Jelena Pršić, Alfa BK University, Serbia

Locks and Walks in Paul Auster's Oracle Night

Abstract

The paper is concerned with Paul Auster's novel Oracle Night (2003) from the point of view of the importance of the city and its analogy to human thoughts, feelings, and life itself. Acknowledging the relevant theoretical framework, such as Elizabeth Grosz's concept of 'interface,' Yi-Fu Tuan's notions of space and place, as well as various critical views on Auster's works, the paper aims to contrast "closed spaces" with "open-air city scenes," in order to emphasize that closed spaces mirror the main character's confusion, whereas open-air urban scenes reflect his increased clarity of vision. The paper concludes that the feelings of being alive and happy seem possible, certain, and hopefully permanent only in contact with the streets, outside all rooms, and free from locks. In addition, by analyzing the nature of writing, the paper finds that the main character is the embodiment of the interface (Grosz 248) between the private/body and the shared/city.

Keywords: Paul Auster, Oracle Night, city, New York City, locks, walks

1. Introduction

Avid readers of Paul Auster's novels know that his fiction abounds in characters who are writers by profession. Oracle Night is far from being an exception to this principle, and at the very beginning of the book, we meet Sidney Orr, a writer in his mid-thirties. However, writing fervently about writers is not the only major feature that appeals to Auster's audience. When Orr introduces himself by saying, "I had lived in New York all my life" (Auster 1), he is also revealing that Oracle Night is one of Paul Auster's city novels, that is, New York City novels. Moreover, Sidney Orr's

character will soon confirm that this is one of those novels in which the character's past and present, enjoyment and struggle, aim and aimlessness are inextricably linked with the city.

Some significant theories of spatiality will assist our understanding of Oracle Night and help us underline its recurrent themes, such as confined and open spaces, city spaces, the physicality of writing, the close relationship between the character and the city, the exploration of the creative process of writing, and complex interplay of fiction and reality. In her essay "Bodies-Cities," Elizabeth Grosz defines 'body' as a certain integration of physical and psychosocial sides of a human subject, that is, as a "sociocultural artifact," while 'city' refers to all living and non-living, material, and non-material, concrete and abstract elements of an urban entity (241, 244). According to Grosz, the relationship between the body and the city is "a two-way linkage that could be defined as an interface, perhaps even a cobuilding" (248, author's emphasis). In other words, Grosz is "suggesting (…) a model of the relations between bodies and cities that sees them, not as megalithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings" (248). In his book Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, Yi-Fu Tuan differentiates between space – unknown, void of personal meaning, and place – familiar, endowed with value, claiming that "[w]hat begins as undifferentiated space ends as a single object-situation or place" (72). Spatial ability in human beings turns into spatial knowledge when a person, through experience, can envisage their movements and changes of location (Tuan 67-68). In other words, "when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (Tuan 73).

The early information that New York City has always been Orr's home, as well as the emotional tone it has to it, testifies to a strong interface (Grosz 248) that must have existed between the main character and his city. However, the same sentence goes on to say the following: "(…) but I didn't understand the streets and crowds anymore" (Auster 2). The close bond between the character and his city, the linkage that must have provided a high level of mutual understanding and recognition, seems to have disappeared. We find out that Orr has lost control of his physical movements due to a serious illness he has gone through, which may have resulted in forgetting what his surroundings look like. In addition, we will learn that the absence of control refers to other spheres of his existence, such as his marriage and his writing, as well as spaces other than urban,

such as his flat. What once used to be a place for him (either as an outer/city place or inside/emotional/creative place) has become an "undifferentiated space" (Tuan 72). The sentence's ending, "and every time I went on my little excursions, I felt like a man who had lost his way in a foreign city" (Auster 2), apparently only underlines that Orr is trying to find his way in the city, which is, in turn, felt as unsympathetic towards a man who does not seem to be one of its dwellers. However, the real emphasis here is on "my little excursions," indicating that a regular activity of going out and walking is what matters most. By walking in New York, the character is attempting to reacquaint himself with spaces of urban streets as well as spaces of his life. Only then could the outside and the personal worlds stop being threatening and unfamiliar – by becoming places again. Therefore, the key points of the entire sentence quoted are as follows: parallelism between life and the city, the necessity of going out, a sense of being lost, search for the truth about other people and search for one's own truth.

