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SPECIAL ISSUE

From Low Road to High Road: The Spatial Recontextualisation of Memory in Paul Auster's Twenty-first Century Fiction

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Abstract

This article examines the US author Paul Auster's twenty-first century fiction and traces that ephemeral moment, when encounters with and movements in places bring back forgotten memories, sometimes unwanted, through the body. The urban and other places through which Auster's often unhappy and self-destructive characters move surprise them by making them re-live situations they would rather forget. These places form what Arnold H. Modell calls a "metonymic trigger" that activates a bodily memory, a process of recall and response, where the past and the present suddenly become indistinguishable. As such, memories are not echoes or representations of past events, but experiences in the here and now, and Auster's literary fiction delicately articulates these experiences and captures the sense of immediacy and movement that accompanies memories and the processes of remembering. Memories are, however, also inextricably linked with imagination. Auster's characters often find solace in imagined places, and the repeated encounters with these places soften the blow of encountering real ones. Gradually, the characters move from triggered body memories to a remembering that creates a distance between the trigger and the response. The powers of imagination, then, entangled with and emerging from bodily memories, seem essential in recontextualising the painful memories into something more manageable.

Keywords

Auster, Body Memory, Embodiment, Imagination, Place, Fiction

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Introduction

Some time ago, I drove to a friend's house via a rural road I had not taken in several years. Immersing myself in that landscape in a swerving car triggered a visceral, bodily memory of that friend telling me—in that same location—about the difficulties she faced in her life at the time. Over the years I have, of course, known about her situation, but not with my body; now, having taken that same road many times, I can bring back the memory at will, but not as a bodily memory.

In this article, I examine the US author Paul Auster's twenty-first century fiction and trace that ephemeral moment, when encounters with and movements in places bring back forgotten memories, sometimes unwanted, through the body. The urban and other places through which Auster's often unhappy and self-destructive characters move "surprise" them (Runia 55; Thrift 114) by making them re-live situations they would rather forget. These places form what Arnold H. Modell calls a "metonymic trigger" or a "metaphorical correspondence" that activates a bodily memory, a process of recall and response, where the past and the present are suddenly indistinguishable: *"[t]he traumatic memory . . . remain[s] intact, as it [is] not . . . recontextualized as a result of later experience"* (39-40; Kulmo). As such, the connection between memory, body and place is an entangled one, and in what follows, I examine how Auster's fiction both illustrates and actively participates in the creation of such entanglement. I apply an embodied framework to show how the mind, body and place, as well as memory, imagination and reality co-exist in a process of unfolding that is inherently grounded in movement (e.g., Johnson; Johnson and Rohrer; Lakoff and Johnson; Maturana and Varela).

In what follows, I discuss the eight novels Auster has published since 2000; I focus particularly on *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), *Invisible* (2009) and *Sunset Park* (2010), but also capture moments from *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Man in the Dark* (2008) and *4 3 2 1* (2017). The two remaining novels *The Book of Illusions* (2002) and *Oracle Night* (2003) I mention in passing. Much of Auster's fiction has been studied with a postmodern lens, which is partly explained by an extensive focus on his 1980s and 1990s fiction (e.g., Eckhard; Salmela; Shostak). However, Auster's later novels, which have naturally been less researched, have also received similar attention (e.g., Ciocia; Ciocia and González; Misztal) as a way to navigate the fact that his fiction does not always "make sense" (Huisman 286). For instance, Rosemary Huisman claims that the postmodern novel undermines everything a traditional narrative consists of and that the readers seem to expect, such as coherent "identity of characters, of setting, of plot" (286). Consequently, the "post-modernist disruption" (286) undermines how life itself is ordered, and using Auster's *Sunset Park* as an example, Huisman suggests that the postmodern novel describes a world in chaos where "being human cannot be sustained" (289).

I argue that Huisman's view, in effect, undermines how humans experience life in all its complexity. Although the aforementioned "disruptions" are still visible in Auster's later works and he continues to use, for instance, metafiction and stories-within-stories, the outcomes are wholly more hopeful. Auster's "utterly fragmented beings" (*A Life* 8) are not people who have lost their selves or their connection to the world but who are coming to terms with having a "range of selves within a single self" and trying to find "a way to live, a way of making life possible for oneself" (*A Life* 7-8). Moreover, Auster's "experimental" narration, does not enact a disorderly chaos any more than coherence would enact reality, for such divisions into past, present and future or beginning, middle and end, or indeed into real and imagined are "useful for assembling fragments of experience into a coherent and organized plot, but [nonetheless…] devices, not natural phenomena" (Riessman 1057).

