprised of twenty pages of near-continual narrative. Effing's story describes his life as the artist Julian Barber, the collapse of his marriage, his voyage into the American wilderness and entombment in a cave, and the son – the historian Solomon Barber – he abandoned. For Fogg, this amanuensis identity constitutes a further development in the process of frustrated self-recognition: transcribing and editing what he terms 'Effing's story as told by himself' is a process as interpretative and relational as it is deterministic:

It was a tricky and difficult process, I learned, and in many instances I had to reconstruct passages almost entirely in order to remain faithful to their original meaning. I didn't know what use Effing was intending to make of this autobiography...he pushed me hard on the revisions, scolding and shouting whenever I read him a sentence he did not like...it was a draining experience for us (two stubborn souls locked in mortal combat). (*Palace* 187)

Relationality is the principle guiding precept to the narrative of *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, 'an uncanny mystery embedded in town folklore', which 'interrogates identity, representation in art, the voyeuristic look, the meaning of language and life in a community'.⁹² Hustvedt's second novel, like her debut, draws upon the negative aspects of Lacanian theory and mirror stage relationality; like Auster's *Moon Palace*, it grounds this within a more positivistic framework of self-other discourse. Recalling Marco Stanley Fogg, Lily Dahl's name is heavy with metonymic intent: the word 'Lily' conjuring personal and natural growth, aesthetic beauty and vulnerability; while the Norwegian patronym 'Dahl' phonetically connotes 'doll', a noun suggestive of imaginative play, uncanniness and the substitutive otherness of objects. Marks believes that identity formation in Hustvedt's novel is determined by the 'dynamics of looking and being looked at, between the identity endangering powers of the other's look, and its simultaneously invigorating effects'.⁹³ This reading complements and

⁹² Siri Hustvedt, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (London: Sceptre, 1996), pp. 11-12. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Dahl* with page number cited.

⁹³ Marks, p. 98.

complicates Hustvedt's earlier problematization of the dynamics of looking in *The Blindfold*, in which Alise Jameson's exploration of power, play and desire stresses the masochistic, misogynistic and monopolising domination of the male gaze (see Chapter one). In *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, according to Marks, this voyeurism is not dominating but pleasurable, and engenders a *jouissance* of looking and being looked at:

This analysis of the voyeuristic setting resonates with the Lacanian panorama of the mirror stage: the voyeur acts as a mirror in which the self feels reflected in its totality, which can be disinhibiting and stimulating in its suggestion of power; yet at the same time, the dependence of the voyeur leads to a loss of self-determination.⁹⁴

In Hustvedt's novel, Lily's relationship with three men can be read through the self-other relationality Marks identifies: Hank Farmer, her soon-to-be-former fiancé and local police officer; Ed Shapiro, a mysterious artist whose room at the seedy Stuart Hotel looks into Lily's apartment; and Martin Petersen, a stammer-sufferer and regular diner at the Ideal Café where she works as a waitress. Hank's relationship with Lily, supposedly close, is defined by a distancing and binary positioning: his long nights at the police station; his chaste, chivalrous affection ('he gave Lily a quick kiss on the cheek'); and his physical flaws which imply a deeper, more irresolvable imperfection and incompatibility ('he was so close she could see the faint scars of adolescent acne'). (*Dahl* 22-23) Hank's otherness stimulates and is stimulated by Lily's voyeuristic gaze, and by

⁹⁴ Marks, p. 100.

her own objectifying subjectivity: ‘Hank nodded and kissed her again. She watched him bound out the door and across the street. He moved beautifully, and she thought to herself that he looked better from a distance’. (*Dahl* 23) Hank and Lily’s relationship breaks down in the first chapter of Hustvedt’s novel: what Lily believes to be a liberating moment of self-identification serves to fix her within the Lacanian panorama of self-other relations Marks describes. In one particular scene, Hustvedt offers the reader this mimetic yet metonymic rendering of the psychically invasive, aggressive other, where the boundaries between subject and other are transgressed:

He clutched her upper arms to hold her up. If he let go, she knew she would fall. I don’t care, she thought again, and she looked up at him with a dead expression...I’m bad, she said to herself, and with that thought she smiled. Before she knew what she was doing, she was smiling like an idiot into Hank’s enraged face. He started to shake her. Lily’s head flew backward, then whipped it forward again. She lost her footing and stumbled forward into Hank, who continued to shake her. His fury amazed Lily, and she heard herself cry out in surprise. (*Dahl* 44)

Lily’s ambivalent, possibly sexual response to Hank’s violent otherness is transposed into an erotically-charged exchange with the artist Edward Shapiro. Lily’s striptease for Shapiro – on the evening before she breaks her engagement to Hank – deploys a discursive visual language which precedes their first face-to-face encounter. Lily’s presentation of herself to Shapiro as a silhouetted nude plays with the Lacanian conception of the ‘lacking’ individual, while concurrently recalling her earlier narcissistic observation:

I'm bad, she thought, and at that moment she knew what she was going to do. Lily turned on every light in her apartment and yanked open her window so violently that she saw Shapiro turn his head and look at her. Good, she thought, good. (*Dahl* 44)

Shapiro's face, like that of Lily's, is 'hidden in shadow'; (*Dahl* 38) his objectifying gaze confirms his desire for the erotic otherness of her projected identity:

This is wonderful she said to herself, and unbuttoned her cutoff jeans. She turned to one side and wriggled out of the tight shorts. She could feel the stiff material slide down her buttocks, and that sensation, along with the fact that he was looking at her, prompted an image of herself as someone else. (*Dahl* 38)

Lily's pleasure also comes from the 'borrowed gestures': a pre-existing visual language of the striptease that has been lodged in her unconscious, the realm of the other. The scene closes with a final moment of intersubjective exchange, with Shapiro playing a burst of Mozart's Don Giovanni which recalls the social discourse of Bakhtin in, firstly, its mutually reflexive exchange, but also in its polyglot nature:

That was when Lily heard the music. A man started singing in a language Lily didn't know, and after a short time a woman answered him. Edward Shapiro came back to the window, and Lily looked at him...Listening to

the voices of those two people, she imagined that the real adventure of her life was beginning now.⁹⁵ (*Dahl* 40)

Like Fogg with Effing in *Moon Palace*, Lily's subsequent erotic relationship with Shapiro is critical to this ongoing process of self-realisation. By contrast, Hustvedt presents Martin Peterson's relationship with Lily in a more psychologically unsettling way, aligning him with Hank as someone who moves from being intimate and nurturing to an elusive and intrusive other. A regular at the Ideal Café, Martin 'always studied her calmly and deliberately as if it was his job to look at her', but his eyes 'made her a little uncomfortable'. (*Dahl* 8) Nevertheless, Lily professes herself 'oddly drawn to him' as a mysterious individual who was rumoured to have been 'born both', and whose otherness is as intriguing as it is unsettling:

The secret of Martin wasn't his body, but it wasn't his mind. He gave off something peculiar – an air of hidden knowledge or intuition that sometimes made Lily feel he was looking at her from a great distance even though he was only inches away. (*Dahl* 9)

Many of Lily's relationships are defined by some form of distancing, a tension between openness, intimacy and alienation which encircles Hustvedt's protagonist and those she comes into contact with. Unique to Martin's identity is his ability to differentiate between the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, which has inexorably tragic consequences: 'It's like there's a skin over everything, and if

⁹⁵ 'I wanted to live dangerously, to push myself as far as I could go...I remember those days well, I remember them as the beginning of my life' (*Palace* 3).

you could just get under it, you'd, you'd get to what was real, but you never can, so you've got to look for a way to cut through it. You see?' (*Dahl* 64) Suffering from a speech impediment so debilitating it compels him to keep his counsel in social situations, at the Ideal Café Martin communicates with Lily through a series of taps to his table:

Martin always wanted the same breakfast – poached eggs on toast – but unlike Lily's other customers, he had never been happy in silence...He wanted an exchange, so instead of Martin stammering out an order and getting flustered, he tapped out a little rhythm on the tabletop with his fingers, rat-tat-a-tat-tat, and Lily answered him with two, tat-tat...No-one else was in on it. The beats were a language all of their own.⁹⁶ (*Dahl* 10)

These exchanges between Martin and Lily exemplify Bowie's observation that Lacanian linguistics reflect the subject's displacement of desire,⁹⁷ while intimating empathic otherness underpinning Bakhtinian dialogism. Martin's stammer can be read in several ways: a moment of *méconnaissance* where the Real slips into the Symbolic order, a polyphonic utterance in the Bakhtinian mode, or a symptom of some unspoken trauma which stimulates an empathic response. Later, Martin asks Lily to say the word 'mouth' because 'the two come

⁹⁶ Hustvedt's oblique reference to 'poached eggs on toast' can be construed as a metaphorical nod to Lacan's 'Hommelette', and finds its symbiotic other in Auster's deconstructive depiction of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty in the first part of *The New York Trilogy*, *City of Glass*. (Auster's fictional alter ego also serves Quinn an omelette during their first encounter in his apartment.) In *Moon Palace*, the obese son of Thomas Effing, Solomon Barber, can be conceived of as another Humpty Dumpty.

⁹⁷ Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Structuralism and Since*, ed. by Sturrock, p. 148.

together perfectly, the word and what it means', a further indication of Hustvedt's critical engagement with structuralist and poststructuralist theory in this particular text.

In *Moon Palace* and *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, Auster and Hustvedt present a subtle and complex interrogation of self-other discourse through the prismatic first-person narration of their protagonists. Through their frequently-thwarted quests for concrete selfhood, Marco and Lily's encounters with other characters foreground this discursive exchange between Lacanian and Bakhtinian discourse within the shifting modalities of these richly allusive texts. How Auster and Hustvedt further problematize the idea of self-subjectivity by presenting multiple selves in their narratives will come under consideration in the next section.

2. Multiple selves and mixing

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin states 'language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's'.⁹⁸ Bakhtin describes this as multicheredness, where, according to Marks, 'no individual voice shall be muted or suffocated by a dominating, deafening and monologic discourse'.⁹⁹ Auster and Hustvedt's writing is populated with multiple selves who share constituent elements of their identity,

⁹⁸ Bakhtin, p. 294.

⁹⁹ Marks, p. 37.

reflected by a commitment to mutually-reflexive recognition. This sharing of identity is metonymically rendered in physical-psychical terms, thereby delineating the reconfigured ontologies of Lacan's alienating mirror stage and the empathic response to otherness implicit in Bakhtinian heteroglossia.

Early in the narrative of *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, when her older neighbour Mabel joins Lily one morning, we see Hustvedt's narrativised exploration of the tension between other-objectivisation and multiple-selfhood:

Lily stared at their faces in the mirror and at Marilyn's between them,¹⁰⁰ and she thought that the three of them felt strange together... There was something too perfect about the way the three of them were framed together in the mirror, and it bothered Lily. It created an annoying stillness that made her think suddenly of things that were alive and things that were dead, and she shrugged her shoulders to release herself from Mabel's touch. (*Dahl* 6)

Much like the male individuals delineated above, her relationship with Mabel constitutes one self-other relationship in a socially-structured panorama of otherness. Mabel is helping Lily to learn her lines in the role of Hermia for a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play the older woman admires because, in her words, 'I've always liked the idea of changelings... the older I get, the more certain I am that you can't know who's who or what's what'. (*Dahl* 34)

Both women read Hermia's lines: Mabel's knowledge of the play enables her to recite it from memory; further, it changes her voice: 'She didn't sound young

¹⁰⁰ Lily has pinned to her wall a poster of Marilyn Monroe, the American actor, sex symbol and cultural icon.

exactly, but she didn't sound like herself either, and Lily could almost feel the presence of a third person in the room.' (*Dahl* 35) When Lily comes to read the lines, she has the revelatory experience of speaking with Mabel's voice:

Until then, Hermia's voice had been as remote to Lily as a song in another language she could memorize but not understand. But that afternoon, she discovered that by watching Mabel closely, by adopting her tone and posture, she felt more when she spoke the lines. In fact, it seemed to Lily that the emotion came from Mabel's voice and gestures rather than from inside herself, and this made her a little uneasy. Mabel barked orders at Lily, corrected and scolded, and then, all at once, Lily discovered what she was saying. She meant it as much as she meant anything.¹⁰¹ (*Dahl* 36)

Reciting her lines, the boundaries of Lily's identity are almost completely macerated, and in multiple directions: under Hustvedt's absent narration, acting as Mabel, speaking as Hermia, speaking words written by a male Elizabethan playwright, William Shakespeare. It emphasises Lily's identity as a heroine-actor,

¹⁰¹ Conscious or not, this particular scene seems to revisit the scene in *Moon Palace* where Fogg reads back to Effing the typescript of his spoken autobiography, particularly Auster and Hustvedt's sharing of the noun 'scolding' in an eerily similar context. A metalinguistic link, or temporal-spatial wormhole, between the two novels, the coincidence is reinforced by Lily's reference to Mabel's birdlike 'sharp little bones': 'She's just a stick, Lily thought, no flesh at all'. That the etymology of 'scold' is Old Norse – derived from 'skald' – is, perhaps, doubly ironic, and a hermeneutic counter on Hustvedt's part to poststructuralism's preoccupation with the differential and slippery constituency of language. Another indication of how Auster and Hustvedt speak to each other – and reader – through their fiction.

of being in control and out of control of events in the narrative, and of having masculine and feminine otherness intruding upon and nurturing her identity.

Unlike their uncomfortable encounter under the illusory gaze of Marilyn Monroe, here Lily willingly submits to the other-determination of Mabel as a prototypical surrogate mother. However, it is another absent mother that dominates the narrative of *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*: the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Bodler, a local farmer's wife, and the subsequent disinterment of her corpse, casts a spectral shadow over Hustvedt's novel. Discovered by her male twin years after her disappearance, Helen Bodler's body is described as being 'frozen in a position of panic, a position that showed she had tried to claw her way out of the grave'. (*Dahl* 16) Later, Lily cycles towards the Bodler's farm, where she finds a suitcase filled 'with neatly packed clothes, as if someone had planned a trip, never taken it and then forgotten about the suitcase altogether. The clothes inside had belonged to one woman'. (*Dahl* 29) Finding a pair of white shoes, she tries them on: 'When her fingers touched the laces, she was struck by the thought that these were Helen Bodler's shoes...With a shiver of excitement, Lily removed the shoes and in that same instant decided to take them'. (*Dahl* 30-31) By keeping the shoes, she not only makes an empathic gesture towards the tragic otherness of Helen Bodler, but it blurs her ontologically with the dead woman, a conscious gesture following her unconscious decision to journey there. Lily's discovery of the suitcase, and her effective theft of the shoes, stimulates a supernatural otherness within Hustvedt's narrative which prefigures a later scene where Martin suggests he once shut Lily in a refrigerator as a child, whereupon she died.

In *Moon Palace*, Auster's treatment of multiple selfhood finds a natural home in his exploration of father and son relationality. Uchiyama concurs, noting that the novel 'pursues the intersection of subjectivity and time through the father-son relationship'.¹⁰² Fogg's singular identity is further subjected to psychic and emotional disordering via the triangulated ontology of his personal connection to Effing and Solomon Barber. This forms a genealogical *mise en abyme* of objectification, where the temporal-spatial definition of Fogg's identity unexpectedly collapses into and cascades through that of his long-lost grandfather and father. Effing and Barber are presented as physical polar opposites, with Effing's frailty indirectly contrasted with the gargantuan proportions of his son, Barber. Where Effing is 'all bones and trembling flesh', Barber is described as a 'pandemonium of flesh upon flesh':

The word 'big' hardly did justice to him...He was one of those monstrous fat men you sometimes pass in a crowd: no matter how hard you struggle to avert your eyes, you can't help gawking at him. He was titanic in his obesity, a person of such bulging, protrusive roundness that you could not look at him without feeling yourself shrink. It was as though his three-dimensionality was more pronounced than that of other men. Not only did he occupy more space than they did, but he seemed to overflow it, to ooze out from the edges of himself and inhabit areas where he was not. (*Palace* 110-11)

¹⁰² Uchiyama, p. 125.

Fogg even calls into question Barber's legitimacy, claiming: 'It was not possible that the spare and diminutive Effing had produced such a son: he was a genetic mishap, a renegade seed that had run wild, blossoming beyond all measure'. (*Palace* 111) This questioning of Barber's ancestry is a disavowal of what Uchiyama terms 'the enigma of his [Fogg's] own origin', a subversion of Lacanian narcissism into a negation of the intrusive Other, which subsequently ruptures the self-other dialectic in a transgressive explosion of violent aggression.¹⁰³

Near the close of the narrative, Fogg and Barber visit the grave of the former's mother and uncle. Auster's metaphorical rendering of the subject's attempt to return to the Other triggers a further psychic decentering of Fogg's identity:

I suddenly found myself fighting back tears. I had not been expecting such a violent response, but once it hit me that the two of them were actually lying there under my feet, I couldn't stop myself from shaking...I can't see more than a blur, a few isolated gestures in the fog of recollection. (*Palace* 282-83)

Barber's revelation of his love for Fogg's dead mother prompts a furious reaction in Fogg, who likens the sensation to 'anger, a demonic surge of nausea and disgust'. (*Palace* 283-84) The Symbolic order reconfigures itself around Fogg's powerlessness: his shifting identity once more in the objective influence of an unstable signifying system of boundless unknowability: 'Barber had loved my

¹⁰³ Uchiyama, p. 127.

mother. From this single, incontestable fact, everything else began to move, to totter, to fall apart – the whole world began to rearrange itself before my eyes’. (*Palace* 283) In an allegorical gesture towards Lacan’s recasting of Freud’s Oedipus complex, at the point of reunification Fogg disavows his ancestry and chases his father towards an empty grave, whereupon Solomon falls and breaks his back: ‘He began to lose his balance...He must have stumbled...It all happened so fast...’ (*Palace* 284) Fogg’s remembrance, as he himself admits, is hazy. Solomon Barber finds himself, like his own father, Thomas Effing, physically disabled – unconsciously and consciously, physically and emotionally – through the actions of *his* other, Fogg; while he lies in hospital, Barber appears to float free of the objectifying system of signification into the empathic gaze of Fogg: ‘Girdled in a huge plaster cast that was suspended from pulleys, Barber hovered in midair as though defying the laws of physics’. (*Palace* 285) As Fogg’s father loses weight, his curious observation of his father, exhibiting the signs of ‘a secret self that had been locked inside him for years’ resolves into the perception of a developing resemblance to Effing, something grounded in the latter’s patriarchal possession:

I looked at him and saw something familiar, and before I could identify the thing I had seen, it was gone. Two days later, something similar occurred, but this time it lasted long enough for me to sense that the area of recognition was located somewhere around Barber’s eyes, perhaps even in the eyes themselves. I wondered if I hadn’t noticed a family resemblance with Effing, if something about the way Barber glanced at me just then had not reminded me of his father. Whatever it was, this brief moment was

disturbing, and I was unable to shake free of it for the rest of the day.

(*Palace* 287-8)

As Barber's ontology moves closer to that of Effing, so Fogg's becomes realigned within the patriarchal chain, the genealogical *mise en abyme*:

All of a sudden I realised I was looking at myself. Barber had the same eyes I did... We looked like each other, and the similarity was unmistakable. Once I became aware of this, once the truth of it was finally thrown up against me, I had no choice but to accept it. I was Barber's son, and I knew it beyond a shadow of a doubt. (*Palace* 288)

Fogg experiences a moment of hitherto unparalleled self-recognition instigated and negated by his father's slow death: 'I understood how fragile my world had become. The egg was slipping through my fingers, and sooner or later it was bound to drop'. (*Palace* 289) Under Lacan's model, Fogg's identity is displaced, embedded and reaffirmed by the death of the barred Other, represented by his father, Solomon Barber, and his grandfather, Thomas Effing, and given a further metonymic gloss by the absence of a common patronym.

Hustvedt and Auster's narrativised investigations into multiple otherness through these two particular novels reifies their mutual apprehension of self-other discourse. Doubles, according to Dimovitz, 'underscore the notion that these characters each reflect different ontological dimensions of the self'.¹⁰⁴ Having already identified incidences of self-other transgression in *Moon Palace* and *The*

¹⁰⁴ Dimovitz, p. 625.

Enchantment of Lily Dahl, the physically and psychically-porous boundaries of the self similarly allow for an accumulation of other-identities in a *mise en abyme* of selfhood: Fogg identifies echoes of his identity in those of Effing and Barber, while Lily actively assimilates Mabel and Mrs. Bodler's self-subjectivity into her own. This layering of identities by Hustvedt and Auster recalibrates Lacanian mirroring through the social discourse of Bakhtin to present an ambiguous model of multiple selfhood, one which effects reconciliation with the Other as a means of ameliorating the negating aspects of objectivisation.

3. Outsiders, solitude and society

The moments when interior or exterior worlds collide, shattering, blurring or reshaping the self invasively, is crucial for understanding how Auster and Hustvedt appropriate and interrogate different facets of the self-other dialectic. For Lacan, otherness is psychically determined; for Bakhtin, it is socially determined; Buber's model offers a hybrid of the two. Internal and external spaces exist in a continual dialogue where neither can be said to fully inhibit the other, nor exhibit the defining characteristics that provide the etymological grounding for either term. This questioning of binary conditions is exemplary of postmodern literary praxis:

Postmodernism does not move the marginal to the centre. It does not invert the valuing of centres into that of peripheries and borders, as much as use

that paradoxical doubled positioning to critique the outside from both the outside and inside.¹⁰⁵

While depicted as marginal individuals within their given societies who are struggling to come to terms with a central structurally-determined mystery, as the fictive constructs of Auster and Hustvedt, Marco and Lily remain at the centre of their respective narratives. The objective world encircles them in a panorama of socially- and psychically-determined otherness. Both live in apartments which can be, initially at least, viewed as a metonymic representation of their psychic interior; despite its apparent absence, the external world is ever-present in that interior world – an exemplary exploration of postmodernism’s negotiation between centre and ex-centric. Moreover, their entrance into the internal spaces of others further shapes this interior world, while objects conjured within these other-spaces colour their personal-psychical experiences and the direction of their process of self-actualisation.

At the opening of *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, Lily is in her apartment, observing the artist Edward Shapiro through her window: ‘She had been watching him for three weeks’. (*Dahl* 1) The interior detail of Lily’s apartment is largely ignored by Hustvedt, save for the mirror and the poster of Marilyn Monroe mentioned earlier. The focus of the narrative is on Lily’s interior world, rendered through third person narration and free indirect discourse. Through the enclosed, raised space of her apartment, she is able to see out onto the streets of Webster (a word as suggestive of social interconnectedness as it is entrapment, entanglement

¹⁰⁵ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 69.

and death in the jaws of an arachnid-like Other). The window, as a symbolic object, constitutes the place where interior and exterior meet.¹⁰⁶

Every morning since the beginning of May, she had gone to the window to look at him [...] On this particular morning, however, it was raining hard and Lily couldn't quite see him. She stuck her head out the window and squinted in his direction...all she could make out was a blurred, waving body behind the glass. (*Dahl 1*)

The 'blurred' connotes an identity not easily objectified; the 'waving' acts as an enticement to Lily to keep looking, to look harder: the ontological exteriority of Edward Shapiro's inner world (the hotel room where he paints) initially both stimulates and resists Lily's attempts to apprehend it: 'The front of the canvas had always been hidden from her'. (*Dahl 2*) What becomes necessary is for Lily to cross the physical, psychological divide and verbalize her hitherto unidirectional attempt at constructing a dialogue with him.

Hustvedt facilitates a comparison between Lily's interior space and that of her neighbour Mabel which emphasises the older woman's subjective fascination with the objective world, while noting the permeable spatial boundaries between their interior and exteriority. Hustvedt describes Lily hearing Mabel in her own apartment, physically absent but aurally present:

¹⁰⁶ Alexandra Harris notes that the etymology of 'window' in its present usage is – like 'scold' – from the Old Norse '*vindauga*', meaning 'wind-eye' and signifying 'what came in, rather than seeing out' (Alexandra Harris, 'Making the weather', *Guardian*, 12 September 2015, p. 7).

Day after day, she listened to the old woman walk, rustle papers, open and close cupboards and drawers, clink dishes, cough, mumble, flush her toilet, and all afternoon and far into the night, she listened to Mabel type. (*Dahl* 4)

This delineation presents Mabel as the occupant of a room, or realm, where objects are granted superior status to the lives of those who produced them – a trait not entirely dissimilar to that of *The Blindfold's* Mr. Morning:

Mabel's room smelled of dust, perfume and the paper of old books. She owned hundreds of them, and they crowded the apartment, bulging from shelves that lined several walls in the living room, bedroom and even the bathroom. Lily breathed in that odour again when Mabel opened the door for her...Stale and dry, Lily thought, like dead bugs. (*Dahl* 34)

Here Hustvedt collapses the gendered and psychological distinctions that orient themselves around these two characters: the gothic, masochistic overtones of the earlier novel are dissolved, and in their place something equally mysterious, but ultimately more symbiotically nurturing and empathic, is expressed:

Mabel poured Lily a cup of tea, her hands trembling as she held the pot in the air. The woman always looked cold. But the room was warm, and Lily had gotten used to Mabel's tremors and quakes and her constantly moving hands. She wasn't sick. She was nervous, so tightly strung that Lily half expected the woman's body to hum from the strain. (*Dahl* 34)

In this scene, it is quite possible – albeit overly simplistic – to conceive of Lily and Mabel's spaces as zones of focused feminine ambiguity: where the binary

structure of self-other discourse is flattened and fragmented, situating both women within an equable interior world of shared gender-subjectivity. This overlooks the subtlety of Hustvedt's writing, which insists upon relational complexity through the sharing of subjective characteristics between individuals irrespective of age, class or gender.¹⁰⁷ While in Mabel's room, Lily notices a small Japanese drawing of an erotic scene, prompting a reaction which is part prudishness, part arousal: 'How could Mabel have such a thing out in the open for people to see? An old lady like her? Lily stared at her knees. The picture reminded her of one of those distorted sexual dreams... In spite of herself, the Japanese lovers aroused her'.
(*Dahl* 35)

A similar picture presents itself in the overly patriarchal Ideal Café. As a social hub for Webster's working men, the Ideal Café is rendered by Hustvedt as the heteroglot social centre in a linguistically Bakhtinian mode. The two marginal, subversive voices are female, but one of those voices belongs to Lily's fellow waitress and friend, Bert. By giving a female character an explicitly male name, Hustvedt reaffirms a critique of the binary nature of traditional gender distinctions codified in *The Blindfold*, where she uses Iris' transvestitism to revisit issues related to gender, power and the male gaze.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, Lily's awareness of and

¹⁰⁷ The oblique blurring of Mabel's identity with that of Mr. Morning, and or Lily Dahl's with Iris Vegan's, gives a strong indication of this: identities which transgress the boundaries of the narrative framework within which they find themselves. This is a trait consciously shared with Auster, whose characters disappear from and reappear in his novels in an overtly intertextual way.

¹⁰⁸ See Alise Jameson.

fascination with the rumours surrounding the mysterious Edward Shapiro emerge from the gossipy discourse dished out by its male patrons:

She had heard his wife left him because he gambled, and she had heard she left him because, as Lester Underberg put it not a week ago in the café, ‘he couldn’t keep his pecker at home.’ Lester had it ‘on good authority’ that Shapiro had ‘nailed’ a beautiful redheaded student in his office while playing Verdi at full tilt. (*Dahl* 3)

Hustvedt generates the sense that these are not Lily’s words; nor are they Siri Hustvedt’s: they’re Lester Underberg. In an extended scene, Lily and Vince, the chef-patron, converse in the kitchen in an authentically polyphonic mode:

The fat man leaned over the stove and said, ‘Where’s the funeral? It’s so quiet in there, you’d think I was cooking for a bunch of stiff.’

Lily grinned and shook her head. ‘You say that every morning, Vince. It gets noisier in an hour. You know that.’

‘This is one dead little burg, baby doll. Its big-time excitement round here when one of them old Lutherans lets out a fart.’ (*Dahl* 11)

Bakhtin might suggest that the interior world of the Ideal Café – the social centre of Webster’s conjured world – is both singular and multiple: homogeneously

male, yet heteroglot; author-controlled, yet imaginatively discursive; a closed environment, yet subject to incursions from outside.¹⁰⁹

In Auster's *Moon Palace*, space is similarly characterised by the bisecting of interior and exterior, disordering the progression of Fogg's narration.¹¹⁰ A decentered individual seeking the lack in his identity, Fogg straddles these boundaries: as with Lily Dahl, or indeed Daniel Quinn or Iris Vegan, the apartment he comes to inhabit is elevated in stature to the room of the mind, a psychic interior shorn of detail and the physical presence of the Other: 'little by little I came to understand that I had come to the right place, that this small apartment was indeed where I was meant to live'. (*Palace* 17) The eponymous Moon Palace appears as a neon restaurant sign seen by Fogg through his window, a chance sighting which induces Fogg to journey further into the wilderness of his psychological terrain:

The force with which those words assaulted me drowned out every practical reference and association. They were magic letters, and they hung

¹⁰⁹ Vince's use of an 'EITHER/OR' sign for the Ideal Café's bathroom offers a metaphorical summation of Hustvedt's philosophical and thematic considerations in this particular text. Hustvedt also cites Kierkegaard's text as one of her major philosophical inspirations, and a Kierkegaardian interplay of indeterminacy, ambiguity and ambivalence underscores Hustvedt's second novel.

¹¹⁰ Mark Brown in particular focuses on how Auster's characters 'locate themselves in the world through a matrix of situated and relational coordinates' in order to 'establish stable relationships with others and a coherent sense of themselves'. What Brown terms 'the metropolitan conditions' necessary for the establishment of this stable 'I' demand a 'satisfactory and supportive' correspondence between the 'subjective inner terrain and their physical, invariably metropolitan one' (Mark Brown, *Paul Auster* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007], pp. 1-2).

there in the darkness like a message from the sky itself. MOON PALACE. I immediately thought of Uncle Victor and his band, and in that first, irrational moment, my fears lost my hold on me. I had never experienced anything so sudden and absolute. A bare and grubby room had been transformed into a site of inwardness, an intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events. (*Palace* 16)

Like Lily's window opening out onto Edward Shapiro's hotel room, Fogg's allows the leakage and slippage of interior into exterior, and vice versa: the apartment becomes a site of reversed self-objectification, the departure point for Fogg's achieving restorative self-identification. A sequence of unforeseen events disrupts the linearity of Fogg's journey inward: his Uncle Victor's death, the disappearance of his inheritance, Fogg's growing physical and psychic disintegration and social isolation. This is further affirmed by his gradual sale of the library of books bequeathed to him by his Uncle Victor, his last link to his old family. Before selling them, Fogg reads the books, transferring the contents of his apartment to his interior space: 'As I sold off the books, my apartment went through many changes [...] The room was a machine that measured my condition: how much of me remained, how much was no longer there'. (*Palace* 24)

After Fogg is evicted from the apartment he sleeps rough in Central Park, eventually taking refuge in a small cave. Auster's deployment and treatment of both park and cave reaffirm his commitment to exploring and critiquing the

perceived binary link between outside and inside.¹¹¹ This portion of the novel describes Fogg's descent into the depths of his unconscious, his futile and dangerous journey away from the Imaginary order and towards the Real.¹¹² At this point in the narrative, the ontological and epistemological traits which make him human have all but vanished, Fogg having rejected social discourse and plunged himself into the desperate hermetic confinement of his interior terrain:

I slept in the park every night after that. It became a sanctuary for me, a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands of the streets. There were eight hundred and forty acres to roam in, and unlike the massive gridwork of buildings and towers that loomed outside the perimeter, the park offered me the possibility of solitude, of separating myself from the rest of the world. In the streets, everything is bodies and commotion, and like it or not, you cannot enter them without adhering to a rigid protocol of behaviour. (*Palace* 55)

Fogg's attempt to renounce the confines of the Symbolic order imposes a new conditionality of existence upon him. As he states, 'you cannot live without

¹¹¹ We might also be able to identify an exploration of Descartes identification of a split between mind and body, foundation of Husserlian phenomenology. For a detailed examination of Auster's interest in Cartesianism and the phenomenological method of investigation, see Chapter three.

¹¹² Auster deepens the genealogical *mise en abyme* of Fogg's solitude by inserting his grandfather, Thomas Effing, in a cave later in the narrative. Effing's cave, unlike that of Fogg, is a vast subterranean space; Fogg's cave is a small refuge in an urban park. The identity of both men is made by their being reduced to a primitive existence outside of the eyes of society. Solomon Barber's fall into a grave at the close of the book symbolically signifies his own enforced attempt to return to the point of origin – the Real – which in its failure authenticates his identity as Fogg's father.

establishing an equilibrium between the inner and outer. The park did that for me'. (*Palace* 55) Lacan's influence is evident here, with Auster problematizing the spatiality of interior and exterior as parabolic representatives of consciousness and unconsciousness:

In the park I did not have to carry around this burden of self-consciousness. It gave me a boundary, a threshold, a boundary...a chance to return to my inner life, to hold onto myself purely in terms of what was happening inside of me. (*Palace* 56)

Each time Fogg visits an interior space other than the cave – a theatre, a reading room, a hash house – Fogg encounters further disequilibrium under the gaze of the Other: 'I'm starting to shrink, I said to myself, and suddenly I found myself talking out loud to the face in the mirror. 'Don't be afraid', the voice said'. (*Palace* 66) Yet when he shelters in the park's cave of the Real, Fogg severs all contact with the outside world, losing himself in the realm of the prelapsarian psyche: 'Most of the time I was barely conscious, and even when I seemed to be awake, I was so bound up in the tribulations of my body that I lost all sense of where I was'. (*Palace* 68) In one final allusion to Lacan, consciousness threatens to lapse into unconsciousness, or death, with Fogg experiencing a period of protracted vomiting – the purging of his interior – and the final hallucinatory collapse of language:

Nothing could hold its shape in me. Once I remember, I saw the Moon Palace sign in front of me...The letters disappeared, and only the two *os* from the word *Moon* were left. I saw myself dangling from one of them,

struggling to hang on like an acrobat...Then I was slithering around on them, and then I wasn't there anymore. The two *os* had turned into eyes, gigantic human eyes that were looking down at me with scorn and impatience. They kept on staring at me, and after a while I became convinced they were the eyes of God. (*Palace* 66)

The 'two *os*' invite an interpretative statement above and beyond that offered by Fogg (*ergo* Auster), one which is essentially Lacanian: they metonymically suggest the panoply of inescapable otherness which guides Fogg's struggle for self-identification; Fogg's orphan identity, and the absent mother and father figures to which Fogg clings to stabilise his subjectivity; consciousness and unconsciousness, two separate existential spheres; or self and Other, locked in continual discourse, mutually-dependent for self-definition. The plethora of possible meanings reaffirms the absence of teleological meaning: the meaning is contained in the totalizing process of imagination (writer), apprehension (reader), and reflection and reification (critic), a process which occurs consciously and unconsciously.

