

The Interplay of Memory and Visual Representation in Paul Auster's Travels in the Scriptorium

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Abstract:

Paul Auster, a renowned writer with a career spanning over four decades, explores themes of identity, memory, and language in his novels. His exploration of language is playful and self-referential, reflecting the various ways to use language to create meaning. The relationship between chance and destiny is another key theme, as characters face the unpredictable forces of fate. Auster's novels often blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, exploring themes related to memory, trauma, and loss. This analysis examines Paul Auster's "Travels in the Scriptorium" through the lens of the Freudian Uncanny, Spatial-mnemonic processes, and Visual memory construction. The Study investigates how the protagonist's confined environment and reliance on visual stimuli illuminate the intersection between spatial awareness, memory formation, and identity preservation. The research explains how the familiar-unfamiliar dichotomy manifests through the protagonists' intersections with photographs, documents, and recurring characters.

Key Words: Memory, Identity, and Uncanny.

Introduction

In the Auster's novel, Mr. Blank is a man who is haunted by a photograph of Anna, whom he believes is dead. He is troubled by memories of Anna and believes he is to blame for her passing. The text is a typed manuscript that describes the events leading up to Anna's demise. Anna is the only person who takes care of Mr. Blank. He wonders if Anna is the only one who is completely on his side, while others are left to speculate. The text describes that Mr. Blank is unable to remember his past and is forced to read a report about the confederacy, its garrison, and its enigmatic strange terrains. He recalls a window covering that has a white tape strip fastened to it, and he spins around it, reminiscing about his childhood experiences with the chair at a barbershop. He is unaware that the chair is equipped with four small wheels, which

would allow him to travel over to the window covering without standing up. Mr. Blank is perplexed by a woman named Anna, who apparently is his wife.

Freudian uncanny and familiar becoming unfamiliar suggest that Mr. Blank repeatedly fails to recognize familiar people and places. He questions his relationship with Anna, sometimes perceiving her as a wife, lover, or caretaker. The room itself shifts between feeling like a prison and a safe space. He asks her if her name is Anna, and she confirms it. Anna brings him a plate of food, including orange juice, toast, poached eggs, and Earl Grey tea. Anna reassures Mr. Blank that he promised to take the pills every day, and if he doesn't, the treatment won't work. Mr. Blank is hesitant to swallow the pills, but Anna assures him that she loves him and will never lie to him. Anna kisses him on the lips, sending a shiver of excitement through his body. By the moment Anna stands upright, Mr. Blank has regained his composure. They sit beside each other on the bed, and Anna rubs Mr. Blank. She assures him that it's a physiological response to the medication and that it will go away in a few minutes. Anna feeds Mr. Blank. As he flushes the toilet, Anna observes that his pyjama bottoms remain bunched around his ankles, and he must either bend over or crouch down to raise them. Anna enters the bathroom, and Mr. Blank decides to take a sponge bath, but Anna advises him to choose a full bath in the tub (p. 21).

The mnemonic process and episodic memory reveal that he relies heavily on typewritten documents to reconstruct past events. Memory fragments surface through physical interactions (bath, pills, touch). He struggles to maintain the chronological order of events. Past and present blur, especially regarding Anna's identity. Anna reassures Mr. Blank, who is moved by her presence, and he begins to remember her. Anna explains that he was young the first time he was frightened by her. Mr. Blank, a man who is shy and insecure about his physique, is clothed in white by Anna, a special request from Peter Stillman, Jr. He is asked to resemble the Good Humour man, which Anna tells him is a request from Peter Stillman, Jr. Mr. Blank is surprised by Anna's modesty and the small size of her clothing. Anna helps him with the outfit, putting the socks on his feet and tying the laces. As Anna leaves, Mr. Blank is dressed in white clothes, which is a special request from Peter Stillman, Jr. The protagonist includes Mr. Flood, Anna, David Zimmer, and Peter Stillman, Jr. He reads the fourth paragraph on the second page, which describes a strange event that occurred less than an hour ago (p. 28).