Embodiment does not mean that the above divisions or ones between, for example, minds and bodies, the inside and the outside or borders and boundaries, cannot be discussed. It rather means that we recognise these concepts as a "convenient shorthand" for "identifying aspects of ongoing organism-environment interaction" (Johnson and Rohrer 17); that we understand that mental processes consist of more than our thoughts and brain activity (Tewes et al. 1); and that, for instance, interior and exterior are "directions of motion, not . . . separate domains" (Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 201). Embodiment thus means that even if we separate these concepts for purposes of elucidation, we realise their inherent and unavoidable interconnection.

Embodiment can be employed to trace how we are mobile, quite literally, in our everyday lives. However, it can also reveal the more subtle ways we are connected to our literal, remembered and imagined surroundings. Embodiment, then, arises as a rather natural part of any mobility related research. Mobilities research has expanded, especially in the social sciences, since the publication of Mimi Sheller's and John Urry's influential 2006 article outlining the "New Mobilities Paradigm." Mobility, however, and the myriad of social, cultural and material phenomena attached to it, has long been a central theme especially in the humanities (e.g., Cresswell; Merriman; Merriman and Pearce). Mobilities research often seeks to employ "mobile methods" where the researchers themselves move with their research subjects and within the situation under investigation. The various ethnographic approaches or, for instance, biosensing are seen to better capture the participants' experiences and this way give more accurate data on the effects of mobility (e.g., Spinney; Büscher et al.). Peter Merriman, however, cautions us not to abandon the many cross-disciplinary and mixed-method possibilities available also in the humanities, including using literary texts as source material (168). Lynne Pearce suggests that literary texts could, in effect, better reveal the spectrum of mobility-related human experience because the "incidental information in which textual narrative is embedded" can reach a level of honesty and reflexivity that the ethnographic data might not ("Text-as-Means" 81). Literary texts, then, can be used to investigate socio-cultural phenomena outside of them.

I argue that the embodied framework I apply further highlights the suitability of literary

fiction for mobilities research. It supports a shift from a more traditional yet still common literary criticism, where texts are seen as *ends-in-themselves* towards using the texts as a *means* to an end (Pearce, "Text-as-Means" 79). This working "*with* texts rather than *on* them" (Pearce, "Text-as-Means" 79) enables a look beyond the way Auster's novels flatly represent or describe the experience of memory; Auster's fiction in itself contributes to making sense of a world in which the past, present and future, and reality, memory and imagination are not neatly aligned. Auster's novels do not only "[make] us conscious that our senses are continuously confronted by a chaotic and shifting world without labels" but also "summons us to struggle, reckon, and grasp it *intentionally*" (Stafford 11; my emphasis).

In the three sections that follow, I first trail the "low road" of triggered body memories, where the quick and automatic evaluation of our surrounding situations "reverse[s] the temporal order of emotional and cognitive processes," whereby the emotion comes before the cognitive evaluation (Tewes et al. 5-6). I then continue up the hill through a halfway point where there emerges an awareness of how encountering places can, eventually, bridge the past and the future. Finally, I walk further up towards the "high road" where the distance between the stimuli and the emotional response grows longer; this is what ultimately helps Auster's characters to face their painful memories without being triggered by them. They move from surprising bodily memories towards a remembering which, as an "embodied skill . . . brings transformation" (Sutton and Williamson 316).

On all three levels of the road memories are also inextricably linked with imagination (e.g., Mullally and Maguire). For example, Geroge Zarkadakis discusses how our individual and cultural experiences—what we know of the world and what we have perceptually experienced—influence creative inspiration and the ability to imagine things that do not exist as of yet. Moreover, in imagination lies the potential for finding places of solace, and ultimately, a way to live with painful memories. The imagined places, created at the crossroads of real-life sensory experience, memories, ideas and cultural understandings of locations (e.g., Finch 83; Hansen 44) serve as basis for creating an "inner refuge, . . . [t]he place a man goes to when life in the real world is no longer possible" (Auster, *Brooklyn* 100). Despite the ephemeral quality of such places, they work as a midway point of presence between the past that haunts and a future that gazes at the past from a different perspective.