For Auster and Hustvedt, what matters most is between the *os* – the split between subjectivities and theoretical frameworks which permit a proliferation of meanings. Rooms and enclosed spaces operate as domains of self-subjectivity: Fogg's time in the cave can be read as a vertiginous plunge into the depths of his psyche, an attempt to return to the Real. Lily's and the Ideal Café, acknowledge Lacan's Symbolic and Imaginary, while exhibiting the social heteroglossia of Bakhtinian discourse. Neither author presents the meaning of these spaces in a definitive, deterministic way. Rather, the very spatiality of these two texts, with

their complex nexus of interior/exterior, self/other and conscious/unconscious, constructs a space anterior to the texture of their novels where the reader's critical imagination receives them.

Conclusion

Auster and Hustvedt's appropriation of elements of Buber, Bakhtin and Lacan's approaches to the self-other dialectic further confirms a commonality to their respective process of aesthetic expression, one which seeks to incorporate alternative philosophical aspects within the hybrid spatiality of their texts. By situating their protagonist-subjects against and within a shifting panorama of otherness, Auster and Hustvedt show how identity construction is both differential and relational: in each narrative self-other distinctions yield to blurred exteriorities, transgressed individuality and the fracturing of the unitary self-image. However, for the decentered subjects presented in their fiction, respectful recognition of the transgressive other forms a fundamental step on the road to self-knowledge: as Marks puts it, 'through the cracks in the Cartesian shell, from the very core of the self, emerges the other'.¹¹³ Perception, particularly how narrativised aesthetic and ethical responses to visual art constitute an intersubjective framework in their novels, will come under consideration in the next chapter.

Hustvedt's own interest in what she terms 'zones of focused ambiguity', permit the complex and critical interplay of these theories and methods. It is possible to argue with some credibility that Auster's receptivity to these ideas is drawn from Hustvedt's a priori personal interest in them. Further, Hustvedt and Auster's writing relationship can be viewed as an embodiment of Buber's

¹¹³ Marks, p. 2.

conception of silence, whereby during an absence of verbal, or indeed textual, dialogue, the relation of reciprocity still endures:

Not only is the shared silence of two such persons such a dialogue, but their dialogical life continues, even when they are separated in space, as the continual potential presence of the one to the other, as unexpressed intercourse.¹¹⁴

Within a novel, much like a marriage, we see how different identities, theoretical ideas and spatio-temporal contexts shape the texture of a particular narrative, whether autobiographical or fictional. The instances of intertextual play between the novels of Auster and Hustvedt are illustrative of the ways in which the two writers consciously, and unconsciously, cross the boundaries of the novelist-identity of the other. These dialogic exchanges signify, on an emotional level as well as a technical one, a means of ongoing homage to their respective authorial identities, and their enduring marriage.

¹¹⁴ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 97.

Chapter four: Literary visuality – phenomenology and ekphrasis

Introduction

The previous chapter examined Hustvedt and Auster's narrativisation of self-other dialectics through psychically-structured and socially-constructed otherness, in tacit acknowledgement of the ideas of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan. This chapter will turn to Hustvedt and Auster's assimilation of the different modes of phenomenological investigation described by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, focusing principally upon how Hustvedt and Auster have narrativised aesthetic and ethical responses to visual art through intersubjective frameworks in their fiction. Hustvedt and Auster's fictive representations of visual art – painting, sculpture and film in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*; silent film in Auster's *The Book of Illusions* – will provide a useful case study to illuminate Hustvedt's proposition that 'the experience of looking at visual art always involves a form of mirroring [...] we are witnessing what remains of another person's creative act, and through the artistic object we find ourselves embroiled in the drama of self and other'.¹ This particular facet of Hustvedt and Auster's embodied process of aesthetic expression, often deployed in tandem with other theories of self-other discourse (see Chapter three), moves their work

¹ Siri Hustvedt, 'Embodied Visions' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 338-9.

beyond postmodern ambivalence towards an ambiguity which implicates and engages the reader in a reciprocal dialogue.

Hustvedt's fictional representations of the embodied response to phenomena both real and imagined – in a narrative sense – indicate a nuanced and highly idiosyncratic aesthetic response to phenomenological investigation. For Astrid Bolger, 'few authors have tackled the complex relationship between looking and seeing, remembering and feeling' with equal aesthetic and ethical power as Hustvedt, whose engagement with visual art through her fiction and non-fiction is 'multi-layered and open-ended' and 'profoundly subjective and dialogical'.² According to Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, Hustvedt makes a 'vital contribution' to the 'contemporary debate about visual arts' through her rigorous application of this postulate of 'intersubjectivity', of an open discourse between the artwork as an individual utterance of the artist and a responding viewer'.³ Critical for Schultz-Hoffmann is Hustvedt's 'commitment to the emotionality of perception' through these ekphrastic intersubjective frameworks, establishing a 'multiplicity of different participants' which extend beyond the boundaries of the text.⁴

² Astrid Böger, "I look and sometimes I see": The Art of Perception in Siri Hustvedt's Novels' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016), pp. 281-95 (p. 281).

³ Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, "What fascinate me are the journeys that begin with looking and only looking: Siri Hustvedt's Visual Imagination' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016), pp. 265-81 (p. 267).

⁴ Schulz-Hoffman 'Siri Hustvedt's Visual Imagination' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, pp. 267-68.

As addressed in the second chapter of this thesis, Auster's work is commonly associated with the deconstructive strategies of postmodern fiction. His fictional depiction of the separation of action from meaning and language from the things it represents are often ascribed to the anti-logocentrist preoccupations of deconstruction. However, Auster's largely unacknowledged interest in Buberian dialogism and phenomenology points towards a move from what many critics commonly identify as a postmodern literary mode of production, towards the 'after postmodernism' moment associated with his wife.⁵ This may partially be a product of his own philosophical investigations into solipsistic Cartesianism, or a deeper receptivity to phenomenology which corresponds with Hustvedt's own appreciation of the discipline. As outlined elsewhere in this thesis, this receptivity can be seen as being drawn from the bond between two married writers, developed psychically through mutual recognition of their embodied relationship, and exhibited through emotionally-grounded empathy, verbal communication, their shared role as the other's first reader and the dialogic intertextuality of their fiction.

Phenomenology is described by Robert C. Solomon as 'the study of human consciousness; it is an attempt to define the 'structures' that are essential to any

⁵ Zapf's identification of 'a new attention to the relationship of texts to concrete, biographically-embedded subjects and to the wider context of the intersubjective life-world' offers an alternative interpretive position to the ekphrastic techniques deployed by Auster in *The Book of Illusions* (see Zapf, 'Narrative, Ethics and Postmodern Art in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*' in *Ethics in Culture*, ed. by Erll, Grabes and Nünning, p. 171).

and every possible existence'.⁶ The blurring of structuralist and phenomenological modes of representation identified by Simon During serves to remind us of the fluid nature of Hustvedt and Auster's fiction.⁷ In an early interview Auster observes:

It [my fiction] has to do with perception, the connection between seeing the world and speaking the world, what happens in that gap between the two. It is about trying to come to grips in language with things that elude understanding.⁸

⁶ Robert C. Solomon, 'General Introduction: What is Phenomenology?' in *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. by Robert C. Solomon (Savage: Littlefield Adams Quality Paperbacks, 1980), pp. 1-39 (p. 1).

⁷ According to Simon During, 'the movement [poststructuralism] did *not* simply move beyond structuralism: its deepest roots lay elsewhere – in the French reception of phenomenology'. What is ostensibly postmodernist perhaps reflects poststructuralism's concerns with 'ideal forms, finished, spatialized and totalized objects, objects that exist without an origin.' For During, and many other commentators, notably Gayatri Spivak, Derrida's decentered linguistics and logocentric crises are directly influenced by Heideggerian *Dasein* (or Being-in-the-world): an 'existential analytic' constituted by 'anxiety at the instability and chanciness of its own being, by an experience of nullity and meaninglessness most intensely expressed in death's simultaneous necessity and arbitrariness' (Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* [London: Routledge, 1992], pp. 15-16; p. 20). Notwithstanding his disavowal of Derrida (see Chapter two), Auster's enduring interest in European existentialism, particularly the texts of Franz Kafka, Knut Hamsun and Samuel Beckett, and his commitment to exploring the corollaries of chance and fate – albeit under the guise of a commitment to realism – are consciously, or unconsciously, indebted to Heidegger. Hustvedt, meanwhile, has highlighted Heidegger and Sartre's debt to Soren Kierkegaard, who she contends 'is so strong that other philosophers, Heidegger and Sartre especially, robbed the man blind'. Susanne Becker, 'Deceiving the reader into truth': A Conversation with Siri Hustvedt about *The Blazing World*', *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, pp. 409-22 (p. 414).

⁸ Auster, 'Interview with Joseph Mallia', *BOMB*, p. 25.

In another interview, Auster restates this interest in perception, Cartesianism and the elusive nature of epistemological knowledge, concepts attributable to Husserl:

What it boils down to is the old mind-body problem. Descartes. Solipsism. Self and other, all the old philosophical questions. In the end, we know who we are because we can think about who we are. Our sense of self is formed by the pulse of consciousness within us – the endless monologue, the lifelong conversation with ourselves. And this takes place in absolute solitude.⁹

Auster's insistence on the 'absolute solitude' of self-consciousness might overlap with elements of Husserl's transcendental reduction, sometimes referred to as the *epoché* or suspension: a distancing from daily life through which an intuitive understanding about consciousness and the essential nature of objects is arrived at.¹⁰ Certainly, Husserl's philosophy and career were guided by a lifelong commitment to Cartesianism, with Husserl determining that 'no philosopher of the past has affected the sense of phenomenology as decisively as Rene Descartes, France's greatest thinker'.¹¹ More importantly, Auster has already described his affinity for Merleau-Ponty's model of embodied subjectivity, notably condensing

⁹ Auster, 'Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory' in *Collected Prose*, p. 559. In their basic formulations there appears to be overlap between Husserl's model of subjectivity and Damasio's autobiographical self; however, this extent of this overlap warrants more developed scrutiny than is possible or appropriate here.

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, trans. by Peter Koestenbaum (Lancaster: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1985), p. 10; Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 45.

¹¹ Husserl, p. 3.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological model into the following observation: 'The world is in my head. My body is in the world'.¹² (*Report* 192)

Hustvedt's own interest in phenomenology reflects an intuitive and complex understanding of embodied intersubjectivity drawn from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's work, whereby 'the world forms itself around me and begins to exist for me'.¹³

The older I get, the more I realise that I'm a phenomenologist. I've been re-reading Merleau-Ponty and trying to get something out of the very difficult Husserl. I do know what interests me is human experience, always lived from a first-person point of view. Reality does not consist of things in themselves seen from a suprahuman perspective, but our shared intersubjective universe.¹⁴

Her approach to phenomenological theory is wide-ranging, detailed and painstakingly rendered not just through her fiction, but in a number of non-fictional texts, and is reinforced, according to Marks, by her interest in the

¹² '1966-67. A year of much reading, perhaps more reading than at any other time in your life. Not just the poets but the philosophers as well. Berkeley and Hume... Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty... You can see traces of all four thinkers in those words of yours, but in the end it was Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology that said the most to you.' (*Report* 192-93) In another example of the dialogical and collaborative nature of their literary marriage, it was Auster who introduced Hustvedt to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. See Appendix.

¹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. ix.

¹⁴ Siri Hustvedt, 'Interview with Sean P. Carroll', *Bookslut* (May 2008) <http://www.bookslut.com/features/2008_05_012791.php> [Accessed 27 January 2016]. Auster has said of Hustvedt 'she reads Husserl on planes'. See Appendix.

dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber, who ‘defend the credo of mutuality and communication against the idealized sense of individuality and autonomy’ (see Chapter three).¹⁵ Hustvedt herself writes:

The mutability that happens between people is indisputably real, and it cannot develop in isolation. What becomes an *I* is embedded in a *you*. We are inherently social beings and our brains and bodies grow through others in the early dynamics between a child and his parents, but also within a given language and culture as a whole.¹⁶

The ‘pulse of consciousness’, the ambiguous phrase Auster deploys to describe subjectivity, points to the problematic nature of phenomenological inquiry. On the one hand hermetically self-contained, on the other dialogically-informed, there is a perpetual conundrum surrounding subjectivity. The nuanced differentiation between Hustvedt and Auster’s respective expressions of phenomenological interest gestures towards the enduring contradictions underpinning I-centeredness.

The very nature of this problematic paradigm is formulated around differing interpretations of the essence of consciousness, aided in no small part by the lack of concrete definitions to Husserl’s original investigations, as Christopher McCann records: ‘even if one turns to Husserl one cannot find any such set of [defining] principles, since Husserl kept on redefining what he meant by

¹⁵ Marks, p. 23.

¹⁶ Hustvedt, ‘Embodied Visions’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 337-354; p. 338.

phenomenology'.¹⁷ Solomon isolates the split between Husserl's attempts to reconcile epistemological, transcendental and ontological phenomenology, and the existential-ontological focus of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom consciousness is not viewed merely as 'a knowing consciousness but as an acting, 'willing', deciding consciousness'.¹⁸ The split between these two branches of phenomenology is reiterated by Marks:

While Husserl's phenomenology reconfirms the existence of a Cartesian cogito and attempts to make sense of the presence of independent others from the point of view of a monadic existence, Merleau-Ponty moves the self beyond the safe limits of subjectivity and throws it into the world, in a state of symbiosis between self and other.¹⁹

As the founding father of phenomenology, a number of critical studies treat Husserl as a unifying figure whose work moved from epistemological philosophy (intentionality), via transcendental philosophy, to ontological philosophy (intersubjectivity).²⁰ The key concepts underpinning his theories – intentionality, *epoché* and intersubjectivity – will come under consideration in the first section of this chapter. In the second section I will move onto Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserlian intersubjectivity, in order to introduce how Hustvedt and Auster have attempted to narrativise his ideas of embodied intersubjectivity: what Marks

¹⁷ Christopher McCann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 207.

¹⁸ Solomon, p. 2.

¹⁹ Marks, p. 41.

²⁰ Zahavi, p. 3; McCann, p. 205.

identifies as ‘an ontology of embodied connectedness’.²¹ The third and closing section will then turn to depictions of visual art in the fiction of Hustvedt and Auster. Particular focus will be given to their practice of ekphrasis, what James Heffernan labels ‘the verbal representation of graphic representation’.²²

Ekphrasis can be treated as an exemplary model of phenomenological representation, and creative co-production which depends upon multiple subjectivities for its realisation and operates inside and outside of a text. Notable ekphrastic treatments of Hustvedt’s writings include a study of the text of *What I Loved* by Asbjørn Grønstad, for whom the novel ‘configures subjectivity, perspective and the logistics of looking in densely inflected and rather complex ways’.²³ To date, very few critical studies link Auster’s work with the ekphrastic genre. Timothy Bewes and James Peacock respectively isolate the cinematographic and allegorical purposes of Auster’s filmic representations without pursuing the purpose of his ekphrastic motifs.²⁴ Yet his novel *The Book of Illusions* includes extensive descriptions of imaginary silent movies, which are possessed of an ekphrastic power equivalent to that of Hustvedt’s imaginative rendering of artist Bill Weschler’s paintings and sculptures in her own novel,

²¹ Marks, p. 48.

²² James A. Heffernan, ‘Ekphrasis and Representation’, *New Literary History* (22: 2, 1991), 297-316 (p. 299).

²³ Asbjørn Grønstad, ‘Ekphrasis Refigured – Writing Seeing in Siri Hustvedt’s *What I Loved*’, *Mosaic* (45: 3, 2012), 33-48 (p. 41).

²⁴ Timothy Bewes, ‘Against the Ontology of the Present: Paul Auster’s Cinematographic Fictions’, *Twentieth Century Literature* (53: 3, 2007), 273-97; Jim Peacock, ‘Carrying the Burden of Representation: Paul Auster’s *The Book of Illusions*’, *Journal of American Studies* (40:1, 2006), 53-69.

What I Loved.²⁵ This presents a unique opportunity to situate Auster's ekphrastic techniques alongside those of Hustvedt.

²⁵ Auster also deploys ekphrastic techniques in *Moon Palace*, *Man in the Dark*, *Sunset Park*, and the autobiographical diptych *Winter Journal* and *Report from the Interior*, with the latter including photographs and stills from films in a mode reminiscent of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) and the intermedial memoir-fiction of German writer and academic W.G. Sebald.

Husserlian intentionality

The origins of phenomenology have been invariably traced back to Cartesian epistemology, Kantian objectivism and Hegelian dialectics. Solomon in particular emphasises Husserl's 'Cartesian attention to the primacy of first-person experience', in addition to his focus on 'the Kantian search for basic 'a priori' principles'.²⁶ For Marks, Husserl's approach to intersubjectivity effects a reconciliation with Hegel's investigations of self-other dynamics, particularly his desire to 'sublate the difference between self and other into a unity of absolute spirit' within a prototypical 'system of identity'.²⁷ The very hybridity of Husserl's ideas, coupled with his diurnal reinterpretation of his own theories, inevitably generated conflicting interpretations of his ideas, resulting in the division between epistemological and ontological phenomenology delineated by Solomon and McCann. For Solomon, the central irony of Husserlian phenomenology is that the presuppositionless epistemology Husserl espoused created a circular theory favouring intuition over empiricism, description over interpretation, and a philosophy lacking in distinction between 'method and result'.²⁸

Despite these contradictions, Husserl's major achievement was the establishment of a mode of investigation which effected a 'radical conversion [of philosophy] from naïve objectivism to *transcendental subjectivism*':²⁹

²⁶ Solomon, p. 1.

²⁷ Marks, p. 25.

²⁸ Solomon, p. 4-7.

²⁹ Husserl, p. 5.

It is the methodology through which I come to understand myself as that ego and life of consciousness in which and through which the entire objective world exists for, and is for me precisely as it is. Everything in the world, all spatio-temporal being, exists for me because I experience it, because I perceive it, remember it, think of it, judge it, value it, desire it.³⁰

According to Zahavi, all subsequent phenomenological approaches emerge from Husserl's early investigations into intentionality, what Zahavi summarises as the 'object-directedness of consciousness'; for Husserl, this represents 'the essence of consciousness, in which I live as my own self'.³¹ Consciousness, in Husserl's world, 'is always consciousness of something';³² or rather, 'nothing other than what I am aware of and what appears valid in such *cogitations*. *The whole meaning and reality of the world rests exclusively on such cogitations*'.³³ The individual ego is structured by these cogitations, which in turn structure reality: the immanent world only exists through consciousness; objects only exist through our intention towards them. What creates meaning, or transcendence, within the immanent world is the intended act of perception within what Zahavi refers to as an experiential 'mode of givenness': without an object of intention upon which to fix, self-subjectivity cannot exist. Objects need not physically exist within the

³⁰ Husserl, p.8. Again, here it is possible to discern a degree of theoretical overlap with Damasio's neurobiological model of selfhood, moving from protoself to core and extended consciousness through one's awareness of its temporal-spatial situatedness.

³¹ Zahavi, p.3; Husserl, p. 12.

³² Zahavi, p. 14.

³³ Husserl, p. 8.

perceptive field: they remain present within the ‘existence of an experience with the appropriate internal structure of object-directedness’:³⁴

Regardless of whether we are talking of a perception, thought, judgement, fantasy, doubt, expectation or a recollection, all of these diverse forms of consciousness are characterised by intending objects and cannot be perceived without a look at their objective correlate, that is, the perceived, doubted, expected object.³⁵

Teleologically-engendered subject-object relations are refocused within continually-evolving spatio-temporal contexts: that which we experience today may not be what we experience tomorrow.³⁶ ‘True being’, Husserl surmises, ‘whether real or ideal, has significance only as a particular correlate of my own intentionality, actual or potential’.³⁷

Understanding perception within our worldly experience is guided by the intuition of a universal ideality of human consciousness ‘with a view toward disclosing certain special intuitions that yield necessary truths’:³⁸

³⁴ Zahavi, p. 21. Here one can discern a phenomenological inflection to the deconstructed textual strategies of *The New York Trilogy* and *The Blindfold* (see Chapter two). Equally, one can divine a Buberian structuring of self-other relations to those and other novels by Hustvedt and Auster, further reflecting the hybrid spatiality of their narratives.

³⁵ Zahavi, p. 14.

³⁶ Zahavi, p. 10.

³⁷ Husserl, p. 23.

³⁸ Solomon, p. 15-16.

These special intuitions are called ‘*eidetic*’ or ‘*essential*’ intuitions.

Essential intuition is identified as intuition of the universal, which empirical intuition is sometimes called *individual* intuition.³⁹

Pure (transcendental) consciousness of the universal ideality can only be achieved through the *epoché*, which involves the suspension of ‘the reality of the objective world in general and the sciences of the world’.⁴⁰

Epoché eliminates as worldly facts from my field of judgement both the reality of the objective world in general and the sciences of the world.

Consequently for me there exists no ‘I’ and there are no psychic actions, that is, psychic phenomena in the psychological sense.⁴¹

From this psychic-decluttering, which enables us to see the *ego cogito* as one object within a nexus of immanent intentionality, Husserl insisted upon a pure epistemology untainted by philosophical, psychological or theoretical interpretation or commentary:

Phenomenological experience as reflection must avoid all interpretative constructions. Its descriptions must reflect accurately the concrete contents of experience, precisely as they are experienced.⁴²

The *epoché* reduces the individual human ego to a transcendental ego capable of identifying and making sense of the transcendental ‘being of the world’, a world

³⁹ Solomon, p. 15-16.

⁴⁰ Husserl, p. 10.

⁴¹ Husserl, p. 10.

⁴² Husserl, p. 13.

which consists solely of ‘pure phenomena of experience of pure cogitata’, concretely experienced or otherwise.⁴³ This potentiality of experiential object-directedness transgresses ‘the immediately and actually given events of the immediate sphere’ to ‘bring out manifold aspects of new experiences’.⁴⁴ The transcendent ego shares in and forms a constituent part of ‘a universe of possible experiences’.⁴⁵ All theories of knowledge must therefore fall under the aegis of subjectivity: objective meaning is only possible through ‘an infinite cohesion of synthetically connected *acts*’ drawn from our own ‘sensory creations’, as part of an ‘inexhaustibly infinite a priori’ experiential spatio-temporality.⁴⁶

Husserl’s concept of ‘transcendent subjectivity’ presages and directly influences the ontologically-ordered intersubjectivity of Merleau-Ponty without disavowing the principal beliefs of his phenomenological investigations, I-centeredness:

To say, in my natural existence, ‘I am, I think, I live’ means that I am one human being among others in the world, that I am related to nature through my physical body, and that in this body my cogitations, perceptions, memories, judgements, are incorporated as psycho-physical facts.⁴⁷

Triggered by the *epoché*, the ego’s heightened epistemological sensibility firstly enables the individual to form ‘systems of intentionality, as well as to possess

⁴³ Husserl, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Husserl, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Husserl, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Husserl, p. 29.

⁴⁷ Husserl, p. 9-10.

systems already formed’;⁴⁸ secondly, what Husserl describes as the ‘spatial reality’ of existence, or the recognition of the concrete and potential presence of other objects, points towards the recognition and affirmation of other subjective entities:⁴⁹

I experience other minds in a unique manner. Not only do I experience them as spatial presentations psychologically interlaced with the realm of nature, but I also experience them as experiencing this self-same world which I experience...I experience the world not as my own private world but as an intersubjective world, one that is given to all human beings and which contains objects accessible to all.⁵⁰

In a quotidian sense, the individual ego remains isolated from the realm of the transcendental. Contra alterity, for Husserl sharing the perceptions or reading the views of others is a psycho-physical impossibility: we can only acknowledge the other as another self-conscious entity. However, empathic other-recognition can be arrived at through the acceptance of co-existence and co-experiential intentionality:

I experience my own conscious existence directly and truly as it itself. This is not true of the consciousness of others, such as their sensations, perceptions, thinking, feeling, desiring. In my own self, however, these

⁴⁸ Husserl, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Husserl, p. 32.

⁵⁰ Husserl, p. 34.

experiences of others appear in a secondary sense, as ‘co-experienced’ in the mode of a unique perception of similarity.⁵¹

By establishing an alter-ego, the subjective individual is able to share in the world experience of the other, rather than recognising within that alter-ego a verisimilitude of otherness: what Zahavi terms a ‘congruity between one’s own experience and the other’s experience’.⁵² Preservation of Husserl’s favoured first-person perspective determines our experience of, and experience through, the other, and a means of seeing one’s own self, as Marks concurs: ‘Self’s perception of other is a mere transfer, an intentional imagination, an inner process which preserves a distinct boundary’.⁵³

As a perception-focused alternative approach to self-other dialectics, Husserlian phenomenology finds fertile ground within the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster’s narratives. Moreover, within the three core principles of Husserlian phenomenology identified by Zahavi – intentionality, transcendentalism and intersubjectivity – it is possible to identify characteristics shared with the self-other dialectics of Lacanian poststructuralism and Buberian positionality (as discussed in Chapter three). Zahavi also comments upon the link between Husserlian intentionality and Lacanian objectification, being determined by the essential nature of consciousness, the role of the eidetic reduction in establishing object differentiability, and the distinction between the formal ontology

⁵¹ Husserl, p. 34-35.

⁵² Zahavi, p. 117.

⁵³ Marks, p. 46.

of phenomenology (what it means to be an object) and the material ontology of linguistics (its essential structures and characteristics).⁵⁴ There are, moreover, no specific references to the unconscious in Husserl's writing, as to Husserl the unconscious exists within the horizon of transcendental subjectivity. Unlike Buber's model of mutuality, Husserlian subjectivity is not directly disclosed through dialogue with the other. Bakhtin's socially-constructed subject falls into the embodied system of object-focused intentionality established by Husserl and reconfigured by Merleau-Ponty.⁵⁵ However, as Marks' study into relationality in Hustvedt's work shows, Hustvedt's deployment of intersubjective frameworks within her fiction necessitates the utilisation of multiple subjective positions; positions established and patrolled by sometimes conflicting theories. The ambiguity of Hustvedt's fiction frees up spatial territory for these expressions of subjectivity, while inviting another subjective entity – the reader – to engage with and interpret them. To understand how both Hustvedt and Auster's respective approaches to intersubjectivity have developed, it is necessary to look at the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty.

⁵⁴ Zahavi, pp. 29, 37.

⁵⁵ According to Michael Holquist, Bakhtin viewed perception as 'an act of authoring', with the gap between mind and world establishing a model of consciousness 'based on otherness'. For Bakhtin, 'existence, like language, is a shared event' framed by the symbiotic simultaneity of dialogism (Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* [London: Routledge, 1990], p. 7; p. 18; p. 28). Buber's position on perception aligns with that of Bakhtin.

Merleau-Ponty's embodied subjectivity

At the close of *Paris Lectures*, Husserl suggests that 'transcendental phenomenology is ipso facto the true and genuine universal ontology...the path of *universal self-knowledge*, first in a monadic then in an intermonadic sense'.⁵⁶

Husserl's establishment of intentionality, transcendentalism and intersubjectivity as the bases of phenomenology were subsequently developed by a number of philosophers, most notably Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's key text, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, opens with a lengthy reading of Husserl's work.

While many practitioners of what Solomon identifies as 'existential phenomenology' consciously broke with Husserl's transcendent epistemology in favour of a conditional ontology more closely aligned to the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Soren Kierkegaard,⁵⁷ according to McCann Merleau-

⁵⁶ Husserl, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Any study into Hustvedt's work which declines to mention the influence of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard finds itself on dangerous ground. Hustvedt borrows from the central structural conceit of *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843) for her novel *The Blazing World*, whose narrative is freighted with Kierkegaard's philosophical principles. (Husserl is also referred to in the text). In an interview with Susanne Becker, Hustvedt describes Harry as a 'Kierkegaardian figure...Like S.K. she is too clever, too ironic, too brilliant for her own good and she suffers because others cannot understand what she is up to' (Becker, 'Deceiving the reader into truth' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 414). Hustvedt's latest essay collection *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women* contains 'Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Truths of Fiction', which was delivered as a keynote lecture at the University of Copenhagen in 2013. While Hustvedt's is the stronger interest, there is a shared affinity for Kierkegaard: close to the conclusion of *Portrait of an Invisible Man* Auster includes a quote from *Fear and Trembling* (1843): 'he who is prepared to work gives birth to his own father' (Auster, 'The Invention of Solitude' in *Collected Prose*, p. 60). One can perhaps perceive this affinity in the ambiguous interplay of commitment and

Ponty's retracing of Husserl's steps through the epistemological, transcendental and ontological planes produces a stronger affinity to his predecessor.⁵⁸

Phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty, offers '...a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity''.⁵⁹ Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty views phenomenology as 'the study of essences...the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness',⁶⁰ and his development of an experiential phenomenology is largely founded upon the object-directed principles of Husserlian intentionality:

Our perception ends in objects [...] To see an object is either to have it on the fringe of the visual field, and be able to concentrate on it, or else respond to this summons by actually concentrating upon it. When I do concentrate my eye on it, I become anchored in it, but this coming to rest of the gaze is merely a modality of its movement: I confirm inside one object the exploration which earlier hovered over them all, and in one movement I close up the landscape and open up the object.⁶¹

ambivalence in their respective narratives, while the motif of shaking, trembling or ontological estrangement is one that frequently recurs throughout their writing.

⁵⁸ McCann, p. 206.

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. vii. Merleau-Ponty's use of the term 'facticity' remains problematic, as Solomon records: 'one can never ascertain with confidence which features of our 'situation' are given to us and fixed from without (*facticity*) and which features of our situation are created by us (*transcendence* or *possibility*)' (Solomon, p. 36).

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, p. vii.

⁶¹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 77-78.

Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is ‘the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them’; the world ‘the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and my explicit perceptions’; the body, ‘my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world’; society is ‘coexistence involving an indefinite number of consciousnesses’.⁶² ‘The world’, Merleau-Ponty offers in summary, ‘is not what I think, but what I live through’.⁶³

This is particularly critical for Hustvedt, for whom perception is a ‘dynamic process’ which oversees a ‘mutual collapsing of subject and object’.⁶⁴ It is principally Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the embodied essence of consciousness which challenges the Cartesian foundations of Husserlian phenomenology, situating his own investigations firmly in the ontological field rather than the epistemological. Contra Husserl, Merleau-Ponty insists upon the embodied nature of being, underpinned by the concept of embodied consciousness: ‘To see is to enter a universe of beings which display themselves [...] Any seeing of an object by me is instantaneously reiterated among all those objects in the world which are apprehended as coexistent’.⁶⁵ We only know that which is given to us through the physically-constituted field of perception. Consciousness and existence are of

⁶² Merleau-Ponty, p. xi; p. 81 ; p. 406..

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, p. xviii.

⁶⁴ Schulz-Hoffman, ‘Siri Hustvedt’s Visual Imagination’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 277.

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, p. 79.

equal constituency, and ‘the thing, and the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body’:⁶⁶

The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it by virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body.⁶⁷

What Marks parses as ‘an ontology of embodied connectedness’ generates symbiotic systems of subjective simultaneity; a nexus of otherness which is physically defined, socially interconnected, and psychologically intersubjective:⁶⁸

The *Cogito* must reveal me in a situation, and it is on this condition alone that transcendental subjectivity can, as Husserl puts it, *be* an intersubjectivity...The world, which I distinguished from myself as the totality of things or of processes linked by causal relationships, I rediscover ‘in me’ as the permanent horizon of all my cogitations and as a dimension in relation to which I am constantly situating myself.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, p. 237.

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, p. 239.

⁶⁸ Marks, p. 48.

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. xiv.

As with Heidegger and Sartre, according to Solomon Merleau-Ponty's departure from Husserl pivots upon the rejection of the *epoché*.⁷⁰ For Merleau-Ponty, 'the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction',⁷¹ as it is guided by the spatio-temporal constraints of self-subjectivity:

We cannot subject our perception of the world to philosophical scrutiny without ceasing to be identified with that act of positing the world, with that interest in it which delimits us, without drawing back from our commitment which is itself thus made to appear as a spectacle, without passing from the *fact* of our existence to its *nature*, from the *Dasein* to the *Wesen*.⁷²

Reconfiguring the phenomenological reduction as 'reflection', Merleau-Ponty illustrates his greater pleasure through the discovery of 'vision, not as 'thinking about seeing', to use Descartes' expression, but as a gaze at grips with a visible world'.⁷³ The visible world becomes that which is known to us through our bodily orientation; therefore acknowledgement of one's own gaze constitutes a tacit recognition of the gaze of the other:

⁷⁰ Solomon, p. 21. Solomon describes the *epoché* as a process which 'forces us to describe consciousness and its objects rather than the world and its objects': a position which the existentialists, notably Sartre with his famous declaration that '*existence* comes before *essence*', continually challenged (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet [London: Methuen, 1989], p. 26).

⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty, p. xv.

⁷² Merleau-Ponty, p. xvi.

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, p. 409.

The other can be evident to me because I am not transparent for myself, and because my subjectivity draws its body in its wake. [...] The other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we are all participants as anonymous subjects of perception.⁷⁴

Marks contends that Hustvedt and Merleau-Ponty 'share their emphasis on the dialogue between body and world, and on the inseparability of the self from its environment'.⁷⁵ Auster, as we have seen, also shares this emphasis. Without interacting with and being penetrated by a world of otherness, the self remains incomplete.⁷⁶

The positioning of the object...makes us go beyond the limits of our actual experience which is brought up against and halted by an alien being, with the result that finally experience believes that it extracts all its own teaching from the object. It is this *ek-stase* [ekstasis] of experience which causes all perception to be perception of something.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, p. 411.

⁷⁵ Marks, p. 50.

⁷⁶ Marks, p. 49.

⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, p. 81. There is a curious similarity between Merleau-Ponty's language ('alien being') and that of Lacan (the 'alienating exteriority' described in the mirror stage): a quirk of translation perhaps, or further evidence of their utilisation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic; Marks notes that Lacan and Merleau-Ponty both attended the French philosopher Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel in the mid-1940s (Marks, p. 58).