The sergeant overseeing the room hands the protagonist a pile of blank sheets, ink, and a pen, permitting him to write. The main character expresses gratitude to the colonel for the opportunity to write but emphasizes that he needs to be alone while doing so. The protagonist, labelled a traitor in Ultima, is given a pen by Colonel De Vega to write his story. He speculates that the Colonel may have already written about him, and if he receives his answer today, he may be allowed to continue writing about him, and if he receives his answer today, he may be allowed to continue writing about his suffering. Despite the challenges, the protagonist finds joy in the writing process. After being locked in, he tries to manoeuvre around the bars of the window but fails. In summary, while the protagonist is unsure why Colonel De Vega chose to write his story, he finds solace in the act of writing. The text describes a man named Mr. Blank, who is trapped in a room with a window covering his head (p. 29).

The idea of the "uncanny" as articulated by Sigmund Freud in his influential essay, plays a significant role in the works of renowned American author Paul Auster, particularly in his novel "Travels in the Scriptorium" Freud's idea of the uncanny refers to the unsettling sensation that

emerges when something familiar becomes unfamiliar, a theme that resonates deeply in Auster's examination of identity, reality and storytelling. In "Travels in the Scriptorium," Auster intertwines the roles of the reader, the writer, and the characters, crafting a meta-narrative that prompts readers to reconsider their perceptions of reality and fiction. Richardson (2015) opines in *Unnatural Narrative: Theory, History, and Practice* the inclusion of Auster himself in the story amplifies this uncanny feeling, as readers face the unsettling experience of the author transforming into a character in his own narrative (p. 77). This self-referential technique is characteristic of postmodern literature, where the distinctions between reality and imagination are intentionally obscured, encouraging readers to actively engage with the text and reflect on their own understanding of reality.

The uncanny aspect of Auster's work is evident in how it transforms the familiar into something strange, reminiscent of postmodern authors like the French novelist and a poet Raymond Queneau. While Queneau is often linked to the Oulipo literary movement, Auster's writing focuses on identity and the power of language. A notable similarity between Queneau and Auster's novel "Travels in the Scriptorium," the protagonist, Mr. Blank, encounters a spectral figure that may not be his own reflection (p. 47). Similarly, Queneau's influential work "*Exercices de style*" Skutta's (2012) *Functional Perspective and Text Types. Variants of Textual Construction in Raymond* examines the different ways in which a single narrative can be told, highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives and identities within one story (p. 235).

Nicholas (2013) says in *Arthur Rimbaud et Le Foutoir Zutique by Bernard Teyss  dre* The experience of coming into contact with a "world we think we know and finding it changed, unfamiliar, a little disquieting" (p. 835). It is a key element of the uncanny and is central to Auster's literary style. Furthermore, the concept of memory and its relationship to identity is a recurring theme throughout Auster's writing, evident in "Travels in the Scriptorium." Stan et al. (2012) apprises in *Deconstructing and Reconstructing Identity. Philosophical Frames* the Struggle of the protagonist to piece together his own past and find a way to reconcile his fractured sense of self is a classic instance of the uncanny, as familiar and strange combine to create a disorienting and disturbing experience (p. 328).

The Freudian uncanny and spatial disorientation manifest the uncanny through Mr. Blank's paradoxical relationship with his environment. His room simultaneously functions as a prison and a sanctuary, creating a space where the familiar becomes disturbingly unfamiliar. This spatial uncanny extends to his relationships, particularly with Anna, whose identity fluctuates between caretaker, lover, and possible victim. The constant imagery of stuck doors and locked windows contributes to the sense of psychological confinement in ostensibly familiar surroundings. He decides to look out of the window and observe his surroundings in the hopes of finding some clue about his circumstances. In an attempt to open the window, Mr. Blank lifts the window sash to its utmost position and forcefully pushes it open. However, the window does not budge, and he suspects that it has jammed. These nails are invisible and cannot be extracted from the wood, making it impossible for him to open the window. Blank remains stationary by the window, anxious about what he could discover from the door. Instead, he returns to the chair and chooses to shatter the window. The text highlights the dangers of focusing on one's own desires and the importance of avoiding confrontation with the truth. Blank is a man who cannot find any blunt objects in the vicinity, and he is determined to attempt breaking a double-paned thermal window (p. 32).