The repeated encounters with imagined places soften the blow of encountering real ones and gradually Auster's characters move from triggered body memories to a remembering that creates a distance between the trigger and the response thus recontextualising the painful memories into something more manageable. In Auster's work, this is not necessarily a positive or a particularly happy experience. Indeed, the characters do not usually feel so "glad to be alive" (Brooklyn 303). They would want to scream, as Nathan Glass does at the end of *The Brooklyn Follies*, but they do often encounter a deepened sense of calm and self-understanding alongside a balance between the past and the present.

The Low Road of Body Memories

As embodied and mobile beings, we are connected to our literal, remembered and imagined surroundings by responding to them more or less spontaneously in our actions and practices. These encounters, then, produce emotional and affective reactions that again, in turn, affect our actions and practices in an embodied circuit (Shotter, "Presences" 440; Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 196). The spontaneity arises from our body memories, i.e., the traces left on our bodies by our experiences in life. Body memories are largely pre-reflective and implicit; we are not always aware of "how" we do things even if we are aware of "what" we are doing (Koch et al. 273). Body memories consist of, for instance, muscle memory and motor skills, habitual and familiar patterns of social interaction and "procedural memory for motion patterns" (Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 201). It is through such body memories that Mr. Blank in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, to whom I return towards the end of the article, can feel his way through the room where he is confined despite having forgotten who or where he is. However, as Hanne Louise Jensen emphasises, "having a pre-reflexive starting point does not imply a passively sensing and isolated body without the ability to use pre-conscious past experiences as a mediator in perception of the present. … [E]motions build bridges between the present and the past" (202). From this unfolding-in-space through emotion, as I show, arises Mr. Blank's ability to also create meaning and order in his life as well as his ability to orient himself within his memories and imaginations despite having lost his sense of self.

Body memory is also contextual and situated, in other words, place-bound. It incorporates the spatio-temporality of our bodily experience and "entails the involuntary emergence of images and sensible impressions related … to … lived situations" (Koch et al. 275). As these impressions include emotions and affects, it follows, first, that situational body memories are "affectively and emotionally charged" (Koch et al. 275), and second, that "the experienced space around us is [also] charged with affective qualities" (Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 196).

Moreover, Tess Osborne suggests that physiological reactions are spatial in themselves (76). She employs biosensing technology to track the body's autonomous and "nonconscious somatic reactions" to being in emotional situations and locations that have special meaning (65). Re-placing oneself in a familiar place, suggest Sutton and Williamson in turn, instantiates the experience of re-living the past event and this can either deliberately or unintentionally generate affects and emotions in our bodies, which in a bottom-up process triggers memories related to that place (316).

Body memories and emotions, therefore, are not mere inner states or representations of the situations we encounter; "[r]ather, the affected subject is engaged with an environment that itself has affect-like qualities" (Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 197). In these situations, "[o]ur body is affected by the other's expression … Our body schemas and feelings expand and 'incorporate' the perceived body of the other" (Fuchs, "Intercorporeality"

198). As such, while body memories are essentially individual, based on our personal experiences, they are also culturally and socially learned, i.e., embedded in our cultural and social surroundings (Koch et al. 273; Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 201). Such socio-culturally embodied knowing affects how we direct ourselves towards the world and form our "interaffective" relationships (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 25-26; Lefebvre). As such, the kinds of environments we grow up and live in are crucially important. However, this does not mean that one's patterns of action and ways of engaging with others cannot change. This is the hopeful point my article highlights. Our "responsiveness" to the world, to which John Shotter above referred, keeps us moving.

Body memories, then, as situational and emotional, help us orient ourselves within real-life situations. Moreover, I argue that our embodied relationship with places—a relationship which is in itself inherently social (Fuchs, "Circularity" 1 and "Intercorporeality" 205)—is also based on the process of "interaffectivity." We engage with landscapes and places the same way we engage with other people when we "partially inhabit the 'feeling' side of another's body" and rather than "perceive another body as a material object … [we are] affected by the meaning of its appearance" (Simonsen 172).