Various critical approaches to Paul Auster's works emphasize the importance of space, narrative strategies, text, and paratext. Among these, we will mention Steven Alford, who claims that "[t]he idea that space is significant is not new" (617). Reminiscing the old phrases that identify the book with the world/nature, Alford underlines a long history of the connection between plowing and writing, the earth, and discovery/significance (617). Naturally, if we try to translate these equivalents into a contemporary context, we will find their postmodern form in the relationship between contemporary urban space and life/meaning/text. Regarding Auster's postmodernist fiction as a deconstruction of Aristotle's Poetics, Dragana Nikolić, among other things, considers his storytelling and claims that "[t]here is no possibility of a solution or knowledge in Auster's fiction" (ch. 1). Actually, Oracle Night in itself is not one of Auster's detective novels – in which we would expect a kind of solution – or, to use Bennett Kravitz's terminology, it is not Auster's anti-detective novel, which is "never able to unravel the conundrum [or] get to the bottom of the mystery" (45). However, in this book, there is an element of mystery, a pair of personal problems – for example, Orr's inability to penetrate the essence of his marriage and the impossibility of ending/continuing his story – the main character is trying to cope with. If the absence of an answer is what characterizes Auster's other mystery fiction, one of our goals is to see whether there is a solution here and, if there is, what kind of role the city has in its creation. Similarly, James Peacock

examines the unconventionality of Auster's language and style, suggesting that the absurdity in his work is intentional and that there is no such thing as truth or reality (115). Furthermore, Peacock claims that Auster's vagueness and the sense of disorientation are not negative or pessimistic but very productive (41). Antoine Dechêne underlines that "Oracle Night offers a mise en abyme of the detective-writer's investigation through the repeated use of metalepsis" (par. 7). However, Dechêne states that Auster's reliance on the embedded storyworlds, which leads to a "playful subversion of narrative logic," is not harmless but potentially tragic (par. 7). Richard F. Patteson focuses on Auster's use of paratext, seen "as an alternate plot, existing apart from the main narrative yet parallel to it in important ways" (118). Paratexts are different versions of the reality represented in the book (Patteson 118). Patteson claims that "the mirroring and doubling of narrative patterns in Oracle Night (…) also extends to the characters and their relationship with the author, further increasing the novel's ghostly mise en abyme effect" (124).

By comparing and contrasting "closed spaces" (e.g., locked, or closed flats, rooms, etc.), which are mostly within New York and form its part, with "open-air city scenes" (i.e., city walks), we are going to point out that Sidney Orr's presence in each of these places/spaces reflects his current physical and/or mental state. Additionally, by analyzing Paul Auster's statement that books are a private thing, the paper also aims to find out whether Sidney Orr, as a character, confirms this statement or not, as well as how this problem parallels the opposition between closed/private and open spaces. In this way, we will attempt to complement and broaden the critical framework we have mentioned by offering an innovative approach to the novel's major relationships, dichotomies, and parallelisms.

2. "[O]nce a person enters that room, he can't get out unless he uses a key to unlock the door from the inside." (Auster 88)

Despite being an open-air city novel, Oracle Night presents a variety of closed spaces, mostly showing Sidney Orr in everyday situations. However, in addition to functioning as ordinary places for living, working, etc., they seem to serve as spaces within which the character experiences confusion, ignorance, hopelessness, and loss. Usually, these places are either literally locked or

otherwise impossible to escape/leave, and they invariably reflect Orr's inability to solve a problem or even to identify it.

Orr's confusion and lack of knowledge are expressed in his own flat, his friend John Trause's flat, and in a taxi. Although the flat Sidney shares with his wife Grace, an art director in a publishing house, may seem like a nest full of warmth and understanding, it is almost an "undifferentiated space" (Tuan 72) where Sidney spends most of his days alone, recovering from a near-fatal illness. Waiting for his wife to come home, he is either writing or preparing food, or killing time in other ways. Even though, at first, he does not recognize any problem between himself and his wife, Grace, her increasing absences from home slowly initiate Sidney's confusion. It is in their flat on a Saturday that he finds her note: "Sidney: Hope you had fun on your walk. I'm going out to do some errands. Shouldn't be long. See you back at the ranch. Love, G." (Auster 9) and it is here that he listens to her phone message saying that "[s]he was rushing to meet deadline and wouldn't be able to get out of the office until seven-thirty or eight o'clock" (Auster 100). In addition to her absences, there are also her absentmindedness and unexpected behavior when she is at home. For instance, such is the moment when she informs Sidney about her pregnancy and gives a list of reasons for abortion. This leads to Orr's inability not only to rationalize her attitude, but also to interpret immediately his own reaction to the contrary:

She complimented me on the food, but otherwise she didn't say much during the meal. (…) [S]he seemed to be somewhere else, less present than usual. (…)

She'd blurted out the news so unexpectedly, I didn't know what else to do but sit back down in my chair. (…)

My only object was to talk her out of aborting the child, and I was willing to indulge in any sort of dishonesty to plead my case. The question was why. (Auster 109, 111)

The confusion over reality and fiction as Sidney enters John's Manhattan duplex is apparently only a writerly problem, as he has been mentally using John's place of living as a setting for his story. However, this anticipates another reality-fiction ambiguity, which will later be sparked by Sidney's idea that Grace and John might have had a love affair:

I had visited Trause's apartment countless times in the past, but now that I had spent several hours thinking about it in my own apartment in Brooklyn, peopling it with the invented characters of my story, it seemed to belong as much to the world of fiction as to the world of solid objects and flesh-and-blood human beings. (Auster 25)

Grace's sudden tears in a taxi driving them back home to Brooklyn baffle Sidney as much as her explanation (that she is worried about John's leg ailment) strikes him as false. Sidney knows that "[s]omething else [is] troubling her, some private torment she [isn't] willing to share with [him]" (Auster 41). However, his knowledge stops there, just as the taxi halts, since "every ramp [is] clogged with traffic and [they can] hardly advance at all" (Auster 41). The car, of course, is not just a closed space, it is a vehicle, and driving could be read as a metaphor of life's progress or, in this case, the progress of a marriage. Parallel to the halt of the taxi, Sidney and Grace's relationship seems to be hopelessly hampered.

Hopelessness, loss, and the feeling of being lost appear in Sidney's character's underground room in Kansas City, on a metro train, in Sidney's workroom, and Grace's dream. The moment when Bowen, the protagonist of Sidney's story, accidentally locks himself in, staying alone and helpless in an underground room, is a moment when hope starts to die away for both Bowen and his author. Sidney, who has bought a special blue notebook, re-started writing after a long time, and is now in the middle of his story, has no idea how to set Bowen free and continue the narration. Parallel to this, Sidney is in the middle of his life and has no clue of how to deal with it:

I walked down to the end of the hall and opened the door of my workroom. (…) I opened the notebook, and when I glanced down at the page in front of me, I realized that I was lost, that I didn't know what I was doing anymore. (…) The only thing I could see that morning was my hapless little man – sitting in the darkness of his underground room, waiting for someone to rescue him. (Auster 92, 93)

Despair caused by loss and confusion over how to atone for his fault overwhelm Sidney on a crammed metro train. As it happens, he loses John's envelope with a manuscript that could solve his and Grace's financial problems:

It was an unforgivable mistake. John had entrusted me with the only copy of an unpublished story, and given the academic interest in his work, the manuscript alone was probably worth hundreds of dollars, perhaps thousands. What was I going to tell him when he asked me what I thought of it? (Auster 146)

Anticipating the loss of John as a friend, that is, the situation in which John is guilty of hurting Sidney and not vice versa, Sidney concludes that "[i]f someone had done to me what I'd just done to Trause, I think I would have been angry enough to want to strangle him" (Auster 146).

Sidney's time spent in his workroom is in itself a manifestation of a state of being lost in more than one way. Obviously, he is lost in thought while writing, but this mental "disappearance" seems to become a physical absence as well. If we suppose that he is sitting at his desk, that is, not moving his body, then this alleged/figurative disappearance seems possible only during his moments of stillness. For the first time in his life, awkward things start to happen: he does not hear Grace's knock at the door, he does not remember the phone ringing, and Grace does not find him in his room, where he claims to have been. This last thing also indicates two forms of Grace's losing Sidney – Grace has been at risk of losing him due to a serious illness but will also risk losing him as a husband once he finds out about her affair.

Grace's dream, which shows the two of them hopelessly locked inside an underground room, incredibly mirrors Bowen's situation. Much like Bowen's room, the room in her dream is outside New York, but the dream, as a whole, seems to function as another closed space for Sidney, similar to his barren workroom or else to his "lost" story.

