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Item Type	Article
Authors	Coughlan, David
Citation	MFS: Modern Fiction Studies;52 (4), pp. 832-854
Publisher	John Hopkins University Press
Download date	2026-05-20 14:17:47
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/10344/3824



PAUL AUSTER'S CITY OF GLASS: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

David Coughlan

As a detective story, Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, the first book in *The New York Trilogy*, shares with the classic stories of those such as Edgar Allan Poe or Arthur Conan Doyle a rational protagonist who believes in the power of reason, who believes that the apparent randomness of the world around him need only be viewed in the right way, or read in the right way, before the order that surely is inherent in the world can be perceived. But *City of Glass* exhibits characteristics not only of the classical detective stories, but also of the crime fiction which developed during the 1920s and 1930s, as in the work of Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler. In crime fiction the characters are more fully rounded, the largely urban locations play an important role, the detective is as likely to introduce disorder into the world around him as he is to arrive at the truth, and any truth that does emerge is unlikely to be the whole story. In New York City, Auster certainly provides the urban setting, and in the character of the voluptuous Virginia Stillman, therapist turned wife, he gives his detective, Daniel Quinn, the chance to light a cigarette and be kissed by a beautiful woman, in the style of Marlowe. In light of these elements of *noir*, it's not surprising that Auster's book was selected as the first to be adapted for the series Neon Lit, a collection of comic book versions of urban crime fiction.

City of Glass: The Crumblechaw

The result, in 1994, was Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli's *Neon Lit: Paul Auster's City of Glass*, later reprinted as *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, though the name that appears on the front cover and on the title page is simply *City of Glass*. This profusion of names is strangely suitable for Auster's text, which is itself so often concerned with the nature of authorship and identity. Its detective, Daniel Quinn, for example, who, as it happens, shares his initials with Don Quixote, is a writer of detective stories that feature the detective Max Work, and that he writes under the pseudonym William Wilson.¹ He becomes involved in this real-life investigative case only as a result of a wrong number, "the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not" (Auster 3; Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli 2).² The "someone he was not" is Paul Auster, detective, and this is the person that Quinn plays at being as he undertakes his case.

The case itself involves protecting one Peter Stillman from his father, Peter Stillman Sr., who was jailed for keeping his young son imprisoned for nine years, from the age of two, has recently been released from captivity, and now, again, could pose a threat to his safety. Quinn intercepts Stillman at Grand Central Station and, monitoring his every movement, trails him through New York, described as "a labyrinth of endless steps" (Auster 3; 4). It all seems rather pointless, however. Stillman does not attempt to approach Peter, but instead, each day, simply leaves his hotel, walks through the city by seemingly random and arbitrary routes, picks broken and useless items off the streets and places them in his bag, lunches in the Riverside Park, dines at the Apollo Coffee Shop on 97th Street and Broadway, and then returns to his hotel.

However, clues to the reasons for Stillman's actions lie in a book that he had previously written entitled *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World*. Stillman's book relates the biblical Tower of Babel to the story of the Garden of Eden, where Adam, given the task of naming all the things of the world, spoke words that grasped the essential heart of their objects; as Auster writes, "A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things" and "language had been severed from God." The story of the Garden of Eden, then, is not only the story of "the fall of man, but the fall of language" (43; 39). However, Stillman's project is to restore the language of man to a prelapsarian state, to undo the effects of the fall that saw the word divided from the thing it named. He had tried to use his son to access the prelapsarian language, incarcerating him in that room so that "he would forget everything he knew" and emerge "speaking God's

language" (Auster 49; 45). Now, collecting broken things, Stillman instead creates a new language by renaming what has lost its original function, so that the word is again a part of the true thing.

This account should help to explain why Art Spiegelman (coeditor of the Neon Lit series) asks near the beginning of his introduction to *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, "What would Peter Stillman, Paul Auster's cracked seeker of Ur-language in *City of Glass* call the visual adaptation of the novel he figures in? A *Crumblechaw*? A *Nin-compictopoop*? An *Ikonologosplatt*???" (i) He goes on to admit that "Comics may no longer be the 'real name' for a narrative medium that intimately intertwines words and pictures but isn't necessarily comic in tone," but if his renaming is to parallel Stillman's then that suggests some dissatisfaction with the existing relation between sign and referent (i). Indeed, Spiegelman dislikes the sign, the label "graphic novel." This term had come to the fore during the 1980s to designate certain book-format comics, and then seemed particularly suited to some of the hallmark works of that period, works such as *Watchmen* (1987) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986). Spiegelman disdains the term, however, seeing it "as a mere cosmetic bid for respectability" (i), but the label "graphic novel" does at least highlight comics' capacity for visual narration, for storytelling that partakes of both *mimesis* and *diegesis*, or showing and telling.³ Nevertheless, even if Spiegelman were to accept the term "graphic novel," he might still have preferred to christen this one *City of Glass: The Crumblechaw*. Some time before Neon Lit, he had tried, and failed, to get Auster to write an original comic, but to do an adaptation of an existing work seemed, initially, pointless, because, he says, "I couldn't figure out why on Earth anyone should bother to adapt a book into . . . another book!" (ii).⁴ This repeated book would seem to be exactly the kind of useless thing that Stillman might rename, but, it will be argued, it succeeds not only as an adaptation of the original novel but also, as Mazzucchelli sees it, "as a translation from one language to another" ("Three Questions"). Moreover, through this act of translation, the original text's investigation into and interrogation of language is brought to bear on the comic's own visual language, in the process revealing its richness and subtlety, and providing source material for a future poetics of comics.⁵