The Spatial process must be understood as the character Mr. Blank meticulously maps his confined room. He discovers the wheeled chair for movement. He repeatedly attempts to comprehend the window and its limitations. The room's features (desk, bed, bathroom) serve as spatial anchors. Despite his fear and anger, he attempts to break the window but fails. He finds Anna, who is on top, and studies her unhappy yet beautiful young face. He then looks at other photographs, discovering that none correspond to Anna's name. Graf had been an associate of the staff for twelve years before leaving for the Alien Territories. Graf has endured suffering, violence, and upheaval. His father never fully recovered from the hardships and passed away ten summers ago at the age of fifty-six. Graf was sent on a journey to the Independent Communities of Tierra Blanca Province, where the cholera outbreak spread through the capital. He moved to isolated communities to investigate religious sects, but his wife and daughter vanished. (p. 36). The relationship between spatial ability and memory has been a concern for cognitive psychology for decades. Researchers have investigated how brain activity in navigating physical space, such as the function of the hippocampus, can be translated into study of memory and information processing.

In the novel 'Travels in the Scriptorium' by Paul Auster, the protagonist's struggles with disorientation and fragmented memories suggest a deep connection between spatial and mnemonic processes. One key aspect of this relationship is the concept of the "memory Palace," Uricchio (2012) conceptualised mnemonic technique dating back to ancient Greece and Rome in which individuals construct vivid mental representations of physical spaces to aid memory recall, as expresses in 'A Palimpsest of Place and Past' (p. 46). This idea that the spatial organization of memory can serve as a powerful memorization tool is echoed in Auster's novel, where the protagonist's attempts to piece together his past involve a metaphorical journey through a labyrinthine mental "Scriptorium" of fragmented recollections. Auster's novel also resonates with research on the role of visual and spatial cues in episodic memory. The protagonist's reliance on photographs and other visual stimuli to trigger memories aligns with the notion that episodic memories are inherently tied to the spatial and sensory contexts in which they were formed as a closer glance like Baronian's (2007) *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature*. Similarly, the novel's emphasis on the protagonist's shifting spatial awareness and disorientation suggests that the disruption of spatial processing can profoundly impact one's ability to access and integrate autobiographical memories (p. 119)

Roediger (2017) highlights in *A Typology of Memory Terms* Spatial cognition and the ability to mentally represent our surrounding environment are crucial aspects of human memory. Our capacity to construct mental representations of space, the objects within it, and their relative positions enables us to navigate, interact with, and recall information about our physical world. The interconnected nature of the visual and spatial system is a key factor in how we process, store, and retrieve information. Emerging research suggests that the visual and spatial dimensions of memory are closely intertwined. Mental imagery, a multifaceted cognitive process, involves the generation, inspection, and manipulation of internal representations of objects, events, and scenes that are not physically present. This ability to mentally visualize information is a critical component of spatial reasoning, which encompasses cognitive skills such as recognizing, transforming, and describing spatial relationships. The formation of these mental maps and spatial representations not only aids in navigation and object recognition but also enhances our capacity to store and retrieve episodic memories (p. 15).

If the confederation turned against him, then it necessarily follows that the Confederation turned against itself. The novel serves to emphasize the protagonist's conflict with guilt and the desire to know one's own actions during a period of hardship. Flood, Anna, David Zimmer, Peter Stillman, Jr. He finds enjoyment gliding between the desk and bed, and as he skates around the room, he recalls his first love, a girl he once loved. Graf, a member of the Bureau, is tasked with investigating reports about Land, soldier who managed to escape the Alien Territories with a hundred men. Graf is asked to leave the country at nine o'clock and is tasked with writing his semi-annual report. As the conversation between Graf and Joubert ends, Mr. Blank interrupts him. He is approached by a man who asks if Graf has finished the story about the Confederation (p. 38).