Interestingly, the end of confusion, ignorance, and perhaps even loss also happens inside, but something changes in the essence of the closed space. At one moment, Sidney unlocks the door for John's son Jacob to enter, giving him the opportunity to see Grace, call her his "unofficial stepmom" (Auster 200), and subsequently beat her up. As one interpretation suggests, in Oracle Night "[you] can hear the glass [between the past and the present] breaking" (D' Erasmo). Jacob's arrival, we would add, is the point when this glass breaks, the past pouring into the future. It is a symbolic moment when Sidney's imagination turns out to be an oracle, while his confusion and ignorance transform into clarity, confirmation, and realization. Within the identification of the latter

opposites, the end of loss means having nothing to lose any more, including hope. Moreover, being unlocked for the first time, the flat now seems to have lost its characteristic of a closed space: “I unlocked the door and the thing that had been building inside me over the past days was suddenly real: the future was standing in front of me” (Auster 197-98). At the same time, the “undifferentiated space” (Tuan 72) starts transforming into a (known) place.

3. “I had to start thinking about a new plan and I figured a walk in the cool air might do me some good.” (Auster 160)

If confusion and ignorance rule over the closed spaces Sidney Orr spends time in, then his walks in New York City – regular, needed, and enjoyed – provide his consciousness with increased clarity of vision and a boost in optimism. Despite Sidney’s confession that he “feel[s] like a man who ha[s] lost his way” (Auster 2), each of his city excursions shows us that he is adamant about re-finding his way and befriending the streets again.

Whether walking will offer any solutions to Sidney’s multiple problems is always a matter of question and never a factor in deciding in favor of going out as opposed to staying at home. In the drizzle and windy weather – which Sidney either really likes or pretends to like – in the rain with no umbrella, weak and still unrecovered, Sidney walks:

I usually went north on my walks, but that morning I headed south, turning right when I came to Court Street and continuing on for six or seven blocks. The sky was the color of cement: gray clouds, gray air, gray drizzle borne along by gray gusts of wind. I have always had a weakness for that kind of weather, and I felt content in the gloom, not the least bit sorry that the dog days were behind us.

(…)

[Rain] seemed imminent. I didn’t bother to go back upstairs for an umbrella, however. Another trip up and down the three flights would have taken too much out of me, so I decided to risk it, banking on the chance that the rain would have hold off until after I returned. (Auster 2-3, 93)

Nathalie Cochoy claims that "[by the hero's walking through the city] the American city novel (…) succeeds in conveying an experience, and more precisely an experience of the most ordinary, yet maybe the most valuable moments of life" (42). Similarly, Richard Patteson says that Sidney's "recuperative walks around Brooklyn," among other things he narrates about, "[appear] trivial at first" (119). However, "it quickly becomes apparent that within the text of Orr's daily routine (…) is encoded a constant struggle between life and death, existence and nonexistence" (119-20). Cochoy further suggests that "the motif of urban walking, in American novels, cannot be reduced to some aimless flânerie or to some despaired meandering or deciphering of signs, but (…) it invents a new way of writing the city" (44). If human thoughts are able to write the city, then, by means of an 'interface', as defined by Elizabeth Grosz (248), the city is also capable of writing human thoughts. Thinking in the open air is often better than thinking inside, and thinking while walking may be especially advanced. Sidney's solitary walks, if we neglect unnecessary or unurgent errands, are mostly and essentially taken for the sole purpose of walking, and yet there is some hope that traversing the streets – as opposed to standing or sitting still – could clear his vision and give birth to fresh and fruitful ideas at critical moments of his present life. It is by walking that Sidney reterritorializes the space of the city, trying to turn it gradually into a familiar place.

During a walk Sidney is trying to devise a plan on how to continue his writing. New York's influence on his stream of thought is doubtless omnipresent but by no means aggressive or even obvious. The city inspires him so subtly and unnoticeably that, at times, he forgets where he is and even visualizes another city while absorbing his own. Unfortunately, the narrative clue remains an ideal, but walking and thinking stay real:

> *[B]y the time I'd passed the New School and was approaching Sixth Avenue, I was already lost in thought. Bowen was still trapped in the room, and with the unsettling contents of Grace's dream still echoing in my head, several new ideas had occurred to me about the story. I lost track of where I was after that, and for the next forty or thirty minutes I wandered around the streets like a blind man, more in that underground room in Kansas City than in Manhattan, taking only the scantest notice of the things around me. (Auster 118)*