City of Glass: The Comic Book

In this work of translation, Karasik and Mazzucchelli were concerned with what Will Eisner calls "the 'weave' of writing and art" (124) for, usually, and as Spiegelman states, a comic "intertwines

words and pictures" (i).⁶ The words in comics can be included in captions ("Quinn had heard of cases like Peter Stillman before" [Auster 33; 32] (See also fig. 1), or as dialogue or thoughts in word balloons ("If I am going out, where exactly am I going" [12; 12] (See also fig. 2). The pictures are normally presented in panels, varying in number, in this case, from one to nine per page. As a medium, the comic is perhaps closest in form to film: the voice-over narration of film can be compared to narrative captions in comics; both contain dialogue and sound-effects (the phone goes "ring ring ring" in the graphic *City of Glass* [9] (See also fig. 7); both progress frame by frame, though, as Eisner points out, frames in comic books "do not correspond exactly to cinematic frames. They are part of the creative process, rather than a result of the technology" (38); both are usually collaborative efforts; both employ the visual and the verbal; and both raise interesting questions about the nature of visual narrative, about how the visual and the verbal share and distribute the weight of the narrative. Many comics (such as the sort that Dylan Horrocks fondly refers to as "clumsy old trash") are criticized for what is perceived as an artistic failing, a formal redundancy resulting from a tendency to show and tell the same thing, which means, in Eisner's terms, using the image as an illustration rather than a visual. Yet this criticism must, at least in part, be motivated by a frustration, hardly unique to comics, over the sometimes unrealized potential of the form, though in truth it would be difficult for a single work to exhaust the possibilities inherent in an art form that allows for the simultaneous presentation of two strands of information, and involves reading within each strand and between both strands.

These issues of showing and telling are to the fore in Karasik and Mazzucchelli's accounts of the process of their visual translation, where, despite being adept at using the stylistic language of the comic book, it took them some time to realize how, and why, to apply it to *City of Glass*. Initially, Mazzucchelli worked on the project alone, and the four sample pages (predating Karasik's involvement) that accompany the interview "Three Questions for David Mazzucchelli" show his first attempt to adapt the first five pages of Auster's original text and the way in which he was "thinking about using the text and the pictures to deliver two levels of information simultaneously."⁷ Over the ten panels of the first two pages, the reader is told much of what Auster also tells about Quinn, that "we know, for example, that he was thirty-five years old" (Auster 3), while, at the same time, the reader is shown that "more than anything else, however, what he liked to do was walk" (3), as Quinn is seen on the streets of New York City. However, though Mazzucchelli could easily tell Auster's story, and produced, as Bill Kartalopoulos says "an 'atmospheric' presenta-



Figure 1

Page 4 from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul, Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.



Figure 2

Page 88 from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul, Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.



Figure 3

Page 72 from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul, Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.

tion of Auster's text," he felt that he failed to communicate a certain aspect of the novel (Mazzucchelli, "Three Questions"). As a result, Spiegelman brought in Karasik who, unbeknownst to Spiegelman, had, years previously, worked independently on adapting some pages of *City of Glass* as an exercise. As Kartalopoulos describes it, "One of the most seamless and productive collaborations in modern comics followed, as Karasik and Mazzucchelli traded several subsequent drafts to infuse Karasik's structured iconography with Mazzucchelli's sense of urban space and broad graphic palette. Mazzucchelli drew the book in its final form" (Mazzucchelli, "Three Questions").

The problem, and the challenge, as Spiegelman puts it, is that "*City of Glass* is a surprisingly nonvisual work at its core, a complex web of words and abstract ideas in playfully shifting narrative styles," so that this graphic novel would be a visual narrative based on a non-visual non-narrative (ii). Karasik, too, agrees that *City of Glass* "appears initially impossible to do because it is so non-visual, because it is largely about the nature of language, because its subject matter is text itself, and the writing supporting that theme is so present and precise," but he observes that "although the book is 'about' words, Auster is very generous with giving his characters things to do." Therefore, he also started with what to show and what to tell ("with the pink marker, I highlighted the action that needed to be depicted, and with the blue pencil highlighted what needed to be said" [n.p.]), but a comparison of Mazzucchelli's sample pages with the corresponding pages of *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* shows revealing differences. The reader is still told that Quinn "was thirty-five" (Auster 3; 3), but the reader is now also told, not shown, that, "more than anything else," what Quinn "liked to do was walk" (3; 4). These words do not accompany images of Quinn in the street (in fact, Quinn is not shown outside his apartment for the first eleven pages of the graphic novel), but instead appear in a captioned panel of the view from Quinn's apartment of buildings across the street. The remaining eight panels on the page quote selectively from an important paragraph from Auster's text which begins with "[New York was] an inexhaustible space, [a labyrinth of endless steps]," and concludes with "[New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he] realized that he [had no intention of ever leaving it again]" (3-4; [4]). In the two panels following the view of buildings, the lines of the buildings seem to float free of their positions, or the buildings fade into abstraction (see fig. 1); in the next two panels the lines, reflecting Auster's metaphor for the city, come to form a labyrinth; in the two panels after that the labyrinth becomes a fingerprint; and in the last two panels on the page the fingerprint is now a mark on the window that Quinn walks past, the buildings visible outside. These

panels can be seen to form an example of what Mazzucchelli calls the "visual metaphors" ("David Mazzucchelli") introduced by Karasik to represent the non-visual in Auster's original text, in this case that Quinn was "lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. . . . The world was outside of him . . . Motion was of the essence," all of which the original text tells us, but the graphic novel, challengingly, strives to show (Auster 4).⁸