Reliance on visual stimuli has implications for how the photographs on the desk serve as memory triggers. He obsessively studies faces in photos, trying to match them with names. Written documents (typescripts, labels) become crucial for maintaining reality. Visual markers (white tape) help orient him in space. These elements create a narrative about deteriorating memory and identity, where the protagonist must constantly reconstruct his reality through external aids. Graf's house remains untouched, with no evidence of the disease infiltrating its walls. The text describes the protagonist, James P. Flood, who is accused of being an adversary to the Confederation and has been charged with using force against McNaughton. While the protagonist is suspect of being an opponent of the confederation, he takes pride in having existed in a time that enabled him to engage in such a broad human. He believes in the Confederation's values and has passionately defended them with his words, deeds, and blood (p. 39).

Graf is unsure if the story is a real-life event and is confused by the fact that it is a work of fiction. Farr reveals that he has a picture of Graf on his desk and will be able to recognize him when he arrives. The conversation highlights the importance of protecting the welfare of the Confederation and the potential dangers of a sabotage attempt. Graf is uncertain about the truth regarding Ernesto Land, whom he believes has turned traitor to the Confederation. Land had been in the armed forces following the Consolidations of year 31 and had been enthusiastic about the Confederation's victory. Blank is frustrated with the story he is reading and decides to drink water from the bathroom sink to stay hydrated. The man, Sameul Farr, is tall, in his mid-thirties, with dark locks, dark eyes, and a haggard visage (p. 56).

Memory construction and visual anchors offer insights into Mr. Blank's episodic memory, which relies heavily on external visual stimuli. The photographs on his desk serve as mnemonic devices, while typed manuscripts become crucial tools for reconstructing his fragmented past. His meticulous attention to visual details---from the white tape markers to the arrangement of objects reveals an attempt to maintain cognitive coherence through spatial organization. This dependence on visual anchors highlights the interconnection between spatial awareness and memory formation.

Farr remembers that he had something to do with Anna, but it was captured over thirty years ago. Blank is shocked by Farr's expression and tries to explain that he is still alive. Farr insists that he is not allowed to talk about it, and Mr. Farr explains that the whole thing was his idea and that they were doing what Farr asked them to do. Farr claims that the treatment he is receiving is his idea, and he wants to see a lawyer to get him out of the situation. The story highlights the tension between the protagonist and Farr, as well as the consequences of their

actions. Farr and Mr. Blank discuss the story of the Confederation, a fictional country with a history similar to America's. They discuss the story's beginning, middle, and end, and Mr. Blank proceeds to read the rest of the story, which he believes is part of the treatment. Farr mentions that the Specters are returning, and he warns Mr. Blank. The Confederation has chosen the primitives as a common enemy to unite the people and start a war (p. 62).

Graf, a loyal officer, visits the Colonel with Joubert's letter, yet De Vega, another loyal officer, appears to be in on the plot. Graf knows that De Vega is involved because he didn't ask enough questions. Joubert gives Graf the names of three men, spies who work for the Bureau in Ultima, who together have been the origin of Joubert's knowledge about land, following the conversation with the colonel, Graf ventures out to seek them. Graf, a character in the story, is cut off from the Bureau and left alone in Ultima, a small garrison town. Graf enters into a liaison with Carlotta Hauptmann, the Colonel's mistress, who confirms that Land and his crew entered into the Territories over a years ago. However, Graf manages to cross the border, possibly through a bribe. Graf inspects the other hogans, finding them all dead, and identifies several individuals he makes friends with twelve years before. (p. 64)