By walking and thinking, Sidney is putting off doing unwanted and difficult things, optimistic about seeing them more clearly and preparing psychologically for them. Such is the case when he postpones informing John about his unsuccessful visit and talk to his addict son Jacob:

I rarely went into Upper East Side, and since the weather had improved in the past hour, rapidly warming to the point where my jacket now felt like an encumbrance, I turned my daily walk into an excuse to prowl around the neighbourhood. It was going to be hard to tell John how depressing the visit had been for me, and instead of calling him right away, I decided to put it off until I returned to Brooklyn. (Auster 172)

It is in the street, "far from home" (Auster 187), that Sidney discards the torn-up pages from his blue notebook, containing both his unfinished story and the written form of his ideas about Grace's affair with John. The notebook, together with the Chinese man called Chang, who has previously sold it to him, symbolize the evil to which no city and no human being are immune. According to Eve Garrard, the term 'evil' could be understood and used in several ways: as everything adverse in human lives (including moral evils and natural evils), as any wrongdoing (from genocide to malicious gossip), or in a very narrow sense, as particularly horrifying actions we may contrast with ordinary wrongdoing (320). Although Chang does not represent any extreme forms of evil, we could say that in Sidney's life, he functions as bad luck, temptation, and a pathway to sin. As is the case with some other embodiments of evil in literature, Chang changes his location, occupation, and behavior. Sidney's bad luck does not strike only his life as a writer once the notebook proves impossible for his story. Further friendship with Chang turns Sidney into an adulterous husband, leading him to a position that hints at a mirror-like situation – his wife's adultery as the only story that may, in fact, be possible and finishable. Eliminating the evil by getting rid of the blue notebook (thus destroying the time devoted to and the effort put into Bowen's story) and pretending that Grace and John's affair is only a weak piece of writing, another failed story (which, even if relatively finished, should be torn to pieces and sent to oblivion), is most probably the wrong way to solve things. Moreover, as Dechêne says, "Sid's nightmare truly starts when he destroys the notebook that is physically absorbing him" (par. 11). Confirming John Trause's warning about writing as an activity of predicting future events, as opposed to recording the past ones, "the destruction of the notebook triggers the horrors that conclude the novel" (Dechêne, par. 12). However, at that

moment, Sidney clearly sees it as a remedial action, which, given the aura of a mission, deserves to be executed outside, in front of the eyes of the city. Only there will it be valid as an action, only if discarded in a city rubbish bin will it be really gone, unseen despite so many eyes, destroyed indeed. An already former notebook thus ends up together with other obsolete and semi-plausible stories of New York: “I dropped the bag into a trash can on the corner, burying it into a bunch of wilted roses and the funny pages from the Daily News” (Auster 187).

Speaking of an actual, substantial solution to at least one of Sidney Orr’s problems, we end the reading of the novel faced with a fair dénouement – Grace has been punished for her sin, John has died, and Sidney seems to be a winner ready to forgive and start his married life from scratch. However, since we are dealing with Auster, we soon realize that Oracle Night’s closing scene is only a deception. Going to the hospital to see his wife after losing her lover’s child, having to cope with the inability to write and physical weakness, living on the gift money given to him by the man who could never have been his friend – all this is far from a closure, let alone a solution. And yet, Sidney suddenly feels alive and happy in his “unlocked” flat. Then, as if afraid of losing these feelings inside, among the walls where everything has previously proved unlucky and lifeless, as if trying to solidify and eternalize the emotions that may actually be elements of a future solution or else its replacement, he soon rushes out into the street – the only reacquainted space where this seems possible. Of course, he is walking:

> *I was happy, happier to be alive than I had ever been before. It was a happiness beyond consolation, beyond misery, beyond all the ugliness and beauty of the world. Eventually, the tears subsided, and I went into the bedroom to put on a fresh set of clothes. Ten minutes later, I was out on the street again, walking toward the hospital to see Grace. (Auster 207, emphasis added)*

4. Locking and/or Walking

In one of his interviews, talking about the nature of literary works, Paul Auster said that, unlike many other forms of art, “books are private” (“Paul Auster Interview” 00:18:19-00:21:31). By claiming this, he alluded to the fact that reading a book, as opposed to watching a play, visiting an exhibition, or attending a dance performance, is a private thing, an activity that includes only the reader and the author/book. However, what he also suggested by this statement is that, of course,

writing a book is a private thing. Interestingly, in Oracle Night, we witness how writing as a private activity – locked within the walls of Sidney Orr's workroom – subtly becomes, if not public and consciously shared, then shared by others or visible to others at a subconscious/metafictional level.