In this sense, Merleau-Ponty seeks to break with the hermetic paradigm of Husserl's Cartesian transcendental subjectivity, reconstitutes Kant's *a priori* principles with a focus on the existential nature of being, and reconfigures Hegel's master-slave discourse as the basis of intersubjective engagement.

Moreover, like Husserl, his phenomenology effects a partial reconciliation with Buber's philosophy of dialogism, Bakhtin's socially-constructed consciousness and Lacan's psychically-structured unconscious (see Chapter three). Language, aesthetics and meaning are the products of experiential being: 'because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning'.⁷⁸ The production of meaning through language is triggered by our apprehension of the dialogical role of the other:

There is one particular object which is destined to play a crucial role in the perception of other: language. In the experience of dialogue there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground... We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity.⁷⁹

The essential characteristic of transcendental subjectivity is not found in the tautologically-limited *epoché*, but the intersubjectively-coexistent domain of perspective. Hustvedt in particular utilises Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied perception to interrogate how and why human beings produce and respond to the

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, p. xxii.

⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 412.

visual language of particular artworks: ‘Producing art includes a drive to make something, an embodied intentionality. [...] Art necessarily establishes a relationship between the artist and an imaginary reader, viewer or listener: it is inherently dialogical’.⁸⁰ The ekphrastic technique is predicated upon this notion of dialogue between subject and object, viewer and viewed, and writer and reader, an indeterminate spatio-temporal zone where ‘our perspectives merge into each other and we co-exist through a common world’.⁸¹ Marks states:

In her conceptualization of vision and visual art, Siri Hustvedt accentuates this ambivalence of the other’s presence [...] Hustvedt highlights how the perception of other people, as well as the perception of artworks, reflects identity constellations governed either by intersubjective exchange or subject-object domination.⁸²

In Marks’ reading of Hustvedt’s novels, the gaze of the other can be objectifying or affirmative, reflective or invasive. Perception is a process of intersubjective exchange or subject-object domination, underscored by the idea of seeing or being seen. Art constitutes part of an ‘interactive field’ within a ‘field of intertextuality’. Yet, one aspect of intersubjectivity that Marks’ otherwise excellent study leaves unaddressed is how this shared perception is achieved through a dialogic aesthetics of co-production, ekphrasis being the exemplary aesthetic practice in

⁸⁰ Hustvedt, ‘Embodied Visions’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 342

⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty, pp. 412-13.

⁸² Marks, pp. 54-55.

the linguistic-phenomenological field. To understand how Hustvedt and Auster approach intersubjectivity in their art, we must look at the ekphrastic method.

Narrativising seeing

Ekphrasis is the means by which visual objects are rendered linguistically in a particular text: what has been invariably referred to as a ‘literary mode’,⁸³ a ‘technique of persuasion’,⁸⁴ and an ‘intertextual, intermedial genre: loose; shifting over time; merging...into the discourses of art history and the textuality of anthropology and cultural studies’.⁸⁵ Heffernan traces the emergence of ekphrasis as a literary principle back to a 1967 essay by Murray Kreiger, which identified poetic ekphrasis as a means of slowing and stilling what he terms the ‘plastic spatiality of objects’ within a text.⁸⁶ More recent studies of ekphrasis delineate a multiplicity of practical applications and interpretative possibilities:

Ekphrasis now seems to present countless opportunities for the discovery of meaning: it has been variously treated as a mirror of the text, a mirror in the text, a mode of specular inversion, a further voice that disrupts or extends the message of the narrative, a prefiguration for that narrative (whether false or true) in its suggestions.⁸⁷

Shadi Bartsch and Jas Eisner note that ‘the moment of ekphrasis can be and has been characterised as gendered, spatial, ephiphanic, mute, appealing to the audience in the text or outside the text, or to no one but its speaker in the text –

⁸³ Heffernan, p. 298.

⁸⁴ Frank J. D’Angelo, ‘The Rhetoric of Ekphrasis’, *JAC* (18:3, 1998), 439-497 (p. 440).

⁸⁵ Valerie Cunningham, ‘Why Ekphrasis?’, *Classical Philology* (102: 1, 2007), 57-71 (p. 60).

⁸⁶ Heffernan, p. 298.

⁸⁷ Shadi Bartsch and Jas Eisner, ‘Introduction: Eight Ways of Looking at an Ekphrasis’, *Classical Philology* (102: 1, 2007), i-iv (p. i).

and even as closing off the possibility of interpretation'.⁸⁸ Elsewhere, Frank D. Angelo emphasises the rhetorical role of 'narration and praising and blaming' in the classical conception of ekphrasis (prosopoeia).⁸⁹ Critical to either mode of ekphrastic praxis is a concomitant commitment to 'clarity and vividness': 'the means by which the speaker or writer enables the audience to absorb the work of art into the mind. Clarity and vividness help the speaker to create an illusion that elicits an imaginative response from the viewer'.⁹⁰ Ekphrasis is therefore best conceived as a dialogic co-production: an intersubjective exchange between author and reader.

According to Valerie Cunningham, the ekphrastic technique is inherently phenomenological, 'pointing at an allegedly touchable, fingerable, *thisness*. It lays claim to the absolute *thereness* of an aesthetic object'.⁹¹ In postmodernist and metamodernist fiction, ekphrasis ironically engages with the poststructuralist suspicion of linguistic certainty, where 'writing is always tormented by the question of real presence, by challenges of knowability, by the problematics of truth and validity', while offering the reader something authentic, concretised, and tangibly 'real' within the framework of the narrative.⁹² Ekphrasis explores the 'tension between the realist, presencing, logocentric desire and the counter-

⁸⁸ Bartsch and Eisner, p. i.

⁸⁹ D'Angelo, p. 441.

⁹⁰ D'Angelo, pp. 441-12.

⁹¹ Cunningham, p. 61.

⁹² Cunningham, p. 61.

pressure of absence'.⁹³ Under the conditions of ekphrasis, the object-directed consciousness of Husserlian phenomenology merges with the embodied connectedness of Merleau-Ponty, thereby triggering within the text a proliferation of meaning-framing functions:

The enactment of multiple views within the space of ekphrasis and the parallelism of those views with the multiple viewings... suggest that ekphrasis itself may function as a space in which to challenge and rethink one's viewings, to refashion one's subjectivity.⁹⁴

Hustvedt and Auster use ekphrastic techniques to illustrate how phenomenological investigation, like selfhood, is embodied, mobile and mutable.

If consciousness and perception constitute a dialogic co-production predicated upon the pre-cognitive coexistence of embodied individuals, then texts and artworks are also produced in this way: as Hustvedt writes, '*all visual art implies a spectator*'.⁹⁵ Describing the meaning-making possibilities of ekphrasis, Bartsch and Eisner refer to the importance of the intersubjective split, or 'gap', which makes imaginative co-production possible: 'the gap between images and

⁹³ Cunningham, p. 71.

⁹⁴ Bartsch and Eisner, p. iii.

⁹⁵ Hustvedt, 'Embodied Visions' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 342. In a 1975 essay on the work of the painter David Reed, Auster similarly comments upon the physical nature of the artworks: 'By allowing us to imagine his hand, by allowing us to *see* his hand, he has exposed us to the serious task of seeing... It pushes the artist out from the shadows, leaving him with nowhere to stand but in the painting itself. And in order for us to look at one of these works, we have no choice but to go in there with him' (Paul Auster, 'Black on White: Recent paintings by David Reed' in *Collected Prose*, pp. 400-402 [p. 402]).

the words that evoke them is a space to reflect upon or point to other gaps, especially the undefined space beyond the materiality of art and the textuality'.⁹⁶ The separation recalls Freud's Tummelplatz, Buber's betweenness, or Voegelin's metataxis. It also implies Hustvedt and Auster's acknowledgement of the co-productive relationship between reader and writer (see Chapter one). Hustvedt and Auster's deployment of ekphrastic techniques explore the ambiguous boundaries between subject and object, viewer and viewed and writer and reader, while giving further indication of the collaborative qualities of their dialogic, and indeed intermedial, fiction.

Hustvedt's observation that all artworks presuppose a viewer problematizes the continued critical and commercial preoccupation with artistic integrity and independence of aesthetic spirit. The process of artistic production is frequently initiated psychically and physically by one individual purposefully moving from intentionality of consciousness toward the conscious act of aesthetic intention. The contradistinctions within the field of phenomenology complicate the artistic act further: Husserl may argue that art emerges from self-consciousness to enter the realm of intentionality and transcendent subjectivity; under Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological methodology, aesthetic intention constitutes a concretised expression of ontological givenness. We see an

⁹⁶ Bartsch and Eisner, p. iv. Marks similarly identifies this gap, drawing on a quote from Victor Burgin which describes the Barthesian text as a 'space' between the object and the reader/viewer – a space made up of endlessly proliferating meanings which have no stable points of origin, nor of closure' (Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* [Houndsmiths; Macmillan, 1986], p. 73, [qtd. in Marks, p. 61]. Buber and Voegelin's theories are similarly intertwined within this hybrid spatiality.

indication of this problematic in Auster's avocation of the 'power of restraint' in art:

This is where the tension in art comes from. And that's where all the real feeling comes from. The sense that there is a whole life behind every statement made, that there is a whole world echoing behind the words that are spoken. If you try to say everything, you don't wind up saying very much at all.⁹⁷

The artistic act must by necessity be an expression of being in the world; it is an embodied process through which the artist establishes and retains independence, intention and originality within the intersubjective universality.

Notwithstanding collaborative artworks which are produced by a number of artists, the intention to commit to the aesthetic act is always decisively taken.⁹⁸ Moreover, after being triggered by the psychical impulses within a given individual, art requires the coordination of motor-sensory functions, acquisition of materials, establishment of procedures and certain spatio-temporal conditions to enable its production. This is reflected not simply in the very detailed rendering of an artist's life and work through their subjective narratives; nor in the highly idiosyncratic artists and artworks depicted in their texts; but, more pertinently, in

⁹⁷ Auster, Contat and Waters, 'The Manuscript in the Book', p. 187.

⁹⁸ There are, of course, exceptions: the cut up techniques of William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin, the automatic writing of Gertrude Stein or the Imagist poetry of William Carlos Williams; the art brut of Marcel Duchamp, the abstract figurations of Jackson Pollock; the improvised free jazz of Ornette Coleman. Even these adhere to a given form and method of production which has been arrived at intentionally through the phenomenological field.

the fact that Hustvedt and Auster opted to write (and publish) novels which meditate upon the nature of art and visual representation: *The Book of Illusions* in 2002, and *What I Loved* in 2003.⁹⁹ Whether this process was initiated consciously or unconsciously, it remains an arresting coincidence. Both writers have been keen to differentiate their own work from that of the other. If the purpose of this thesis is to indicate how their work connects in a dialogic, collaborative and intersubjective way, the counter-argument necessarily stresses the absence of any felt connection. In the following three sections I will explore this idea of subjective aesthetics within a phenomenological framework: first addressing Husserlian intentionality and I-centeredness, then moving on to Merleau-Ponty's approach to intersubjectivity, before looking at how Hustvedt and Auster use ekphrastic techniques to delineate and problematize the tropes of identity, relationality and aesthetic valorisation within their fiction.

1: Intentionality and aesthetics

As an exploration of the emotionally-intertwined lives of two New York families in the 1970s, Hustvedt's *What I Loved* is an inherently phenomenological text. Characters, events and artworks are described through the first-person narration of art historian and academic Leo Hertzberg. Leo's life changes irrevocably after buying a painting by New York artist Bill Weschler, whom he subsequently arranges to meet:

⁹⁹ A defining characteristic of Hustvedt's authorial persona is the engagement with visual art through writing.

Even on that first day, I felt Bill's asceticism, his almost brutal desire for purity and his resistance to compromise. The feeling came from both what he said and his physical presence. He was calm, soft-spoken, a little retrained in his movements, and yet an intensity of purpose emanated from him and seemed to fill up the room. Unlike other large personalities, Bill wasn't loud or arrogant or uncommonly charming. Nevertheless, when I stood next to him and looked at the paintings, I felt like a dwarf who had just been introduced to a giant. (*Loved* 10)

In this first meeting, Hustvedt plays upon the Hegelian tension between self-determination and other-transgression, while Leo's unfolding portrait of Bill valorises his artistic 'intensity of purpose'. He notices Bill's physical dishevelment, a state of disorder echoed by the chaotic plenitude of objects, particularly books, in his loft apartment.¹⁰⁰ For Leo, these signify 'not only Bill's poverty but his obliviousness to the objects of domestic life...He remained curiously unattached to the places where he lived and blind to the details of their arrangements'. (*Loved* 10) Bill's apparent blindness to the objective order of things contrasts sharply with his perceptivity as an artist, a trait underscored by Leo's comment that 'I decided that his almost magical appeal had something to do with his eyes': his physical presence belies his ability to intuitively perceive the essential value of certain objects and individuals. Leo contrasts the power of Bill's gaze with what he perceives to be his elusive nature: 'When he looked at me, he

¹⁰⁰ The towers of books described by Iris in Hustvedt's earlier novel, *The Blindfold*, are represented here for an alternative, more overtly phenomenological purpose.

did so directly and without embarrassment, but at the same time I sensed his inwardness, his distraction...Bill gave off an air of autonomy so complete, it was irresistible'.¹⁰¹ Bill's consciously-constructed hermetic identity is reiterated by his anecdotal recollection of dispensing with a significant sum of money as an act of 'independence'. (*Loved* 14) Finally, commenting upon Leo's purchase of his painting, Bill says: 'I've been working for ten years. Dealers have rejected the work hundreds of times...I don't ask that anyone be interested. Why should they be interested? I'm wondering why *you* are interested'. (*Loved* 12)

By depicting their encounter in this way, Hustvedt suggests that mutability and mutuality are intrinsic characteristics of artist and artwork: Leo is 'reading' Bill as Bill is 'reading' Leo. Each emerges through the flux of perception and transcendent subjectivity as the intended object for the other. Their dialogue catalyses and concretises the intersubjective basis of their relationship as it unfolds. Discussing 'skin in paintings', (*Loved* 11) Leo and Bill exchange interests and influences: a metonymically-rendered, gendered deconstruction by Hustvedt of masculine power dynamics, and an ironic comment upon the ambivalence and occasional antipathy between artist and critic (and reader and writer). Conversely, the conceptual artist Bill constitutes as a symbiotic other for the art historian Leo: Leo enters Bill's loft – the spatio-temporal zone of his self-consciousness made concrete – in much the same way as he enters his figurative art. When Leo explains how he likes 'ambiguity...not knowing where to look on

¹⁰¹ Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved* (London: Sceptre, 2003), p. 9. Hereafter referred to in the text as *WIL* with page numbers cited.

his canvases', (*Loved* 12) it seems to empathically echo an earlier remark by Bill: 'That's the problem with seeing things. Nothing is clear. Feelings, ideas shape what is in front of you. In my work I wanted to create doubt...because that's what we are sure of' (*Loved* 12):

"Seeing is flux," he said. I mentioned the hidden narratives in his work and he said that for him stories were like blood running through a body – paths of a life. It was a revealing metaphor and I never forgot it. As an artist, Bill was hunting the unseen in the seen. The paradox was that he had chosen to present this invisible movement in figurative painting, which is nothing if not a frozen apparition – a surface. (*Loved* 13)

The strength of Bill's monadic identity gradually yields to the affirmative power of Leo's penetrative gaze and empathic aestheticism: the meeting becomes the moment 'when a meandering conversation between two men took an irrevocable turn toward friendship'. (*Loved* 15) Bill's commitment to independence is evident – yet it is provisional and problematized by Leo's verbal portrait of him. Leo's recording of Bill's 'inwardness...distraction...autonomy' both counters and reinforces Marks' identification of Hustvedt's emphasis of 'boundary subversions that exhibit the monadic shell of individual existence as a porous, stable and illusory construct'.¹⁰² In this short passage, Hustvedt both establishes and collapses the boundaries of subjectivity between the two men, generating future opportunities to apprehend interconnectedness within her narrative.

¹⁰² Marks, p. 47.

The artist-critic dichotomy is configured differently in *The Book of Illusions*, although its very presence further serves to reiterate the dialogically intertextual nature of Hustvedt and Auster's fiction. Auster's novel is similarly composed of a series of self-reflexive first-person recollections, whilst being 'haunted by theological and eschatological questions' that are more implicitly rendered in Hustvedt's text.¹⁰³ *The Book of Illusions* foregrounds Auster's apprehension of what Zimmer refers to as 'the burden of representation': a problematic nexus of seen and unseen, real and imagined, within which myriad conflicting subjective responses are stimulated. Peacock's observation that Auster's novel interrogates 'whether art enhances life, precludes life or is in fact the only life we have' effectively delineates the phenomenological grounding of the novel.¹⁰⁴ His apposite summation could equally be applied to the narrative framing of *What I Loved*; but, unlike the neo-realist linearity of that text, Auster's narrative unfolds within what Peacock terms a 'rhizomatic structure', which 'disallows, even as it seems to invite, a spiritual trajectory, which culminates in death, salvation and resurrection'.¹⁰⁵

In *The Book of Illusions*, Auster's artist, the spectral silent film actor, producer and director Hector Mann, comprises an elusive, illusory other-presence to his amanuensis biographer and critical advocate, David Zimmer. The narrative opens with a typically Austerian declaratory statement: 'everyone thought he was

¹⁰³ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 54

¹⁰⁴ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 54.

¹⁰⁵ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 68.

dead'.¹⁰⁶ For much of the novel Mann exists tantalisingly outside of Zimmer's immediate perceptive field, only presenting himself as an actor in a silent movie: a simulacrum of his embodied identity. The mysterious Mann crafts a multiple-identity mythos that covers his true self like a cloak of invisibility, an act of artistic self-deconstruction which Zimmer's critical monograph, *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, tacitly acknowledges: 'When my book about his films was published in 1988, Hector Mann had not been heard from in almost sixty years'. (*Illusions* 1) Mann's very disappearance from 'the world of things' metonymically reconfigures Husserlian I-centeredness, inviting the continually-thwarted object-directedness of Zimmer's gaze, who repeatedly attempts to glean a glimmer of Mann's givenness from the transcendent, translucent celluloid that framed his existence: 'I wanted to share my enthusiasm for Hector's work. The story of his life was secondary to me'. (*Illusions* 3) According to Peacock, the ungraspable slipperiness of Mann's life and films 'embody the deliquescence of the real through the proliferation of representations'; his life 'a series of disguises, of shifting identities'; his films reflecting and enacting 'the permeable and amorphous frames through which every person and every action is viewed'.¹⁰⁷ However, Zimmer's fixation with Mann's silent movies focuses on their objective quality; representational immanence seems to elevate them above the temporal-spatial concreteness of Zimmer's quotidian existence:

¹⁰⁶ Paul Auster, *The Book of Illusions* (London: Faber, 2002), p. 1. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Illusions* with page number cited.

¹⁰⁷ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', pp. 63-5.

I was witnessing a dead art, a wholly defunct genre that would never be practiced again. And yet, for all the changes that had occurred since then, their work was as fresh and invigorating as it had been when it was first shown. That was because they had understood the language they were speaking. They had invented a syntax of the eye, a grammar of pure kinesis...It was thought translated into action, human will expressing itself through the human body, and therefore it was for all time. (*Illusions* 15)

Zimmer's highly subjective 'close reading' of Mann's art derives from a period of near-monastic, psychical solitude following the sudden death of his wife and children. Mann's films trigger within Zimmer an attempt at abreacting this earlier trauma, an ultimately fruitless act which deepens the irresolute teleological basis of Mann's disappearance, and Zimmer's own defeated sense of nihilism.¹⁰⁸ His obsessional absorption in Mann's films, a vanishing act of his own, is shadowed by a visit to the doctor to demand 'oblivion', sensory separation from the world of things: 'I had never lost track of myself so thoroughly'. (*Illusions* 25)

In an inversion of the narrative trajectory of Hustvedt's novel, Auster sustains the physical split between critic and artist for much of the narrative, while allowing an inference of psychical overlap. Each man comes to perform the intended object function for the other. However, like Hustvedt's depiction of the Weschler-Hertzberg relationship, as the narrative progresses the physical-

¹⁰⁸ Auster's treatment of the latency of traumatic affect deploys a degree of 'backshadowing' with that of Quinn in *The New York Trilogy*. A detailed exploration of Hustvedt and Auster's approach to trauma will follow in the next chapter.

psychical boundaries separating Zimmer and Mann inexorably begin to close. This reification of Mann's existence ought to signify an attempt by Auster's to resolve the contradistinction between the epistemological and ontological basis of consciousness. Instead, the parabolic nature of the narrative structure transmutes into a deeper, more impregnable paradox. When Mann and Zimmer finally meet, it is part of a carefully orchestrated encounter managed by Mann's biographer, Alma Grund. The meeting is limned by a number of intertextual gestures towards Hustvedt's novel. Zimmer describes entering a poorly lit room, contrasting with the natural light of Bill's studio: 'the illumination was sufficient for me to see Hector's face, to look into his eyes. A pale glow hovered over the bed, a yellowish air mixed with shadows and dark'. (*Illusions* 224) Despite the dark, both Zimmer and Mann are able to visually observe the other, with the reference to Mann's eyes metonymically referencing perception as the site of self-consciousness. Moreover, Zimmer can scarcely believe his eyes, expressing surprise at Mann's corporeality:

What astonished me most, I think, was the simple fact that he had a body. Until I saw him lying there in the bed, I'm not sure that I ever believed in him. Not as an authentic person, at any rate...It stunned me to acknowledge that Hector had hands and eyes, fingers and shoulders, a neck and a left ear – that he was tangible, that he wasn't an imaginary being. He had been inside my head for so long, it seemed doubtful that he could exist anywhere else. (*Illusions* 224)

Echoing Bill's comment to Leo in *What I Loved*, Mann comments: 'You wrote a book. Again and again I have read that book, and again and again I have asked

myself: why did you choose me? What was your purpose, Zimmer?' (*Illusions* 224) Auster closes the circle of intersubjective connectedness by making Mann reach out for Zimmer at the end of their meeting, transgressing the physical-psychical boundary between the two men: 'As I stood up from the chair, he reached out and grabbed my arm...I remember the cold, clawlike feel of his hand, and I remember thinking to myself: this is happening. Hector Mann is alive and his hand is touching me now'. (*Illusions* 226) In *What I Loved*, at the end of their first meeting, according to Leo's recollection, Bill 'gripped my lower arm with his hand and shook it. This sudden gesture of camaraderie, even affection, made me unusually happy'. (*Loved* 15)

Both *What I Loved* and *The Book of Illusions* establish an allegorical structure framed around aesthetic autonomy and independent perception to address Husserlian I-centeredness and transcendent intentionality, and the exchange between the subjective identities of self and other. As their novels indicate, the problematic nature of Husserl's hermetic monadology is subjected to subtle critique by Hustvedt and Auster, thereby revealing the ontological essence of existence.

2: Embodied subjectivity

What I Loved and *The Book of Illusions* effect a detailed examination of the embodied nature of consciousness, using visual art as a means of commenting upon other-subjectivity. As outlined in the section above, relational aesthetics are determined by a collision between artistic and interpretative subjectivities.

Perceptivity, exemplified by the production and reception of artworks, is an embodied process, dependent upon a physical-psychical network of relations, responsive to the dialogue between artist and spectator, and mediated by the artwork. By looking at specific pieces by Bill Weschler and Hector Mann, I hope to be able to illustrate below how Leo Hertzberg's and David Zimmer's responses to their art are framed around the tension between Husserl's transcendent phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's ontological intersubjectivity.

The first painting by Bill that Leo sees is a work which, on first inspection, appears to depict 'a young woman lying on the floor in an empty room', holding a little yellow taxi in a hand that rests on her pubic bone. Counterintuitively titled *Self-Portrait*, under further scrutiny the painting reveals to Leo a complex tableau which implicates both artist and viewer within a nexus of perceptive relationality:

It took me about a minute to understand that there were actually three people in the painting. Far to my right, on the dark side of the canvas, I noticed that a woman was leaving the picture. Only her foot and ankle could be seen inside the frame, but the loafer she was wearing had been rendered with excruciating care, and once I had seen it, I kept looking back at it. The invisible woman became as important as the one who dominated the canvas. The third person was only a shadow. For a moment I mistook the shadow for my own, but then I understood that the artist had included it in the work. The beautiful woman, who was wearing only a man's T-shirt, was being looked at by someone outside the painting, a spectator who seemed to be standing just where I was standing when I noticed the darkness that fell over her belly and her thighs. (*Loved 4*)

Leo concludes that ‘the hand that had painted the picture hid itself in some parts of the painting and made itself known in others’. (*Loved* 4-5) In a subsequent passage, the bodily presence of its creator is acknowledged through vaguely-gendered references to the artist’s technique: ‘rendered with excruciating care’, ‘a tangle of heavy paint’, ‘forceful dabs’, and more conclusively, ‘marks left by a man’s thumb. It looked as if his gesture had been sudden, even violent’. (*Loved* 5) Here Hustvedt makes explicit the uncompromising intensity of Bill’s aesthetic vision through his physical presence on the canvas. This engages the attention of the viewer, and forces Leo to consider the painting with equivalent intensity of perception.

Grønstad determines that Leo’s first encounter with *Self-Portrait* is both ‘catalytic and catastrophic...a decisive, fortuitously constitutive aesthetic experience’ freighted with ‘the pregnancy of the gaze’.¹⁰⁹ The painting is subsequently experienced by numerous others, not least the artist and model, and its meaning morphs and transmutes under these shifting spatial, temporal and even emotional contexts, heightening and deepening its latent eroticism. After hanging the painting in his apartment, Leo looks at it again with his wife Erica: ‘She examined it calmly and said, ‘It’s like looking at another person’s dream, isn’t it?’

¹⁰⁹ Grønstad, p. 40. Böger proposes that Bill’s *Self-Portrait* establishes the narrative’s central themes of hidden realities, distorted perceptions and the general instability of human relations’, while Caroline Rosenthal describes the portrait as a ‘palimpsest’ which embodies the multiple plot layers and ‘figurative constellations of the novel’ (Böger, ‘I look and I sometimes see’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 287; Caroline Rosenthal, *New York and Toronto Novels after Postmodernism: Explorations of the Urban* [Rochester: Camden House, 2011], p. 75, [qtd. in Böger, p. 287]).

(*Loved 5*) In contrast with Leo's florid and detailed ekphrasis, Erica's 'simple, direct and penetrating' comment invites Leo to look more closely at the painting, identifying other motifs hitherto unseen: (*Loved 8*)

When I turned to the picture after Erica spoke, I saw that its mixed styles and shifting focus did remind me of the distortions in dreams...It was then that I noticed a bruise just below her knee. I had seen it before, but at that moment its purple cast, which was green at one edge, pulled my eyes towards it, as if this little wound were really the subject of the painting. I walked over, put my finger on the canvas, and traced the outline of the bruise. The gesture aroused me. (*Loved 5*)

The sensuous, sexual overtones of Bill's painting – distilling what are later revealed to be its unconsciously-rendered, aesthetic expression of the model Violet Blom's desire for the man who is painting her – catalyses an erotic reaction of equal power in Leo: 'We made love because of the painting. I have often wondered since why the image of a sore on a woman's body should have been erotic to me'. (*Loved 6*) Much later, Leo's adolescent son encounters Bill's painting of Violet:

The growing body has its own language, and solitude is its first teacher. On several occasions in the spring, I found Matt standing in front of the *Self-Portrait* that had hung on our wall for thirteen years. His eyes travelled over the plump young Violet and onto the little taxi that rested near her pudendum, and I saw the canvas again as though for the first time – with its full erotic force. (*Loved 123*)

Due to its physical materiality and erotic ambiguity, Bill's painting invites tactile contact while denying possession. Even though Leo owns the painting, he never refers to it as his. It remains Bill's, even after the latter's death: a portrait which vividly represents the ontological basis of transcendental subjectivity, while effecting an abstruse expression of the aesthetics of intentionality.

In *The Book of Illusions*, Zimmer's highly subjective aesthetic response to the 'visual language' of Mann's films is foregrounded by the tragic circumstances of his initial venture into their world. There he discovers, paradoxically, an authenticity of ambiguity in their representation which contrasts to the mediated simulacra of modern movies, whose 'sound and colour had weakened the language they were supposed to enhance'. (*Illusions* 14) Zimmer equates the films of the silent era to 'poems, like some intricate choreography of the spirit, and because they were dead, they probably spoke more deeply to us than they had to the audience of their time'. Mann's improvised, low budget exploration of the form is described as having 'an intimacy to it that held your attention and forced you to respond to it'. (*Illusions* 20) Mann's silent movies embody both an otherworldliness and universality that issues a challenge to the humanistic essentialism of perception: silence, according to Peacock, 'holds both an attraction and an atavistic fear'.¹¹⁰ In contrast with the material texture and erotic charge of Bill's painting, the paradoxical appeal of these films to Zimmer lies in their tangible otherness and spatio-temporal unreality:

¹¹⁰ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 57.

The very things that separated them from us were in fact what made them arresting: their muteness, their absence of colour, their fitful, speeded-up rhythms. These were obstacles...but they also relieved the images of the burden of representation. They stood between us and the film, and therefore we no longer had to pretend that we were looking at the real world. The flat screen was the world, and it existed in two dimensions. The third dimension was in our head. (*Illusions* 15)

Zimmer describes the relationship between the camera and Mann's face as an 'intervention', one reliant on the self-signifying, self-negating presence of Mann's moustache: 'In motion, it is a tool for expressing the thoughts of all men. In repose it is little more than an ornament...Such is the code of images'. (*Illusions* 30)

In *Mr. Nobody*, the final film Mann makes before his disappearance, Auster makes a deliberate reference to the problematic ontological-existential paradigm.¹¹¹ *Mr. Nobody* has been called by Peacock 'an allegory of the commodification and subsequent effacement of the self under the postmodern capitalist system'.¹¹² It can also be considered that *Mr. Nobody* occupies a space equivalent to Bill's *Self-Portrait* in *What I Loved*, as a metonymic representation of subjectivity, embodied ontology and the power of the gaze, catalysed by Mann's disintegrating relationship with his financier and de facto manager, the laconically-named Seymour Hunt. The avaricious Hunt is recast as C. Lester

¹¹¹ Mr. Nobody is the name of Mia Fredricksen's anonymous tormentor in *The Summer Without Men*.

¹¹² Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 65.

Chase, a villain 'out to destroy Hector and rob him of his identity' by tricking him into drinking a potion that renders him invisible:

He is still there before our eyes, but the other characters in the film are blind to his presence...He is a specter made of flesh and blood, a man who is no longer a man. He still lives in the world, and yet the world has no room for him anymore...He has simply been erased. (*Illusions* 40)

In line with Peacock's perceptive observation, Auster uses *Mr. Nobody* to offer an allegorical commentary on artistic independence, and the surrendering of identity and self-subjectivity to the pressures of commercial success and financial greed: in other words, the gaze of the other. Mann's disappearance in the narrative of the film prefigures his disappearance from the world of film and the immanent world: 'It is a meditation on his own disappearance...a film about the anguish of selfhood. Hector is looking for a way to say goodbye to us...and in order to do this he must eradicate himself in his own eyes. He becomes invisible.' (*Illusions* 53) The film ends with Hector Mann transfigured in the body of another man, with only his moustache, 'the link to his inner self, a metonym for his urges, cogitations and mental storms' remaining as a reminder of his previous identity: (*Illusions* 30)

He is someone else now, and however much he might resemble the person he used to be, he has been reinvented, turned inside out and spat forth as a new man. The smile grows larger, more radiant, more satisfied with the face that has been found in the mirror. A circle begins to close around it, and soon we can see nothing but that smiling mouth, the mouth and the

mustache above it. The mustache twitches for a few seconds, and then the circle grows smaller, then smaller still. When it finally shuts, the film is over. (*Illusions* 52)

In this sequence Mann is reduced to a vanishing point, a pinprick in the screen, then eventually a nothing: an ironic acknowledgement by Auster of I-centered subjectivity and ontological constituency. Tired of being ‘framed by others’, to paraphrase Peacock, Mann attempts to make himself invisible to the world of things.¹¹³ Zimmer’s quest to sustain Mann’s identity renders this impossible: he remains an object in the transcendent zone of intentionality, and within the authentic ‘aesthetic artefact’ of Auster’s narrative.¹¹⁴ It is an irony of the form that through Auster’s ekphrastic treatment of *Mr Nobody*, Hector Mann’s film – like Bill’s painting – is reconstituted as an aesthetic artefact in the embodied subjectivity of the reader.

3: Ekphrasis as co-production

The narratives of *What I Loved* and *The Book of Illusions* discursively deploy ekphrastic techniques as a means of describing perception while preserving ambiguity within the text. According to Grønstad, ‘writing about ekphrasis becomes a means of perception, not an act of possession...the object is

¹¹³ Peacock, ‘Carrying the Burden of Representation’, p. 64.

¹¹⁴ Peacock, ‘Carrying the Burden of Representation’, p. 69.

presented as malleable, unfinished and constantly transmuting into something else'.¹¹⁵

The ekphrastic relation is one defined by intertextuality, the visual work acting as a supplement to the literary text. The image of a tangible text in *What I Loved* makes the moment of vision that ekphrasis performs more of a creative than a responsive act of seeing.¹¹⁶

In *Self-Portrait*, both viewer and reader enter a figurative universe of flattened surfaces; the large sculptures by Bill, such as *O's Journey* and *The Changeling*, literally invite the spectator to enter their three-dimensional worlds, further illustrating Hustvedt's interest in the "back-and-forth dialectic between spectator and artwork".¹¹⁷ In this sense, it revisits the thematic and theoretical paradigms of Hustvedt's earlier novels, which drew upon the psychical and social discourses of Lacan and Bakhtin, now marrying them with an intertextual ekphrastic aesthetic which reaffirms the visual possibilities of representation. Indeed, we can argue that Hustvedt's earlier novels look forward to this more overtly phenomenological approach, particularly the difficulties of description Iris Vegan experiences in *The Blindfold* (see Chapter two). Further, it reconfigures the hermeneutic foundations of the reader-writer relationship in a literary form which is 'vertiginously

¹¹⁵ Grønstad, p. 46.

¹¹⁶ Grønstad, p. 45.