The Story concludes with Graf questioning who was responsible for the deaths, as he believes it was Land and his men. It emphasizes the harsh realities of life in the confederation and the importance of maintaining connections and friendships. Graf is shocked by the brutality and the death of the innocent, and he assumes that Land has nothing to do with it. He thinks that his longtime friend is attempting to initiate a revolt to create a force of Primitives to attack the western territories of the Confederation. However, Land's troops, who are educated dreamers and political radicals against the Confederation, are unaware of their true mission and believe they will assist the Primitives in annexing the western provinces. Graf find it difficult to understand him, questioning what he means by everyone, which includes Land and his troops, the Gangi, and the other tribes among the primitives. Farr rotates his head towards the source of the sound. As the consultation ends, Farr tells Mr. Blank that they have run out of time to continue telling in story. He insists that they will continue with the story tomorrow, but the old man still shouts that he hasn't reached the end. He struggles to remember Anna's last name but recalls it to be Anna Blume. As he ponders the story, he realizes that Trause's name returned to him effortlessly. He decides to keep thinking about the story while anticipating a doctor's visit. (p. 65). Loader (2013) confesses that the protagonist's journey through a mysterious and confined space becomes a means of exploring the essence of memory and its association to the surrounding environment. The text itself can be seen as a "space" within which the narratives unfold, with the interplay between the physical setting and the protagonist's recollections forming a central aspect of the work. (p. 180).

The essay "A Palimpsest of Place and past" examines the connection between the memory palace and Camillo's "theatre of memory." Highlighting the subtle but significant distinctions between the two. The memory palace relies on the performative engagement from its users. This essay's exploration of the relationship between the space of the narrative and the space within the narrative provides a useful framework for understanding the spatial dimensions of memory in author's work. Groes (2016) articulated As Salman Rushdie expressed with the great eloquence, the novel concurrently "Places, and takes as its subject, 'the privileged arena of conflicting discourses right inside our heads'" (p. 156).

This concept of tension between psychic and physical space, the internal and the external, is at the heart of the palimpsestic experience we are examining. Jahshan (2003) explicates the concept of the palimpsest, a manuscript page written, erased, and rewritten, serves as a rich metaphor for the stratified nature of memory, identity, and the experience of place. As linguistic theorists have argued, the palimpsest can be employed to describe the process of cultural erasure and the writing over of narratives of the colonizer rather than that of the native. To this end, the palimpsest offers a model through which to contemplate the tension between present and past, dominant and marginalized, and how these forces shape our understanding of space and our place within it. ‘Travels in the Scriptorium’ presents a protagonist who, much like Kramer’s philosophical inquiry, grapples with the evanescence of memory and the instability of self. The protagonists of the novel, Mr. Blank, finds himself in a disorienting and foreign space, compelled to come to terms with the Specter of his past and the ambivalence of his present. Through these simultaneous explorations, Kramer and Auster invite their readers to engage in a process of discovery, subverting the notion of a fixed and stable self. The concepts of the “double” and the “spectral” that Auster masterfully weaves throughout his work resonate with Kramer’s own philosophical musings on the very nature of memory and self. Mr. Blank in “Travels in the Scriptorium” is lost in a world where the boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, and self and the other are increasingly transgressed. Haunted by fragmented memories and disorientation, Mr. Blank’s journey serves as a metaphor for Kramer’s philosophical reflections on the fluid slippery nature of self and identity. This dissolution of hard edges invites the reader to reflect more deeply on their own sense of self and on the forces conditioning their lived experience. In Paul Auster’s ‘Travels in the Scriptorium,’ the tension between memory and visual representations is the novel’s focal point. Like much of his oeuvre, the novel is replete with metafictional layers that encourage reader to contemplate the nature of storytelling and the boundaries of individual and collective memory (p. 391).