However, for us to be affected by places, they do not need to exist; as I noted above, our body memories also direct our emotions within our memories and imagination. A particular scene in *Invisible* exemplifies this. The novel tells of Adam Walker, now a sixty year old, who asks an old Columbia University friend, Jim, to help him finish the book he is writing. Adam is dying of leukaemia and has decided to "produce a final reckoning" about "the old days, that long-ago year (1967) when so much happened to me, happened in me and around me … Nothing like a fatal illness to sharpen one's thoughts, to make one want to tote up the accounts" (*Invisible* 87). The central event of 1967 which demands such reckoning concerns Adam's friendship with Rudolf Born, a Frenchman working as a visiting professor at the School of International Affairs at Columbia. Born is a controversial personality with smooth conversational skills and a flair for flattery coupled with a quick and fiery temper. This temper leads to a violent confrontation with a young Cedric Williamson, who attempts to rob Adam and Born one night with what turns out to be an unloaded gun. Born stabs Williamson, and while Adam runs to call an ambulance, "barely [able to] absorb what [he is] seeing" (*Invisible* 65), both Born and Williamson vanish from the site. Williamson is later discovered in Riverside Park with over a dozen stab wounds to his body. Born denies having been there and threatens Adam if he goes to the police. By the time Adam musters the courage to do so, Born has fled the country.

The memory of the events continues to haunt Adam not only because of Born's horrific deed but, as Adam states, because Born "had shown me something about myself that filled me with revulsion … I could never forgive him—and I could never forgive myself" (*Invisible* 71). Adam "feel[s] a strong urge to quit the country" (*Invisible* 94) and in the Autumn departs for an exchange in Paris, despite suspecting that Born is there. A supposedly chance encounter with Born occurs, and as Adam walks away from Born, "the sun shoots across the

sky and explodes into a hundred thousand splinters of molten light. The Eiffel Tower falls down. Every building in Paris bursts into flame. End of Act I. Curtain" (*Invisible* 187): Adam has concocted a plan to bring Born down by infiltrating the family of his wife-to-be Hélène and her daughter Céline and then revealing the secret at the most opportune moment.

Towards the end of the novel, Jim, having finished revising Adam's novel after his death, meets the now 58-year-old Cécile in Paris. The brief encounter with Adam in 1967 has left a permanent impression on her. In an interaffective relationship, Adam, the first love of her life, "opened up something in her heart that altered her perception of herself, that thrust her for the first time into a direct confrontation with the depths of her own heart" (*Invisible* 263). Moreover, she cannot forget the "terrible, broken-down place where Adam lived" that was just around the corner from where Jim and Cécile are now meeting (*Invisible* 267). The building has been torn down, but Cécile can sense it as a trace in the present of a past that no longer exists (e.g., Ricoeur; Sviland). "Odd, isn't it?," she remarks, "I was there only once, one time for an hour or two, but … it's still burning inside me. I went there because I was angry at him" (*Invisible* 267). The hotel was where Cécile confronted Adam after he told her mother "those *monstrous things*" about Born (*Invisible* 239). The strong emotions of longing, regret, lust, love and resentment that she felt at the time and continues to feel demonstrate how "the processes of memories are influenced by attention, arousal and emotion. … [The] increased arousal of the [autonomous nervous system] … has the ability to enhance memory encoding/creation but also the processes of recall" (Osborne 67). The hotel thus becomes a metonymic trigger for Cécile.

Cécile's proximity to the place at the very moment of delivering these lines to Jim generates, as Osborne suggests, following Stephen Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman, an "emotional memory that [is] capable of moving the body" (76). The tears that now fall on her cheeks as she recounts her feelings towards Adam and the memory of the confrontation, when she quite uncharacteristically spat in his face, is an experience that once again surprises Cécile and through this emotional experience "'release[s]' [her] more deeply into [herself]," thus manifesting the "intensity of emotional [bond]" she has with the place (Seamon 17, 19). At the same time, despite its absence, through Cécile's body the building "'live[s] on' and vibrate[s]" (Adams-Hutcheson 24). On the one hand, the absent building *lives on*, i.e., continues to live, as a reverberation in Cécile's body. On the other hand, the building *lives on*, i.e., feeds on her body having been there, a body that keeps the building alive through Cécile's memory. The place becomes "active in relation to [her], since physical and spatial changes in the place reconfigure human actions and experiences" (Seamon 18). In other words, the building thrives and lasts with human interaction and is imbued with affect-like qualities, as suggested by Fuchs above.