As can be seen, in order to achieve a worthy visual translation, Karasik and Mazzucchelli together tested the language of comics, and they played with comic conventions too, with the font of the text, and with the form and presentation of word balloons, for example. The word balloons used to present Stillman's "surprisingly gentle tenor voice," as Auster describes it, are angular in shape, not rounded as is normal, and his dialogue begins in each balloon with a large initial, in a bolder and more decorative script than the clear small capitals of most of the dialogue (73) (see fig. 3). His son's speech, given in a voice described as "unlike any [Quinn] had ever heard. It was at once mechanical and filled with feeling, hardly more than a whisper and yet perfectly audible, and so even in tone that he was unable to tell if it belonged to a man or a woman," also requires a revision of the normal speech bubble (Auster 6–7). If Italians call comics *fumetti*, "literally 'little smokes', after their visualisation of speech balloons" (Sabin 217), then Peter's speech, given in a mix of small capitals and lower-case letters, rises from a fire somewhere in his belly, the tail of the balloon now snaking up from his throat, and then from the surface of the water, and then from a comic book character, and then from an inkpot, and then from the mouth of a puppet, and on, through a sequence of sixty-five images (see fig. 4).⁹ Spiegelman sees this as "an uncanny visual equivalent to Auster's description of Stillman's voice and movements" (iii).

In addition to these visualizations of descriptions, Karasik and Mazzucchelli also capture the varying narrative voices in the text, giving different visual styles to Quinn's narrative and each of the embedded narratives or texts, and thereby "allowing the style of drawing to act as another layer of information" (Mazzucchelli, "Three Questions"). Working in black and white, as he does throughout the book, Mazzucchelli presents Quinn's story in a naturalistic style, using a heavy line and solid inks, but the line, in sympathy, becomes more ragged and fractured when giving Quinn's account of that day when he saw "[as never before: the tramps,] the down-and-outs, the [shopping-bag ladies,] the [drifters and drunks]. They range from [the merely destitute to the wretchedly broken]" (Auster 108; [102]). On just two pages of the graphic novel, sketchier faces appear, done in lighter lines, as Quinn's thoughts dwell on children who, like Peter,

had grown up in isolation (32–33), while the image of a crying infant, drawn as if by a child with a crayon, speaks again of the theme of lost childhoods (7, 33, 50, 52, 104, 119) (see fig. 7). Elsewhere, Mazzucchelli deviates from his "baseline style" by employing "iconic representations" ("Three Questions"); compared with the dominant style, Virginia Stillman's account of her husband's treatment by his father is more heavily stylized, in the manner of warning signs (see fig. 5), and a pamphlet by Henry Dark called *The New Babel* and Stillman's *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World*, in which Dark's pamphlet is summarized, are presented in a style mimicking woodcut engravings (see fig. 6), combined with silhouetted shapes and images from Albrecht Dürer's engraving "The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve)" (1504), Pieter Bruegel the Elder's oil painting "The Tower of Babel" (1563), and maps of North America.

Considering Karasik and Mazzucchelli's efforts to convey certain non-visual elements of the original text, it is perhaps surprising then that there are certain parts of the story that seem to demand to be visually interpreted but that the artists treat conservatively. For example, after Quinn has been following Stillman through the streets of New York for some days, but has yet achieved nothing, no insight into Stillman's motives, and no advancement of the case, "for no particular reason," (Auster 67; 62), he looks over his notes and begins to map out Stillman's journey for each day. The first resulting diagram resembles a rectangle, though "it might also have been a zero or the letter 'O.'" The second is "a bird of prey perhaps, with its wings spread," or it is the letter "W" (Auster 68). It is followed by the letter "E," then "a shape that resembled the letter 'R' . . . a lopsided 'O' . . . a tidy 'F' . . . a 'B' that looked like two boxes haphazardly placed on top of one another . . . a tottering 'A' . . . a second 'B': precariously tilted on a perverse single point" (70). From these nine letters, so far spelling out O-W-E-R-O-F-B-A-B, Quinn realizes that the entire series will read THE TOWER OF BABEL, inferring from his knowledge of Stillman's book.¹⁰ Later, considering the "E" and "L" that he predicts are yet to come, Quinn remembers that El was "the ancient Hebrew for God" (Auster 72; 65).

Stillman, then, has been writing his way across the surface of the city, his steps tracing a literal passage as he makes his way through the streets, which is a striking thought. However, although Karasik and Mazzucchelli suggest how they might have developed this in an earlier panel of Quinn following Stillman (where they use a dotted line to trace Stillman's passage), and in a later panel illustrating Quinn's own day of walking (where an image of a striding Quinn is superimposed on a map of Manhattan), instead, mirroring the way they appear in Auster's original text (67–69), they present Quinn's



Figure 4

Page 15 from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul, Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.

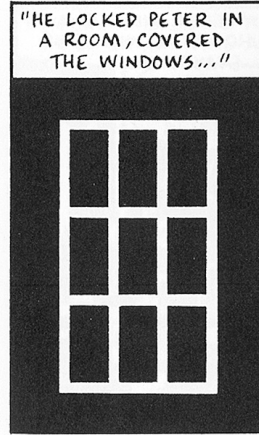


Figure 5

Page 27 from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul, Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.