The protagonist, Mr. Blank, is a mysterious character whose past is shrouded in doubt. As he grapples with his own fragmented memories, the novel explores how visual reminders, such as photographs and drawings, can be employed as touchstones for memory and a means of reconstructing personal history. As in *Stranger than Fiction: Literary and Clinical Amnesia* Annoni (2013) also resonates with the wider themes of identity, personal liberty, and guilt often explored through literary representations of amnesia (p. 138). As the novel progresses, the intertwining of past and present within the narrative structure mirrors the notion that “memories of the past can be recalled and actualized within the present.” Baronian et al (2007) opines the incorporation of visual elements, like the photographs reproduced in the novel, further emphasizes the “Spatial aspects of memory” and how the “visual and spatial aspects of memory” are “incorporated within its pages” (p. 14). Temporal- Spatial Displacement emerges from the narrative, demonstrating how spatial awareness influences temporal understanding. Mr. Blank’s movement through the room in a wheeled chair parallel his navigation through memory fragments. His inability to reconcile conflicting versions of events mirrors his spatial confinement, suggesting that physical boundaries reflect cognitive limitations. The typescript documents serve as both spatial and temporal markers, allowing him to traverse both physical and memorial landscapes.

He suspects that Anna, Flood, Fair, and Sophie may have done something to him. Blank is a man who has been writing a story for years, a tale he has been repeating over and over again.

Feeling lonely, he decides to tell the story with his voice rather than merely thinking it in his head. The narrative revolves around the Confederation, Sigmund Graf, and Ernesto Land, who are located in the Alien Territories. Graf is searching for Land, who might be a double agent or have absconded with Graf's wife and daughter. Joubert suspects that Land is a traitor to the Confederation and has formed a private army to help lead the Primitives in an invasion of the western provinces. However, Graf believes the situation is more complicated, as Land is loyal to the confederation and may have crossed the border without Colonel De Vega's knowledge. Graf suspects Land, De Vega, and the entire military are planning to orchestrate a phony war with the Djjin to hold the Confederation together. Graf has come to two Gangi villages, both of which have been massacred. One possibility is that Beatrice and Marta have run away with Land, and if Graf finds together, he has vowed to kill him. Another possibility is that Beatrice and Marta have died, leading Graf to decide to kill Land, either by taking action or by forgetting the whole affair. Blank is left wondering where they are, While Graf wanders the desert alone on his horse, whitey, in search of Ernesto Land (p. 81).

He decides to write about it, and in part two, Graf enters the Alien Territories, where he encounters a mound of corpses, including his old friends Ernesto Land, Graf discovers that Land and his men were murdered by the Djjin. Blank is pleased to have reshaped the story according to his own design, but he also knows that Graf is unaware of the sinister scheme into which he has been drawn. The Confederation dispatches a second army to wipe out the first army, and Graf becomes the key figure in the operation. Graf tells his story in Ultima, where De Vega works him over and beats him relentlessly for a week. When he finishes his story, De Vega takes possession of the manuscript and releases him from the prison. Graf is stunned, as he was expecting to be shot, and here he is paid a large bonus for his work and given a free ride back to the capital in a first-class carriage. Sigmund Graf, Deputy Assistant Director of Bureau of Internal Affairs, returns to find the entire capital's population clamouring for an invasion of the Alien Territories (p. 84).

Graf counters with his own offers, resigning and firing a bullet through his skull. He speaks to a young girl, Anna Blume, and wonders about her identity and her mother. Blank revealed that he had a passport that Anna Blume found when he sent her on her mission. Blank asked if he knew Anna, who was a legend in the city. The pictures, which are external evidence, do not tell the whole story. A woman will enter the room to feed him dinner, and if everything goes well, Anna will be sent in to comfort him. The treatment will resume in the morning, but for now, it is the day it has always been, with Anna kissing and tucking Mr. Blank in (p. 88).