¹¹⁷ Hustvedt, 'Embodied Visions' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 339.

intersubjective',¹¹⁸ and reliant on a nexus of betweenness to bring forth the artwork's aesthetic statement.

Like Zimmer's critical appreciation of Mann's penultimate film *Mr Nobody*, Leo's depiction of Bill's final sculptures, a 'series of autonomous pieces about numbers', show an artist 'at the top of his form'. The number pieces effect a meditation on totalization, utilising myriad sources and marrying the mythical and popular culture to create its own mythos:

It was rambunctious art, thick with allusion – to voids, blanks, holes, to monotheism and the individual, to the dialectic and yin-yang, to the Trinity, the three fates, and three wishes, to the golden rectangle, to seven heavens, the seven lower orders of the sepithroth, the nine Muses, the nine circles of Hell, the nine worlds of Norse mythology. (*Loved* 168)

Through a narratively-engendered form of ekstasis, we share Leo's perception psychically and physically, by entering the sculptures through the pages of the novel:

In cube three, a tiny man wearing the black-and-white prison garb of cartoons and dragging a leg iron has opened the door to his cell. The hidden rhyme is 'free'. Looking closely through the walls of the cube, one can see the parallel rhyme in another language: the German word *drei* is scratched into one glass wall. Lying at the bottom of that same box is a

¹¹⁸ Grønstad, p. 41.

tiny black-and-white photography cut from a book that shows the entrance to Auschwitz: ARBEIT MACHT FREI. (*Loved* 169)

These works, on first glance ambiguous and abstract in extremis, are deeply personal, partially rooted in Bill's slowly fracturing relationship with his son Mark:

In several pieces Bill alluded to the often tedious business of acquiring the signs we need for comprehension – a fragment of Mark's math homework, a chewed pencil eraser, and my favourite in cube nine: the figure of a boy fast asleep at a desk...It turned out that these pictures of boredom were more personal than I thought. (*Loved* 169)

Throughout *What I Loved*, Hustvedt supplements her ekphrastic aesthetic with explicit references to the intersubjective framework which effectively co-produces Bill's work:

An organic extension of everything Bill had done before, these knots of symbols had an explosive effect. The longer I looked at them, the more the miniature constructions seemed on the brink of bursting from internal pressure. They were tightly orchestrated semantic bombs through which Bill laid bare the arbitrary roots of meaning itself. (*Loved* 169)

Hustvedt's ekphrastic technique depicts artworks which are not easily assimilated into the imagination, and demand an engaged reader. Her approach to ekphrasis is complex and, like the work she describes, densely allusive. Her narratives continually engage with the reader and inculcate an intersubjective complicity in the linguistic creation of visual imagery.

In contrast to Leo's brief, subjective overview of Bill's number pieces, *Mr Nobody* is described by Zimmer in a lengthy passage of ekphrasis which runs to over a dozen pages in length, and includes stage directions, camera angles and truncated dialogue. Ekphrasis is the means by which Auster problematizes representation, effecting a detailed description of an imaginary film within this imaginary text, while critiquing the problematic ontology of what Peacock terms 'aesthetic creation in splendid isolation', which threatens 'actual or metaphorical death'.¹¹⁹ Auster pushes the spatio-temporal possibilities of ekphrasis with Zimmer's detailed description of the illusory Mann's last films, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*. Peacock views Auster's treatment of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* as equating 'representation with erasure', and suggests that our reading of the preceding portion of Auster's text prepares us for the 'deconstruction of the 'naïve polarities of 'art' versus 'life''.¹²⁰ Bewes, by contrast, proposes that Auster 'looks longingly towards cinema as a symbol of everything that writing is unable to achieve', before offering the qualifying observation that 'cinema in Auster functions to bind his work even more firmly to the novel'.¹²¹

Zimmer's depiction of the film bridges the gap between Husserl's concept of the objective reduction, by stripping consciously-perceived objects to their essential characteristics, and Merleau-Ponty's ontological consciousness, the objects being reframed by Zimmer's existential spatio-temporality. As with *Mr*

¹¹⁹ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 66.

¹²⁰ Peacock, 'Carrying the Burden of Representation', p. 66.

¹²¹ Bewes, p. 291.

Nobody, the film effects an allegorical investigation into the realm of subjectivity, reconfigured by Zimmer's reflective interpretation:

I understood that I had it wrong...the setting of the film was not Tierra del Sueno or the grounds of the Blue Stone Ranch. It was the inside of a man's head – and the woman who had walked into that head was not a real woman. She was a spirit, a figure born of the man's imagination, an ephemeral being sent to become his muse. (*Illusions* 243)

Martin, a writer, has retreated to bucolic solitude to recover from writing a novel. Nevertheless, he begins writing again almost immediately, and that night he is joined by the 'spirit' Claire, a young woman who metonymically embodies the supposedly binary distinction between objective reality and subjective consciousness. In a subtle reference to Husserlian intentionality and the illusory nature of reality, Auster has Claire read a small section of Kantian philosophy to Martin:

In a mock-serious voice, she is reading a passage of Kant out loud to Martin: *...things which we see are not by themselves what they see...so that, if we drop our subject or the subjective form of our senses, all qualities, all relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves.* (*Illusions* 264)

Whether Claire actually reads this text at all is a matter of conjecture: in *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* all other italicised text signifies Martin's interior monologue, or voice-over narration; yet other instances of Claire, and indeed Martin, engaging in dialogue are rendered in plain text.

Martin's text both sustains and commits their love affair to disaster: the more he writes, the closer to death Claire moves. These moments are relayed in a phenomenologically reductive manner as pure description without presupposition or ethical-moral judgement, relayed as in a bullet-pointed treatment for a film script

1. Claire is writhing around on the bed, in acute pain, struggling not to call out for help.
2. Martin comes to the bottom of the page, pulls it out of the machine, and rolls in another. He begins typing again.
3. We see the fireplace. The fire has nearly gone out.
4. A close-up of Martin's fingers, typing.
5. A close up of Claire's face. She is weaker than before, no longer struggling. (*Illusions* 266)

However, the audience's collective reading of the film is determined by Zimmer's own embodied interpretation: 'We go from Martin back to Claire, from Claire back to Martin, and in the space of ten simple shots, we finally get it, we finally understand what has been happening'. (*Illusions* 266) Eventually, in a scene of artistic self-destruction (and self-deconstruction) that ironically recalls Mann's *Mr Nobody*, Martin destroys his manuscript to save Claire's life, thereby committing both their lives to an existential void, drawing a final observation from Zimmer:

Martin burned his story in order to rescue Claire from the dead, but it was also Hector rescuing Brigid O'Fallon, also Hector burning his own movies,

and the more things had doubled back on themselves, the more deeply I had entered the film. (*Illusions* 272)

At such intertextual moments, it is possible to perceive the merging subjectivities of Martin, Mann and Zimmer. The physical impact upon Zimmer is a form of self-shattering, as he observes ‘the words and images had insinuated themselves inside me’. (*Illusions* 272)

Auster’s use of ekphrasis marks a departure from the logocentric preoccupations of his earlier fiction. In *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, Auster constructs a mise en abyme of transcendent phenomenological deduction, refracted by multiple intersubjective positions: Mann’s script and direction, Zimmer’s narrative interpretation, the reader’s response, all orchestrated by a pointillist ekphrastic technique. In Zimmer’s depiction of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, the mediating function of the screen is subverted: the burden of representation falls to the page, the author-reader function, and the zone in between two subjectivities. For Auster, it is a risky undertaking: describing a film in minute detail, slowing narrative time in the pursuit of allegorical ambiguity, while trying to build and sustain narrative tension. By contrast, Hustvedt’s deliberate and painstaking ekphrases are more luminous and apposite for the sensory perception she seeks to convey. In ekphrastic terms, therefore, visual art perhaps lends itself more readily to the genre than film, but Auster similarly places certain demands upon the reader to those of Hustvedt, which emphasises their shared discursive approach to transcendent phenomenology.

Conclusion

In the narratives of *What I Loved* and *The Book of Illusions*, Hustvedt and Auster establish a network of embodied identities which discursively addresses the epistemological and ontological nature of consciousness. Self-subjectivity is exemplified by the artist identities of Bill Weschler and Hector Mann, and thereafter apprehended via the solipsistic interpretations of their alter egos, Leo Hertzberg and David Zimmer. This layering of densely allusive artworks and impressionistic critical self-reflexivity within the narrative generates a *mise en abyme* of intersubjective perception, where multiple perspectives and destabilised identities interact. At the opening of these novels, the two narrators Leo Hertzberg and David Zimmer are barely able to glimpse the psychical depths of their artist alter egos. As the narratives develop, Hustvedt and Auster reaffirm the intersubjective basis of self-other dialectics and phenomenological investigation.

In these two particular novels, Hustvedt and Auster further illustrate their narrative oscillation between the poles of postmodern irony and modern commitment. Self and other emerge intertwined from the ideality of transcendent subjectivity into a concretised world of intersubjective perceptivity. In their apprehension of the I-centeredness of consciousness, object-directedness and the psychical ability to apprehend the givenness of things, Hustvedt and Auster texts unconsciously gesture towards foundations of Husserlian phenomenology, while correspondingly framing their fiction around the ‘vertiginous intersubjectivity’ of Merleau-Ponty’s nexus of embodied ontology, and the co-productive possibilities of ekphrastic technique. Yet while they challenge Husserl’s conception of an interdependent monadology, one psychically defined and consciously patrolled,

they fail to effectively reconstitute it, establishing a tentative equilibrium with the boundary subversions of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. By acknowledging the empathic value of self-conscious coexistence and perceptive intersubjectivity, they illustrate and emphasise the ethical prerogatives of fiction's newly-calibrated metamodernistic moment. This is further reified by Hustvedt and Auster's respective approach to narrativising trauma, which will come under discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter five: Troping trauma – 9/11, America and the family

Introduction

The last chapter examined the theoretical basis to Hustvedt and Auster's establishment of embodied intentionality and transcendent subjectivity within their fiction. Hustvedt and Auster's embrace of a range of theoretical positions through the hybrid spatiality of their aesthetic mode of production has engendered a highly complex, nuanced and idiosyncratic approach to self-other relations. In this next chapter, I will extend these intersubjective frameworks to their critical engagement with trauma theory, using their narrativised response to the September 11 terror attacks as a case study. As long-standing residents of New York, Hustvedt and Auster witnessed the destruction of the World Trade Centre in Lower Manhattan that morning, and both felt compelled to pen novels which address what Judith Butler describes as the mood of 'national melancholia' and 'disavowal of mourning' that gripped not just the city of New York, but the nation itself.¹ Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American* (2005) is a family drama staged in a New York still coming to terms with the local and national trauma of 9/11. In *The Brooklyn Follies* (2006), Auster records the adventures of a loosely-affiliated community of Brooklynites in a rambling and episodic narrative temporally-located prior to the attacks.

¹ Judith Butler, *Prearious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. xiv.

Both novels contribute to the growing body of 9/11 literature which has been absorbed into the problematic paradigm that notably Mark Seltzer termed ‘wound culture’.² What Martin Modlinger and Philip Sonntag describe as the literary-cultural interest in ‘other people’s pain’ has, in the twenty-first century, transmuted into a transnational and transcultural ‘global condition’ according to Sabine Sielke;³ while Anne Kaplan notes that ‘most people encounter trauma through the media’,⁴ contributing to a subset of ‘vicarious or secondary trauma’ which is ‘experienced globally’.⁵ For Seltzer in particular, ‘the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons’ constitutes ‘a collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound’.⁶ Our contemporary culture’s craving for ‘addictive violence’ demands ‘a public spectacle’, thereby delineating ‘one of the crucial sites where private desire and public space cross’.⁷ No trauma spectacle has been more widely disseminated than the attacks on the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11; the attacks themselves triggered a range of narrative responses across a multiplicity of media. Troping trauma is now a major

² Mark Seltzer, ‘Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere’, *October* (Vol 80: Spring 1997), 3-26 (p. 3).

³ Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag, ‘Introduction: Other People’s Pain – Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics’ in *Other People’s Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*, ed. by Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 1-18 (p. 1); Sabine Sielke, ‘Why ‘9/11 is not Unique’, or: Troping Trauma’, *Amerikastudien* (55:3, 2010), 385-408 (p. 387).

⁴ Ann E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 2.

⁵ Kaplan, p. 39; p. 2.

⁶ Seltzer, p. 3.

⁷ Seltzer, p. 3.

concern of contemporary fiction, generating what Roger Luckhurst describes as a ‘repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood’.⁸ Trauma’s intertwining of history, culture, politics and subjectivity prompted Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone to perceive its theoretical framework as a ‘knot’, tying together representation, the past, the self and suffering’.⁹ James Berger proposes that trauma culture lies at the intersection of the ‘psychoanalytic concept of trauma’ with ‘literature, literary theory, historiography, and contemporary culture’,¹⁰ while Susannah Radstone highlights the link to poststructuralism, commenting that trauma theory enables ‘the Humanities to move beyond the impasses and crises in knowledge posed by these theories, without abandoning their insights’.¹¹ For Sabine Sielke, trauma studies ‘oscillate between theorizing the ‘unrepresentability’ of trauma and spelling out its narratives’, while enacting the ‘fundamental force of the interdependent practices of memory and forgetting’.¹² Further, this can be viewed as aligning with what Boxall identifies as the sense of bodily estrangement which has coloured a number of narrative responses to traumatic affect and the ‘illegibility of the present’ in the early Twenty-First Century.

⁸ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 80.

⁹ Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone, ‘Introduction’ in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-10 (p. 4).

¹⁰ James Berger, ‘Trauma and Literary Theory’, *Contemporary Literature* (38:3, 1997), 569-582 (p. 569).

¹¹ Susannah Radstone, ‘Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics’, *Paragraph* (30:1, 2007), 9-29 (pp. 10-11).

¹² Sielke, p. 385.

Sigmund Freud's pioneering work in the field of psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century continues to guide contemporary literary-cultural responses to trauma. As Berger notes, Freud's revisions to his early 'trauma, repression and symptom formation' – as summarised with the observation that 'hysterics suffer reminiscences' – engendered the concept of 'latency', where the experience of a traumatic event is unavailable to consciousness and remains buried in the psyche. For Berger, traumatic experience is possessed of a transgenerational quality, whereby 'history becomes a complex entanglement of crimes inflicted and suffered', but frequently inadequately apprehended.¹³ Trauma, moreover, is inherently phenomenological, triggering crises of subjectivity and ontological disordering which are pivotal to how trauma is experienced, understood and represented. Radstone and Sielke both isolate the work of Ruth Leys in tracing the genealogical foundation of trauma through her description of mimetic and anti-mimetic subjective positions. The mimetic strand, according to Leys, involves 'a kind of hypnotic imitation or identification in which, precisely because the victim cannot recall the original traumatogenic event, she is fated to act it out or in other ways imitate it'.¹⁴ For the anti-mimetic position, under the hypnotic imitation the subject is distanced from the moment of trauma 'in the sense that she remains a spectator of the traumatic scene, which she can therefore see and represent to herself and others'.¹⁵ Radstone's summary of

¹³ Berger, p. 570.

¹⁴ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 298.

¹⁵ Leys, p. 299. This apparently binary split is a misnomer: Leys herself suggests that it is 'unresolved' (p. 305), and Radstone similarly isolates the suggestibility of traumatized subjects 'who are neither in control of nor in charge of themselves' under the conditions of hypnosis (Radstone, p. 14).

the two contending positions – ‘in the mimetic theory, trauma produces psychological disassociation from the self; in the anti-mimetic theory, it is the record of an unassimilable event which is dissociated from memory’ – neatly encapsulates the circular dynamic of Freud’s revisions to work on trauma, and how these have generated a schism in trauma theory, reflecting, as Berger argues, a differentiation in emphasis on the role of acting out and working through: a differentiation reflected, in his view, in the contrasting theoretical approaches of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra.

The cultural elevation of trauma theory during the 1990s, coupled with its formulation through deconstruction and poststructuralist psychoanalysis, overlaps with Hustvedt and Auster’s early critical engagement with the mechanics of postmodern fiction, and the continuation of their careers in the ‘after postmodernism’ moment. Following 9/11, Hustvedt and Auster both wrote first-person testimonies about the events of that morning. Auster’s response was immediate, penning ‘Random Notes – September 11, 2001 – 4.00pm’ which was published by *Die Zeit* two days later. It begins with a moment of familial rupture: on her first day at high school his daughter travelled alone on the subway, passing under the World Trade Centre less than an hour before the towers fell. She, like many others in the city that evening, does not come home; Auster and Hustvedt are fortunate: their daughter is unharmed and able to spend the night with friends in the city. As they watch the towers burn from the top floor of their house in Brooklyn, Hustvedt’s sister calls ‘to tell us about the screams she heard after the

first tower collapsed'.¹⁶ Later Auster describes walking with Hustvedt through Park Slope, their neighbourhood, where they encounter people wearing masks and handkerchiefs over their faces; a symbiotic alternate to the spectral New Yorkers of Lower Manhattan, wandering through the apocalyptic streets shrouded in the white dust of the collapsed towers, dust which now blows across the Hudson River into their home: 'the smells of the fire have settled into every room of the house. A terrible stinging odor: flaming plastic, electric wire, building materials'.¹⁷ Auster declines to mention the human beings trapped in the burning ruins or pulverised to microscopic matter, although he speaks to his barber whose neighbour was talking to her brother-in-law, who was still inside one of the towers when it collapsed. He thinks of his friend, the high-wire artist Philippe Petit, who in 1974 crossed the space between the totems to capitalism in 'an act of indelible beauty'.¹⁸ His compact account of the day closes with a rueful observation: 'And so the twenty-first century begins'.¹⁹

Hustvedt's essay, '9/11 or One Year After' – jointly published by *The Observer* and *Die Zeit* in 2002 – is possessed of a temporal perspective missing

¹⁶ Paul Auster, 'Random Notes – September 11, 2001 – 4.00pm' in *Collected Prose*, pp. 517-18 (p. 517).

¹⁷ Auster, 'Random Notes' in *Collected Prose*, p. 517.

¹⁸ Auster, 'Random Notes' in *Collected Prose*, pp. 517-18.

¹⁹ Auster, 'Random Notes' in *Collected Prose*, p. 518. Auster's 'NYC = USA', published one year after the attacks, includes the following observation: 'we experienced that day as a family tragedy'. In the article he also calls New York, 'the true heartland' of the US: 'the five boroughs are a living embodiment of what the United States is all about: diversity, tolerance, and equality under the law [...] No matter how we fail to live up to those ideals, that is America at its best' (Paul Auster, 'NYC = USA', in *Collected Prose*, pp. 520-23 [pp. 520-22]).

from her husband's random notes. However, like Auster, she too acknowledges the paradigm-altering events of 9/11 as being:

A threshold and a way of telling time – before and after, pre and post. It has been used to signify the dawn of a new era, an economic fault line, the onset of war, the presence of evil in the world, and a loss of American innocence.²⁰

In the days and weeks that followed, Hustvedt and Auster joined the city's residents in trying vainly to overcome the disorientating effect of what had happened, focusing their attention on family, friends and the wider community:

For New Yorkers, whether we were far from the attacks or close to them, September 11 remains a more intimate memory. For weeks afterwards, the first question we asked friends and neighbours whom we hadn't seen since the attacks was: 'Is your family all right? Did you lose anybody?'²¹

Like Auster, she recounts the experiences of her sister in Tribeca, her friend Larry who worked at the Wall Street Journal in the shadow of the towers, Charlie the liquor store owner who lost his sister-in-law, friends in John Street who were trapped inside their building. September 11, she summarises, was 'a story of collective trauma and ongoing grief':²²

²⁰ Siri Hustvedt, '9/11 or One Year After' in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 119-30 (p. 119).

²¹ Hustvedt, '9/11' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 119.

²² Hustvedt, '9/11' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 120.

The attacks on the World Trade Centre can only be understood through individual people, because if we lose sight of the particular – of one man’s or one woman’s or one child’s suffering and loss – we risk losing sight of our common humanity, and that is form of blindness, not only to others but to ourselves.²³

Hustvedt’s approach to representing the impact of 9/11 on New York is guided by her abiding interest in psychoanalysis, and discursive investigations into the field of neurobiology. This is evidenced by her easy application of terms and rhetorical tropes linked to trauma theory, such as ‘traumatic events are often accompanied by a form of dissociation’, and ‘those of us who are not widows, widowers, or the children of a dead parent have moved from active grief to the repression necessary for recovery’, alongside narrativised reflections upon recent developments in neuroscience.²⁴ Hustvedt’s method of engagement with trauma is transdisciplinary, dialogic and intertextual: by making repeated excursions into the worlds of science, medicine, psychoanalysis, and various cultural and literary theories, while blurring fact and fiction within her narrative to foreground the individual and collective effects of trauma.²⁵ In her trauma-focused non-fiction

²³ Hustvedt, ‘9/11’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 130. In fact, her use of the psychoanalytic term ‘repression’ in relation to grief here is problematic, with repression and resistance typically connected by Freud to the process of acting out, rather than working through.

²⁴ Hustvedt, ‘9/11’ in *A Plea for Eros*, pp. 121-125.

²⁵ Hustvedt’s narrative of autobiographical selfhood is partially informed by traumatic affect and ontological estrangement, as she describes in a 2012 article for *The New York Times*: ‘As an infant I had febrile convulsions. In 1981 I had a brief seizure that threw me against a wall, followed by a yearlong migraine. In 2006 I developed a mysterious seizure disorder that manifests itself in violent shaking...I once had a seizure

work *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt recounts in detail the ‘mysterious seizure disorder’ that followed the death of her father.²⁶ The first occurred when delivering his eulogy; further seizures followed when she delivered a speech in public. The act of writing this exploration of trauma theory, repetition compulsion, and psychoanalytic history became for Hustvedt an essentially cathartic enterprise, a post-traumatic exploration of identity, memory and intersubjectivity.

By contrast, Auster’s trauma narratives lack this explicit transdisciplinary emphasis. Auster’s narratives eschew any mention of the key psychoanalytic texts and advances in neurobiology of Hustvedt’s, and more by the empathic possibilities, and limitations, of establishing communities founded on Buberian mutuality in the wake of a traumatic event. Nevertheless, Auster’s *The Brooklyn Follies*, like Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American*, constructs what Jill Bennett identifies as ‘a certain affective dynamic internal to the work’ through a ‘language of sensation and affect’ through its examination of the impact of 9/11, the necessity of the movement from melancholia to mourning, and trauma’s

while climbing a mountain, which was probably caused by hyperventilation’ (Siri Hustvedt, ‘Reliving the Crash’, *The New York Times* [18 February 2012], [qtd in Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘History and Trauma in Siri Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American*’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, pp. 329-340 (p. 330)]).

²⁶ As noted earlier in Chapter one, her father’s death, and his experiences in the Second World War, made a significant contribution to the narrative of her post-9/11 novel, *The Sorrows of an American*, with his journal entries and letters from the Philippines appearing as verbatim transcripts in the text.

genealogical, transgenerational constituency.²⁷ It is the contention of this chapter that this can be read as the consequence of Auster's dialogic verbal and intertextual engagement with the ideas of Hustvedt.

In order to reflect upon how Hustvedt and Auster attempted to narrativise the trauma of 9/11, I will first look at this apparent distinction between latency and transference, as outlined in the respective texts of Caruth and LaCapra. In the following section, I will conduct a brief review of existing studies into 9/11 fiction, and theoretical approaches to art which attempts to represent trauma in an empathic way. Thereafter, I will look at Hustvedt and Auster's 9/11 novels to establish how they approached representing the terror attacks, their depictions of transgenerational affect within the community of New Yorkers, and the metonymic application of this model to reflect upon the transhistorical sorrows of America. In the conclusion, I will reflect upon how their work is enfolded within the wider post-9/11 literary and aesthetic response to September 11, and the implications for the dialogical nature of their writing relationship.

²⁷ Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2.

Latency and acting out

Hustvedt's observation that 'traumatic events are often accompanied by a form of dissociation' can be traced directly to Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* (meaning belatedness or the temporal deferral of meaning) conception of trauma,²⁸ the moment of affect incurred by a shocking event remains difficult to locate for both victim and analyst.²⁹ In an 1895 letter to his friend Wilhelm Fleiss, Freud isolates psychic rupture as the site of trauma:

This first stage of hysteria may be described as 'fright hysteria': its primary symptom is the *manifestation of fright* accompanied by a *gap* in the psyche...repression and the formation of defensive systems only occur subsequently, in connection with the memory; and thenceforth *defence* and

²⁸ Hustvedt, '9/11' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 121. Hustvedt has recorded her own dissociative detachment following a car crash in Brooklyn which destroyed the car in which she, Auster and their daughter Sophie were travelling. 'After the accident, I was clearly in a dissociated state – weirdly detached from myself – and although I left the hospital without an injury that could be seen on a CT scan, both my memory and my sense of self had been altered by the shock. My amnesia for the accident and the flashbacks that followed, belong to my psychological state, but they are also, of course, part of my physiological state that involved changes in my brain...I am not entirely free of the 'physioneurosis' that began with a car accident almost 10 years ago'. (Siri Hustvedt, 'Reliving the Crash', *The New York Times* [18 February 2012] [qtd in Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'History and Trauma in Siri Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American*' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, pp. 329-30]).

²⁹ Luckhurst, p. 81. The traumatological concept of 'belatedness', what Caruth limns as 'incomprehensibility', is intertwined with the 'belatedness' of Boxall's contemporary and Green's late postmodernism, particularly the conflation of post-Holocaust aesthetics with postmodernism.

overwhelming [of the ego] (that is the formation of symptoms and the outbreak of attacks) may be combined to any extent in hysteria.³⁰

The psychic gap fundamental to the formation of trauma is essentially generative: without beginning treatment, the sufferer will continue acting out the hysterical, or traumatized, symptoms. Written in the wake of the Great War, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) documents the iterative changes in psychoanalytic technique made necessary by new and emerging forms of trauma, stating 'the immediate aims of psycho-analytic technique are quite other today than they were at the outset'.³¹

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud identifies a variant form of 'traumatic neurosis' which prior to the conflict had been commonly associated with mechanical concussion, railway accidents or sudden risk to life; its symptoms closely resembled 'hypochondria or melancholia'. What was initially an 'art of interpreting', and thereafter a means of uncovering 'the patient's resistances', the psychoanalytic method continued to encounter what Freud labelled 'transference neurosis': a struggle between remembering, repeating and working through, reliant upon drawing out painful memory. For patients whose traumatic experience was deeply buried in the psyche through repression, this process of transference was largely inconclusive:

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Draft K' in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), pp. 89-96 (p. 96).

³¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Gay, pp. 594-626 (p. 601).

The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. Thus he acquires no sense of conviction of the correctness of the construction that has been communicated to him. He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past.³²

Freud's concern here is not simply with the traumatized patients who appear to resist the cathartic process of psychoanalysis, but with the intertwining of incomprehensible trauma and unconscious resistance to transference, determining that 'there is no doubt that the resistance of the conscious and unconscious ego operates under the sway of the pleasure principle: it seeks to avoid the unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed'.³³ Psychoanalytic treatment therefore focuses on mastering and disposing of the stimuli which overwhelm the ego and force the patient to continually act out the symptoms of trauma, while channelling the patient's remembrances as a counter to their instinctive urge to return to a pre-traumatic, inorganic state (what was referred to earlier as the 'unpleasure principle', or 'death-drive', which Lacan later reworked as the Real).³⁴ However, the process of working through cannot always be achieved successfully; instead, the acting out of latent trauma preoccupies the ego of the shattered subject.

³² Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Gay, p. 603.

³³ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Gay p. 603.

³⁴ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Gay p. 612.

In *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Cathy Caruth builds upon these early Freudian conceptions of belatedness, resistance and repression to foreground the delayed telling – an ungovernable tension between aporia and anamnesis – that follows a traumatic event:

The wound of the mind...is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it fully imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.³⁵

Trauma, according to Caruth, ‘is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available’.³⁶ Yet, as reading Freud reminds us, the phenomenological constituency of that event and the possibility of representing it through action or discourse are denied to consciousness, and instead characterised by ‘the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena’.³⁷ Caruth situates the latency of trauma within the individual’s temporally-dislocated acknowledgement, cognition and cathartic closure of its ‘shocking and unexpected occurrence’:³⁸

³⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3-4.

³⁶ Caruth, p. 4.

³⁷ Caruth, p. 11.

³⁸ Caruth, p. 6.

The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat but precisely the *missing* of this experience of the threat, that fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known.³⁹

The psychic wound constitutes nothing less than a 'breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world',⁴⁰ one which eludes understanding and is only acknowledged retrospectively. Trauma narratives represent 'a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of the event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival'.⁴¹

Working through Freud's conception of trauma as first explored in *Studies in Hysteria* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, then turning to his fictionalization of the traumatic history of the Jews contained in *Moses and Monotheism* (1934-38), Caruth plausibly argues that latency is determined by the 'peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival'.⁴² It is this very incomprehensibility which produces history defined by transgenerational aporia and 'political and ethical paralysis'.⁴³ For Caruth, as for Freud, 'a history can be grasped only by the

³⁹ Caruth, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Caruth, p. 4.

⁴¹ Caruth, p. 7.

⁴² Caruth, p. 58. Again, here we see a distinct overlap with postmodern fiction's problematization of historical knowledge and its tendency towards ironic inversions of epistemological models. This is particularly acute in the writing of Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, John Barth and Don DeLillo.

⁴³ Caruth, p. 10.

inaccessibility of its occurrence: history is ‘the endless repetition of previous violence’.⁴⁴ Trauma is not simply repressed but incubated: it consists ‘not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself’.⁴⁵ Drawing upon Freud and the semiology of Paul de Man, Caruth equates trauma with departure: what she labels the ‘*unconsciousness of leaving*’, or surviving a fall. Survival is a phenomenon as enigmatic as the traumatic event itself: ‘it is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living’.⁴⁶ Survival, and the will to testimony, forces the disarticulation of repression and resistance in favour of confrontation not only with the trauma itself, but with the perpetrator. Latency, Caruth counterintuitively proposes, is inherently restorative, forging a link between trauma and survival, witnessing and testimony, which are axiomatic, self-referential and self-perpetuating: the trauma survivor is ‘forced, continually, to confront it over and over’, while the super-ego alternately raises and lowers the barrier to sensation and knowledge which prevents recognition and expression of ‘the enigma of survival’.⁴⁷ The drive to unpleasure in confronting trauma is simply a drive towards self-affirmation.

Caruth’s interpretive model is particularly successful when applied to the work of French film director Alain Resnais, whose fragmentary post-Holocaust

⁴⁴ Caruth, p. 62.

⁴⁵ Caruth, p. 17.

⁴⁶ Caruth, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Caruth, p. 58.

narratives enact the ambiguous separation between incomprehensibility and disarticulation favoured by Caruth. In this regard, Hustvedt and Auster's 'after postmodernism' aesthetic mode of production develop the frustrated apprehension of traumatic affect and transferential reconciliation of postmodernism, while pushing towards empathic recognition in the vein of Buber's dialogic *I-Thou* model. However, Caruth's textual re-presentation of Freud's ambitious yet ambiguous traumatology presents a number of problems.⁴⁸ Far from slipping loose of the contradictions of poststructuralism and deconstruction, her theory of trauma finds itself further entwined. For LaCapra, Caruth fails to fully account for the generative quality of belatedness: in his words, it repeats 'whether consciously or unconsciously, the disconcertingly opaque movement of post-traumatic repetition in a seeming attempt to elucidate that movement'.⁴⁹ The primacy of 'not knowing', as he puts it, and its relationship to affect and unconsciousness, moves us further from the traumatic point of origin. Poststructuralism and

⁴⁸ It ascribes, in one sense, supremacy to trauma which is ethically problematic and tautologically complex. Caruth's observation indicates the confluence of poststructuralism and phenomenology within the traumatic field: firstly in her affinity for semiotician Paul de Man's approach to referentiality and the resistance to theory as a means of perceiving history; secondly with the establishment and identification of the binary nature of trauma in order to deconstruct its apparent oppositionality; and finally in the problematic link between events which are consciously perceived and unconsciously stored. Under Caruth's logic the totalizing structures critically challenged by poststructuralism, and the localized and self-referential micro-narratives which followed thereafter, of which transhistorical or collectivised trauma is one, simply supplant one metanarrative (history as knowledge) for another (history as incomprehensibility). Caruth's observation that 'a history can be grasped only by the inaccessibility of its occurrence' further illuminates this point (Caruth, p. 18).

⁴⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 184.

postmodernism, with their focus on self-reflexivity, contingency and slipperiness, are particularly ill-suited to this purpose, according to LaCapra. We must instead locate the study of trauma within his preferred field of historiography, locating the source of traumatic affect through empirical study, in tandem with the testimonial power of the *memento mori*.

Transference and working through

Trauma, according to LaCapra, is a ‘disruptive process that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence’.⁵⁰ The principal focus of LaCapra’s *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), is to acknowledge, understand and attempt to resolve how ‘trauma and its symptomatic aftermath pose acute problems for historical representation and understanding’.⁵¹ Like Caruth, LaCapra draws upon trauma theories first developed by Freud in collaboration with a number of established neurologists during the late nineteenth century, and latterly through a highly idiosyncratic series of discursive essays on the subject of psychoanalysis. Leys’ identification of mimetic and anti-mimetic modes of trauma can be traced to Freud’s acquaintance in the mid-1880s with the work of two French theorists, Jean-Martin Charcot and Hippolyte Bernheim. Both were early proponents and practitioners of hypnosis as part of a transferential treatment of neurasthenia.⁵² Freud soon departed from this hypnosis-as-treatment method of psychoanalysis, instead working with Josef Breuer, pioneer of the ‘talking cure’

⁵⁰ LaCapra, p. 41.

⁵¹ LaCapra, p. ix.