Figure 6

Page 39 from *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul, Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.

maps baldly (although Karasik and Mazzucchelli do show nine letters where Auster gives only three). Rather than locating the words in the streets of the city, Karasik and Mazzucchelli instead draw attention to their placement on the page (of Quinn's notebook, of Auster's book, and of their own comic book). They emphasize this in the following panels, where, behind the step of the walker, the pavement is seen to fall away and crumble into the paper, where the nine letters are arranged on the page. Considering this, it is interesting to note, as Spiegelman does, that Karasik, in his own work, "had shaped the adaptation so that each cluster of panels took up proportionally about as much space as the corresponding paragraphs did in Paul [Auster's] prose original" (iii). What this suggests is that the artists' focus is not so much on Auster's story as on Auster's text, and it might so be possible that they do not further illustrate Auster's representation of Quinn's maps because their aim is to picture the words on the page, but this is a picture already, a quotable graphic.

City of Glass: The Tower of Babel

If Karasik and Mazzucchelli are attending to the word, then it would seem they are also remaining very true to Auster's text in its intention. Returning to Stillman and his message, it can be argued that his writing across the city seems part of his naming project, for it renames New York as the new Tower of Babel, the construction of which will herald the return of the language from before the fall, meaning it would "be possible for the whole earth to be of one language and one speech" (Auster 48; 44). In this naming, the word seems again a part of the thing, for Stillman's writing is a language of the earth, or of the city; his steps have taken place in the streets of New York. Stillman's text, then, stands in relation to Auster's own, for both of them write on and about the New York streets, working within the same space, but interpreting the results of their actions in opposing ways. Though Auster's New York, true to Stillman's re-naming, is interchangeable with the words that produce it, it is not, as Stillman believes, because the words are one with the city. "The Tower of Babel" is not the city's essential name in this world, the mark of its true presence. Rather, for Auster there is no city outside the text, and the world is produced by it, not simply represented within it. We cannot access Auster's New York except through Auster's text, but there is nothing to that New York but its text, to the extent that, when Quinn walks through the city, an account of his path is given by naming; "He walked down Broadway to 72nd Street, turned east to Central Park West, and followed it to 59th Street and the statue of Columbus. There he turned east once again, moving along Cen-

tral Park South until Madison Avenue, and then cut right, walking downtown to Grand Central Station" (106). This New York is formed of words alone.

Auster foregrounds this textuality when he writes of Quinn that "What interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories" (7), it is not only to affirm that Auster himself fosters such relations, his text invoking the works of Poe and Cervantes to foreground the themes of identity and authorship, and connecting to the other stories in *The New York Trilogy* and, beyond that, to the works of Marco Polo, Stevenson, Dickens, Whitman, Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne through a complex web of namings, citations, and references.¹¹ Looking at Quinn's place in the text, it seems possible to isolate him from anything non-textual. Certainly, Quinn himself had "long ago stopped thinking of himself as real" (Auster 9; 7); his wife and child are dead, and he no longer has any friends; he presents himself to the world as a writer through the pseudonym William Wilson, who, though "an invention, . . . now led an independent life" (Auster 4) (Quinn is tempted, but fails, to introduce himself as Wilson to a young woman at a train station when he sees her reading one of his novels, while, in the same way, the woman who has moved into his apartment knows only that a writer, William Wilson, lived there); he has a literary agent whom he never meets; he lives vicariously in the world through the character of the private eye Max Work; when he finally plays the part of the detective himself, the identity he adopts is Paul Auster's; the people he encounters on his case include a deaf mute and a counterman "whose name he did not know" (37); Stillman commits suicide, and when Quinn learns of his death he is told it was "all over the papers" (Auster 122; 119); Quinn knew that Virginia and Peter were gone too when "the line went dead" (Auster 123). Even in *The Locked Room*, the last book in *The New York Trilogy*, the man originally hired to find Fanshawe, a man named Quinn, is said to have disappeared. The only characters who encounter Quinn and remain are a writer, Paul Auster, his wife, and their son Daniel. Quinn is so completely a textual creation, so bound to his own text, that his end coincides "with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook" (130), and all that remains of him in the end, all his remains are, is that red notebook in which he kept his notes on Stillman, and which, in conjunction with the character Paul Auster's witness, allows the unnamed narrator to tell Quinn's story. *City of Glass* itself must end when the text finds its conclusion, when the "city was entirely white now," like an empty page (132).

Quinn may be fictitious, but this is not to say that Quinn does not exist. When he writes the initials DQ on the first page of the red notebook, which "was the first time in more than five years that he

had put his own name in one of his notebooks" (Auster 39; 36), he inscribes within the text his own adherence to the text, and places himself in Auster's New York. Words are "a way of being in the world" (Auster, *Invention* 123), and Quinn exists because "Materializing the signs, the notebook *creates* them" (Malmgren 197). The named notebook is a record of a reading of a text that remarks on the textuality of the world it produces, so that, reading and rewriting Stillman's message, Quinn reads the true nature of his textual existence, and writes himself into the world. "Language is not truth," writes Auster, "It is the way we exist in the world" (*Invention* 161).

In adapting this textual world of fictional characters, the artists can take things literally, can even place Quinn side-by-side in a panel with his creation, Max Work, and let one be as real as the other. Yet, as Alex Shakar observes, "there is a hierarchy of sketchiness at work in the renderings of characters. Quinn's face, for example, is less detailed than that of his own fictional creation, the detective Max Work," while "the character Paul Auster . . . possesses the liveliest face in the book" (n.p.), though this is only natural, of course, since the character Paul Auster is drawn to resemble the author Paul Auster (and the character's wife drawn to resemble the author's wife, Siri Hustvedt).¹² This perceived hierarchy of presence can be related to the varying visual styles used by Mazzucchelli to convey the different narratives in the text for they are all an expression of the way in which Auster's original text is riddled with realities that are more or less real, with autobiographical elements that are placed in the novel without comment, with texts-within-texts that play at being real, with characters who drive themselves to fictionality. Yet really there is no sense of hierarchy in Auster's *City of Glass*. Real texts such as the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost* appear in non-existent texts such as *The New Babel*, which is part of a text of indeterminate existential status, Stillman's *The Garden and the Tower*, which appears in a work of fiction, the red notebook, nominally written by a man who never existed. In this way, Auster suggests that for him the world is already in a state of flux, reality tending towards fiction through the translation of language, and fiction becoming reality through empathic power.