Orr's wife, we have seen, seems to have a dream about a situation incredibly similar to the one in his story, but this is not the only instance of this kind of "sharing." Another accomplice to his inability to continue and finish his story is nobody else but his own character Bowen. Orr is continuously returning to his notebook (after walking back to his room, which is reminiscent of his walking through the city) to hopelessly gaze at his trapped character. Simultaneously, while "waiting for someone to rescue him" (Auster 93), the character, disabled by the darkness of his underground room, is probably capable only of gazing back at his author through the thin metafictional curtain dividing them. This is actually an unusual yet inevitable moment of 'scopophilia.' 'Scopophilia' is a term built around Jacques Lacan's theory of the gaze which entails that the body is both the subject and the object, the observer and the observed (74-75). The subject is thus alienated from itself, denied its full subjectivity, and caused to experience itself as being seen (Lacan 75). By metafictional sharing of his thoughts, helplessness, gaze, and even his body/personality in this transformation from the subject into the object and vice versa, Orr is suggesting that writing is, in fact, much more than a private thing. He is creating a space for a true interface (Grosz 248) between the author and the character, between reality and dreaming, between private and shared, between being locked in a closed space/writer's crisis and being free outside his aimless thoughts and his jail-like flat. Orr epitomizes Auster's tendency in his post-New York Trilogy novels to continue the "theme of fluid selves held together (or not) by the ability to narrate, to textualize their lives" (Sim 187). Happiness, writerly success, and solution, we have concluded, are always sought in walking – which has been functioning as the opposite of being locked, either physically or mentally – but we must not forget that, just as writing is much more than a private thing, walking is much more than what is being shared.

5. Conclusion

Focusing on the importance of the city in Paul Auster's New York novel Oracle Night and its analogy to human thoughts, emotions, and life as such, in this paper, we have compared and contrasted closed spaces with open-air city scenes. Acknowledging some theoretical approaches to spatiality (i.e., Grosz's concept of 'interface' and Tuan's notions of space and place) and various critical views on Oracle Night and Auster's writing in general, we have made an attempt to contribute to the existing critical framework.

By analyzing Sidney Orr's time spent in his flat and workroom, his friend's flat, and other closed spaces, we have shown that being there reflects his confusion, ignorance, hopelessness, and loss. For example, being at home (which seems to have turned into an "undifferentiated space" [Tuan 72]) for Sidney usually means either living a solitary life of an uninformed husband or a hopeless life of a writer void of ideas. Visiting his friend's flat, which he mentally borrows as a setting for his story, creates, in his mind, confusion over reality and fiction.

On the other hand, by looking into open-air city scenes (i.e., Sidney Orr's walking), we have seen that the main character's interface (Grosz 248) with the city mirrors his increased clarity of vision and a more optimistic view. Even though walking in Sidney's life is a beloved activity that needs no purpose, finding solutions to his many problems is always one of Sidney's accompanying aims. For instance, while walking, he is trying to think of an ending to his story or preparing to deliver difficult news. It is also in the city that he performs a remedial action of discarding his unlucky notebook. By walking, Sidney is reterritorializing the space of the city in order to slowly transform it into a familiar/friendly/inspiring place.

A solution as such, we have concluded, does not exist in Oracle Night in the same way as it is not found in Auster's other fiction. Still, Sidney's feelings of being alive and happy do exist, and we have interpreted them as potential elements of a future solution or at least its replacement. Obviously, this is how Orr, who initially feels them inside his flat, until recently locked by lies, secrets, and doubts, understands them as well. When he rushes out in the open air, overwhelmed by the sudden emotions, he seems to be trying to strengthen and immortalize them under the New York lockless sky, in the only reacquainted space where optimism has managed to live longer than the length of a few pages. He needs these feelings to forever go on walking and searching for an

answer. If there is no answer after all, what remains is the unalienable feeling of being alive, followed by unconditional happiness as compensation for not really having a happy ending.

Finally, we have commented on Auster's statement that revolves around the activity of reading (but also the one of writing) as a private thing. In this regard, Orr's case suggests that, at a subconscious/metafictional level, writing includes more than being locked within one's thoughts – it requires an interface, in Elizabeth Grosz's terms, between the private and the public, i.e., (mental/metafictional) locks and (mental, but also physical) freedom/sharing/walks.

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