Encounters in the Middle

The above example shows how my use of Auster's literary fiction to investigate the interconnectedness of place, memory and time becomes, if not a mobile method, then perhaps a visceral one. James Ash suggests that visceral methods can help examine non-human objects by bringing them to the foreground *through* the body (206; Hayes-Conroy). The non-human too, like the absent Parisian building alive in Cécile's memory, "[b]elongs to a movement" and by showing how these objects are connected both to the body and to each other in an "affective feedback loop" the non-human can "express itself" (Ash 206). Such an ability echoes in *affective materialities* whereby things, places, bodies and mobilities interact and constitute one another, thus showing life as "more than a vital energy that must distinguish itself from materiality" (Adams-Hutcheson 23). On the one hand, this vital energy brings us into contact with the material world through our emotions, affects and sensory impressions that we enact through movement (e.g., Jensen 202; Sheller 228). On the other hand, within this "geopower" (Grosz et al. 131-32), material objects become places of emotion and affect. This is one of the reasons why Adam is so reluctant to return to his childhood home, "to that house of screams and silences" where, in the aftermath of the tragic drowning of his seven-year-old little brother Andy, his mother attempted suicide and his father "seemed to look right through" him (*Invisible* 109). Adam is "[e]mbodying avoidance . . . to avoid unwanted recollection associated" with his home (Owen 2).

In *Sunset Park*, Miles Heller is similarly disinclined to return to his home in New York City. Miles is a 28-year-old college drop-out who struggles to find meaning in life after he killed his eighteen-year-old half-brother Bobby twelve years earlier by pushing him onto a road and into an oncoming car. Thus far, Miles has kept the details of the event to himself and told "nothing, nothing, nothing" (17), especially to his legally under-age girlfriend Pilar, 17, with whom Miles now lives in Florida. His exile and the severing of all ties to his family in New York City has been both an act of forgetting, of "spar[ing] him the discomfort of having to talk about things he has been struggling to avoid for years" (17) as well as a form of self-punishment as he does not "know if the push came before or after he heard the oncoming car" (17-18). On the run, Miles has been able to "confine himself to the here and now," which for him means living without any plans or "longings or hopes" (6). Towards the end of the novel, Miles reveals to his mother that, at first, his exile and his determination to live on "as little as humanly possible" (6) was an attempt to "[b]ecome better, become stronger" (263), but gradually he "stopped thinking about the goal and concentrated on the effort. . . . [He] became addicted to the struggle" (263).

However, Pilar has now kindled something in Miles. Her "spirit and intelligence" and "the feeling that she is entirely present when they are together" makes Miles feel "at home in her body" (10, 14). With her "emotional excesses [and] … combustibility" Pilar has made Miles "slowly come back to life" (14). In this state, Miles already senses that "the moment is coming

when he will need to move on again" (6). For a long time, he has been able to anchor himself into the present moment through the absence of those places and people who would remind him of Bobby, but this ability is slowly waning as the memory which haunts him has never really disappeared.

Incidentally, a violent confrontation with Pilar's sister Angela and her husband forces Miles to flee Florida sooner than anticipated, and this random encounter ultimately pushes him back towards the memories of his childhood in New York City. With nowhere else to go, he travels up to New York and to Bing Nathan, his only friend from his youth, who is squatting with a group of people in a derelict building in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Drawing closer to New York on a bus, the promise brought by the "last leg of the journey" and the now falling snow brings back memories of "the cold days and long nights of his boyhood winters" (68) in Manhattan's West Village, which were tainted, first, by the divorce of his parents and then, the death of Bobby: "suddenly" as everything he left behind is looming in the horizon, "the past has turned into the future" (68).

The squalid house in Sunset Park seems to fit Miles perfectly; "neither suburban nor historic" the house is "merely a shack, a forlorn piece of architectural stupidity that would not fit anywhere, neither in New York nor out of it" (124-25). Sunset Park itself is no less uninviting and Miles "quickly loses interest in [it … as] there is something dead about the place" (132). I agree with Huisman (286–87) that squatting in the house represents some attempt to restore a sense of order "[i]n a collapsing world of economic ruin and relentless, ever-expanding hardship" (4). However, for Huisman this seems to arise from a need to "fix" the house by occupying it, to restore the past for the future the way Bing does when he repairs historical artefacts in his workshop called the *Hospital of Broken Things*. However, all the people living in the house know that their story will come to an end: "each morning they wake up to the threat of immediate and forcible eviction" (38) and they are all dreading the moment as that means they will have to face the consequences of being alive in the world.