⁵² According to his biographer Peter Gay, Freud believed Charcot’s ‘somatic’ theory deployed the ‘external stimuli’ of hypnosis most effectively ‘when there is a particular disposition of the nervous system and therefore that only neuropaths (especially hysterics) are hypnotizable’. By contrast, Bernheim saw that the ‘physical effects, effects of ideas which are provoked in the hypnotised subject or not’ constituted ‘all the phenomena of hypnosis’, and therefore hysteria. Power and desire are implicated in the hypnotic process, as Leys notes above, coupled with the dual constitution of disassociation which decentres the subject and determines the extent of traumatic repression, resistance or repetition (Sigmund Freud, ‘Review of Forel’s Hypnotism’ [1889] [qtd in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Gay, p. 45]).

which, according to Rachel Bowlby, emphasised communication as a means to recovery, and the ‘stress fell on the auditory, not the visual’ symptoms of trauma.⁵³ Breuer and Freud’s co-authored *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) produced the famous observation that ‘hysterics suffer for the most part from reminiscences’,⁵⁴ which varying from a series of partial traumas to one central destabilising event, and were heightened by the psychological sensitivity of the sufferer, thereby conferring the ‘distressing affects of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain’ upon them.⁵⁵ For Breuer and Freud, traumatic memory instilled within the sufferer a ‘double consciousness’ or ‘hypnoid’ dissociative state,⁵⁶ thereby preventing the lessening of affect: they recorded, ‘if the reaction is suppressed, the affect remains bound up with the memory’.⁵⁷ The cathartic method of Breuer’s talking cure focused on the movement from an anhedonic state towards confrontation and apprehension, and eventual abreaction, of the original trauma:

Remembering without affect almost always fails to be affective; the psychological process that had originally taken place has to be repeated in as vivid a way as possible, brought to its *status nascendi*, and then ‘talked

⁵³ ‘In the talking cure, there is no one language, but a constant movement of boundaries between languages themselves and between language and other domains. [...] The Greek word *cathartic*, adopted to describe the new therapeutic treatment, carries the connotation of a (good) riddance of bodily or emotional matter’ (Rachel Bowlby, ‘Introduction’, in Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria* [London: Penguin, 2004], pp. vii-xxxiii [pp. viii-xiv]).

⁵⁴ Breuer and Freud, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Breuer and Freud, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Breuer and Freud, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Breuer and Freud, p. 11.

through' [...] allowing its trapped affect to drain away through speech; it then submits the idea to associative correction by drawing it into consciousness'.⁵⁸

Modlinger and Sonntag record that the symptoms of hysteria and the problems of remembrance lie 'at the core of recent debates on the nature, transmission, treatment – and telling – of trauma'.⁵⁹ Unlike Caruth's insistence on the unspeakable nature of trauma, LaCapra's reading of Freud's work emphasises the verbal and nonverbal dynamics of transference embedded in 'melancholia and mourning, acting out and working through' as a means of consciously reconstituting shattered subjectivities.⁶⁰

These processes of working through, including mourning and modes of critical thought and practice, involve the possibility of making distinctions or developing articulations that are recognised as problematic, but still function as limited and as possibly desirable resistances of undesirability.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Breuer and Freud, p. 10-19.

⁵⁹ Modlinger and Sonntag, p. 2.

⁶⁰ LaCapra, ix.

⁶¹ LaCapra, p. 22. LaCapra's dynamics of trauma overlap with the phenomenological register of Hustvedt's approach to visual art in the narrative of *What I Loved*, whereby the boundaries between subject and object, viewer and viewed collapse as characters enter into the artworks; as Schulz-Hoffman notes: 'The interior kinesis of the character is transferred to the ambience, becoming a unity with it' (Schulz-Hoffman, 'Siri Hustvedt's Visual Imagination' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 277). To rework Hustvedt's observation, perhaps all traumatic events require a spectator to initiate the process of transference.

The dynamics of trauma, LaCapra believes, ‘are not fully owned by anyone, and in various ways affect everyone’,⁶² while transference, like trauma itself, involves ‘the implication of the observer in the observed’.⁶³

Critical for LaCapra is what he describes as an ‘empathic unsettlement’ and the discursive, or dialogic, nature of that unsettlement – a revisionist trope which develops Breuer’s ‘talking cure’ – through what he refers to as a ‘middle voice’ affected by the ‘tangled and difficult relations of proximity and distance’ to the other.⁶⁴ This neutral middle voice establishes a conscious barrier and intersubjective recognition of self and other which is necessarily interpretative, empathic and non-judgemental. Hyperbolic responses to trauma, such as the irrational, hallucinatory and highly subjective symptoms of hysteria, anxiety, neurosis and so on, constitute a ‘necessary affective response’ to trauma’s impact.⁶⁵ From this individuated and empirical position, both analyst and patient are able to begin the painstaking process of working through the traumatic experience.⁶⁶

LaCapra’s particular theoretical framework applies these Freudian ideas to the sociocultural and political realities which guide historiography, as opposed to

⁶² LaCapra, p. xi.

⁶³ LaCapra, p. 36.

⁶⁴ LaCapra, p. xi.

⁶⁵ LaCapra, p. xi.

⁶⁶ Here LaCapra’s empathic unsettlement recalls Buber’s philosophy of dialogism, particularly the split between the Lacanian register of the *I-It* paradigm, and the dialogic mutual reciprocity of Buber’s favoured *I-Thou* model. The phrase ‘middle voice’ similarly echoes Buber’s notion of the ‘between’: an ambiguous, oscillating zone of transference between self and other.

the literary-theoretical route of poststructuralism, or deconstruction, which influences the work of Caruth. Generalizations about the effects of trauma, according to LaCapra, serve to obscure the critical distinctions – individual, historical, sociocultural, or geopolitical – between specific traumatic events, while impeding the possibility of understanding and reaching cathartic closure; responses to mediatised trauma being a case in point. Distinct to Caruth, LaCapra points to this limiting ‘faith to trauma’ as a form of misrecognition: a desire to remain close to the latency of trauma to preserve the sanctity of its inaccessible memory, which thereby ‘invalidates a form of conceptual or narrative closure’.⁶⁷ While he values the necessity of writing trauma to make sense of trauma, LaCapra quotes Perez Zagorin to question poststructuralism’s reduction of ‘all modes of thought to the common condition of writing’.⁶⁸ The self-referential nature of Barthesian *écriture*, and the intimation of enduring ambivalence between survivor and witness, and perpetrator and victim, has problematic implications for the empathic unsettlement LaCapra valorises:

Undecidability and unregulated *différance*, threatening to disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions, including that between past and present, are related to transference and prevail in trauma and post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of

⁶⁷ LaCapra, p. 22-23.

⁶⁸ Perez Zagorin, ‘Postmodernism: Reconsiderations’ (qtd in LaCapra, p. 9).

traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop.⁶⁹

By its very nature, self-referentiality favours acting out over and above working through: ‘in acting out tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene. Any duality (or double inscription) of time (past and present and future) is experientially collapsed or productive only of aporias or double binds’.⁷⁰ Moreover, poststructuralism’s problematization of self-other distinctions holds implications for the identities of victim and perpetrator, which, according to LaCapra, ‘seem to undercut the problems of agency and responsibility’.⁷¹ This necessarily extends to the transferential nature of the analyst and patient relationship and the cathartic possibilities of the talking cure.

LaCapra also distances his thinking from that of more abstract generalizations of affect which have problematic ethical implications for trauma studies, sometimes resulting in the fetishized ‘wound culture’ identified by Seltzer. LaCapra questions the validity of reading all history as the history of trauma, stating that ‘at times it has even become an obsession or an occasion for rash amalgamations or confluences (for example, in the idea that contemporary culture, or even all history, is essentially traumatic)’.⁷² The transferential nature of trauma, coupled with its elevated position within in contemporary culture, self-reflexively generates a cultural milieu in which theoretical abstraction is placed in

⁶⁹ LaCapra, p. 21.

⁷⁰ LaCapra, p. 22.

⁷¹ LaCapra, p. 25.

⁷² LaCapra, p. x.

greater authority than truth claims arrived at through historiographic practice. While Caruth's reading of Freud appears to locate truth in subjectivity, LaCapra seems to situate it in the objective world, describing the cultural tendency to 'convert trauma into sublimity', which 'paradoxically become[s] the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or group'.⁷³ This psychically-grounded transgenerational resistance to transference and catharsis, LaCapra seems to suggest, is wilful and deliberate: 'one possessed, however vicariously, by the past and reliving its traumatic scenes may be tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner'.⁷⁴

By contrast, according to LaCapra, the process of working through trauma 'involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and re-representation in a manner that may never transcend [it]', but which, crucially, 'counteract[s] a re-enactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation'.⁷⁵ Here he finds some common ground with Caruth, acknowledging the emergence of what he terms 'traumatic realism' through literary and other artistic representations, forms which emphasise 'mutual interactions and resistances' while offering a 'disconcerting exploration of disorientation, its symptomatic dimensions and possible ways of responding to them'.⁷⁶ The disconcerting, disorientating and indefinable qualities of such an aesthetic seem to offer a means to comprehend trauma's incomprehensibility while it remains unavailable to consciousness. LaCapra

⁷³ LaCapra, p. 23.

⁷⁴ LaCapra, p. 28.

⁷⁵ LaCapra, p. 42.

⁷⁶ LaCapra, p. 186.

places a higher value upon ‘ambivalent’ or ‘allegorical’ art which ignores traumatic events or specific figures, citing the work of Kafka, Beckett, Celan and Blanchot – all writers whose work Auster has expressed some admiration for. Writing trauma, for LaCapra, involves a process of acting out, working over and working through in analysing, understanding and ‘giving voice’ to the past.⁷⁷ In *The Brooklyn Follies*, it is possible to see such a moment: a retrospective narrative ostensibly about 9/11 in which all mention of the signifying trauma is withheld until the final page, thereby resisting the ‘wound culture’ Seltzer critiques. In *The Sorrows of an American*, the layering of intergenerational trauma and first-person testimony gesture towards the transhistorical nature of traumatic affect foregrounded by the national tragedy of 9/11. Both novels, as we shall see below, owe a debt of gratitude to Freud.

⁷⁷ LaCapra, p. 186.

Narrativising 9/11

The attack on the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11 has been described as ‘unique’,⁷⁸ a ‘semiotic event’,⁷⁹ and ‘emotional phenomena’.⁸⁰ 9/11 was, moreover, ‘exceptional, unheard of, and unimaginable, raising the fundamental question of its representability in language and in art’.⁸¹ The visceral power of the 9/11 attacks, and its shattering of ‘the symbolic resources of the culture’,⁸² seemed to demand what the author Don DeLillo described as a ‘counter-narrative’.⁸³ For Heffernan and Salvan these narrative responses to 9/11 were conditioned by their appropriation of trauma theory or simulacra theory. The terror attacks delineated the ‘historical logics of globalisation’ and the ‘trans-

⁷⁸ Kaplan, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁸⁰ Roland Bleiker ‘Art after 9/11’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* (31: 1, 2006), 77-99 (p. 90).

⁸¹ Hubert Zapf, ‘Trauma, Narrative and Ethics in Recent American Fiction’, in *Other People's Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*, ed. by Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 145-168 (p. 163).

⁸² Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 1.

⁸³ Don DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, *Harpers* (December 2001), p. 33-40 (p.39). Hustvedt, DeLillo and Auster are friends, with Auster dedicating *Leviathan* to DeLillo. *Falling Man* utilises an ekphrastic technique akin to that of Hustvedt, using representations of two Giorgio Morandi paintings to reflect upon the empathic and cathartic qualities of visual art. The title of DeLillo’s article is taken from a piece by Gerhard Richter. ‘Double Exposure’, Hustvedt’s essay on Richter, was published in *Modern Painters* in 2002, while ‘The Drama of Perception: Looking at Morandi’ was published in the *Yale Review* in 2009 (both were reprinted in *Living, Thinking, Looking*). DeLillo’s other novels also deploy ekphrastic techniques, particularly the lengthy description of the Zapruder film of President Kennedy’s assassination in *Underworld* (1997), and his representation of Douglas Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho* video installation in *Point Omega* (2010)..

realistic effects’ of ‘the cultural logic of postmodernism’; ‘an expression of global terror, but also a ‘performance’ specifically designed for maximum intermedial impact.⁸⁴ Its semiotic consistency, phenomenological hybridity and intersubjective impact forced writers to ‘confront the signal event that reorients the culture and marks it in its deepest substratum’.⁸⁵ For Bennett these narratives were grounded in the vicarious trauma of the non-survivor: ‘for many secondary witnesses – those affected by the tragedy, but not directly involved – the symptomology of trauma offered a means to articulate an affective response’.⁸⁶ According to Versluys, novelists, being possessed of a ‘affective and empathetic understanding’, described a multiplicity of restorative-narrative forms within which the individual is ‘healed’ and ‘made whole’ through ‘narrative and semiosis’.⁸⁷

In his survey of fiction responding to 9/11,⁸⁸ Versluys identifies two categories: those novels characterised by a textual depiction or engagement with the immediate aftermath of the attacks, critically addressing the ‘perpetrator-victim dichotomy’ of mainstream political and cultural responses through a

⁸⁴ Julian Jimenez Heffernan and Paula Martin Salvan, ‘The Stricken Community: Recidivism and Restoration in American 9/11 Fiction’, *Arizona Quarterly* (69: 2, 2013), 145-69 (pp. 145-46).

⁸⁵ Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Bennett, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 12; p. 4.

⁸⁸ Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 1.

‘triangulating discourse’ which ‘appeals for an ethics of responsibility’;⁸⁹ and those novels which reflect a temporal and emotional distancing from the immediacy of 9/11 to re-contextualise its impact. With their concern for what T.M. Luhrman calls ‘quiet traumas’,⁹⁰ 9/11 exists as a ‘vestige’ or ‘spectralisation’, while the narrative delineates a metonymic exploration of ethics, morality and responsibility within the new context.⁹¹ The post-9/11 canon Versluys describes seems to respond to Butler’s call for the minimisation of global violence and acknowledgement of independency as the basis of a ‘global political community’,⁹² while ‘foregrounding that practices and perceptions of power are inseparable from processes of memory, mediation and forgetting’.⁹³ Literary fiction penned in response to 9/11 applied this framework on a microcosmic, or glocal, scale. In many of these narratives, trauma’s intersubjective foundation is reiterated through their focus on New York’s grieving citizens, while being referentially delineated by the disappearance of the

⁸⁹ Works of fiction in this category included notable narrative responses by New Yorkers: DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, Jay McInerney’s *The Good Life* (2006), and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) (Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 183).

⁹⁰ T.M. Luhrmann, quoted in Kaplan, p. 19.

⁹¹ If there is a difficulty with these categorizations it is that, as time passes, all novels written after September 11 could be considered part of the post-9/11 canon. Here one sees an equivalent position in Robert Eaglestone equation of postmodernism with post-Holocaust aesthetics, specifically the philosophies of Levinas and Derrida, both of whom have influenced the writing of Hustvedt and Auster. As with the artists, writers and thinkers of the late Twentieth Century, all contemporary writers live and work in the post-9/11 era. See Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹² Butler, p. xii.

⁹³ Sielke, p. 396.

familiar figures of the Twin Towers: ‘their visual absence was traumatic’, the concretisation of a psychical ‘gap or lack’ in the Manhattan skyline.⁹⁴ Absence as a trope of trauma draws upon the latency identified by Caruth, with Radstone observing that the relationship between representation and actuality is defined by ‘the absence of traces’.⁹⁵ Alternatively, trauma narratives that recontextualised 9/11 within a history of transgenerational trauma and Western cultural hegemony took their theoretical and structural cues from LaCapra.

Other critical approaches to the canon Versluys identified have found the response by American writers to 9/11 to be more problematic. In targeting the symbols of political, economic and cultural power that had characterised and coloured the texture of the late Twentieth Century, the origins of the attack are inscribed in the narrative of American hegemony and ‘first world privilege’ that preceded it,⁹⁶ and in the ‘conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression’ that followed.⁹⁷ It triggered a new cycle of ‘military violence and retribution’ under the guise of the Bush Administration’s War on Terror,⁹⁸ which bequeathed to the global community armed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, further destabilisation and Islamist insurgency across the Middle East, and the global proliferation of localised jihadi networks. Experienced globally through digital

⁹⁴ Kaplan, p. 12.

⁹⁵ Radstone, p. 12.

⁹⁶ Butler, p. xii.

⁹⁷ Butler, p. xi.

⁹⁸ Butler, p. xii.

and mass media, it enacted a ‘rupture for everybody’;⁹⁹ its visual nature ‘seemed to feed trauma’ by making individual and collective trauma inseparable and reinforcing: being experienced by those who survived it, witnessed it first hand or watched the broadcast images, transacting a transnational victimology.¹⁰⁰ While Bennett argues that ‘we are all victims of the 9/11 attacks, by some degree of association’,¹⁰¹ others such as Kamila Shamsie, Richard Gray and David Holloway highlight representations of the 9/11 terror attacks which are burdened by a native insularity and myopic victimology which fail to adequately reconcile the strange (Other) with the familiar (domestic) required to reach empathic resolution.¹⁰²

The trauma narratives of Hustvedt and Auster are inevitably drawn into these critical debates, while the authenticity of their empathic narratives is

⁹⁹ Bennett, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Kaplan, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Bennett, p. 20.

¹⁰² Shamsie in particular critiques American incredulity at the 9/11 terror attacks as being symptomatic of its incapability of critically distinguishing between ‘America in the world’ and ‘the world in America’: the false dichotomy of the ‘brutal military power’ and realpolitik of American foreign policy, and the ‘exuberance and possibility’ of its cultural hegemony. Shamsie writes: ‘all of America looked at America with one eye shut’, while further highlighting, ‘with pitifully few exceptions’, the domestic concerns of 9/11 novels penned by Americans. (See Kamila Shamsie, ‘The Storytellers of Empire’, *Guernica* (01 February 2012) <http://www.guernicamag.com/shamsie_02_01_2-12> [Accessed 23 June 2017]). Like Shamsie, Gray seeks to establish an alternative post-9/11 canon, positing Homi Bhaba’s notion of interstitiality as a means of transcending the ‘spaces between cultures’ which concretise the separation of self and other, through the formal and thematic possibilities of narrative. See Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), p. 93.

problematized by the perspectives of Shamsie, Gray and others. Nevertheless, the novels that will come under consideration in this chapter are characterised by intersubjective exchange between victim and witness or artist and audience, and the move from the melancholia of compulsive repetition towards the ‘active *work* of mourning that allows one who has lost an object to move beyond grief’.¹⁰³ Debra Shostak compares this process with LaCapra’s definition of melancholia, which is ‘characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatised self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past’.¹⁰⁴ The embodied nature of witnessing trauma and its dissociative effects invites an intermedial exchange between surviving or witnessing trauma, and forming an aesthetic response to art which is summarised by Hustvedt’s comment that ‘seeing isn’t always believing’:

The temperamentally sensitive will be more vulnerable to shocks and blows than the temperamentally robust. This applies to art as well. Our temperaments in tandem with our personal stories as we grow as human beings will affect our responses... and become part of the dialogue.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Debra Shostak, ‘In the Country of Missing Persons: Paul Auster’s Narratives of Trauma’, *Studies in the Novel* (41: 1, 2009), 66-87 (, p. 67). Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) predates *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but this split between latent trauma (melancholia, acting out, incomprehensibility) and the process of transference (mourning, working through, apprehension) is present in the earlier text.

¹⁰⁴ Dominick LaCapra, ‘Reflections on Trauma, Absence and Loss’, p. 189, qtd in Shostak, p. 67. Shostak also highlights LaCapra’s separation of absence and loss, with absence being ‘existential’ and loss ‘temporal’. Absence for LaCapra, is not an ‘event’ in the way that 9/11 was, but a transhistorical, ontological condition (Shostak, p. 67).

¹⁰⁵ Hustvedt, ‘Embodied Visions’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 344-45.

The textual hybrid spatiality and drive towards restorative mutuality deployed by Hustvedt and Auster in their respective post-9/11 narratives further indicates a movement towards a metamodernistic mode of writing. It equally serves to reinforce the dialogic constituency of their writing relationship, where these separate and distinct approaches to narrativizing 9/11 co-exist in complementary symbiosis.

1: Representing unrepresentability

This section will examine how Auster and Hustvedt attempted to narrativise 9/11 by exploring the tension between latency and transference. The difficulty of adequately representing the event and traumatic aftermath of the September 11 terror attacks is located within its phenomenological incomprehensibility. Luckhurst, drawing upon Bruno Latour's 'hybrid assemblages', describes the traumatic event as a 'tangled object' that blurs binaries and confuses the 'fundamental categories of subject and object, human and non-human, society and nature'.¹⁰⁶ Leys contends that 'language bears witness...only by a failure of witnessing or representation',¹⁰⁷ thereby issuing an 'ethical obligation on the listener'.¹⁰⁸ For Sielke, 'trauma does not simply escape the symbolic...rather it marks the limits of the symbolic, while at the same time

¹⁰⁶ Luckhurst, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ Leys, p. 268.

¹⁰⁸ Leys, p. 269.

being retained and conserved across time, escaping historicity while compulsively returning',¹⁰⁹ what Luckhurst elsewhere describes as 'a fundamental tension between interruption and flow, blockage and movement'. Consequently, according to Luckhurst, 'if trauma is a crisis in representation, then this generates narrative possibility just as much as impossibility'.¹¹⁰ Katharina Donn concurs, observing:

While the impact of trauma, with its disturbing flashbacks and haunting memories undermines the epistemological categories of a purely empirical, diagnostic approach from the start, the symbolic complexity of a literary text can offer a way out of this paralysing shock.¹¹¹

The oscillation between paralysis and agency, incomprehensibility and representation, empiricism and imagination, and mourning and melancholia are discursively delineated by Hustvedt and Auster in their two post-9/11 novels.

The Sorrows of an American revisits the thematic and theoretical concerns of *What I Loved*, developing the triangulation of traumatic affect, self-other recognition and an aesthetic of cathartic mutuality established by Hustvedt in the

¹⁰⁹ Sielke, p. 391.

¹¹⁰ Luckhurst, p. 83.

¹¹¹ Katharina Donn, 'Crisis of Knowledge: Trauma in *The Sorrows of an American*' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, pp. 341-56 (p. 342).

earlier novel. As Elizabeth Kovach records, ‘life in *The Sorrows of an American* is characterised by mutability and insecurity’:¹¹²

In a city proven vulnerable by 9/11, Hustvedt’s characters must deal with a confounding simultaneity of contradictory conditions on a most personal as well as greater socio-political levels.¹¹³

In Hustvedt’s fifth novel, a middle class New York family tries to come to terms with paterfamilias Lars Davidsen, while the wider community attempts to come to terms with the traumatic aftershocks of 9/11. Hustvedt principally utilises self-other dialectics in tandem with psychoanalytic theory to explore the national trauma of 9/11, and the deaths of Lars and his daughter Inga Blaustein’s husband from cancer. As Mark C. Taylor suggests, ‘absence – what is unsaid and, perhaps, unsayable – always sets the story in motion’.¹¹⁴ Hustvedt’s novel opens with Erik recalling: ‘My sister [Inga] called it ‘the year of secrets,’ but when I look back on it now, I’ve come to understand that it was a time not of what was there, but of what wasn’t’. (*Sorrows* 1)

We enter the narrative through the embodied subjectivity of Hustvedt’s psychiatrist/psychoanalyst protagonist Erik Davidsen. Through his solipsistic narration, we learn that Erik is affected by a sense of joylessness – what he terms

¹¹² Elizabeth Kovach, ‘Violated Securies: Symptoms of a post-9/11 Zeitgeist in Siri Hustvedt’s *The Sorrows of an American*’, *eTransfers: A Postgraduate eJournal for Contemporary Literature and Cultural Studies* (2: 2012), 1-18 (p. 5). <<http://qmul.ac.uk/cagcr/etransfers/docs/86154.pdf>> [Accessed 26/03/2017].

¹¹³ Kovach, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Mark C. Taylor, ‘Wounding Words’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, pp. 153-184 (p. 166).

‘anhedonia’ (*Sorrows* 122) – following the death of his father, and the suicide of a patient, Sarah, with whom he was having an affair. Intoning ‘I’m so lonely’ at moments of quiet crisis and personal insecurity, (*Sorrows* 17) Erik finds himself subjected to the same unconscious pressures as his patients, friends and family members. His repeated verbalisations form an intersubjective link to Erik’s deceased father, who suffered a similar affliction in his closing years ‘at the nursing home’, where ‘he would utter Marit [his wife’s name] over and over’. (*Sorrows* 16) Erik’s professional identity – with its necessary tension between proximity and distance to the other – is engrained with intersubjective implications which complicate his relationship with others.¹¹⁵ His predominantly perception-driven narration becomes a framing device within which the language of psychoanalysis and the tropes of trauma interweave with the structural and inherently transferential elements of Hustvedt’s literary technique, as the author herself observes:

The analyst as a neutral figure has long struck me as a flawed idea [...] Erik knows he is not neutral, knows that psychotherapy happens in the land of Between, that wilderness between you and me. Although the patient’s narration must dominate, the analyst can steer, probe, wander,

¹¹⁵ ‘Writing as Erik, I felt an underground music that determined the rhythms of the book’s form. I knew I was writing a verbal fugue, point and counterpoint, themes chasing themes and variations on them that kept returning: telling and not telling, listening and deafness, parents and children, the past and the present, on generation’s sorrows living on in the generations that follow it’ (Siri Hustvedt, ‘The Analyst in Fiction: Reflections on a More or Less Hidden Being’ in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, pp. 152-65 [p. 165]).

and interpret, while he or she maintains a thoughtful, sympathetic professional distance.¹¹⁶

Similarly, Erik's narration elicits a response within the reader which is equally thoughtful, sympathetic and interpretative, a process reaffirmed by Hustvedt: 'there is no real other in a novel, only imagined others. But writing novels is nevertheless a form of open listening to those imagined others'.¹¹⁷

Hustvedt's use of a psychoanalyst narrator, therefore, not only offers an ironic inversion of the patient-analyst relationship, drawing the reader deeper into the drama between self and other, but it also offers a more concretised means by which she can adequately narrativise the aftermath of 9/11. For Zapf, Hustvedt includes 9/11 'as one contemporary background for the semi-autobiographical traumas of everyday life'.¹¹⁸ Hustvedt's treatment of trauma in her fiction revolves around an openly discursive exploration of a range of other voices: the disciplines of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, neuroscience and literary theory.¹¹⁹ Donn goes further, proposing that Hustvedt's 'imaginative mode...makes the novel a space for developing a multi-dimensional knowledge not without, but beyond the rational'.¹²⁰ Through the nexus of multiple perspectives and

¹¹⁶ Hustvedt, 'The Analyst in Fiction' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 157.

¹¹⁷ Hustvedt, 'The Analyst in Fiction' in *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 165.

¹¹⁸ Zapf, 'Trauma, Narrative and Ethics' in *Other People's Pain*, ed. by Modlinger and Sonntag, p. 164.

¹¹⁹ Zapf, 'Trauma, Narrative and Ethics' in *Other People's Pain*, ed. by Modlinger and Sonntag, p. 164.

¹²⁰ Donn, 'Crisis of Knowledge' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 342.

Rather than problematizing knowledge through the historiographic metafiction delineated by Hutcheon, for Donn Hustvedt's novel indicates a new epistemology which attempts to move beyond the 'crisis of

theoretical positions identified by Zapf and Donn, Hustvedt begins to delineate an ethical position in relation to trauma, one which emphasises its intergenerational and transgressive constituency: what Taylor terms ‘psychic inheritance’. Erik’s initial apprehension of trauma, according to Jean-Michel Rabaté, is initially Caruthian: as Erik observes, ‘trauma isn’t part of a story; it is outside the story. It is what we refuse to make part of the story’.¹²¹ (*Sorrows* 52) Later, according to Rabaté, the narrative of *The Sorrows of an American*:

Gains a Freudian dynamism of its own...it affirms that talking, like writing, can lift the trauma. Writing can transform the unspeakable wound into a metaphorical scar – a true ‘scar-letter’.¹²²

In *The Sorrows of an American*, Hustvedt explores how the tension between incomprehensibility and belatedness of affect, and the split between loss and absence, constitute a crisis of subjectivity (melancholia) which must be worked through to achieve catharsis (mourning).¹²³ Further, according to Elizabeth

knowledge’ trauma engenders. This overtly empathic epistemological mode is rooted in a framework of embodied intersubjectivity and reciprocal mutuality.

¹²¹ Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘History and Trauma’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 337.

¹²² Rabaté, ‘History and Trauma’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 337.

¹²³ ‘A man a came to think of as my imaginary brother...brought up in Minnesota by parents very much like mine, he was the boy never born into the Hustvedt family’. (*Shaking* 5) For Mark C. Taylor, ‘Erik, the psychoanalyst, and Inga, the philosophy student and writer, are pseudonyms for two Siri’s who write the text.’ Taylor also highlight’s Hustvedt’s drawing upon Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* as an intertext for *The Sorrows of an American*, isolating Kierkegaard’s belief in ‘psychic inheritance’ whereby ‘the sins of the father are visited on sons and daughters in the form of dread, which can become overwhelming. From generation to generation, psychic debt (*de Schuld*) is compounded and guilt (*die Schuld*) increases’. (See

Kovach, Hustvedt presents 9/11 in a liminal and vertiginous way, allowing it to pervade ‘the story and structure’ through its myriad fragmentary and fleeting appearances, represented through the differing remembrances of the Davidsen/Blaustein family members.¹²⁴ The events of 9/11 are largely peripheral to the emotional core of the central narrative.

This peripherality similarly applies to Auster’s *The Brooklyn Follies*. Auster’s first and only novel to deal directly with the national trauma of 9/11 can be read as one novel in a sequence which progresses postmodern fiction’s exploration of the tension between traumatology and the limits of historical knowledge. Debra Shostak proposes that ‘Auster’s framing of the novel’s action between moments of personal and national trauma points to one of the abiding preoccupations of his career’.¹²⁵ For Heffernan and Salvan, the novel ‘enacts the

Mark C. Taylor, ‘Wounding Words’ in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf pp. 166-68.)

¹²⁴ Kovach, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Shostak, p. 66. According to Shostak, this interest in trauma is a long-standing one: the writing of his first published non-fictional text – *The Invention of Solitude* – was triggered by the sudden death of his father, and examines this through a central presence as absence organising motif. Auster’s book also addresses the transgenerational trauma of his grandfather’s murder at the hands of his grandmother, and the effect of the Holocaust. The existential narratives of Auster’s early fiction – *New York Trilogy*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *Moon Palace*, *The Music of Chance* and *Leviathan* – all exhibit postmodern techniques self-reflexively rendered through the effects of trauma, and the contingent frustration of cathartic recovery, with the narrative suggesting a metonymic commentary upon the socio-cultural failings of contemporary America. After *Leviathan*, Auster’s novels switch to a more obliquely empathic mode which gives precedence to linear storytelling: the causality-focused ethical narratives of *Mr. Vertigo*, *Timbuktu* and *The Book of Illusions* in particular move beyond the mechanistic contingency of his earlier fiction. In this sense less of a departure, more of a deepening and rebalancing of these empathic concerns: nihilism ceding to optimism, dissolution

conjunction of historical terror, Utopian community and American literature in a characteristic meta-literary turn'.¹²⁶ Auster's first, and only, novel to notionally engage with the national trauma of 9/11, *The Brooklyn Follies* is an episodic, neo-picaresque text in the tragi-comic mode. His protagonist is Nathan Glass, a former life-insurance salesman and cancer survivor, who is retelling the past few months of his life. Nathan, like Hustvedt's Erik, is a Brooklynite, and possessed of typically-Austerian cratyllic surname, although the New York he shows us is not the Manhattan of destabilising reflections of Auster's *City of Glass*, but the empathic Brooklyn the author now calls his home. His narrative opens with a typically Austerian non-sequitur – 'I was looking for a place to die'.¹²⁷ Conversely the novel closes with a joyous declaration of certainty and emotional rectitude, after the narrator is discharged from hospital following another brush with mortality: 'I was happy my friends, as happy as any man who had ever lived' (*Follies* 304).

At the close of the novel, Auster dispels the tragi-comic absurdities of Nathan's empathic narrative with a reference to the 9/11 terror attacks:

giving way to narrative resolution: 'the narrators pursuing their objects engage in a therapeutic process which brings them towards accepting loss, contingency and thwarted desire'. Shostak similarly notes LaCapra's separation of 'absence from loss, acting out from on working through, mourning from melancholy' in Auster's narrativised confrontations with trauma. (Shostak, pp. 66-8.)

¹²⁶ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 161.

¹²⁷ Paul Auster, *The Brooklyn Follies* (London: Faber, 2005), p. 1. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Follies* with page numbers cited. Compare this opening with that of *The Book of Illusions* ('everyone thought he was dead').

It was eight o'clock when I stepped out onto the street, eight o'clock on the morning of September 11, 2001 – just forty-six minutes before the first plane crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre. Just two hours after that, the smoke of three thousand incinerated bodies would drift over toward Brooklyn and come pouring down on us in a white cloud of ashes and death. (*Follies* 303-04)

This reflects what Heidi Elisabeth Bollinger identifies as an inversion of the '*deus ex machina*' trope, an otherwise 'miraculous intervention', which precipitates the 'unsettling and frustrating conclusions [which] invoke the confusion and sense of unreality generated by mass disasters', and offers an opportunity to 'reread the historical disaster in light of its outcome'.¹²⁸ For Bollinger, the 'paradigm-shattering' close of *The Brooklyn Follies* problematizes 'not only the future beyond the plot's end but the meaning of all preceding events'.¹²⁹ By contrast, Heffernan and Salvan emphasise the positivity of the novel's close, suggesting that 'Auster creates a narrative where violence is projected into the future, into a suspended 'not-yet' time – immediately before 9/11 – and place – Brooklyn – where he can build a Utopian community' which will survive future violence'.¹³⁰

Bollinger argues that 'Auster's ending does not befit his plot, but punctures it', suggesting that at that moment it switches from being a pre-9/11 novel to a post-9/11 one. Auster's approach to representing the 'semiotic' event of

¹²⁸ Heidi Elisabeth Bollinger, 'The Danger of Re-reading: Disastrous Endings in Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, *Studies in the Novel* (46:4, 2014), 486-506 (pp. 486-87).

¹²⁹ Bollinger, p. 487.

¹³⁰ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 162.

9/11 is equal parts playful and thoughtful: by positioning the event at the close of the novel, he deliberately steps away from other post-9/11 novels which employ a degree of foreshadowing, or indeed backshadowing, in relation to the event. The linearity, temporality and ethicality of the novel are called into question: our understanding and knowledge of the events of the preceding pages are shaded with new meaning. On the one hand, it is fundamentally a novel about 9/11, where the ‘invocation of 9/11 amplifies the meaning of trauma’; on the other, 9/11 is so superfluous to the narrative its arrival appears blandly superficial, much like the mediatized representation the global community experienced. Bollinger’s belief that ‘the sucker-punch ending dramatizes the meaninglessness of the type of ‘everyday people’ storytelling in which Auster has indulged’ overlooks the credibility of Auster’s narrative: this is a novel about trauma in which the limit event appears belatedly. In metamodernistic terms, it is both and neither approach to representing trauma: it oscillates between critical reflexivity and critical distancing which preserves Auster’s customary ambiguity, while similarly retaining his pervasive and persuasive empathic concerns about the impact of trauma on the city of New York, and an American nation comprised of citizens, families and communities united in melancholia and mourning.