In Paul Auster's "Travels in the Scriptorium," the main character, Mr. Blank, is a man tormented by the recollections of his past, especially the tragic accident involving Anna. Wearing blue-and yellow striped pyjamas and black leather slippers, Mr. Blank sits in a room that is not fully furnished, attempting to reconstruct his life and what occurred in Anna's death. The narrative illustrates Mr. Blank's inability to remember his past, forcing him to use a typed manuscript that describes the events to him; while reading, he is confronted with his own suppressed memories, which dominate his current existence (p. 11). The novel's emphasis on photography and its effect on memory also resonates with Siegfried Kracauer's and Ronald Barthes' writing on the medium. The ghostly presence of a photograph of Anna in Mr. Blank's life emphasizes the complex relationship between visual representation and memory. As Barthes contends, "the Photograph is never experienced as an illusion," and the Photograph of Anna serves as a real but incomplete link to the past as confesses (Baronian et al, 2007, p. 140).

Thus, “Travels in the Scriptorium” interweaves memory, narrative, and visual representation, challenging the reader to contemplate the fluidity of personal identity and the difficulties of navigating a world defined by loss and fragmentation. The broken narrative of the novel and the disorientation of the protagonist reflect the uncertain and ongoing nature of remembering, as Mr. Blank grapples with the gaps and inconsistencies in his memories of the past. Anna’s photograph serves as a real yet incomplete connection to a past moment, emphasizing the intricate relationship between visual representation and memory (p. 34).

The room becomes a metaphor for Mr. Blank’s confined consciousness. He discovers a wheeled chair that allows limited mobility, mirroring his restricted access to memories. Windows that won’t open and locked doors highlight his psychological imprisonment. Each visitor—Sophie, Quinn—brings fragments of a past he struggles to recall. As its core, this is a story about human connection and memory. Mr. Blank’s relationship with Anna anchors him, even as he questions whether she is real or imagined. His attempts to understand his role in others’ lives—whether a creator, destroyer, or both reflect universal questions about responsibility and identity. The “treatment” he receives suggests both healing and control, raising questions about the nature of care and confinement. The narrative concludes as it began, with the promise of Anna’s return, suggesting a cyclical existence where past and present blur, and identity remains eternally uncertain.

In this world where unity and individuality can no longer be asserted in a classical psychoanalytic manner, the once-hegemonic dialectic of presence and absence and the idea of castration as the ultimate calamity are no longer dominant. It is merely an illusion, artificially sustained at times by those in power to control and direct the desires of others, keeping them locked in an outdated worldview and making them obedient. In “Travels in the Scriptorium” playfully explores the idea of uncanny by creating a world where reality and fantasy, inside and outside, the lived and the imagined, continuously overlap. The novel is replete with repetition, uncanny coincidences, animism, anthropomorphism, and an aura of radical suspicion towards sexual identity, all contributing to an overall atmosphere of the uncanny. The novel is complex, multi-level metafictional work interrogating the nature of identity, memory and the author-reader relationship. The narrative centres on Mr. Blank, who wakes up in a strange room with no memory of how he arrived there. As Mr. Blank, attempts to rebuild his identity and the chain of events that brought him to the room, the reader is led into a maze of nested stories, unreliable narrators, and questionable points of view. One of the leitmotifs of the novel is the dislocation of boundaries between reality and fantasy. Throughout the story, Mr. Blank faces a series of uncanny and disturbing events that challenge the nature of reality. Through a close reading of his writing, we can uncover the underlying rules that govern the narrative worlds he creates, such as repetition, strange coincidences, animism, anthropomorphism, automation, radical uncertainty regarding sexual identity, fear of death, silence, and telepathy.

Repetition is an element in Auster’s novels. The cyclical nature of Mr. Blank’s days includes regular visits from Anna/Sophie for food and medication. The repeated use of “treatment” throughout the novel highlights this theme. Mr. Blank consistently returns to the typescript and tale of Graf and Land. The fact that it’s “the day it has always been” implies a loop. The repeated cycle of pill-taking with female caregivers emphasizes this. Auster often explores the theme of identity and how individuals struggle with the concept of self. The repetition of events, symbols, and narrative forms serves to undermine the reader’s sense of stability, making them question the nature of reality and the fragility of human condition (p. 72). Mr. Blank’s

automated daily habits are striking. He takes his pills in a mechanical manner when prompted. The unconscious way he moves between desk and bed in his wheeled chair further illustrates this. The idea of automatism, where the human mind engages in involuntary or subconscious actions, is a recurring theme in Auster's writing. The author's exploration of subconscious and its influence on our behaviours and decision-making processes delves into the complexities of the human psyche on a deeper level (p. 75).