If Auster's New York is formed of words alone, Karasik and Mazzucchelli's is formed solely of images of words, and they match Auster's textualization with their visualization. In other words, if words are "a way of being in the world," so are pictures, and though the degree of sketchiness may suggest gradations of reality, nevertheless they all exist on the same plane (Auster, *Invention* 123). Taking this further, it is significant that Carl Malmgren observes that "Quinn is amazed that his initial interview with Peter Stillman takes

fourteen hours. He can't know that taking the case means entering text time, where experiential time equals writing time; the detective's interview in chapter two takes the amount of time it takes to write that chapter" (196). It was picturing Peter's speech in this chapter of Auster's book that led to Karasik's sequence of sixty-five images, from Peter to puppet, discussed above, and what is striking here, in the nine pages of Peter's uninterrupted monologue, is how the altered word balloons attached to this monologue can be seen now not only as a means of illustrating Peter's stilted speech, but also as a way of drawing attention to the graphic form of this speech, in both works. In the original novel, dialogue looks like all that is not dialogue on the page, and only conventions such as quotation marks set it apart. Spoken, invisible, words, therefore, look the same as unspoken words on a page, exist on the same plane. Yet, the lines of these altered word balloons also look no different from the lines that draw any visible figure on the page, and so it might almost be possible to imagine that the characters on the page do not listen to each other's speech, but read each other's dialogue (see fig. 4).

City of Glass: City of God

This relates in interesting ways to the question of the one, original language, because, as Norma Rowen offers, "we remember that one school of thought adhered to the theory that the prelapsarian language was preverbal, a language of signs" (229). This covers, in some ways, Stillman's act of writing by walking, which strives to avoid speaking a broken English language, but it also, perhaps surprisingly, includes Quinn, who writes for the most part in his red notebook with a ballpoint pen bought from a deaf mute, a flag attached to the pen showing the hand positions for each of the twenty-six letters and urging the user to "learn to speak to your friends" through a language of signs (Auster 52; 47).¹³ Yet Quinn's fondness for his own character, Max Work, suggests that he would sympathize with the aims of Stillman's quest, because Work, as an embodiment of the detective's rational belief in purposeful observation, causality, and logical closure, "allows Quinn's texts to accomplish an end, to create order" so that "Work (as a character) allows Quinn's writing to perform work (as a concept)" (Nealon 94, 93). He is like that other detective, Blue in *Ghosts*, the second book of *The New York Trilogy*, who shares Stillman's view of what language should achieve; "Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world" (146). In his city of glass, Quinn is seeking exactly this world of transparency where there is a direct correspondence between the signifier and the signified, between the word and its object. When

he does finally fail in his investigation, he goes on to recreate the circumstances of Stillman's first experiment to use his son to recover the prelapsarian language, removing himself to a room in the Stillmans' empty flat. After writing in solitude for some time, Quinn "felt that his words had been severed from him," that now they were a "part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower" (Auster 130; 132). "Here," says Rowen, "are words that turn into things, images of such force and clarity that they seem able to take their place in the world of objects, to become matter," and so, she asks, "Has Quinn found the prelapsarian tongue?" (232, 231).

If Karasik and Mazzucchelli are presenting their *City of Glass* as words turned into images, but images objectified, mattering, then perhaps it is possible that Quinn finds the prelapsarian tongue, a language of signs, not in *City of Glass*, but more truly in *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*. Perhaps this is what Spiegelman means when he says, "By insisting on a strict, regular grid of panels, Karasik located the Ur-language of Comics: the grid as window, as prison door, as city block, as tic-tac-toe board" (iii). Quinn is shown to work at a desk by a nine-paned window, reflecting the nine panels on the comic's page (Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli 6), and on one page the view of Quinn working is given in through this window, with each pane forming one panel, and the gutters between the panels forming the window's frame.¹⁴ Is the comic's page of panels, then, a window onto another world, visual narrative more transparent, more immediate, more true, than the non-visual, and visual language the one, universal language?¹⁵

City of Glass: New York City

Karasik and Mazzucchelli actually undermine the very notion of comics' visual language as a universal language on only the second page, as they illustrate Auster's opening clause, "It was a wrong number that started it" (3; 1). This beginning immediately signals the text's theme of miscommunication because the number that connects to the wrong person is equivalent to the word that no longer names its object. In Karasik and Mazzucchelli's version, as the point of view draws back from a close-up on the zero on a telephone, it seems that the ringing phone is visible by the fourth panel, but as the point of view draws back further, this is revealed to be only a picture of a phone on the telephone directory on which the ringing phone stands. What was thought to be an image of an object is seen now to be only a picture of a picture of an object, a representation of a representation. In this way, the visual is as capable of misdirection as the verbal.¹⁶

This capacity for misdirection is an indication of the sign's desire to play, not work, and to suggest more than its author intends. Stillman has fun, for example, with Quinn's name, saying:

[Rhymes with twin, does it not? . . . And sin, too . . .] 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.] (Auster 74; [68])¹⁷