As such, the *vibrating* building in Sunset Park becomes for the characters a desperate attempt to halt time. The house is not "imbued with the spirit of the past" (72), as are Bing's artefacts at his hospital. Neither is the house something that will carry Miles and his friends towards the future. Rather, the house *lives on* and sustains its inhabitants by capturing the present moment as if it is devoid of all temporal structure. The building "flying under the municipal radar" (38) seems not to exist at all. By embedding himself in this non-place, which to Miles "is not his New York, not the New York of his memory" (132), he can soften the blow of returning home. He can hold his family at bay for the time being and keep "his mind … with Pilar in Florida" while his "body is … here now" in New York (132). This illustrates the way our "cognitive and embodied practices are often at odds with one another" (Pearce, "Text-as-Means" 81). Thus unlike the absent Parisian hotel making the past alive for Cécile in an interaffective relationship, the *present* house in Sunset Park stills the world around Miles; he refuses to enact the possibilities—affordances—that his return to the city seems to demand (e.g., Stilwell and Harman; Gibson). Although his attempt at immobility and

stasis will ultimately fail, for now, Miles can slow down the inevitable process of flooding his present with his past (Sviland) and create a boundary, if only a feeble one, between himself and the memory of Bobby.

High Roads and (Happy) Edgings

Memories, then, are not flat representations of the past, but manifest how we can sometimes be in several places at once or, indeed, pretend we are nowhere at all. Fiction can articulate life as an unfolding in time and space where, for instance, Sidney Orr's literal disappearance into his notebook in *Oracle Night* is not an unrealistic event that does not "make sense." Moreover, as Benjamin states, absence and the past inhabit "a territory that is spatially and temporally contiguous with the infinite realm of potentialities and conditional possibilities: what might have been, what could be, what could have been, and perhaps even what will be" (216). As such, the absent past and the memory of the past always also contain a future. In terms of altering one's past and coming to terms with it, this is crucial: If memories also contain an idea of what could be or could have been, this means that what is lain down in the here and now, i.e., how the past is viewed in the memory that is enacted in the here and now, the kinds of understandings and meanings that are given to those memories will—for good and evil—affect how they are viewed in the future.

Auster often employs this thematic. Earlier, I quoted from *The Brooklyn Follies*, which centres on the idea of an inner refuge, "a better world, a better place that [is] more than just a place, but an opportunity, a chance to live insider your dreams" (101). In *Man in the Dark*, too, the stories August Brill tells himself when he cannot sleep "prevent [him] from thinking about the things [he] would prefer to forget (2). For Brill,

> [t]here's no single reality. … There are many realities. There's no single world. There are many worlds, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds, and each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world. Each world is the creation of a mind. (56)

For each of Auster's characters these possible worlds are all real (see Benjamin 220).

In *Invisible*, the second part of Adam's book, titled *"*Summer,*"* is where he truly harnesses his imagination for the purpose of creating a new reality. Here Adam narrates in the second person a story of an incestuous relationship with his older sister Gwyn. Reading the text after Adam has died, Gwyn nonetheless denies that such an affair ever took place. This is of little importance: Summer is first and foremost Adam's attempt to reach out to a human being who could bring a moment's respite from the guilt he is experiencing. The second-person narration has a similar effect to what Auster states it does in *Winter Journal*: It "opens up a little space between myself and myself in which I could engage in a kind of intimate

dialogue with myself" (*A Life* 55). The second-person narration, then, both personal and impersonal, and the fact that Adam invents the story, with Gwyn the one person he confides in, are ways for him to articulate the space he would have needed at the time to reconcile the death of Andy and his inactivity with Born's crime; it is also a way to deal with the guilt he feels about hurting Hélene and Cécile, for he had grown quite fond of them, and letting Born overcome him. The supposedly fake memory, then, becomes an act of "*remembering in reverse*" or "*remember[ing] … into being*" (Benjamin 214) as a way of filling an absence.