Odd coincidences, such as the connection between Anna Blume in Mr. Blank's present and Anna from his past, abound. The seemingly random appearances of various characters (Farr, Quinn, Flood), who all appear to be connected, add to this intrigue. The parallel between Graf's missing wife or daughter and Mr. Blank's relationship with Anna is notable. These odd coincidences, a hallmark of Auster's storytelling, further contribute to the uncertainty that pervades his works. The serendipitous encounters and the interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated events challenge the reader's understanding of causality, prompting them to question the very fabric of the narrative (p. 82).

The window that seems to have a will of its own refuses to open. The "Shadow-beings" that march through Mr. Blank's mind create a sense of unease. The chair with wheels becomes almost like a companion to him. The theme of animism, where non-human entities are imbued with human-like qualities, can be observed in Auster's depiction of the natural world. The personification of inanimate objects and the blurring of the boundaries between the animate and inanimate suggests a philosophical exploration of the human condition and our relationship with the natural realm. Anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, is another prominent theme in Auster's novels. Through this device, he invites readers to consider the nature of consciousness and the ways we project our own emotions and experiences onto the world around us (p. 95). The inanimate yet ambiguous relationships with his caretakers (Anna or Sophie) create confusion. The blurred line between sexual and caregiving activities complicates matters. The uncertainty about whether Anna is his wife, daughter, or caretaker looms large. A sense of radical uncertainty regarding sexual identity is a theme that Auster explores, challenging the reader's preconceptions and inviting them to confront the fluidity and ambiguity of gender and sexuality (p. 85).

The fear of death, a recurring element in Auster's works, serves as a metaphor for the human condition and the constant possibility of morality. The repetition of corpses and massacres in the Graf narrative heightens this tension. Mr. Blank's obsession with Anna's potential death underscores his unease. The underlying fear of his own death and aging permeates the story. Silence, a potent and suggestive force in Auster's work, frequently employed to express the unutterable and the unsayable, emphasizing the limitations of language and the human condition. The silences between speech and the focus on sounds shattering silence (bird calls, scratching pen) create a stark contrast. The muffled window that refuses to open becomes a symbol of entrapment (p. 91). Telepathy, the sense that characters appear to know what Mr. Blank is thinking, creates an enigmatic manner in which information is transmitted between them. There is blurring of line between Mr. Blank's thoughts and reality. The uncanny feeling is enhanced by the novel's use of repetition and strange coincidences.

Conclusion:

The study analysis reveals how Auster's work explores the complex relationship between spatial awareness, memory construction, and identity formation. Through Mr. Blank's reliance on visual stimuli and spatial orientation, the text demonstrates how physical confinement can manifest as psychological imprisonment. The uncanny emerges through the protagonist's struggle to maintain coherent narratives despite the constant slippage between familiar and unfamiliar elements, highlighting the fragile nature of memory and identity construction in confined spaces. The study suggests the spatial awareness and visual memory are intrinsically linked to the preservation of identity, while the Freudian uncanny serves as a framework for understanding how familiar spaces and relationships can become sites of psychological destabilization. Auster plays with the idea of the double, as Mr. Blank encounters various characters who seem to be versions of himself or of other characters in the novel. The novel is full of examples of anthropomorphism and animism, where abstract concepts and inanimate objects are endowed with human agency and qualities. This uncertainty contributes to the overall mood of the uncanny in the novel, as the reader is forced to grapple with the uncertainty of identity and the blurring of boundaries between self and other. The novel weaves these threads together to produce an atmosphere of a dream world in which reality, memory, and fiction become increasingly blurred. The overall effect is one of a man trapped not only in a physical space but also in a labyrinth of his own mind.

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