Karasik and Mazzucchelli play with rhyme also in a way that illuminates the visual poetics of comic books. Discussing with Karasik the images selected to illustrate Peter's monologue, Kartalopoulos comments that "you've got these shapes that rhyme with one another," with which Karasik agrees, mindful that "you definitely have the shape of the open beak echoed in Henry's profile" (Karasik). The visual rhyming is especially apparent on two opposing pages where the bottom right panel of the first page shows Stillman walking, hunched over and seemingly oblivious, and the bottom right panel of the second page shows a wind-up toy man walking, its posture mimicking Stillman's (Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli 56–57). This end-of-page mirroring can be equated to end-of-line rhyming in a poem, but based on equivalent graphics rather than "equivalent phonemes," and since, as Roman Jakobson advises, "rhyme necessarily involves the semantic relationship between rhyming units," these two panels can be read as a visual simile, suggesting Stillman is like a mechanical man (367, 368). Positional similarity on the page becomes "positional similarity" in Jakobson's sense, meaning "semantic similarity (or contrast)" (Jakobson and Halle 91).¹⁸

Auster is no stranger to visual rhyme, as he sees that "faces rhyme for the eye, just as two words can rhyme for the ear" (*Invention* 161). He uses it himself in *City of Glass* for when Quinn goes to Grand Central Station, to find and to follow Stillman, he spots Stillman on the ramp, but, writes Auster, "[what happened then defied explanation.] Directly behind Stillman, heaving into view just inches behind his right shoulder, another man stopped, took a lighter out of his pocket, and lit a cigarette. His face was the exact twin of Stillman's" (56; [52]). Here, the rhyme is related to those chance coincidences that Auster uses to remark on a text unhinged by the fancifulness of signs, and which are most apparent in the novel's profusion of

doubles, and the abundance of Peter Stillmans, William Wilsons, Paul Austers, and other identities. Shakar observes that "Karasik and Mazzucchelli use visual cues to underscore the proliferation of doubles" and adds, "If the character Paul Auster's son Daniel looks familiar, it is because he's the spitting image of the photograph of Daniel Quinn's dead son," and "when Quinn confronts Stillman Sr. in Central Park, pretending to be his son, if we look carefully we may notice a boy sitting on a park bench who could be none other than Daniel Quinn as a child."

Rhyme is significant for Auster because, he writes, "Things take on meaning only in relationship to each other. . . . The rhyme they create when looked at together alters the reality of each" (*Invention* 161). This reflects on other elements of the visual poetics of *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, for rhyme, as an indication of semantic similarity, is, like metaphor and simile, a variation on repetition, which Karasik and Mazzucchelli also employ, with repeated images of a grid of nine squares, of a marionette or dummy, of an umbrella.¹⁹ Even as rhyme alters the reality of its components, so a repeated thing is altered, by the change in context, and by a new relation to its self (see fig. 7). As Lacey notes, "A few motifs—a child's drawing, the lines of a notebook—reappear throughout, acquiring more power with each repetition" and Shakar argues of the repeated image of the crying child done in crayon that it is:

the center of the book. . . . It will appear again and again, each time in a surprising context which will add to its significance and to its visceral impact. Thus, it will come to signify [Quinn's] dead child; Peter Stillman; his anger at Stillman Sr. . . . Quinn's own childhood; a generalized sense of lost innocence; and the alienation of man from his fellow man and from himself.

This accumulation of meanings is at odds with an understanding of images as communicators of a universal truth, but Karasik and Mazzucchelli provoke these various interpretations aware that (visual) language does not have to tell the truth to be meaningful.

Karasik and Mazzucchelli differ here from Stillman. He might enjoy his game with Quinn's name which, like a repeated image, goes to so many places, but he would not want this multiplicity of meanings to attach to his own naming, to his own text, his message in the streets, which must work if it is to mark New York as the new Babel. However, when he writes by walking, he is in a city that is as Auster says, "a labyrinth of endless steps" (3; 4), where any point of entry gives access to any number of paths, leading in all directions. Each step, which is to say each word, must be carefully considered, because

it is easy to find yourself lost in the maze of textuality when a word can take you anywhere. In this, Stillman does highlight a danger of the rhyming sign, for it is very easy for a profusion of identities to become a confusion of identities.

Exactly the same applies for the artist, for if, as occurs in the graphic *City of Glass*, an image of a spreading tree can take the form of the lungs of a young boy, then it can lead you anywhere; the graphic line, like the line of text, can go anywhere, be anything, be a window, or a building, or a city block, or a map, or a labyrinth, or a fingerprint, or a smudge on a window (see fig. 1). In order to be made to mean something it must be held, contained, or guided in some way, normally through an adherence to convention or a desire for verisimilitude. If, as the detective Blue in *Ghosts* says, "It will not do to call the lamp a bed . . . or the bed a lamp" (148), so it will not do to draw the lamp as a bed, or the bed as a lamp. Yet, the line required by the actual world often diverges from that motivated by artistic intentions or designs on readability. For example, though Stillman may wish his message to be clear, he is not drawing his letters on a map but is walking through the city, and since he cannot leap tall buildings in a single bound but has his steps necessarily in some way determined by the landscape he traverses, the result is that Quinn admits of the first letter that it "resembled a rectangle" but "given the quadrant structure of New York streets, it might also have been a zero or the letter 'O'" (Auster 68). Yet Stillman's message benefits from further constraints in space and time, from his decision to stay within the boundaries of 110th Street, 72nd Street, Riverside Park, and Amsterdam Avenue, from his choice of this suitably rectangular area as his page, and from giving a day to each letter, which prevents his letters from overlapping, and places them in the order in which they should be read.