The creative powers of imagination are central to Auster's fiction and visible especially in the way his characters experience storytelling, the act of writing and the materiality of books and notebooks. All the characters already mentioned, as well as David Zimmer in *The Book of Illusions* use storytelling and writing as a way to overcome loss and guilt. This is the case also in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. In the novel, the elusive Mr. Blank has orchestrated his own confinement within one single room, although he cannot remember who he is or why he is there. All he can sense in his frail and somewhat malfunctioning old man's body is the "implacable sense of guilt" that ails his heart (2). The moment he shuts his eyes, shadow-beings begin to drag across his vision, and he suspects that they are not figments of his imagination, but "memories of actual people" (39), traces of his past among which he himself is now "adrift … struggling to answer the question that haunts him" (2). People come and go in Mr. Blank's room, and the reader familiar with Auster's work soon realises that these are characters from his previous novels. They are the source of Mr. Blank's guilt, "[a]ll the people [he has] made suffer over the years" (81). The novel thus turns into a complex exploration of the nature of creation, the relationship between the author and his stories and the relationship of the characters to the stories into which they are written.

At first, movement alone helps Mr. Blank achieve a sense of peace and still the moving images in his mind. This movement is not something he does intentionally; quite accidentally he first discovers that he can rock and swivel and move with the chair in the room. Later he rejoices in realising that wearing only socks he can skate across the floor "now lifting one foot into the air, now the other, or else floating along with both feet on the floor" (58). On the one hand, these movements lull him into a trancelike state in which "the mind is emptied of all thoughts, all emotions, all connection to the self" (47). However, Mr. Blank soon discovers that his mobilities within the room transport him much further, back, for example, to a moment when he rode his rocking horse, Whitey, "who, in the young Mr. Blank's mind, was not a wooden object adorned with white paint but a living being, a true horse" (3), an object with affective qualities, as Ash and Adams-Hutcheon discussed above. Here, Mr. Blank's body "re-enacts [his] past through the body's present performance" (Fuchs, "Intercorporeality" 202).

However, as Mr. Blank's body cannot sustain such movements for long, the shadow-beings return. Only his "exercise in imaginative reasoning" (*Travels* 80), i.e., storytelling that Samuel Farr from *In The Country of Last Things* has prescribed him, presents a more lasting solution. Mr. Blank is encouraged to continue the story he has been reading on a typescript found in the room but which, to Mr. Blank's great annoyance, was cut short. Reluctant at first, Mr.

Blank soon discovers the power of imagination: As the story fills him, "send[ing] a wave of pleasure shuddering through his body" (111), he closes his eyes and this time "luck spares Mr. Blank from the demons, and … he is once again in the past, sitting in … an Adirondack chair … somewhere in the country" (115). As so often in Auster's novels (e.g., Hansen), storytelling becomes a mobile act that creates a space, where Mr. Blank has the power to still the haunting memories.

Furthermore, perhaps more extensively than any other character in Auster's fiction, Archie Ferguson in *4 3 2 1* fashions his life along "the trajectory of the *path not taken* [which] carries its own momentum, continues in consciousness even though it did not happen, and has the kind of vivid quality of a memory of an event which occurred" (Benjamin 220). The novel consists of four individual lifelines for Ferguson, one which is real and three which are imagined by Ferguson himself. He wants to capture "the persistent feeling" he has had since childhood that:

> the forks and parallels of the roads taken and not taken were all being travelled by the same people at the same time, the visible people and the shadow people, and that the world as it was could never be more than a fraction of the world, for the real also consisted of what could have happened but didn't, that one road was no better or worse than any other road, but the torment of being alive in a single body was that at any given moment you had to be on one road only, even though you could have been on another, traveling toward an altogether different place. (863)

As the real Ferguson's imaginative journey begins, he is unsure where it will lead, but he knows that "the essential thing was to love those other boys as if they were real, to love them as much as he loved himself" (863). In the stories, moreover, he is also able to resurrect loved ones that he has lost, for example, his father. An interaffectivity emerges between the real and the imagined and the people that all of the spaces inhabit.