2. A nation united in grief?

Radstone’s contention that ‘a theory of subjectivity is implicit within trauma theory’ is developed within the trauma narratives of Hustvedt and Auster

in an aesthetic mode that is intersubjective, dialogic and empathic.¹³¹ The problematic *a priori* autonomy of the traumatised subject, the difficulty of moving from melancholia to mourning, and the oscillation between latency and transference in the abreaction of trauma, seem to reinforce the ontological boundaries of perception, while allowing for an epistemologically-grounded self-other dialogue which is inherently intersubjective. Their use of first person perspective allows for what Beverley Haviland describes as the ‘rhetorical continuity of the subject’, thus transcending the ‘discontinuity and rupture that characterise his or her traumatic experience’ and permitting their survival, even if that speaking is fragmented and comes long after the fact’.¹³² Within this first person narration, Hustvedt and Auster also attempt to integrate ‘multiple subject positions’ – partially through empathic narration and the co-deployment of Buberian self-other dialectics – as a means of representing the tropes of identity, community and transgenerational trauma.¹³³

Marks notes that ‘the survivors in *The Sorrows of an American* have ongoing connections to the people they have lost – they feel their presence, listen to their voices, and enter dialogues’.¹³⁴ For Hustvedt, the cathartic potential of language is defined by its ability to cross ‘the boundaries of the body’, (*Sorrows* 16) and pass between the living and the dead in a dialogic exchange. In this

¹³¹ Radstone, p. 13

¹³² Beverley Haviland, ‘After the Fact: Mourning, Melancholy and Nachtraglikeit Novels of 9/11’, *Amerikastudien* (55:3, 2010), 429-49 (p. 430).

¹³³ Haviland, p. 430.

¹³⁴ Marks, p. 185.

regard, language is inextricably linked to the genealogy of trauma; equally, traumatic affect foregrounds the memory problematic explored in Chapter one of this thesis. While clearing out his late father's belongings, Erik discovers a journal which contains Lars' experiences while serving as a soldier in the Second World War, prompting him to reflect:

Every memoir is full of holes. It's obvious that there are stories that can't be told without pain to others or to oneself, that autobiography is fraught with questions of perspective, self-knowledge, repression, and outright delusion. (*Sorrows* 8)

Erik and his sister Inga later discover a letter containing a family secret in which Lars is implicated. Here, Hustvedt returns to her interest in objects as vessels of traumatic memory, aligned to the absence-as-presence affect that these objects confer upon their owners: 'memory offers up its gifts only when jogged by something in the present'. (*Sorrows* 80) Erik's repeated reading of his father's journals and this letter suggest the unconscious acting out of melancholia rather than a consciously mournful working through, and as a consequence his achievement of catharsis is frustrated: 'my scrutiny of his memoir and my daily jottings about the man were clearly forms of grief, but there was something missing in me, too, and that absence had turned into agitation'. (*Sorrows* 122) The difficulty of transference is perhaps one consequence of his father's unavailability: to borrow from Husserl and Freud, Erik's trauma is literally unspeakable due to the absence of the intended object of his grief. When Erik states 'after my father died, I couldn't talk to him in person anymore, but I didn't stop having conversations with him in my head', (*Sorrows* 1) Erik's imagined

dialogues with Lars offers the possibility of psychological reconciliation, while alternately preserving the melancholic psychic inheritance which deepens his anhedonia.

Elsewhere the transgenerational constituency of trauma is further developed through Hustvedt's dialogic exchange between Erik's narration and transcripts from his father's journal. Erik imagines 'my father's paternal grandfather lowering the trunk he would take to America down the mountain at Voss by rope and pulley, and the dugout where he first lived, a hole in the earth covered with grass' in the harsh landscape of the American Midwest. (*Sorrows* 187) The log cabin that Olaf, Lars' grandfather, eventually builds later burns with him trapped in it, prompting this remembrance by Lars: 'he was in bed the last time I saw him, unable to speak. He put his scarred hand on my head as if to bless me'. (*Sorrows* 187) The narrative occupies this zone of ambiguity between the incomprehensible present and the barely-legible recesses of the past, plunging vertiginously into the history of the Davidsen family or Lars' combat experiences through his journal and letters:

We were badly shelled for three nights...They pounded our beach in a systematic and repetitive manner ...The terror you felt when you knew that the next one might dig a cellar where you lay is war at its worst.
(*Sorrows* 69)

After his death, Lars leaves the tiny Minnesotan house his family shared during the Depression to Erik, thus conferring the pattern of trauma established by his

ancestor's departure from their Norwegian homeland: blessing him with his own scarred hand.

Hustvedt's acknowledgement of the historically-engrained incomprehensibility of trauma brings the transgenerational suffering detailed in Lars' journal into intersubjective alignment with the contemporary trauma of his children:

The smoking sky on September eleventh, the television images from Iraq, the bombs that burst on the beach where my father had dug himself a trench in February 1945 burned in unison on the familiar ground of rural Minnesota. Three detonations. (*Sorrows* 232)

Inga Blaustein's physical shaking and emotional instability – recorded by Erik as dating from early childhood, and drawing from Hustvedt's own malady in the wake of her father's death – signify the neuroses of three recent trauma: her father's death, the death from cancer of her author husband Max Blaustein, and her survival of the attacks on the Twin Towers with her daughter Sonia: 'On the morning of September 11, 2001 [...] they were just blocks from the burning towers' (*Sorrows* 3). Erik's diagnosis that, 'I'm convinced now that Inga was suffering from absences' (*Sorrows* 25) reflects this continued state of psychical conflict and emotional stasis, a symptom of her inability to work through the gradations of trauma she has suffered. Like their Norwegian ancestors, death and trauma has turned New York into a city of 'sibling ghosts', (*Sorrows* 11) whose inhabitants carry the physical and psychical scars that refuse to heal. Her own personal testimony of surviving 9/11 remains absent from the narrative; in its

place, Erik's abridged and mediated retelling of Inga and Sonia's story: 'they ran north to White Street without saying a word to each other, running with hundreds of other people pushing away from the fires'. (*Sorrows* 49)

As with the death of Lars, Hustvedt seems to connect Inga's husband's death to the events of September 11 as a commentary upon the inability of America to protect its child-citizens from the physical and psychological pain threatened by globalised terrorism.¹³⁵

I had been worried about Sonia ever since her father died five years earlier...I know that Inga tried to hide her grief from Sonia, that when her daughter was at school my sister would turn on music, lie down on the floor and wail, but I had never seen Sonia give in to sobs, and neither had her mother. (*Sorrows* 3)

Sonia's trauma is deeper than that of her mother and uncle, but her proximity to the terror attacks exacerbates it: 'it was only later that I discovered what Sonia had seen from her schoolroom window' (*Sorrows* 3). Inga similarly senses the disruption to her daughter's psyche: 'I often wonder what she would have been like if there hadn't been September eleventh' (*Sorrows* 48). Sonia's eventual

¹³⁵ This approach, deployed in a number of post-9/11 narratives by American authors, has come under some criticism for reinforcing a mythos of American innocence which is conflated with an exceptionalist national creed. Gray and Holloway both critique this mythos, with the latter writing that 'the early 9/11 novel had a particular tendency to sublimate contemporary anxieties about state activity, and about the state's jeopardising of the safety of its citizens, in stories about the failures of family members to protect one another – particularly the failure of parents to protect children'. See David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 108.

collapse arrives on the second anniversary of the terror attacks, in a physical expression of belated affect: ‘After freezing in front of the pane, Sonia put her hands on either side of her head and shouted, ‘I don’t want this world, I don’t want it’. Then she sank to her knees and began to sob uncontrollably’: (*Sorrows* 229)

The second anniversary opened an internal crack in Sonia, a fissure which she released the explosive feeling that had horrified her for two years. The conflagration that had burned so many, that had pushed people into the open air, onto the ledges from which they jumped, some of the on fire, had left its unspeakable images inside my niece. (*Sorrows* 230)

Hustvedt’s narrative shows the Davidsen family acting out the symptoms of trauma and struggling to work through it. Trauma is directly rendered as a fragmentation and blurring of the actual and the unreal, the observable and unobservable, the psychical and physical; individual trauma is once more contextualised as an intersubjective, collective and transgenerational experience, where the borders between self and other are collapsed and mutually reaffirmed.

Auster’s depictions of traumatic affect in *The Brooklyn Follies* are more muted and mutable, composed chiefly of the cruelties and calamities family members inflict upon each other: ‘everyone knows what dangers lurk behind the closed doors of family life. It can be poison for all concerned’. (*Follies* 3) At the beginning of the novel, Nathan’s family has fallen apart. A philanderer and dinner table demagogue, Nathan finds himself in a mess of his own making: ‘the divorce wasn’t my idea...I was planning to stay with Edith until the end. She was the one

who wanted out'. (*Follies* 3) Nathan's solipsism, more than implied by his divorcee status, is confirmed by his fractious relationship with his daughter

Rachel:

It looked as if Rachel was about to cry, but she blinked back the tears and called me a cruel and selfish person instead. No wonder 'Mom' had finally divorced me...Being married to me must have been an unending torture, a living hell. *A living hell.* (*Follies* 2)

Here Auster effects an inversion of the motif of presence-as-absence underpinning traumatic experience: Nathan is the distanced paterfamilias of a problematically patriarchal society, and conversely the misrecognised or unknown other to his female family members. In the opening pages of the novel, Auster offers a critique of the inability and unwillingness of parents – perhaps as a metonym for the patriarchal panopticon of American power – to protect their children and other vulnerable members of society at times of crisis.¹³⁶

Nathan's narration seems to issue a challenge to the empathic qualities of the reader, rather than the clarion call to mutuality this novel seems to invoke. Nathan is an unreliable and unlikeable narrator: an inelegant, ineloquent windbag. This is doubly ironic given the deluded Nathan prides himself on being a good listener, of having the qualities one would equate with psychiatry – 'you can't sell

¹³⁶ Auster's invocation of Sartre's famous line from *No Exit* (1944) – 'l'enfer, c'est les autres' – offers an ironic doubling with the living hell of surviving trauma to imply Nathan's cynical register of his daughter's authentic complaint: 'not once has she come up with an original remark, with something absolutely and irreducibly her own'. (*Follies* 2)

life insurance as successfully as I did by alienating your customers... You have to be sympathetic. You have to be able to listen. You have to know how to charm people' (*Follies 2*) – while dismissing the 'platitudes' and 'meddling advice' of his daughter. However, his self-aggrandizing solipsism lapses from enhanced self-awareness to self-pity, with Nathan eventually conceding his own inconsistencies in dubious fashion:

I suppose there is something nasty about me at times. But not all the time... I wouldn't want to contradict her memories, but the truth is I cared for them in my own way, and if I sometimes found myself in the arms of other women, I never took any of those affairs seriously. (*Follies 3*)

The only true picture Nathan presents of himself is when he details his cancer diagnosis, and the physical and emotional impact of the treatment:

The shock of the cancer had been so great, I still didn't believe in the possibility of surviving it. I had given myself up for dead, and once the cancer had been cut out of me and I'd gone through the debilitating ordeals of radiation treatment and chemo, once I'd suffered the long bouts of nausea and dizziness, the loss of hair, the loss of will, the loss of job, the loss of wife, it was difficult for me to imagine how to go on. (*Follies 3*)

Here we are presented with a detailed view of Nathan's predicament, and realise that he is acting out the effects of the cancer diagnosis: the sudden rupture of his masculine, philandering former identity, and the dawning realisation of imminent mortality. 'Hence Brooklyn', he writes, 'hence my unconscious return to the place where my story began'. (*Follies 3*)

Elsewhere Auster directly appropriates the tropes of hysteria when recounting the story of Flora, Harry Brightman's daughter, who suffers from a manic condition which fluctuates between moments of mimetic and anti-mimetic trauma. The source of Flora's mania, as described by Harry and Tom, is not fully disclosed, but seems to be a psychic condition which has troubled her from birth. Earlier in the narrative, Tom describes meeting for the first time 'a strange dishevelled creature with darting eyes and a foul, acrid smell hovering around her body' who has 'trembling nicotine-stained fingers' and is 'agitated, bristling with anger'. (*Follies* 33-34) Nathan recounts 'Tom recognized it as the smell of the permanently unwashed, the smell of the insane'.¹³⁷ Alongside the physical representation of mania, Flora exhibits moments of apparent perspicacity in identifying the cratylic nature of Tom's name: 'Tom Wood. I know all about you. In the middle of life's journey. I lost my way in a dark wood. But you are too ignorant to know that. You're one of those little men who can't see the wood for the trees'. (*Follies* 34). Later she describes Harry Brightman, whose original name was Dunkel, as 'a dark man, and he lives in a dark wood. He pretends he's a

¹³⁷ Some elements of Auster's stark depiction of Flora's mania, with its implicit connection to her father's homosexuality and her confused home life, could be considered ethically questionable, unsympathetic and perhaps even misogynistic. However, I think we can allow Auster a little leeway here. His own sister was committed to an institution as a young woman, partly as a consequence of their parents' fraught marriage: 'His parents eventually divorced when Auster was in high school...He morphed into a withdrawn, unhappy teenager. His younger sister, always a fragile girl, simply, he says, 'snapped in her 20s and has never put herself together again' (Hadley Freeman, 'American Dreams', *Guardian* (26 October 2002) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/26/fiction.fashion> [Accessed 23 July 2016]). Auster writes about his sister's mental illness in *The Invention of Solitude* and *Report from the Interior*.

bright man now, but that's only a trick. He's still dark. He'll always be dark – right up until the day he dies'. (*Follies* 35)

Later, as Flora's mania deepens, Auster describes her performatively acting out symptoms which echo the *fort-da* game Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

Somewhere or other, she had come across a set of statistics that calculated how many people in the world were born and died each second on a given day...That was the truth of the world, she told her father at breakfast one morning, and in order to get a grip on that truth she decided to spend the day sitting in the rocking chair in her room, shouting out the word rejoice every fifty-eight seconds and the word grieve every fifty-eight seconds.

(*Follies* 49)

This rocking and shouting has an existential tone, with death being inscribed in our moment of generation:

Rejoice for the ten who are born...Rejoice for them and do not stop.

Rejoice unceasingly, for this much is certain, this much is true, and this much is beyond doubt: ten people live who did not live before. [...] Grieve endlessly for the dead. Grieve for the men and women who were good.

Grieve for the men and women who were bad. Grieve for the old whose bodies failed them. Grieve for the young who died before their time.

Grieve for a world that allows death to take us from the world. Grieve!

(*Follies* 49-50)

Flora's grief has been triggered by her recognition of the purgatorial nature of unresolved trauma: framed by the irreconcilable impossibility of living and the inevitability of death. She has locked herself into a repressive, regressive act of vacillation, unable to move through the repetitive symptoms of her hysteria – and additionally unable to find that empathic other with whom she can commence the difficult process of transference. Flora's trauma is essentially Caruthian: it is incomprehensible to her and Nathan, and is never fully revealed to us as readers.

Flora's verbose melancholia, giving voice to her existential trauma, is delineated sharply against the self-imposed silence of Lucy, Tom Wood's niece. Here Auster fully realises the transgenerational nature of traumatic experience and its impact on identity formulation. Lucy, the daughter of Tom's errant sister Aurora, suddenly appears on his doorstep one morning: 'It was Lucy. A silent, nine-and-a-half-year-old Lucy with short dark hair and her mother's round hazel eyes, a tall, preadolescent girl...Tom hadn't seen her in six years, but he recognised her at once'. (*Follies* 131-32) This moment of other-recognition later proves pivotal within Auster's narrative, and changes everything for Tom, and by proxy Nathan. For the moment, both Tom and Nathan find themselves once more ill-equipped to deal with Lucy's traumatic symptoms, with Nathan recording 'there was nothing physically or mentally wrong with her': (*Follies* 135)

No retardation, no signs of autism, nothing organic to impede her interaction with others. What was it then? Had she suffered some terrible trauma that had shut down her ability to talk? Or, for reasons, that were still impenetrable, had she decided to take a vow of silence, pushing

herself into voluntary mutism in order to test her will and courage – a kid's game that she would eventually grow tired of? (*Follies* 135)

Using Lucy as the multi-faceted personification of a post-traumatic episode, Auster conjures the differentiation in modes of dissociation identified by Leys: dissociation from the self, and dissociation from the event. She is, moreover, a metonym for the transgenerational nature of trauma, with her symptoms reflecting the shared trauma of living with her fanatical step-father Daniel Minor. Her silence a consequence of his God-fearing psychological brutality, and the instruction of her mother not to reveal her whereabouts:

I catch a glimpse of her mother as a young girl. Aurora. The absent Aurora, lost somewhere in the mythical land of Carolina Carolina, a shadow-woman behind the reach of the living. If she is anywhere now, it is only in her daughter's face, in the little girl's loyalty to her, in Lucy's unbroken promise not to tell us where she is. (*Follies* 198)

Unlike the hysterical Flora, Lucy moves from mimetically acting the unspeakable nature of the trauma she has witnessed, to a process of asymmetrical transference with her pseudo-patriarchs, Nathan and Tom. Lucy's condition is partially abreacted from watching Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) with Tom and Nathan, later released during their stay at the Hotel Existence, and fully released near the close of the novel when she is reunited with Aurora:

There was an early rush of happiness immediately following the reunion, but after a while resentments and hostilities began to surface. [...] Through no fault of her own the mother had slashed a wound across the daughter's

soul, and how can the wound ever heal if the daughter doesn't cry out at the top of her lungs and announce to the world: I'm in pain; I can't stand it anymore; help me? (*Follies* 284)

Here, Auster seems to suggest, the process of cathartic transference is as troubled and violent as the original trauma; but elsewhere in the novel the process is less traumatic.

3. Cathartic communities

Sielke believes that 'defining 9/11 as a cultural trauma necessarily raises the issue of new collectivities and communal alliances'.¹³⁸ Heffernan and Salvan propose that a number of literary responses to 9/11 were guided by 'the key notion of community',¹³⁹ or what Ferdinand Tonnies identified as *Gemeinschaft*: 'a social group brought into existence' through 'the positive relationship' of 'mutual encouragement and the sharing of burdens and achievements...functioning both inwardly and outwardly as a unified living entity'.¹⁴⁰ Heffernan and Salvan's interpretation of the inception of a notional community overlaps with those of Caruth and LaCapra:

Communities originate as the outcome of a violent event...The epistemic eclosion of its foundation (the inscription of freedom and equality) is

¹³⁸ Sielke, p. 392.

¹³⁹ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 148.

¹⁴⁰ Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Civil Society*, p. 17 (qtd. In Heffernan and Salvan, p. 148).

enforced through an expenditure of violence that weakens or destroys a previous community...traces of eventual violence keep reemerging in communal life, uncannily repeating its constitutive catastrophe.¹⁴¹

The catastrophe of 9/11, and the consequent formation of what Butler describes as ‘a tenuous ‘we’ of us all’ makes it possible to conceive of the establishment of ‘a community on the basis of vulnerability and loss’.¹⁴²

For exponents of empathic art such as Roland Bleiker and Jill Bennett, working towards an aesthetic of communal catharsis enables individuals and communities to move away from the politically problematic and ethically limited representations of rationalised fear which characterised the initial responses to 9/11, towards ‘a much wider political project that seeks to provide stability, subsistence, dignity, basic human rights, and freedom from fear’.¹⁴³ Here the novel can enact ‘a double role’, according to Heffernan and Salvan: ‘while its plot dramatizes an inter-communitarian transference, its language instantiates a potential communicative purification’.¹⁴⁴ LaCapra’s concept of empathic unsettlement is fundamental to this process, underscored by Hustvedt and Auster’s affinity for Buber’s credo of mutuality. The transferential process of achieving catharsis, according to Haviland, takes place as a dialogue between self and other where ‘past and present are strands of the narrative which the two

¹⁴¹ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 148.

¹⁴² Butler, p. 20.

¹⁴³ Bleiker, p. 95.

¹⁴⁴ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 152.

people are telling and living together'.¹⁴⁵ These communities are not hidebound by local geography: in the post-9/11 novels of Hustvedt and Auster, New York, and Brooklyn in particular, are deployed in a metonymic mode to represent a global community in mourning.

In *The Brooklyn Follies*, 'restored communication features as the accumulation of confessions around the main characters' Nathan, Tom and Harry.¹⁴⁶ Nathan and Tom attempt to forge 'a new community from previous, historically marked, disintegrating ones' in the form of a 'brotherhood' distinct to 'familial, professional or ideological affiliation'.¹⁴⁷ As Tom remarks: 'We've entered a new era, Nathan. The post-family, post-student, post-past age of Glass and Wood'. (*Follies* 159) The centrepiece of Auster's novel is the road trip Nathan, Tom and Lucy take in the chapter 'Dream Days at the Hotel Existence'. Arriving at the hotel, Nathan finds himself immediately drawn to the 'lost and tormented' Stanley Chowder, who compulsively mows his lawn following his wife's death, identifying him as 'a shattered man struggling to pick up the pieces'. (*Follies* 167) Continuing Auster's fascination with the contingent and transitory modes of existence being on the road entails, their eventual arrival at the Chowder Inn prompts Nathan's attempt to establish a restorative vision of a utopian America:

¹⁴⁵ Displacing notions of authorship, authority and solipsistic subjectivity are critical to forming 'the narrative analogue to the temporal belatedness that characterises *Nachträglichkeit* and the asymmetrical reciprocity that characterises the play of transference and countertransference' (Haviland, p. 433).

¹⁴⁶ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 159.

¹⁴⁷ Heffernan and Salvan, p. 159.

I want to talk about happiness and well being, about those rare, unexpected moments when the voice in your head goes silent and you feel at one with the world...I want to talk about Tom and Lucy, about Stanley Chowder and the four days we spent at the Chowder Inn, about the thoughts we thought and the dreams we dreamed on that hilltop in southern Vermont. / I want to remember the cerulean dusks, the languorous rosy dawns, the bears yelping in the woods all night. (*Follies* 166)

The Hotel Existence signals a paradigm shift in Auster's narrative, from the compulsive repetition of acting out trauma in the search for absent others, to the acceptance of the contingent nature of existence.¹⁴⁸ It is, moreover, an intersubjectively constituted space, originally a fictive construct of the childhood imagination of Tom's employer, Harry Brightman, who elsewhere explains the etymology of the hotel's name:

Existence was bigger than just life. It was everyone's life all together...it didn't matter how small your life was. What happened to you was just as important as everyone else. [...] So I imagine this place called the Hotel Existence, and I immediately turn it into a refuge for lost children. (*Follies* 101-02)

¹⁴⁸ Commenting upon Auster's 'concern with the chance nature of events', Shostak concurs: 'Auster's fiction shows its narrators attempting to control the randomness of an event, if not in the happening itself, but in their understanding of it. The fiction finally suggests that the narrators must learn that contingency does not mean – that loss simply happens. Only once they reconcile themselves to this knowledge can they move beyond nostalgic, narcissistic melancholia to return to the historic present' (Shostak, p. 68).

For Tom, by contrast, the Hotel Existence holds a more distinct cathartic possibility: of ‘sharing a life with people I love and respect’: (*Follies* 106)

I want to live in a new way, that’s all. If I can’t change the world, then at least I can try to change myself. But I don’t want to do it alone...I miss everyone I’ve lost. I get so sad sometimes, I can’t believe I don’t just drop dead from the weight that’s crushing down on me. What’s my Hotel Existence, Harry? I don’t know, but maybe it has something to do with living with others. (*Follies* 106)

The meaning of the Hotel Existence is deliberately ambiguous, holding alternative meaning for the characters, for Auster, and for his readers. It is a site of Bakhtinian and Buberian dialogue, of transcendent intersubjectivity and another destination on the long journey to reconciliation and catharsis for the troubled participants of Nathan and Tom’s adventure.

The penultimate section of the novel finds Nathan hospitalised once more. During this visit he once more acknowledges his tenuous identity, observing ‘I was no one’. His musings on death seem to foreshadow the events of 9/11, a moment where, according to Bollinger, ‘the machinery of the historical events and the readers’ internal archive of remembered images overtakes control of the narrative’.¹⁴⁹ The significance of his observations is limned by the reader’s prior awareness of what happened in New York beyond his narrative framework:

¹⁴⁹ Bollinger, p. 504.

Most lives vanish. A person dies, and little by little all traces of that life disappear...A few objects, a few documents, and a smattering of impressions left on other people. These people invariably tell stories about the dead person, but more often than not the dates are scrambled, facts are left out, and the truth becomes increasingly distorted, and when those people die in their turn, most of the stories vanish with them. (*Follies* 301)

When Nathan states ‘Rodney Grant was no one’ it is with pre-existing knowledge about the events of September 11, and the cultural value given to those lives lost in the tragedy. His *Bios Unlimited* project – an empathic rejoinder to the more cynical *Book of Human Folly* he undertakes at the beginning of his narrative – references the *Portraits of Grief* published in the days after 9/11.¹⁵⁰

My idea was this: to form a company that would publish books about the forgotten ones, to rescue the stories and facts and documents before they disappeared – and shape them into a continuous narrative, the narrative of a life. (*Follies* 301)

Here, Auster’s text offers a metonymic means of memorialising the fallen of September 11: an act of aesthetic catharsis for himself, his fellow New Yorkers and the wider global community. Auster has said that the cosmopolitan New York is not ‘part of America’, but rather that it ‘belongs to the world’.¹⁵¹ The *Brooklyn*

¹⁵⁰ Bollinger, p. 502. This observation can be closely aligned to Versluys’ description of the biographies of the victims, which ‘derive their poignancy from the portrayal of ordinary lives’, consisting of ‘anecdotes that are striking because they describe daily routines which have been rudely broken off’ (Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 8).

¹⁵¹ See Brown, p. 1.

Follies offers up Auster's plea for understanding of America's own place within the world, as part of a global community of grief-stricken survivors and witnesses, and the cathartic need for transference from melancholia to mourning.

In *The Sorrows of an American*, Hustvedt uses Sonia's poetry to revisit the idea of establishing an effective empathic aesthetic. Sonia, who witnessed people jumping from the Twin Towers, finds her ability to adequately represent the trauma blocked by its incipient incomprehensibility:

There's supposed to be one about September eleventh next, but I haven't been able to write it. I've tried over and over again, but it's too hard. Maybe I'll just have a blank there, a nothing, a big empty spot with only the text.¹⁵² (*Sorrows* 127)

Sonia's poetry attempts to avoid the false representation of September 11, but its absence forms an overwhelming presence within the structure of her poem, and even when not directly abreacted it still insinuates itself into her poetry:

Policemen came one day to search our roof

two long faced men with gloves and plastic bags.

They climbed the stairs in hope of finding proof

that body parts still lay beneath the flags

we flew before their meaning turned to spoof. (*Sorrows* 127)

¹⁵² 'I want to remember it all, if all is too much to ask, then some of it. No, more than some of it. Almost all. Almost all, with blanks reserved for the missing parts.' (*Follies* 166)

Sonia's writing marks the first stage of working through her trauma, though with her po-faced poetry she struggles to find an original empathic voice, and continues to repress her symptoms. Though markedly different to her poetry, the photographer Jeffrey Lane's quasi-Baudrillardian simulacra aesthetic similarly absorbs and reflects back the imagery of 9/11. (*Sorrows* 217) As a child Lane lost his parents in a car crash: his interpersonal relationships are damaged by his obsessive behaviour, and his art is compromised by its over-reliance on aggressive imagery. Erik describes Lane's series of confrontational photographs titled *Fathers*:

Near my own image, I saw one of Lane's father, a photo of George Bush, the Twin Towers, a hospital corridor, and war images from Iraq. I backed away from the pictures, suddenly nauseated, and staggered into the bright light of Twenty-fifth Street, where I squatted on the sidewalk for a moment with my head lowered to prevent the faint. *Fathers*. (*Sorrows* 263)

Through his invasive, hyperreal photography, Lane fails to establish a meaningful, transactive aesthetic, and like Sonia, he continues to act out the symptoms of his own trauma. Moreover, rather than encouraging an empathic unsettlement in a viewer such as Erik, they are instead forced into violent confrontation with their own neuroses. Here Hustvedt presents the negative register of self-other dialectics more characteristic of Lacanian objectivity and the I-It model of relationality described by Buber.

By contrast, Hustvedt seems to suggest that the dolls and dioramas of Aunt Lisa and Lorelei Kavacek are highly personalised representations of trauma which

produce the requisite empathic unsettlement. The dolls exist in a suspended state of physical pain or psychological grief: 'The doll's mouth had been stitched with red thread in imitation of a full-throated scream'. (*Sorrows* 244) While they 'belonged to a universe with laws and logic similar to our own...where children fell, broke bones, wore casts, needed crutches', (*Sorrows* 198) they only exist as a means of communication for Aunt Lisa and Lorelei, both of whom on the surface appear to lack the emotional and intellectual capacity for verbal transference and anamnesis. Hustvedt presents both women unsympathetically, but the dolls are rendered with excruciating care. As Erik observes, 'I wondered what the women were living through these figures': (*Sorrows* 199) the dolls are 'testimonies of some sort', (*Sorrows* 201) 'telling but not telling'; distilling the transference process of abreaction, anamnesis and catharsis in fabric form. Aunt Lisa's 'three dioramas' (*Sorrows* 244) finally reveal the secret Lars Davidsen took to his grave: his burial of Aunt Lisa's illegitimate, stillborn baby. They become objects of catharsis not only for the teller, but also for those who are being told, Erik and Inga. These dolls have little to do with September 11; but again, this very absence of a specific reference within the wider context of the novel constitutes a referential presence:

I also had an uncomfortable feeling of re-enactment. It wasn't déjà vu, that curious sensation of having lived through an identical event. Rather, it was a form of parallelism. The word 'revenant' appeared in my mind. (*Sorrows* 242)

This seems to recall LaCapra's own observation: 'something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting present or symptomatic revenant'.¹⁵³ The dolls concretise the latency and absent traces of traumatic affect within its narrative, while representing the cathartic possibilities of empathic art.

In '9/11, or One Year Later' Hustvedt remarks upon the mythology of New York: 'real New York and imaginary New York aren't easily separated. The stuff of a city isn't only material; it's spiritual as well'.¹⁵⁴ The city remains a site of identity, memory and empathic recognition which reflects and transcends its geo-spatial or temporal location. The mosaic memories of the afflicted served to reinforce the spiritual essence of the city: 'we are unique. No other place comes close to our diversity...The terrorists understood nothing. When they hurt New York, they hurt the whole world'.¹⁵⁵ Hustvedt's novel closes on this note, describing a cascade of emotion and remembrance, a fluid passage of memory distilled. Interweaving fragments of the narrative – Lars' journal entries, Erik's recollections, disembodied voices of those living and dead – it is the linguistic equivalent to Eggy's string:

It's new, Sonia says about being in love. It's new. The New World. A dugout on the prairie. The vanished. His vacant corpse had left the man I knew. Joel will never know his father. Kyss Papa. My young mother bends

¹⁵³ LaCapra, p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ Hustvedt, '9/11, or One Year Later' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁵ Hustvedt, '9/11, or One Year After' in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 129.

over the body of her father. The war is still going on. The wars are raging.
Men and women are raging. (*Sorrows* 303)

Trauma is layered upon trauma: individual and collective; compacted and condensed; resolved and unreacted. In trying to ‘tie everything together’ – (*Sorrows* 270) to repair, remedy and recover – this section reflects Hustvedt’s belief that ‘memory is flux’: shared and intersubjective. It is the final cathartic transference of Erik’s anhedonia from narrator (and author) to reader, ‘when the boundary between inside and outside loosens, and there is no loneliness because there is no one to be lonely’. (*Sorrows* 301). Within this quasi-cinematic cascade of images Hustvedt locates multiple references to falling, what Caruth elsewhere describes as the unifying feature of intergenerational trauma:¹⁵⁶

A Japanese officer falls over in the long grass. Sarah jumps, falls. Eggy falls. Sonia watches from the window. People are jumping, falling.
They’re on fire. The buildings fall. (*Sorrows* 303)

The last lines of the novel lean towards this ambiguous resurrection in Erik’s recollection of his last meeting with Ms W:

She is smiling at me, and she uses the word again: reincarnation. ‘Not after death, but here when we’re alive.’ She puts out her hand and I take it. She says, ‘I will miss you.’ / ‘I will miss you too.’ (*Sorrows* 304)

¹⁵⁶ Here Hustvedt is implicated in what Gray critically apprehends as the ‘recurrent tendency in American writing...to identify crisis as a descent from innocence to experience’ (Gray, p. 2).

Through the hybrid spatiality of her novel, Hustvedt utilises a multiplicity of theoretical and intersubjective positions to emphasise the mutable nature of memory and trauma. In this regard, *The Sorrows of an American* enacts Hustvedt's personal plea for communal empathy before national fear and trembling.

Conclusion

September 11 confounded consciousness, knowledge, and the possibility of representation. Like many writers and artists exposed to the mediated affect of 9/11, Hustvedt and Auster felt compelled to respond to its apparent incomprehensibility and supposed unrepresentability. In *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Brooklyn Follies*, Hustvedt and Auster deploy an intersubjective framework to narrativise the difficult psychical processes required to move from acting out to working through trauma. These narratives engage dialogically with the split in Freudian thinking perceived by Caruth and LaCapra, while discursively continuing the empathic relationality of their earlier fiction. Both novels provide an ideological counterpoint to the aggression which characterised public discourse and the political and military response to September 11, offering narratives possessed of an affective dynamic which are transactive and communicative.

Hustvedt seeks to re-contextualise the catastrophe as the latest traumatic event in the painful history of a nation which has been characterised by extreme poverty, violent death, individual isolation and loss of identity. Auster's picaresque and allegorical adventure tale is notable for its spatial distancing from 9/11, and its shift from the metalinguistic mechanics of his earlier fiction towards a newly sincere aesthetic mode of production. Of the two, Hustvedt is more explicitly engaged with troping traumatic affect, reflecting her interdisciplinary interests and continuation of the thematic preoccupations of her earlier work. Moreover, Hustvedt and Auster's shared witnessing of September 11 in the intimate space of their home is crucial for understanding the form and function of

their narrative response: both novels carry a dedication to their daughter Sophie, a fact which serves to re-emphasise their empathic concern at the intersubjective and genealogical implications of global terror for future generations.