On the page of the comic, this is achieved by the panel, which now does not open a window on the world, but encloses a space for its world, becoming a prison for the line. The recurring image of the nine-paned window is placed alongside a reminder of "the year Stillman locked up Peter," and the page which is a window onto Quinn working is matched by one where the gutters of the page are now the bars of the cell door from behind which Peter's voice rises (see also fig. 5). Unsettlingly, it is not always possible to tell if the line is contained or has escaped its prison, if it is working or is at play. Late in Auster's novel, Quinn wonders "whether the girl who had moved into his apartment was the same girl he had seen in Grand Central Station reading his book" (129). The graphic novel shows us the woman in Grand Central Station and the woman in the apartment; the faces rhyme, but is it the same woman? Either way, there remains an element of uncertainty, and a chance that the reader is misguided.

City of Glass: A Graphic Novel

Quinn's final prison, the room in the Stillmans' apartment in the city of New York, is the place "in which his inner reality might be expressed," the site of his truest writing, where his words become a part of the world (Rowen 226). For Auster, the bare room, a contained space, contrasts with the labyrinthine city as a place of, and for, writing. Once contained, the body becomes centered on its writing, so that, with the room centered on this writing body, the writing becomes all that there is in the room, filling it, and the writing is one with the space that holds it (in the same way, the panel is one with the image it holds, and takes its place on the page as an object). But this is not the expression of a universal language, but rather of a unique and individual vision that must be written, but not read. In this, Quinn's final writings contrast with Stillmans'. Auster writes that "Stillman had not left his message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down. [It was like drawing a picture in the air with your finger]" (71; [64]). It is only because of Quinn that "[the pictures did exist] - not in the streets where they had been drawn, but [in Quinn's red notebook]" (71; [64]). With this recontextualization, Stillman's words are immediately released from his attempted imprisoning, become open to re-reading and interpretation, and the one language becomes a language of two.

As Quinn comes to the end of the red notebook, and as the end of each *City of Glass* nears, there is no longer a place for Quinn to write, no room to hold him. The comic page loses its cohesion, the page numbers disappear, and the regular arrangement of the panels is disturbed as they descend into chaos, slide on the surface of the page, tumble over, as if into a pit, and finally disappear altogether into darkness. The final image of the book is of objects (an umbrella, a puppet, and a broken eggshell) and images (a fingerprint, a telephone, Henry Dark, Humpty Dumpty, the crying child, the ballpoint pen, and Max Work) piled together with a burning notebook lying on top. This recalls how, "In his dream, which he later forgot, [Quinn] found himself in the town dump of his childhood, sifting through a mountain of rubbish" (72). This rubbish continues the theme of broken objects, broken homes, broken men, and broken words, and the dream comes immediately after Quinn's thoughts on the missing "EL" from *THE TOWER OF BABEL* which he will never read, signifying the absence of a God to guarantee any meaning. Now, at the end, outside of the panel (which is to say outside of the room, the window, and prison), Quinn is lost in the labyrinth, in a babble of voices; as Malmgren comments, "Quinn tried to pretend to be a Work, but he was condemned to be a Text" (197). But it is not as if he has accomplished

nothing; "Quinn's contact with the pure prelapsarian word," writes Rowen, "has been partial, momentary, and personal. He was granted only a series of glimpses," she continues, but "in giving utterance to these glimpses, however, Quinn again laid hold on his vocation as a poet" (232). In the writing of his text, Quinn achieves an authentic experience of his place in the world.

In the final pages, once the panels within which Quinn existed are gone, Karasik and Mazzucchelli keep illustrations to a minimum, using ink wash, which means greys appear now for the first time in the book, and the shading is more natural. This section begins with the image of a typewriter, from which a typewritten page emerges: "At this point the information has run out. I returned home from my trip to Africa in February. I called Auster and he urged me to come over" (136). Except for the last sentence, which is written as if on a page of Quinn's burning notebook, the remainder of the text appears as if typewritten, and arranged around images without frames. In using the image of the typewriter, and the typescript, to tell this framing narrative, Karasik and Mazzucchelli re-emphasize the textual nature of Quinn's reality, but they had indicated his true story earlier with a single panel image of the typewriter and the typewritten line "Quinn told him the whole story;" indeed, the graphic novel opens with a black page with only the words "It was a wrong number that started it" on it, in white, as if typewritten (89, 1).

Later, as Quinn begins a vigil outside the Stillmans' apartment, they place the two forms of presentation side by side in such a way that the typewritten lines ("The account of this period is less full than the author would have liked. Facts are scarce, and even the notebook, which has provided much information, is suspect" [Auster, Karasik, Mazzucchelli 107]) draw attention to the questions surrounding the authorship of the text, and to the text's own peculiarities, such as the detail of the narrative, the disparity between the content of the narrative and what is quoted directly from the red notebook, and the impossibility though actuality of the narrative reporting Quinn's dreams "which he later forgot" (Auster 106). The other effect of these panels, where the pictured words of the framing narrative surround the images, the pictured words, of the story they frame, is to suggest that Quinn's story might as legitimately have been visualized in this way throughout, as a sheet of typed paper emerging from a typewriter. But then, why bother with the typewriter? Why not simply present the words on the page? Indeed, in its delineation of New York in the line of its text, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* was already, in some way, *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*. Karasik and Mazzucchelli's visual translation, therefore, is "a strange doppelganger of the original book," as Spiegelman suggests (iii). Like a detective, it shadows it, but does not mirror it.



Figure 7

From *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. Copyright © 2004 by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik, and David Mazzucchelli.