The absent stories come to life only in relation to the one Ferguson is actually living, as "[i]n the space of memory, everything is both itself and something else" (*Invention* 146). However, Ferguson's exercise is not one where he would fulfil his dreams or rewrite scenes that have left him disappointed. Ferguson knows his imaginary doubles will have to die, and then he will have emerged as "the last man standing" (863), as someone who no longer has to imagine a past nor escape from it. Nonetheless, as a final act in folding the story back onto itself, Ferguson resurrects the now-dead Ferguson-1 and imagines what would have happened if that Ferguson could have continued his life. In this life, "[h]e was married to a woman named Happy" (866). The powers of imagination then, seem essential if one is to re-contextualize one's past.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined memory in Paul Auster's fiction and argued, within an

embodied framework, that memories are not echoes or representations of past events, but experiences in the here and now, “active re-creations[s] … [and] enactment[s] with emotional resonance” (Stafford 11). I discussed how Cécile’s body in *Invisible* was involuntarily moved to tears when she was re-placed in the locations in Paris where she had some of her life’s most formative experiences. I then noted how a derelict house in the even more derelict Sunset Park in Brooklyn became a non-place where Miles could momentarily postpone his encounter both with his past as well as his future. Finally, I discussed the “fundamental link between memory and creativity” (Stafford 11) that allowed Mr. Blank in *Travels in the Scriptorium* to find a respite from the images that haunted him by way of storytelling.

As I have shown, Auster can create literary fiction that articulates the complexities of experiencing memory and imagination. I argue that he achieves this with a writing style that Jack I. Abecassis describes as “silent rhythm incarnated as ink on a page … an incarnated body moving in space, propelled in the flux of time” (Abecassis 1039). In *Winter Journal* Auster traces the “*epiphanic moment*” (220) that resulted in this “rhythmic body writing” (Abecassis 1037; note 7). Watching a dance rehearsal in Manhattan in December 1978, Auster realised how “utterly useless [and] inadequate” the choreographer’s words were in describing the performance that had caused such physical and mental joy in him (*Winter Journal* 223). He understood that “there’s a rift between world and word” (*A Life* 29); he was confronted by the fact that while humans might experience their selves through a more or less coherent narrative, which could be translated into words, these words are “approximate: [they] can’t capture the world” (*A Life* 29).

According to Abecassis, during this epiphany at the dance rehearsal a “crack” appeared “in the wall of Sign theory of language, that perspective on language that pits movement and sound against meaning”; Auster “understood” language “as rhythmic discourse” and “not the Other of meaning” (Abecassis 1039-41). Moreover, this realisation liberated Auster from his quest for perfection (*A Life* 29) and laid the ground for his continued interest in “exposing the inner workings of what [he is] doing” (*A Life* 15). Furthermore, the epiphany at the dance rehearsal serves, according to Auster, as “the bridge between everything [he has] written in the years since then” (*Winter Journal* 224). Over the years, his writing style has matured, his plot structures have become more lucid and his novels perhaps answer more questions than leave open, but underneath all remains a focus on themes such as love, loss, chance and writing and an attempt to verbalise how “[h]uman beings are imponderable” (*A Life* 7). Auster’s embodied writing style, then, illustrates literature’s ability to do “precisely what the individual subject cannot do: subdivide a persistent conscious state into its independent components at any instant and make it visible” (Stafford 9).

Within mobilities research, Auster’s fiction can capture the sense of immediacy and movement that accompanies memories and the processes of remembering in a way that other mobile or visceral methods perhaps cannot. As I discussed in the introduction, this is made possible by shifting the focus towards using literature as a means rather than an end.

Such a focus both broadens literary scholarship and lends credibility to the use of literary fiction in the study of socio-cultural phenomena, including mobilities, because it shows that stories are mobile and an inherent part of our unfolding sense of self.

All the examples I have discussed above capture the way our "lived experience … mixes cognitive and sensory perception in the present with memory, fantasy and the imagination" (Pearce, "Mobility" 24). Memories not only move humans generating affective and emotional responses but are also mobile themselves, bringing the past to the present moment and leading the way towards the future. Literary fiction as art has a unique ability to tap into such experientiality as it "does not re-present what already exists," but rather "presents what is coming into being before the eyes" (Stafford 11).

My reading of Auster's twentieth-century fiction shows that the powers of imagination, entangled with and emerging from our bodily memories, seem essential if one is to recontexualise one's past. While Auster's stories often begin with circumstances where the characters are truly lost in their lives, they gradually find hope in realising that memory and imagination are places "in which a thing happens for the second time" (*Invention* 87) not only for evil but for good as well. These places that shelter David Zimmer, Sidney Orr, Nathan Glass, Mr. Blank, August Brill, Adam Walker, Miles Heller and Archie Ferguson, become a powerful tool with which to reconfigure their painful memories.

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