Conclusion

In the introduction of this thesis, I outlined my intention to explore the literary marriage and collaborative partnership of the American authors Siri Hustvedt and Paul Auster. My principal focus was the identification of discursive intertextual engagement between Hustvedt and Auster's narratives, while acknowledging and differentiating between their independent authorial identities. This thesis would explore the dynamic of symbiotic mutuality between Hustvedt and Auster's work: a mutuality characteristic of what Vera John-Steiner terms the 'interdependence of thinkers in the co-construction of knowledge'.¹ As 'partners in thought', Hustvedt and Auster utilise a range of philosophical positions which have emerged through generative dialogue, foregrounding the reciprocal foundation of their marriage.² This generative dialogue is as intellectually stimulating as it is emotionally freighted, and is characterised by the confluence of centrifugal and centripetal forces. As this thesis emphasises, this dynamic is expressed on occasion through a conscious and explicit dialogical engagement with the work of the other. Unconscious dialogical and intertextual exchanges

¹ John-Steiner, p. 3.

² John-Steiner, p. 3. As John-Steiner points out, this aligns with Dorothy Miell and Karen Littleton's belief that 'negotiating and constructing shared understanding is an inherently creative phenomenon, and its achievement a fundamentally social and collaborative process' (Dorothy Miell and Karen Littleton, *Collaborative Creativity: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Free Association Books, 2004), p. 2 [qtd. in John-Steiner, p. xv]).

intertwine throughout Hustvedt and Auster's texts, further ratifying John-Steiner's observation that 'through collaboration we transcend the constraints of biology, of time, of habit, and achieve a fuller self, beyond the limitations and the talents of the isolated individual'.

In the first chapter of this thesis I attempted to show how Hustvedt and Auster's respective ideality of an authorial self emerges with the establishment of core consciousness in childhood. This ideality is concretised through Hustvedt and Auster's multiple narratives of autobiographical selfhood, which depict the plurality of the self and the 'strangeness of being alive'. The ontology of embodied connectedness present in these autobiographical narratives draw upon and respond to Roland Barthes' alternative approach to life-writing, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied subjectivity and models of consciousness depicted by neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio. The opening chapter goes on to propose that this sense of a nascent authorial sensibility intensified during Hustvedt and Auster's adolescence; their respective response to canonical literature is complex, nuanced and holds ramifications for gendered readings of their work. The discursive relationship between reading and writing is crucial Hustvedt and Auster's construction of an authorial self: much of Auster's critical reading occurred while at Columbia University, and slowed thereafter; for Hustvedt, critical reading has been part of a long, difficult process of engaging with established and emerging forms of knowledge. Hustvedt's benevolent response to a range of masculinised disciplines complicates her self-positioning as a feminist, while we might also conceive that her interest in these alternative

forms of knowledge or uncertainty has been fundamental in shaping her work, and that of Auster.³

In the second chapter I sought to illustrate how poststructuralist literary theory and the postmodern critical frameworks served to generate a cultural milieu and literary epoch out of which Hustvedt and Auster's early fictional narratives emerged. These early narratives were discursive, ambiguous and highly intertextual, generating an open-ended hybrid spatiality within their texts which today aligns itself more closely with the oscillation between modern commitment and postmodern detachment described by Thomas Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker. While declarations of the demise of postmodernism are not immune to criticism, metamodernism offers a means of moving the writing of Hustvedt and, particularly, Auster beyond the critically-limiting postmodern paradigm. In the third chapter I opened up the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster's increasingly ethical and empathic fiction to consider how alternative models of self-other dialectics can be perceived in Hustvedt and Auster's depiction of interpersonal relations in their narratives. Through characterisation, plot, and the inherently psychological terrain of their narratives, Hustvedt and Auster's writing implicitly references the psychical otherness of Jacques Lacan and the social

³ Hustvedt's discursive interest in neurobiology, consciousness and plasticity prompted Auster to remark when promoting 4321 that 'memory and imagination are the same thing. Even physically, in the brain, it is the same thing. Siri brilliantly said the feeling that comes over you as a novelist is that you're remembering things that never happened'. Meadhbh McHugh, 'Paul Auster: We should respond to Trump's stupidity with a world boycott of American goods', *Irish Times* (3 February 2017) <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/paul-auster-we-should-respond-to-trump-s-stupidity-with-a-world-boycott-of-american-goods-1.2957017>> [Accessed 31 March 2017].

dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin, while both Hustvedt and Auster have independently of each other expressed an affinity for Martin Buber's credo of mutuality. These concepts encircle one another within the texture of Hustvedt and Auster's novels, while the authors resist affirming the veracity of one theoretical model over another.

The fourth chapter extended these intersubjective models to Hustvedt and Auster's intermedial narratives and ekphrastic techniques, which in Auster's words, invite the reader 'into the minds and souls of people you don't know, who become real in the course of reading and can affect your sense of the world'.⁴ Hustvedt and Auster have both spoken of their enthusiasm for the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which is made explicit through their extensive writing on the embodied nature of subjectivity. Their application of the aesthetic technique of ekphrasis in their novels foregrounds these phenomenological frameworks, while re-emphasising the collaborative creative process shared by reader and writer. For the fifth chapter, I described how Hustvedt and Auster's approach to narrativising 9/11 were partially attuned to the new paradigm of identity politics, pragmatic idealism and sincerity. Reflecting both sides of the post-Freudian schism in trauma theory, the post-911 narratives of Hustvedt and Auster illustrate their commitment to empathic mutuality as a collective response to traumatic affect.

Hustvedt and Auster's most recent narratives are explicitly polyphonic, frequently intermedial and disclose highly personal philosophical and political

⁴ Meadhbh McHugh, 'Paul Auster: We should respond to Trump's stupidity with a world boycott of American goods', *The Irish Times* (3 February 2017).

inflections in a mode which is ethically congruent, but philosophically mobile and aesthetically idiosyncratic. As James Peacock says of Auster, the hybrid spatiality of Hustvedt and Auster's work presents 'an amorphous set of ideas that constellate in new forms at appropriate times';⁵ Hustvedt herself believes that 'I really do not have a final position on a great many profound questions', but that her alternative epistemology represents 'a long accumulation of knowledge, and changing my mind, rethinking...or discovering some other earlier thought that's wrong'.⁶ According to Kate Womersley, Hustvedt's latest collection of essays focuses on 'the central role of emotion in the practice of science as well of art', while offering 'a critique of its reputation as a female impurity that stains objectivity';⁷ quoting Simon Weil's statement that 'doubt is a virtue of intelligence', Lara Feigel proposes that in our contemporary era of social media echo-chambers and so-called fake news, Hustvedt's 'kind of uncertainty matters more than ever'.⁸

⁵ Peacock, *Understanding Paul Auster*, p. 48.

⁶ Michelle Dean, 'Siri Hustvedt: "Trump was elected because misogyny is alive and well"', *Guardian* (16 December 2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/16/siri-hustvedt-trump-was-elected-because-misogyny-is-alive-and-well-> [Accessed 31 March 2017].

⁷ Kate Womersley, 'Siri Hustvedt's thoughts on art, science and the human condition', *Spectator* (21 January 2017) <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/01/siri-hustvedts-thoughts-on-art-science-and-the-human-condition> [Accessed 14 June 2017].

⁸ Lara Feigel, 'A *Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women* review – In praise of doubt', *Financial Times* (26 November 2016) <<https://www.ft.com/content/960e8f8c-b001-11e6-9c37-5787335499a0>> [Accessed 14 June 2017].

Katie Roiphe proposes that marriage is ‘perpetually interesting; it is the novel that most of us are living in’.⁹ While Roiphe’s not entirely unproblematic romanticisation might be rejected by any number of thinkers, feminist or otherwise, it does overlap with Hustvedt’s comment ‘I have never been bored’ by marriage to Auster. That first encounter at the 92nd St Y can be seen as triggering two alternative aesthetic and intellectual responses: for Hustvedt, it encompassed the individual and unconscious formulation of erotic attraction;¹⁰ for Auster, it reaffirmed the vagaries of chance, or what he later redefined as ‘the unexpected’.¹¹ It also initiated and stimulated a process of discursive interaction with the creative intellect of the other, and grounded Hustvedt and Auster’s emotional relationship in a critically reflexive mode from its inception. Indeed, it is that first meeting of Hustvedt and Auster at the 92nd St Y, and the longevity of their relationship, which is vital for our understanding the shape and trajectory of

⁹ Katie Roiphe, *Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles 1910-1939* (London: Dial Press, 2008) p. 7.

¹⁰ ‘In the taxi I am already in love, crazed, enthralled, smitten, and am trying to hide it. The man beside me is not. I can see it in his shrouded, thoughtful eyes.’ Hustvedt, ‘Extracts from a Story of the Wounded Self’ in *A Plea for Eros*, p. 226.

¹¹ Auster has ascribed his preoccupation with ‘the unexpected’ to a freak accident: the lightning strike which killed another boy in front of him while at summer camp at the age of 14. In an interview with Paul Laity for *The Guardian*, Auster says ‘I’ve always been haunted by it, the utter randomness of it’, and calls it ‘the most important day of my life’. Paul Laity, ‘I’ve waited my whole life to write this book’: Interview with Paul Auster, *Guardian* (21 January 2017), p. 2. Yet alongside this accident we can situate his meeting with Hustvedt as being fundamental in providing him with the emotional and intellectual support to be able to write *City of Glass* and his subsequent novels.

what we might term their shared aesthetic. Remembering Auster's description of Hustvedt in *Winter Journal*, here is Hustvedt's own view of her husband:

Sometimes I like to look at my husband's face in photographs because he becomes a stranger in the pictures, an object fixed in time. Over many years, I have come to know him through my other senses – the feel of his skin, the changing smell of his body in winter and spring and fall and summer, the sound of his voice, his breathing and sometimes his snoring at night. When I look at him in a photograph, my other senses are quiet. I simply see him, and because I find him beautiful, his unmoving face excites me.¹²

As these complimentary descriptions of the spousal other show, and as this thesis has repeatedly indicated, the confluence of influence between Hustvedt and Auster is bidirectional, dialogical and intertextual: the product of consciously and unconsciously-rendered representational motifs and references which draw upon their life together.

However, this confluence of influence is also framed and re-framed by competing cultural forces and gender misrepresentations. All too frequently the narrative of Hustvedt and Auster's emotional and intellectual life as a married couple is simplified along gender lines. One of the principal motivations of undertaking this work is to counter this perception, and to highlight Hustvedt's unique contribution to knowledge formation in our contemporary era, which lies beyond the preoccupation with her marriage to Auster. Merely comparing

¹² Siri Hustvedt, 'Notes on Seeing' in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (New York: Picador, 2012), p. 230.

Hustvedt and Auster's work side by side risks inviting accusations of gender bias; any alignment of Hustvedt's ideas with those of Auster threatens to destabilise or diminish her authorial identity. This thesis seeks to dispel the positioning of Hustvedt as a lesser writer simply by dint of her being married to a more commercially successful and famous male author.¹³ Deeply ingrained, this interpretation pervades the cultural and critical spheres and operates on a number of levels. Hustvedt's work remains largely undiscovered by the Anglophone academic community, while mainstream criticism of her recent work has focused on its difficulty or sense of self-importance. From this one may surmise that women writers are not yet permitted equivalent cognitive capabilities of their male counterparts; as Hustvedt observes: 'women who write books about ideas are not instantly anointed in the way that men are. You get a lot of criticism for being too intellectual, too cerebral'.¹⁴ Hustvedt's personal experience of misogyny

¹³ Hustvedt addresses this at length in her essay 'No Competition' from *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*.

¹⁴ Reviews of Hustvedt's latest collection of essays in *The Evening Standard* and *Slate* were particularly strident in their criticism of her difficulty: 'Hustvedt makes little effort to welcome readers with her prose', according to Katy Waldman, who also complained of 'the author's preening self-regard'; Johanna Thomas-Corr similarly believed Hustvedt 'preens at her own cleverness'. Here one is reminded of James Wood's scabrous anti-Auster article in *The New Yorker*, 'Shallow Graves', in which he decries Auster's 'fake realism and shallow scepticism', and observes 'he does nothing with cliché except use it'. Some critics seem to take particular pleasure at pricking what they seem to perceive as Hustvedt and Auster's overly-inflated egos. See Katy Waldman, 'A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women by Siri Hustvedt reviewed', *Slate* http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2017/01/a_woman_looking_at_men_looking_at_women_by_siri_hustvedt_reviewed.html [Accessed 14 June 2017]; Johanna Thomas-Corr, 'A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex and the Mind by Siri Hustvedt – review', *Evening Standard* <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/a-woman-looking-at-men-looking-at-women-essays-on-art-sex->

and misrepresentation has perhaps pushed her further into this interrogation of the masculine hard sciences while standing defiantly outside the disciplinary tent.¹⁵

This can be construed as a political decision by Hustvedt informed by her feminism; as a male author, Auster is not subject to the same pressures and requirements of self-definition as Hustvedt.

As married artists, Hustvedt and Auster's relationship is especially unique, particularly in the longevity of their careers and the commercial success of their work. The focus on dialogical intertextuality between their texts offers a new critical framework for considering the writing of other married writers of past, present and future.¹⁶ Some work has already been done in this area by John-Steiner,

[and-the-mind-by-siri-hustvedt-review-a3405241.html](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/11/30/shallow-graves)> [Accessed 14 June 2017]; James Wood, 'Shallow Graves', *New Yorker* (30 November 2009) <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/11/30/shallow-graves>> [Accessed 14 June 2017].

¹⁵ Here one is reminded of Hustvedt's comment to Susanne Becker about Harriet Burden being a 'Kierkegaardian figure... Like S.K. she is too clever, too ironic, too brilliant for her own good and she suffers because others cannot understand what she is up to.' (Becker, 'Deceiving the reader into truth' in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*, ed. by Hartmann, Marks and Zapf, p. 414.) Hustvedt can be viewed as a similarly-Kierkegaardian figure, as Auster suggests: 'This is what I fear for poor Siri is there is no consciousness out there that can fully grasp what she's doing. It's so big. It's going to take years for people to absorb the insights she's had in all kinds of fields'. See Appendix 1.

¹⁶ We might use this methodological approach when considering the existence of dialogical intertextuality between the work of Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne, Nicole Krauss and Jonathan Safran Foer, Alice Sebold and David Glenn Gold, or Zadie Smith and Nick Laird. Didion and Dunne's relationship seems particularly closely aligned to that of Hustvedt and Auster, with both relying upon the other as the first reader. Dunne's death, which followed the hospitalisation of their daughter Quintana Roo Dunne Michael, prompted Didion to write the critically-acclaimed grief memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), which shares with the life-writing of Hustvedt and Auster a deliberate self-distancing in the Barthesian mode.

Roiphe and others, yet this may be one of the first of its kind to advance a developed response to their fictional narratives in tandem. There are limitations to this methodology, which I acknowledge cannot make any claim as a definitive, or exhaustive, study of Hustvedt and Auster's biographical history or literary output. Both have penned a significant number of texts over almost forty years, and it would be impossible to refer to them all. Inevitably, some important texts – such as Hustvedt's *The Blazing World* and Auster's *The Music of Chance* and *Leviathan* – have been almost entirely overlooked. However, these are texts that could be returned to in a more developed study. These are areas where differentiation is stronger than affiliation within their work: Hustvedt's myriad disciplinary interests are highly complex, constantly evolving and her perspective upon them continually shifting; the relationship Auster's writing to questions of Jewish identity and the Shoah,¹⁷ nor his admiration for writers of the American Renaissance, particularly Nathaniel Hawthorne.¹⁸ While this thesis has found both concrete and speculative evidence through the twin processes of empirical scrutiny and imaginative interpretation, I have been careful to preserve a

¹⁷ See: Josh Cohen, 'Desertions: Paul Auster, Edmond Jabès and the Writing of Auschwitz', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* (33: 3, 2000), 94-97; Lily Corwin, 'Is That All There Is? Martin Buber, Sufficiency, and Paul Auster's 'The Book of Memory'', *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (30, 2011), 68-79; Stephen Fredman, "'How to Get Out of the Room That Is the Book?' Paul Auster and the Consequences of Confinement', *Postmodern Culture* (6: 3, 1996) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/27576>> [Accessed 17 September 2013]

¹⁸ See: Mark Ford, 'Inventions of Solitude: Thoreau and Auster', *Journal of American Studies* (33: 2, 1999), 201-219; Heiko Jakubzik, 'Paul Auster und die Klassiker der American Renaissance' (unpublished dissertation, University of Heidelberg 1999) <<http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/7259/1/AusterUB.pdf>> [Accessed 17 September 2013].

respectful demarcation between the public and the private when critically responding to Hustvedt and Auster's collaborative relationship. As Roiphe proposes, 'much of what happens in a marriage occurs when you are not looking'.¹⁹ There are certain biographical and quotidian – such as domestic responsibilities – that it would be without academic value to speculate upon, but which will inevitably impact upon the mechanics of narrative and aesthetic production for Hustvedt and Auster.²⁰

Throughout this thesis I have resisted the temptation to make value judgements about Hustvedt and Auster's work, their ethical positions or their political persuasion. Nevertheless, it is possible to conceive of Hustvedt and Auster's ethical narratives as comprising part of a determined self-positioning as political writers and public intellectuals. This shift perhaps reflects their move into late middle age: Auster turns 70 this year, while Hustvedt is in her early sixties. Changing cultural, scientific and geo-political conditions have further shaped their approach to the creative process, and the nature of this generative dialogue; it has also effected their contributions to public discourse. Both lent their support to Salman Rushdie following Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against the author in 1989. In 1994 Auster and Don DeLillo collaborated in the writing and publication of the *Salman Rushdie Defence Pamphlet*, which was inserted into hundreds of

¹⁹ Roiphe, p. 25.

²⁰ In an interview for *Identity Theory* Hustvedt outlined the daily 'logistics' of living in what she terms 'that strange place of the book' that constituted her marriage to Auster. Siri Hustvedt, 'Interview with Robert Birnbaum', *Identity Theory* (6 May 2003) <http://www.identitytheory.com/siri-hustvedt> [Accessed 17 September 2013].

thousands of books sold on the anniversary of the fatwa. Hustvedt and Auster's political voices have become particularly pronounced in the years since 9/11 and the Bush Administration's War on Terror. In 2012, Auster was embroiled in a public spat with then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan after stating in an interview to the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* that he would not visit the country due to its imprisonment of writers and journalists.²¹

Following the election of Donald Trump as 45th President of the United States, Hustvedt and Auster have been two of the more prominent voices of opposition from the global artistic community. In October 2016, Hustvedt and Auster were interviewed together for the Swiss publication *Das Magazin*, which offers an intriguing document of their differentiated positionality on Trump's candidacy: Hustvedt reflects upon the misogyny of the anti-Clinton rhetoric which steered Trump to the White House, stating that 'Trump's ascension is connected with the loss of what these people regard as the golden age of male, white power';

²¹ Prime Minister Erdogan labelled Auster an 'ignorant man' and said of Auster: 'As if we need you? Who cares if you come or not?' Auster responded 'According to the latest numbers gathered by International PEN, there are nearly one hundred writers imprisoned in Turkey, not to speak of independent publishers such as Ragip Zarakolu, whose case is closely being watched by PEN Centers around the world. All countries are beset by myriad problems, Mr. Prime Minister, including my United States, including your Turkey, and it is my firm conviction that in order to improve conditions in our countries, in every country, the freedom to speak and publish without censorship or the threat of imprisonment is a sacred right for all men and women'. David Itzikoff, 'Paul Auster Responds After Turkish Prime Minister Calls Him 'An Ignorant Man'' in *The New York Times* (1 February 2012) <<https://www.nytimes.com/blog/artsbeat/2012/02/01/paul-auster-responds-after-turkish-prime-minister-cals-him-an-ignorant-man>> [Accessed 23 March 2017].

for Auster, Trump's election is bound up in the faltering narrative of American exceptionalism which he critiqued in *Report from the Interior*:

If Trump wins, it will be another country. America will turn into a joke. We will be a mockery and ashamed of ourselves. Shame becomes the predominant national feeling. That we could make such an unqualified, incompetent, ignorant, uninterested, narrow-minded liar as president, we will never forgive ourselves. The most important land in the free world, led by an idiot.²²

On the eve of the election in November 2016, Auster was interviewed by *BBC Newsnight*; in the interview Auster stated he was 'scared out of my wits' at the prospect of a Trump presidency, while denouncing the billionaire New Yorker as 'demented and deranged' and proposing that Trump's call to 'Make America Great Again' was a populist call to arms to 'Make America White Again'.²³

²² Siri Hustvedt and Paul Auster, 'Interview with Sacha Batthyany and Martin Kilian', *Das Magazin* (22 October 2016) <<https://www.dasmagazin.ch/2016/10/21/siri-hustvedt-und-paul-auster/>> [Accessed 31 March 2017]. In her interview for *Identity Theory*, Hustvedt identified the ideology that presaged the rise of Trump: 'I have always thought it was very interesting that in a country that was founded by intellectuals that this should be so widespread. And it is. There is an anti-culture, anti-intellectual presence in the whole ball of wax. That does make itself felt...If you cloak yourself in a kind of populism then it works or can work. You notice, for example, that the right-wing ideologues in this country now brandish a kind of working class [persona] and none of these guys are working class guys.' Siri Hustvedt, 'Interview with Robert Birnbaum', *Identity Theory*.

²³ Paul Auster, "'I'm scared out of my wits': Paul Auster on US election", *BBC Newsnight* (3 November 2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-f4sDQ4Ck>> [Accessed 31 March 2017]

Following Trump's unexpected victory, Hustvedt penned a series of highly critical articles, alongside participating in a number of combative interviews. In both she highlighted the symbolic misogyny of Trump's victory and Clinton's defeat, while re-emphasising her nuanced feminist position. Writing for *The Guardian* she recorded that 'we are witnessing the politics of humiliation' and that 'those who voted for Trump are living in a state of vicarious narcissism':

People who grew up with a powerful sense of white masculine privilege (as well as others who sympathise with that image of power), people for whom that sense of superiority was always precarious and always needed protection, found in Donald Trump a figure for their own fantasy of the restoration of an era now gone.²⁴

Misogyny, according to Hustvedt, 'is alive and well among women and men', particularly white women in their rejection of Clinton and their refusal to take ownership of the historical moment. For Hustvedt, it was no small irony that Trump 'played the female role: the out of control angry hysteric. And yet, he has been perceived as a robust, masculine figure by a large portion of the US public'.²⁵ Trump's inauguration coincided with the promotional tours for Auster's

²⁴ Siri Hustvedt, 'We are witnessing the politics of humiliation', *Guardian* (12 November 2016)

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/12/we-are-witnessing-the-politics-of-humiliation-siri-hustvedt-joyce-carol-oates-and-more-on-the-us-election>> [Accessed 31 March 2017]. The Guardian invited a number of leading American women authors and academics to respond to Trump's election, including Jennifer Egan, Joyce Carol Oates, Cynthia Bond and Katie Roiphe.

²⁵ Michelle Dean, 'Siri Hustvedt: "Trump was elected because misogyny is alive and well"', *Guardian* (16 December 2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/16/siri-hustvedt-trump-was-elected-because-misogyny-is-alive-and-well>> [Accessed 31 March 2017].

latest novel *4321*. As with Hustvedt's own promotional duties for her collection of essays, it provided Auster with a platform to fulminate about what he termed the 'the most appalling thing I have seen in politics in my life'.²⁶ Trump's election has pushed both Hustvedt and Auster towards a greater degree of political engagement, with Hustvedt attending the Women's March on Washington with her daughter in January, and Auster offering to accept the Presidency of PEN America after declining the invitation for a number of years: 'I've decided to speak out as often as I can, otherwise I don't think I can live with myself'.²⁷ Hustvedt and Auster were one of a number of co-signatories of a letter from PEN America urging President Trump to overturn his Executive Order banning immigration from Muslim-majority countries.²⁸ Between Trump's election and his inauguration, I interviewed Hustvedt and Auster at their Park Slope home in Brooklyn. The full transcript of this interview can be read in the Appendix to this thesis. Hustvedt and Auster's warmth and willingness to discuss their marriage and work at length were humbling; their avowals of resistance to the Trump Presidency were enervating.

²⁶ Paul Laity, 'I've waited my whole life to write this book': Interview with Paul Auster', *Guardian* (21 January 2017), p. 2.

²⁷ Paul Laity, 'I've waited my whole life to write this book': Interview with Paul Auster', *Guardian* (21 January 2017), p. 2.

²⁸ Rachel Donadio, 'In Open Letter, 65 Writers and artists Urge Trump to Reconsider Visa Ban', *New York Times* (21 February 2017) <http://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/books/22pen-america-letter-to-donald-trump-visa-ban.html> [Accessed 11 April 2017]. Other signatories included Chimamanda Adichie, Margaret Atwood, J.M. Coetzee, Jonathan Franzen, Nicole Krauss, Jhumpa Lahiri, Jonathan Lethem, Orhan Pamuk, Philip Roth, Alice Sebold, Zadie Smith and Anne Tyler.

Hustvedt and Auster can be considered writers whose liberal politics have been largely ancillary to the narrative propulsion of their fiction, yet with the election of Trump their collaborative relationship appears to have taken an overtly political turn. This overt political turn instils a rhetorical power to their ethical narratives, past and future. It also concretises Hustvedt and Auster's commitment to the empathic communities indicated in their post-9/11 narratives, a commitment to pragmatic idealism which exists beyond the platitudes of the page. Hustvedt and Auster's vocal opposition to Trump can be interpreted as another collaborative moment in the novel of a marriage which began with two unknown poets falling in love one cold February night in New York in the early 1980s, before becoming two major literary figures of the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries: two married writers whose working lives were defined by a dynamic of dialogic mutuality, a microcosm of care and responsibility toward the other.

Appendix: Interview with Siri Hustvedt and Paul Auster

This interview was conducted at Hustvedt and Auster's home in Park Slope, Brooklyn, on the afternoon of Saturday 3 December 2016.

Interview transcript

Paul: No-one has done this. No one has written about the two of us together.

Siri: Actually, there are some dissertations from Germany.

Paul: There are? Well I hadn't heard about them.

Alex: So, *4321*. Can you tell me how that came about? Because there was obviously a bit of a pause between that [book] and *Sunset Park*.

Paul: I'll tell you. *Sunset Park* was a book I wrote in a fever. I wrote it in about six or eight months. And it just took a lot out of me. I don't know why. It was a very intense book. And I really wasn't up to writing fiction right away. I started something else, another novel, and I got farther into it than any other abandoned work, maybe 90 or 100 pages of a novel that I couldn't get a handle on. It kept spreading out.

Alex: I read that in an interview. Is that the one about a twenty-year-old guy...?

Paul: Yeah, that's right.

Siri: But the whole family.

Paul: It was going to be about the whole family. I just could never master it, I couldn't control it. So I literally put it aside. There was, however, in that book an account of the panic attack – which happened in *this* chair – and I used that in *Winter Journal*, which is what I wrote instead. Also, in the novel, he was watching the movie *D.O.A.*, which appears in *Winter Journal*. So it wasn't a complete waste of time. And then that book led to the next one, which is probably the oddest book I've ever written: *Report from the Interior*.

Alex: Why 'the oddest'?

Siri: Yeah, I don't know: why?

Paul: I don't know. I was into it...I was writing it when Lydia [Davis] sent me all those letters. I wasn't planning on putting them in it. I didn't even know of the existence of these letters.

Siri: That's right, I remember.

Alex: So you'd literally forgotten you'd written them?

Paul: Yeah. I mean, I was 19, 20, 21.

Siri: But also, the stunning thing about it was that there were people referred to in the letters that you couldn't remember. Which is exactly what the nature of memory is.

Alex: So from the days at Columbia, or the time in Paris, or both?

Siri: Columbia.

Paul: The Columbia years. '66 to...I think the last letter is 69.

Siri: But then of course we have to say that the novel [4321] is engaged in that same time period.

Paul: These two meditations, poems, pieces of music: whatever you want to call these books...

Siri: Sent you back.

Paul: I think they primed the territory for me to write 4321. 4321 would not have been written without those two, emotionally, psychologically.

Siri: But I think the movement between those two books is a sort of an organic movement. You're sort of answering yourself in some way.

Paul: Yes.

Siri: I've often thought that, weirdly enough, *The Shaking Woman, or A History of my Nerves*, and *The Blazing World* are related works, because they're related structurally, in the sense that there are multiple perspectives that are, sort of, whirling around you.

Paul: Yes, yes.

Siri: And what you end up with is, as I articulate in that book [*A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*], zones of focused ambiguity but no final answer. It was a totally unconscious thing, because it wasn't until I finished *The Blazing World* that I thought 'oh – these texts are bizarrely connected'. I mean, in ways that have nothing to do, obviously, with the story, but the structure.

Paul: Me too. The evolution of one's work. *Invisible* and *Sunset Park* are the first novels in which I have multiple points of view. And then it became possible for me to write *4321* because of that. Previous books of mine, as you know, the perspective does change a few times. For example in *Moon Palace*, where suddenly everything is in the third person, where you are hearing Effing's story through Fogg, or *Leviathan*, you're hearing Sachs' story through Aaron. But it's not quite the –

Siri: It's located in a teller.

Paul: Exactly.

Siri: And that's not really skipping points of view.

Paul: But how this book, *4321*, came about I don't really know. It's a question that I've been mulling all my life, you know: 'what if'.

Siri: You have, of course. And that's a very Austerian proposition, right? So in some ways this work is a complete continuation of those things. I also think that, because I have been talking for years now about the very strange culture-matter dilemmas, that also had an effect on this book. I mean for me it is the most perfect illustration –

Paul: Nature/nurture.

Siri: Nature/nurture where that division is not concretely made. I think it's stupid to make it. And I've been hacking away at this thing about how culture becomes material, literally material in the brain – this kind of false dichotomy which has led to all kinds of terrible mistakes in the sciences and the humanities.

Alex: You are quite strongly anti-Cartesian.

Paul: Anti-dualist.

Siri: I am strongly anti-Cartesian, as you can see from the book.

Alex: Which is interesting because Paul's last two semi-autobiographical pieces the mind-body split is structurally present. Though there's cross-pollination between the two...

Paul: Well we *do* have bodies, and it was interesting to write about the body. And we do form moral and political thoughts and form ideas about the world. And so I focused on one in one book, and the other in the other.

Siri: It's a false dichotomy, I know you agree with me.

Paul: Of course, of course.

Alex: It's an interesting structure. And I really enjoyed the explorations of youthful consciousness in those books. They reminded me a little of *The Book of Memory*, especially those descriptions of Daniel coming into conscious being when he's about three years old.

Paul: I had a conversation with Andy Martinez the other day. He's a younger friend, he's in his thirties, he's a journalist. Somebody I like very much. And he finished reading *4321*, and he said the astonishing thing for him was how well he thought I captured the different stages of boyhood. He said 'I really felt what it was like to be four', and 'I really felt what it was like to be ten'.

Siri: That of course is a part of the process of memory as a form of fiction. You could call it the 'fictional memory'. I mean memory is a form of fiction anyway, but it triggers these feeling states in the reader. Otherwise we couldn't read, could we, if we weren't in some strange way re-experiencing these fictive states?

Paul: It was such a challenge to try to imagine a story that a bright fourteen year old boy would write. So I came up with the story about the shoes.

Alex: The 'Sole Mates' story.

Siri: It's more fun to do this as 'sophisticated older people', I think.

Paul: Of course, of course.

Siri: There's always that distinction between what you wrote when you were fourteen. I mean I remember Paul showed me something, a poem –

Paul: Ah, but that was when I was a pretentious oaf. I was seventeen years old and I was reading all this horrible romantic poetry. It was really the most awful poem I've ever seen in my life.

Siri: Well it wasn't a good one, let's put it that way. Sometimes eleven and twelve year olds write better poems than seventeen year olds.

Alex: They're freer.

Siri: They're much freer. Our daughter wrote a few poems –

Paul: When she was nine or ten.

Siri: She read a lot of poems. We gave her a lot of poems.

Paul: Mostly Emily Dickinson and Blake.

Siri: Which were poems that my mother gave to me. And I did just like my mother did. Without pressure. Just gifts. And then I found out a year later that she was *really into* Emily Dickinson.

Paul: She wrote some beautiful poems that were selected for some anthology of kids' writing.

Siri: I know. But they were *really* beautiful. And I remember when she showed them to me I thought ‘holy shit’. Of course you could feel that she had been reading poetry. But really wonderful. Now of course she writes lyrics, some great lyrics. But when she got a little older she wrote some very drippy poems. I remember she read them to us –

Paul: They weren’t good at all. [Laughs]

Siri: We said, ‘there are some problems’. [Laughter]

Alex: ‘You’ll have to use a pseudonym if you’re going to publish’.

Siri: And later she said, ‘mom and dad, you didn’t tell me that they were just really great’, you know. When you’re really doing it, all those influences are unconscious. They have left the realm of consciousness.

Paul: In *4321* – it’s in a parenthesis in Ferguson 4 – his new uncle Gil Schneiderman says, ‘you have to read everything you possibly can and then try to forget it’. What you can’t forget is going to form the foundation of your work.

Siri: But if you’re talking about conscious memory then I don’t think...

Paul: I’m not talking about conscious memory.

Siri: Because it really is that it suddenly becomes part of the repertoire of ability.

Alex: I was going to ask you, Siri, about this idea of reading everyone you can and then putting it them to one side because your approach is different.

Siri: You mean conscious reference? In ‘The Delusions [of Certainty]’ when I’m really trying to convince an ordinary intelligent reader it is essential.

Paul: I'm going to make tea. Would you like tea?

Alex: I'd love a cuppa.

Siri: First of all you use a lot of footnotes because if people want to go there you want them to go there. A bibliography would be ridiculous. And of course in *The Blazing World* too, there's a sort of dizzying referential apparatus which is part of the book to partly mislead. There is the editor. I didn't want this person, a man or a woman, to be a kind of mediocrity. I wanted them to be better than that, but not ahead of Harry. So Harry is really ahead. And the smart reader is really reading for that.