Notes

1. "William Wilson" is also, of course, a story by Edgar Allan Poe about a character of the same name, though it is not his real name, and a doppelganger who shares that name, his date of birth, and his appearance. *City of Glass* also contains references to the baseball player Mookie Wilson, whose "real name was William Wilson" (128; Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli 127), and Alex Shakar says "let us not forget W. S. [William] Wilson, a contributor to *ebr* and an acquaintance of Auster" (n.p.).
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Auster are from *City of Glass*. Page references have been given to both *City of Glass* and *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* for shared passages, and, hereafter, the second number given can be understood as referring to Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli's *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*. Where Karasik and Mazzucchelli have edited Auster's text, square brackets are used to indicate which portions of text appear in *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*, and the corresponding page number is also put in square brackets to reaffirm that there has been an alteration of Auster's original text. In this way, it can be seen to what extent the one follows the other, and, in some cases, what words have been substituted by images.
3. Roger Sabin agrees that, on the surface, "the idea of the 'graphic novel' was hype—the invention of publishers' public relations departments," but he is also at pains to point out that graphic novels

"were not as new as the public relations people made out, and had a respectable history stretching back to the 1940s. In essence, they were what they said they were: novels in graphic form" (165).

4. In his review, Josh Lacey echoes Spiegelman when he asks, "A comic of *City of Glass*? But why? . . . But why turn a book into another book? Why make a novel from a novel?" but is convinced that "the result is, surprisingly, not just a worthy supplement to the novel, but a work of art that fully justifies its existence on its own terms" as a "complex whole" which is "visually inventive."
5. Martha Kuhlman, for example, urges that "we need a theoretical apparatus that can register and decipher the complex interplay between text and image on the page," and suggests that "Karasik and Mazzucchelli's adaptation may serve as a signpost for new directions in comics criticism."
6. I say "usually" because the debate continues as to what exactly defines comics. See, for example, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and Dylan Horrocks's response, "Inventing Comics."
7. Karasik and Mazzucchelli do, at times, show and tell the same thing, but only in imitation of the events of the story at that point, as when Quinn shadows Stillman, noting all that he does, "seeing the thing and writing about it in the same fluid gesture" (Auster 63), and when the reader, in turn, follows Quinn after he has to abandon his vigil outside the Stillmans' apartment.
8. As Kuhlman describes it, "The artists retain the metaphor of the labyrinth, but add visual analogies not present in the prose version. . . . Motion, loss, and solitude are suggested by the visual transitions from the buildings, to the maze, to the fingerprint, and back. These similarities in form function as 'equivalences' in a 'visual metaphor' that connect the separate stages of Quinn's reverie."
9. A detailed analysis of this sequence is given in Karasik's interview with Bill Kartalopoulos.
10. Though it is tempting to see if there is any trace of a comic book in this detective story of Auster, it probably means nothing that Stillman's name mirrors those of superheroes like Superman and Batman. Still there is a pleasing suggestiveness to the mix of Auster's interest in identity, superheroes' secret identities, and the happy coincidence that three triads of identities, Daniel Quinn, William Wilson, and Max Work, Peter Stillman (the father), Peter Stillman (Quinn posing as the son), and Peter Stillman (the son), and interestingly, Kal-El, Clark Kent, and Superman, all map onto the same configuration of homeless person, writer, and bearer of truth.
11. Lacey notes of these references that the graphic novel "contains a few extras: when Daniel Quinn goes to visit Paul Auster, he discovers that Auster's neighbour is named Menard—presumably the character in Jorge Luis Borges's 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*'."

12. Lacey describes the sudden appearance of Auster in the novel as having "unexpectedly startling power" (n.p.) (see fig. 2).
13. Shakar notes that "Quinn is often depicted without a mouth" (see, for example, Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli 9, 35, 48, 101).
14. The image of the nine-paned window recurs in the text (see fig. 5, and Auster, Karasik, and Mazzucchelli 27, 42, 45), while a grid formed of three rows of three reappears in different contexts, consisting of doors, paving slabs, the numbers on a telephone, or post office boxes (45, 93, 100, 113).
15. Interestingly, both Kuhlman and Horrocks (in a piece unrelated to *City of Glass*) suggest that McCloud, a respected comics critic, would also understand Stillman's desire to heal a broken language. Kuhlman writes that McCloud raises "the fusion of signifier and signified to the status of a desired ideal. Like Professor Stillman, he is nostalgic for an imaginary hieroglyphics radiant with meaning." Horrocks writes that, "Comics are, according to [McCloud's] mythology, our chance to return to an original, pure language of communication - essentially a language of pictures."
16. Shakar also provides a gloss on these panels, concluding that "in the end no representation can be trusted."
17. In light of Stillman's musings, the visual metaphor of the labyrinthine fingerprint (a mark of identity) smudging the windowpane can be related to the graphic novel's engagement with misdirecting signs, for it is like the name (a mark of identity) that does not provide a clear window onto the self but blurs identity, sending it off in many little directions at once.
18. Kuhlman argues that "Poetic features are manifested in Karasik and Mazzucchelli's adaptation in a number of ways: in transitions from panel to panel, in the introduction of various visual motifs, and in the structure of page layout, such that form and content are inseparable."
19. As Jacques Ehrmann argues, "the poetic nature of language may be defined by two necessary and sufficient characteristics: displacement and repetition," where "repetition and displacement are inversions of one another: repetition is a displacement of the *same*, and displacement is repetition of the *other*. But repetition is never exactly the *same*, nor displacement absolutely *other*" (245, 246).

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