Paul: [Placing a Fortnum and Mason tin of Earl Grey on the table] This is the tea.

Siri: You're showing him your *tin*?

Alex: A great British institution.

Paul: And this is the cup I use for my tea. [Places child-sized Beatrix Potter *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* branded mug on the table.]

Siri: It was Sophie's. That's his secret. No one knows about it.

Paul: I've written about it! In *Report from the Interior. Or Winter Journal*.

Siri: It's not even a secret anymore.

Alex: You don't get a lot of tea in there.

Paul. No. But it's perfect for the lips.

Siri: So absolutely, you're right. Although, one thing I learned with a book like [*The Enchantment of*] *Lily Dahl*, where the book is embedded with all sorts of complicated references, is that no one understood it. And I remember that I thought when I was writing it how unbelievably clever it was, and how carefully structured. I was so proud of it. I really did think that this extremely complex intellectual philosophical material was going to be understood. [Laughs] Which was my absolute total stupidity and naivety. I mean it was just a thud of incomprehension. [Laughs] And then I had to wake up.

Paul: A friend of ours is a very good film-maker, Wim Wenders. There was a moment when he wanted to make a film of *Lily Dahl*, and I was going to write the screenplay.

Alex: You know, I think it would make a good film.

Siri: It would. It's the only one that would.

Paul: But I realised that every paragraph was so good, I couldn't eliminate anything. It would have been a sixteen hour movie. You couldn't cut anything out. It was all so wonderfully evoked. Also – something you don't know – we did write a screenplay together once.

Siri: Although we took our names off.

Paul: We took our names off.

Siri: The screenplay had nothing to do with the film. So we unhooked ourselves.

Paul: We were pleased with the results. We liked working with each other.

Siri: We were really good. We were terrific together.

Paul: We were cooking with gas. We wrote it in two weeks.

Siri: The impulse, the joy I got working with you on a screenplay, part of that was later realised in *The Summer without Men*, which was my comedy, where I'm referring to films all the time. We both love screwball comedies, we both like these men and women teaming up, making silly...

Alex: Like *Bringing up Baby*?

Siri: *Bringing Up Baby* is for both of us a little too broad. *The Awful Truth*, which I cite in *The Summer Without Men*, is the epigraph – that is, I think, a masterpiece. There are a number of others.

Paul: *My Man Godfrey*.

Siri: *My Man Godfrey*.

Paul: Have you seen any of these?

Alex: Sadly, no.

Paul: You've got to go back.

Siri: You've got to go back. These are really brilliant comedies.

Paul: The best book to read about these films is by Stanley Cavell. It's called *Pursuits of Happiness*.

Siri: Also referred to in *The Summer Without Men*.

Alex: So maybe that's it: screenwriting as a future collaborative project...

Siri: The way the movies work I can't see it, unless I helped you [Paul] write it and you directed it.

Paul: We also talked, although we're not going to do it, for years we talked about translating Hamsun's *Hunger* together.

Siri: I let that rumour out once, sort of, in an interview. And there was a guy who was willing to pay us to do it. A Norwegian, of course.

Alex: You've done a huge amount of translating in the past, but not so much for a while.

Paul: No. Although there was a new book of translations of Andre de Bouchet. Yale University Press did it in 2014. It was a collaboration [with Hoyt Rogers]. And really what I did was resurrect old the translations I'd done. I did them in the 60s and early 70s. And I revised some of them.

Siri: Translating poetry is a really extraordinary thing.

Paul: The Apollinaire, that was new. For the book [4321]. 'The Pretty Redhead'. I worked on that long and hard.

Siri: And I heard the various drafts. And it got better and better. And I have to say I think it's the most beautiful translation in English by far –

Paul: I think so. I think by far.

Siri: By far.

Paul: But it took a lot of work. But the old ones, the Desnos and the Eluard I did back as an undergraduate. And, just to tell you too, a couple of the excerpts of

Ferguson 4's writings were things I wrote back then, like 'The Droons'. I wrote that when I was 19. Just was lying, you know, never published. And the whole 'Scarlet Notebook', that was something I started writing way back, way back.

Siri: It's good to be able to rob one's self.

Paul: So those are real, real texts.

Alex: So why the change from scarlet to red?

Paul: Because I've written a book called *The Red Notebook*.

Siri: No, but what was the original title?

Paul: *The Red Notebook*. It was originally *The Red Notebook*.

Alex: I see.

Paul: But I used that title again. The American edition is not the British edition.

Siri: But in using 'scarlet', you're making a self-reference as well.

Paul: He said as bright as the 'A' on Hester Prynne's frock [from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*].

Siri: Yeah, yeah – of course. I know.

Alex: *4321* is a book of memory effectively. It's the memories of the four boys, and there's the joke that opens the novel, that ironic statement: 'I have forgotten'.

Paul: It's a real joke. But it's not 'ich hab', its 'shoin fargessen'. That is the normal way of telling the joke in Yiddish. What I wrote was 'I've forgotten'.

Because ‘shoin fargessen’ – Shane Ferguson – is not as funny. But Ichabod is much funnier to me.

Siri: Ichabod is very funny. But also a book which is an essential construction of memory should have as its central joke ‘I have forgotten’ is a very wonderful thing.

Alex: And not just one memory book, but four.

Siri: Four. And for the outside critical reader that’s one of the profundities of the book. This aspect of memory and fiction.

Paul: And just to set the records straight with you, there’s surprisingly little direct autobiographical stuff in there. A few things. I used a few. One of them being the basketball game in Newark that nearly led into a race riot. I was in that game, it really was a triple overtime, it really was one of the last second winners when the kid threw and we won by a point. And then the family called the Rosenblooms, from South Africa. They’re based on a real family, the Rosenbaums, whom I knew back then. And the girl, Diana, not Dana, moved to Israel. She died of cancer in her mid-forties. I loved that family. So there they are.

Siri: It’s what I like to think of as variations on a life, right? Variations of memory in some important way. But also the fact is that the territory that you are plumbing is absolutely the territory of your childhood.

Paul: Sure, the geography.

Siri: The geography. Both of us care for the Francis Yeats *Art of Memory* book, and the explorations of artificial memory, which I think actually are profoundly

important for real memory. There is no autobiographical memory without place, it does not exist, it does not happen. You need space, you absolutely have to have space to have an autobiographical memory. In *The Shaking Woman* I realised that I had moved a memory, this early memory of humiliation when I was a kid and I comfort my cousin. And it's happening in my mind in my aunt's house and I understood way, way later in my adulthood that that house had not been built. I had moved the spatial –

Paul: We do that all the time.

Siri: We do that all the time. But that is why artificial memory, the artificial systems we devise, are so powerful. Because it's not just artificial memory training yourself. Artificial memory is something about memory itself. Which is that we do shift locations.

Paul: Names too. In *Winter Journal* I write about the little boy who whacked me over the head with the rake, and then let my dog loose and caused the death of my dog. I called him Michael. But I realised Michael was his older brother, and he was Eric. I got it wrong.

Siri: That is a kind of displacement similar to what happens in dreams. It seems that that kind of mental imagery, or that kind of material, is not as much about perception per se as it is about dreams, fantasy, so on.

Alex: Is that like reconsolidation – how you remember the last memory or the remembrance of a memory?

Siri: Reconsolidation, yes.

Paul: Another example I could give. Of course I went to Columbia and of course I was there during the revolution of '68, but I was never a reporter for the newspaper.

Siri: No, of course not. I'm talking about broader autobiography. I'm talking about the spaces between these boys, the four. Three of them are fictional.

Paul: I resisted adding another layer: me. PA, as the inventor of AF. I had to cut it off at some point. You have to believe in the reality of Ferguson 4. He says that he would be a character too, but a somewhat fictionalised version of himself. So he's changing his own life.

Siri: He's saying that his own life is another fiction of a kind. Actually, I hadn't thought about this until now, which is grist for the mill: I had a similar experience to Paul for about a year after *The Blazing World*. A novel that failed. And he would read these little parts of it.

Paul: It was all beautifully written. You couldn't get a handle on what you were trying to do.

Siri: I didn't know where it was going. It was terrible. And then this summer after we returned from Europe. And I took this manuscript because I was all in a tizzy, and I was trying to work on it but I couldn't work on it because there was something terribly, awfully, horribly wrong with it. When I got home I realised I had to abandon it. Although the weird thing is I am writing another book and I am very happy writing it and it is a bizarre form of re-visiting a time in my life which also involves fiction, which is the period prior to writing *The Blindfold*. I realised as I was writing it. But it is completely different, it is radically different. It's taken

from a period in New York over the course of a year in the late 70s, a young woman who has come to write a novel. She saved up money. And may or may not go to graduate school. The architectures, the time, the place of this story are very much revisiting my own ready-made memory material. None of the things that happen to her in it happened to me. It's not autobiographical in that sense. It's not auto fiction.

Paul: That always made me think about novels about cars. 'Auto fiction'.

Siri: The terrain of fiction and memory are very much the same. I know people invent worlds. But it has to be invented out of something. Whatever imaginative distances are travelled, the reader has to be able to place him or herself into that world that's created in the book. And it always has to have some relation to stuff that's happened, to what the reader is living. For example, re-reading. I re-read Djuna Barnes *Nightwood*, which I have convinced myself is a work of genius. When I read it for the second time I thought I was going to go back to this beloved book of my youth and not love it anymore. When I read that for maybe the third time it was after I'd written *The Sorrows of an American*, and I realised that the character of Burton had been influenced by Dr O'Connor, the great figure in *Nightwood*. And I had absolutely no awareness of it while I was making him talk. I was just having a high old time. I think all the years I have spent on Dickens have come back. It's detectable. And I would think that with both of our works there are things like that that are happening too. That's what happens. And especially with the intimacy that you have with someone else's texts. I mean how could it not? I mean – I ended up dropping it – it was the beginning of a paragraph and Paul said 'Siri, you know I wrote a sentence almost exactly like that in *Moon*

Palace'. And I said 'oh my god' and, you know, out with that. And he's done the same thing. He wrote a sentence and it was almost word for word from somewhere, and he changed it. Work that you care about becomes imprinted somewhere in your soul. But you know, you don't know about it anymore.

Alex: Was it quite hard to ditch that novel?

Siri: I've used little parts in this new book. And I have a feeling, maybe this is the optimist's view, but maybe I had to go through that hell hole in order to get to this thing that I wanted to write. And maybe that's part of the process.

Alex: When you've written a novel as big as *The Blazing World* it must be quite tough to start something new anyway. Was it like finishing *What I Loved*?

Siri: That was another big novel. Finishing *The Blazing World* I didn't want to lie on the floor and cry for a week but I did feel that 'I have done this'. And I had also found – and maybe I'll never do this again – a form that was so flexible, so open, that it was a shockingly capacious form. That doesn't mean you could go on forever, because no reader would want that, but the form that I discovered as I was working on it, was so exciting, so enlivening, almost a magical form. To leave this behind was difficult because it was so great. But you have to bag it. Even before that I started this novel with this tiny little man. That was only a few pages. The anti-Harry. Though if you're writing against yourself there's nowhere to go. That was hopeless. It just wasn't going anywhere.

Paul: [Returning to the table with his e-cigarette and some post] Sorry, the first two were duds.

Siri: He said you could take them back.

Paul: I will. [Opening a package and holding up a book] Seven Stories Press. This is what I have to read. Kurt Vonnegut. Out loud, at the Brooklyn Public Library. Seven Stories is doing this book with me. We delayed it for a year. It's a book of conversations about every one of my books. It took three or four years. With this Danish professor. Who set up the Paul Auster Study Centre at the University of Copenhagen. And it's an amazing thing. Seven Stories is just a small thing. An American publisher is doing it here.

Siri: Oh no, it's your book.

Paul: Wonderful, thank you. [Holding up a pocket diary] My date book for next year. Thank you Siri.

Siri: You're welcome. I thought usually when I order books they're a little bigger than this.

Paul: Another product of Great Britain. Charing Cross. Made in England. They're wonderful date books. It fits in my pocket. There. See? Is it the same size? Yep. So this is my year.

Siri: Now you have another year.

Alex: I wanted to ask you both about Merleau-Ponty. You both have very different approaches.

Paul: Well I was the first of the family to read him, because first of all I'm a lot older than Siri.

Siri: You are.

Paul: As a young undergraduate I was very interested in reading philosophy. I didn't take many classes. Only one, which was a huge disappointment to me. It was all analytical. Such dreary stuff. Just awful. I hated it.

Alex: There's a portion of *4321* where you describe the Freshman syllabus at Columbia...

Paul: The Columbia programme was so helpful to me. It was such an enormous boon to my brain and my soul. I think everyone should read those books.

Alex: So when you say 'you need to read everything and then forget it' that's because you have done exactly that.

Paul: Yes. So, Merleau-Ponty. I read him. In addition to others. The two twentieth century philosophers I was most attracted to were Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty. Completely different. But very exciting and challenging and thought-provoking.

Siri: Especially the late Wittgenstein. You were not so interested in the *Tractatus*.

Paul: Yeah, but I like the *Tractatus* because it's so beautifully written, so elegant. But Merleau-Ponty seemed to me the most profound, the one who understood this whole embodied self, as Siri calls it. And it had a tremendous impact on me. And that little sequence of notes from the composition book, you've read that? I was twenty. So that reflects the reading. 'The world is in my head. My body is in the world.' It was pretty good for a twenty year old to come up with that.

Siri: It was. It was brilliant. Beautiful.

Paul: So I've always walked around with this warm feeling about Merleau-Ponty, but I haven't re-read it. It was planted in me when I was nineteen or so, and it certainly influenced me. But then at some point, years ago, I urged Siri to read him, and you fell in love. And now you're so much more into him than I am.

Siri: It was for me – and it's absolutely true Paul was the one who said 'I think you have to read this' – and now I return to it all the time. One particular essay, *The Visible and the Invisible*, which I think is the shockingly –

Paul: It's the unfinished book, that's why.

Siri: It's the unfinished book, but the working notes –

Paul: 54, 56? How old was he?

Siri: It was so young. It's really sad. There was so much more that he could have done. In *The Visible and the Invisible* he's clearly getting into the most profound possible answers to this question of mind and flesh, and the ideas that he has in this book about what the flesh is and the chiasmus. It's really dizzying, and it's quite hard. It's much harder than *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

Paul: For me it was *The Phenomenology of Perception* that had the huge impact. I did buy all of them. Northwestern University Press. They were offering all the books in translation and I bought every one I could get my hands on. I did not read every single thing, I must confess. But *The Phenomenology* was a great experience.

Siri: It's interesting because we have the book in our library, that's how I got it, it's Paul's book. What Paul underlined are precisely the things that I wouldn't underline. [Laughs] It was really a fascinating exercise.

Paul: I was reading it through the lens of a nineteen year old poet.

Siri: I know. But he would have these markings in pencil, I don't think there's much commentary –

Paul: Then I stopped underlining it, if I was reading every sentence there's no point in underlining it.

Siri: One of the fascinations for me about Merleau-Ponty is that he was interested in biology and neurology in the way that I am interested in biological realities. And you don't even touch that stuff.

Paul: I wasn't interested in that.

Siri: There's not a mark. All the neurology, of which there is quite a bit in the early part.

Paul: It's possible I didn't read the whole book. Quite possible. Its 450 pages. Though this should be interesting for you: Siri and I have remarkably similar tastes in literature, art, films. But there are differences. I think Siri has a larger world of beloved writers than I do. I have not been able to get through *Middlemarch*. I've never finished it.

Siri: I've read it about four times. It's one of my most beloved books.

Paul: I just can't get past page fifty. And I can't really read Henry James either. Some. And I liked it very much. But I don't feel a great urge to plunge into the Henry James novels. The novellas.

Siri: I got you some of the novellas. *The Aspern Papers*.

Paul: *The Aspern Papers* I loved. I've just never been a great enthusiast for those two writers.

Siri: I finally got you to read, however, *To the Lighthouse*.

Paul: I read it for the first time this summer. I think it's one of the most beautiful novels. At eighteen I read two Virginia Woolf books. I was in my full phase of James Joyce adulation. Finished reading *Ulysses*. I was in Dublin. It was the summer of 1965. I then read two Woolf books. *The Waves* and *Orlando*. And I didn't like either one of them. So I just sort of crossed her off my list. For fifty years!

Siri: I don't like those books that much either.

Paul: Then Siri urged me to read *To the Lighthouse*. I felt overwhelmed. I think it's one of the most beautiful novels of the twentieth century. And I would read paragraphs two, three, four times.

Alex: I read some Woolf for my Masters. Including *Orlando*. I can't remember much of it though. That's the problem with reading: I forget.

Paul: Me too. Siri remembers but I forget everything. So: similar tastes in most things, but not always congruent. Siri has lost all interest in baseball. Which I

taught her in the early days of our being together. And you seemed to love it. Then as soon as you got pregnant and had the baby you suddenly lost interest.

Siri: During the season Paul watches with a lot of passion. This season I remember walking in and watching a game and it was very exciting. I got all wrapped up in it. Then I said to myself, 'no, I do not have the emotional room for baseball'. I do not have it, I do not want to have it. I have to cut myself off from it.

Paul: It's a legitimate position.

Siri: That's my position. It's not that I don't like baseball, it's not that I don't understand baseball. It is that the way my life goes now, if I were to give any more of my life to baseball considering what I do...

Paul: You'd be oversaturated, I know. Siri's not particularly interested in westerns either. I have a fondness for them. Siri's not interested in movies without women in them.

Siri: [Laughs] It's generally true. It's not always true. For example *A Man Escaped* doesn't have many women in it. I love that movie, I think it's one of the greatest movies, period. And there isn't a single woman in it. These movies that are the myth of the autonomous male wandering around with his six-shooter...But I like *High Noon*.

Paul: Grace Kelly's in that. And Katie Jurado.

Siri: You know what I'm saying. Some of these movies with the mythos is just...

Paul: I'm just throwing it out. Visual artwork, very close. I think we respond to the same pieces.

Siri: Yes. The deepest ones, but I think I have the broadest taste. I think there are ones where you'd say, 'I think that's terrible', and I'll say, 'No, that's not terrible. That's interesting.' And it's interesting for taste reasons.

Paul: You do have broader tastes than I do.

Alex: [To Siri] Are you reading more scientific texts now, or more of an equal split between fiction and non-fiction?

Siri: Certain problems in science push me back to philosophy. I read fiction too.

Paul: She reads Husserl on airplanes. Just so you get an idea of what she is able to do.

Alex: How about you, Paul?

Paul: Very much less. I used to be able to devour books. Pretty much throughout my college years I was reading a book a day. Just eating books.

Siri: You've had a different arc.

Paul: The more I've written, the less I've read. I certainly don't read fiction while I'm writing it. I read in between books. Novels. Often just catching up on my friends' work. And then new things, like the Virginia Woolf. New things I haven't read. I like going back. I think I'm launching myself into another reading of *Don Quixote* now. I think I want to do that. Because I am cooked after that big book. I have no idea what I'm going to do next. So I am taking a pause. Even if I did

come up with an idea, February 1st I start travelling. I'm going to be gone for huge stretches of time.

Alex: Where to?

Paul: I'm doing the US and Canada. Then I'm going to England in early March. Then to Germany, to Holland. A week in each place. And in England. I think I was last there for *Winter Journal*. I'm going to Manchester. There's a theatre company, called Productions 59, who have done a lot of things, they're kind of wizard technicians of light and theatrical effects. They did some of the things at the London Olympics. But they've never actually done a play all of their own. They've contributed to other people's plays. But what they've done is they've adapted *City of Glass*, so it's premiering in Manchester and then going on to the Hammersmith in London. I've been reading one draft of the script after another and now it's just about perfect.

Siri: That's so great.

Paul: The guy really has done a good job. Duncan Macmillan is his name. Five drafts and now I think he's pretty much there. I can't wait to see it. I think it's going to be spectacular to look at. So that's one of the lures of going to England this time. Oxford also. But the bulk in London. Five city reading tour in Germany. Amsterdam, the Hague and Brussels for a day. It's going to be a lot. And then in the summer I go back to Europe for a while. Edinburgh festival wants me. It's their 70th birthday and my 70th birthday, and then I'm going to go to Scandinavia and Spain and Portugal.

Alex: How about your time in Germany, Siri?

Siri: I enjoyed it. First I was in Norway for this psychiatric conference, where I gave a keynote and one of the side panels. So I got there on the morning of the eighth, the day of the election, went to bed, woke up in the morning and turned on the TV and there it came.

Paul: The horror, the horror.

Siri: Because I was ‘the American on the opposite shores’ I was solicited to write about the election, so I wrote an editorial for one of the big papers in Norway. They edited it and published it a couple of days after the election. And then while I was in Germany I did a few things about Trump. I was on TV talking about Trump. So it was a weird, ‘Trump: what are the neo-fascist features’, while giving these speeches. The keynote at the psychiatric conference went well. And then I gave three lectures at Tübingen. ‘The Writing Self as Psychiatric Patient’ I gave in Norway. I wrote something else for about psychiatry, neurology and the mind-body problem and how this infects the discipline. I gave four talks in Tübingen. One was about narrative. Narrative and the self, and its uses in medicine, which I had first delivered as a lecture at Columbia. I did that as my opening lecture in Tübingen. And...my brain is dead.

Paul: It doesn’t matter, you were busy. I was on the BBC, right before the election. I don’t know if you saw that. It was so awful. I didn’t watch it. But my daughter Sophie came here on the night of the election and we watched it together, and she showed me on her phone my interview. I look so damn nervous, so anxious. I was stammering and I usually I don’t stammer in my interviews. All the dark fears turned out to be true.

Alex: We've had our own experience in the UK.

Siri: Right, with Brexit. What you are looking at are the politics of humiliation. In every country there is a difference, but what has shifted is we are not looking at a politics of reflection, but these huge overwhelming feelings of having lost something. That's humiliation. And that's why they are specifically white-centered and deeply related to misogyny. That you can see from country to country, from place to place. That is what binds them. Very specific domestic situations, of course, are different.

Paul: In *The New York Times* magazine tomorrow there's an Ian Buruma piece about England and America. Brexit and Trump. I didn't know Trump's last ad was attacking Jews. The World Bank. Antisemitism bubbling up in America has not been the case for decades. Vicious antisemitism. Horrible anti-black and anti-women and anti-Muslim, the most vilified of all.

Siri: Do you know Rene Girard's book on the scapegoat? He's a brilliant thinker who, as many French thinkers has tendency to push things further than they ought to be pushed, at least in my mind. The scapegoat has to do with mimetic desire of what the other has. The great example is two kids are playing in a room, and there's a puppet lying in the room. The kids are ignoring it. Then the little girl sees the puppet and takes it and is playing very happily in her corner. The little boy sees this and wants the puppet. Gerard brilliantly works this out to such a degree that people who are working on social identity theory acknowledge him as a source. There's more empirical data that goes along with it. That's what is binding all this: Trump, Brexit. The fantasy of some kind of manly autonomy is

also part of this. These white guys and the women who identify with them in the middle of the country feel like they've lost their status. They don't have to be poor. Anyway, it's a false thing.

Paul: Brexit. I just think that there is a parallel. We have one decent evening news show in the US. It's called the PBS News Hour. They were covering the lead up to the Brexit vote pretty thoroughly. They had this guy, Michael Brabant, a British journalist. He's was in some southern British town and walks up to a woman, probably in her 50s, well dressed, well pulled together, middle or upper middle class, and identified herself as the wife of someone in the military, a major or something like that. So he said, 'how do you feel about the vote?' And she said 'I hope they take that tunnel and fill it up with cement so that no foreigner will come and bother us again'. The hatred pouring out of this pulled-together woman was shocking to me. The hatred. And you multiply that by millions of other people and that's the attitude.

Alex: The parallels are there.

Paul: Its anti-globalisation.

Alex: Its false nostalgia for a time that never existed.

Siri: The faux Golden Age.

Paul: That's why the old voted for Brexit and the young voted to stay. Anyway, pertaining to your project, our politics are very similar. We really do agree on just about everything.

Siri: Nevertheless, I have to say this event, this terrible event in our history, has really changed things. I've written for *Liberation* and *The Guardian* about Obama, about missing Obama. It's shocking. To be welcomed by Barack Obama is so radically different to what is being posited now as the face of America. It is the worst of us rather than the best of us.

Paul: But Obama incited this reaction from the white haters, and he unnerved them to such a degree that the right tightened. They got what they wanted now. And may the Lord save us.

Siri: Part of my thinks: okay. You deserve it. You assholes. Now you're going to see what you have wrought. Take it. The irony of this is the protection of the rich. Our lives are not going to be radically altered by Trump, unless it's World War Three or something. But what he's doing is turning on the people who voted for him. Those are the people who are going to suffer.

Paul: I mean, the Cabinet. He's got an Attorney General who doesn't believe in civil rights. He's got a Secretary of Education who doesn't believe in public school. He's got an environmental head who doesn't believe in global warming. On and on and on. He's got a health secretary who doesn't want medical insurance. [Paul leaves to take a phone call]

Siri: Back to the thesis. If I were doing this, I would be looking at textual overlaps and developments between two stories. That's where there's more information.

Alex: I'm trying to address the independence-interdependence conundrum, certainly in terms of personal aesthetics. You've been very open and honest about

moments where there are influences, but there's a keenness to preserve your own personal identity. And that's quite difficult.

Siri: Well. We haven't talked about this, and I think it's fair to talk about the sexism. The sexism means essentially this – and I mention this in an interview with a very smart woman in *De Zeitung* – basically if Paul says in interviews Siri said this or Siri told me this – I mean I've heard it – once the interview is published, I'm out. If I talk about Paul at all in the interview, I mean AT ALL, it's the headline. And that difference is not about our friendship, our relationship inside our world together, whatever that is, or the two worlds coming into contact. That's about feeling certain inhibitions because of the way the stories are read. I don't mean our texts, but the story of the marriage. So that the truth is after all these years I often thought 'Paul is really famous and of course people are going to join me to him in ways that don't go back and forth'. Well I can tell you that in Germany I sell more books, I'm just as famous and the response is exactly the same. The sexism doesn't go away. It's not about how many copies you sell, how famous you are. It's about, whether it's conscious or unconscious, people do not want the influence to be both ways. I have been told by journalists that Paul taught me neuroscience, he taught me psychoanalysis. I've sat on chairs here with journalists who have told me, completely sincerely, that Paul taught me everything I know. Not to be...I do have a PhD. What happened here? Some journalists are saying that after this book I should start thinking of myself as a full-fledged intellectual. I have been a fully-fledged intellectual for many years.

Paul: Did someone actually say that to you?

Siri: All the time. Some of it is kind of ignorant, but some of it is constant...it never goes away.

Paul: I've often told Siri that we should get publicly divorced and then secretly live together.

Siri: That wouldn't change it. Because I'm old now, because I've written a lot of books, because I can tell what is sexism is, because places where I am more famous than you they still do it. That to me suggests sexism. It's not 'oh there's Paul Auster's wife, I guess she writes books too'. That does happen, I guess in some places. But you also start to realise what the frame is, even in certain publishing. The further east you go in the world, the fewer women they publish. Places like Greece and Turkey, places where I am read by ardent small numbers of fans, they're just not very interested in publishing novels by women.

Paul: One thing I console myself with is that there are 7.2 billion people on the planet. I heard the numbers the other day. And a good percentage of them have not heard of me or you.

Siri: That's not the point, Paul.

Paul: I know, I know.

Siri: What we are talking about here is overt sexism that affects me all the time. And you know it does because you've witnessed it all the time. You've witnessed it day in, day out.

Paul: I know it does. The preliminary conversation of this interview book was ‘why did you do it’? There are two reasons. There have been a lot of books written about me. I have most of them I think.

Siri: There’s a lot of books. About forty.

Paul: They come to the house and I flick through them. Academic books. Then I put them away. But there was one book. The writer said all my autobiographical writing was fiction, and all my fiction was autobiographical. That was one reason, just to set the records straight. My fiction is fiction, my autobiography is autobiography. And then: Siri. I’m doing this to set the record straight, very directly. I did not teach Siri psychoanalysis, I did not teach her about Jacques Lacan, about Bakhtin or any of these things.

Alex: So it’s very much the reverse.

Siri: He never read – he didn’t even read it. That’s the problem.

Paul: I tell you what I read of Bakhtin. I read the translator’s introduction to *The Dialogical Imagination*. [Laughs]

Siri: Because *who* gave it to you?

Paul: And I got that story about Bakhtin smoking his book, which I used in the screenplay of *Smoke*.

Siri: Yes, because I told you about it.

Paul: I don’t really care about his theories of the novel. I don’t really care that much about these things.

Siri: The Lacan thing got so out of hand.

Paul: I read one thing about Lacan. His *Purloined Letter* piece.

Siri: I worked and worked on Lacan. And I have to say that that becomes very strange. You can make mistakes and what you discover is that you can correct mistakes but people do not want to know. In other words, when it comes to me what people want to think is that Paul is the clever intellectual and that I am the bumbling woman who is writing about her feelings. But I run into it time and time again. People really do not want this upset. They really do not. So that you can do an interview, talk about what you care about, and you are met with total hostility. Real anger. And that does not happen to him. It simply does not happen to him.

Paul: No. People kick me around, but for different reasons.

Siri: People kick you around for different reasons, and it is never linked to me. People don't ask him about me in general.

Paul: And most of the time during an interview when I do talk about you, its cut out.

Siri: It's thoroughly excised. So if he says 'well Siri was talking about this, about something', then it's gone. But it's *your* knowledge.

Paul: I did this interview for *Publishers Weekly*, it came out last week. The things I said about you are there. The publicist for my publisher said, 'what really comes through is how much you love your wife'.

Siri: What happens to me is there is an inhibition. If I talk about you, it's the headline. That's a problem because I would like to be able to be free to talk about how important you have been to me. I said this in lots of interviews when I was younger, and I very quickly learned that was all anybody wanted me to say. Now it's about my work. This is my work. I wish the world wasn't like that. I wish the frames for were different, because its women who lose out.

Paul: [To Alex] That's why it's nice that you're doing what you're doing. You're putting us on equal footing.

Siri: It is a kind of utopian vision that does not exist. And there are people who are just not aware of it. You run into situations where there is real malignance. It happens every time I go out in the world. Like the Tübingen thing. An important person at the University who shall not be named, who did not sponsor me, who just came in at the end, was so hostile. When he introduced me it was so condescending and shocking that people noticed.

Alex: There's a real sense in your most recent essays that you're stepping up a gear intellectually.

Siri: *The Shaking Woman* was a major turning point.

Alex: There's nobody else really writing like this at the moment.

Paul: Nobody. And this is what I fear for poor Siri is there is no consciousness out there that can fully grasp what she's doing. It's so big. It's going to take years for people to absorb the insights she's had in all kinds of fields.

Siri: I know what is original, what is taking from a large body of things, and I also know that nobody has said ever this. That of course is lost on 99.9% of the readers. The people who know about neurobiology do not know about the philosophy or the other references. So I find that even when I start talking like I did at the psychiatric conference, I have to use a story of a girl called Alice who had an episode and developed a phobia. And this is to psychiatrists. I almost feel like I know more about psychiatry than they do. Not about dealing with patients, though I've had my four years. The theory, the history, what it means, how you philosophically frame the problems.

Paul: I think you are one of the most formidable thinkers and writers about art. Visual art. No one comes close to you.

Siri: The point is that you have to get to one place. And it does happen within the disciplines. I mean I'm giving another lecture next week. I wouldn't be invited to Tubingen if I wasn't recognised.

Paul: The way the world works is they don't want people doing more than one thing. I got this when I was directing movies. There's this built in resentment: 'How dare you come into our domain'? I can't think of a person who has been a novelist and a philosopher, I think that's what I would call you. Include the art and the literary things. Sartre wrote philosophy and novels. And plays.

Siri: So did Simone de Beauvoir.

Paul: And so did Simone de Beauvoir. Camus also wrote essays and novels. Susan Sontag wrote essays and novels. I can't really think of anybody else but

those four. And Siri I think is the best novelist of the five by far. And I think you're intellectual work is just as good as anything they ever wrote.

Siri: Well maybe we're getting a little –

Paul: No, I'm telling you.

Siri: I'm doing a conversation with Simon Critchley, the philosopher. He's genuinely serious, coming out of a continental tradition. And what you realise is that he will most definitely understand the philosophy coming out of these. The neurobiology is non-existent. The concern at all is that the biological approach, the most original thing I'm going to pursue in there, is the placenta. People are co-constituent, there is no self without the other, but it is biologically grounded through the placenta.

Paul: It's an organ shared by two people.

Siri: Everyone in the philosophical tradition has ignored what people have known, that tribal peoples have known, that this organ is like a twin. Almost every tribal culture understands the placenta as this organ which is crucial to how we are made. How it is possible that the entire western tradition would never address the fact that human beings begin inside another human being is an astounding fact that has never been properly addressed by anyone. There's a lot of work being done of the dyad, and prenatal life. And neotony. We retain juvenile characteristics for far longer than most mammals. We are the most slowly developing mammal by far. We are cared for years. So the obvious philosophical question is 'why the hell is that?' It allows adaptations to be made that couldn't be made. And one thing I discovered this afternoon, guys, is that Neanderthals had

much more mature systems much earlier. They didn't last. They can tell this from – I love this stuff – molar studies. So this includes brain systems and plasticity. I mean speculative, and it is born out in other mammals. So our very retarded development may be a key to the reason why we survived. Then what you have is this very long attachment system. That child-grown up attachment system is a co-reality. So now you see these studies focusing on the in-between. I've seen a colt being born and within an hour it was up on its wobbly legs. It's a year before human infants can get up on their legs. What is happening between people? There's all these things. Face-to-face encounters. Chimpanzees are on the mother's back. This is also implicated in this long, slow development, this very long plasticity so that change can happen.

Paul: So what other questions do you have?

Alex: I think that ought to do it.

Siri: Was it useful?

Alex: Definitely useful.

Paul: Well I'd be interested to read this thing that you've cooked up.

Siri: I said before, if I were doing this a lot of things would be based on looking at texts and feeling for echoes or distinctions.

Paul: Oh, I did thank you in a text. At the end of *Sunset Park*. It was the only novel that had some thank yous. And I said, thank you Siri Hustvedt for 'the strangeness of being alive'.

Siri: Oh, that's right.

Alex: That phrase crops up in *4321*.

Paul: Yes. Once. 'How strange, how strange it was to be alive'.

Siri: That's true. That's my sentence.

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