

# Auster's "Album" in Report from the Interior: Analysis and Analogies

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# Auster's "Album" in *Report from the Interior*: Analysis and Analogies

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- <sup>1</sup> *Report from the Interior* by Paul Auster, published in 2013, is composed of 4 chapters—the eponymous “Report from the Interior,” “Two Blows to the Head,” “Time Capsule” and “Album”. The latter, on which this article will focus, contains 64 pages of black and white images, 107 in total, most of which are photographs, although the visual material includes film and cartoon stills, drawings and painted illustrations, as well as extracts from newspapers and advertisements. The etymology of the word *album* highlights the white of the pages waiting to be filled in; the word evokes ‘photo album,’ ‘family album,’ and a parallel form, the scrapbook, which can be envisaged as a ‘time capsule’ to borrow the title of the third section of the work. The aim of this essay is to analyze the effects of this album of images on the reader’s experience of what the author himself has called a “crazy book” (Cochoy et Vallas). We will begin by speculating as to the ways readers use and peruse the album, imagining their reactions to the visual material, whether or not they approach the album as a unit. Then we will consider how the pictures mediate between an interior and an exterior, and how they relate to the theme of disappearance. In the next part, central to our analysis and divided into three successive sub-sections, we will examine how the images function as surrogates. By way of conclusion, we will return to our speculations as to how the album is read, and then attempt to illuminate how it is constructed by means of a number of analogies.
- <sup>2</sup> The album, the book’s final section, is approximately as long as the second section, a section that can equally be called ‘visual’ since its subject is the cinema, and more precisely an analysis of the impact two movies had on Auster as a child. The four sections participate in an overall structure that can thus be described as ‘verbal-visual-verbal-visual’, a description that derives from Auster himself (see below). Before he decided to integrate the epistolary material that became the basis for the present section three, the author’s plan was to create a structure that was to be ‘verbal-visual-visual’: a “verbal” section, the original “little” report, was to have been followed by a “visual” one, an outgrowth with its own “rhythm,” verbal in medium but visual in

reference, which in turn would have been followed by a truly visual one (the film images rather than words about those images). At first it seems indeed that the images included in the book were to have just been those of the two films.

- 3 In order to understand the process of construction, let us examine how the author describes it:

I think the reason why I wrote *Report from the Interior* was that after I finished *Winter Journal*, I took a pause, and I realized there was more I wanted to say. At first, I thought the book would be what became the first part, the first hundred pages, a little book. But as I was writing that first part, I realized I wanted to write about some of those movies I had seen as a young person, but when I started writing about them the passages became too long, and I would have destroyed the whole rhythm of the first part if I had integrated those other things into it. So I thought, I have to have another section to discuss the two movies. And as I was doing the movies, trying to write about them, I felt it would be interesting to put stills from the movies into the chapter. But I don't like pictures in books. [...] That's when I came up with the idea of another section, a sequence of images and images only. Sections 2 and 4 are all about the visual, and 1 and 3 are all about the verbal. I had no idea I would be writing the third part when I started the book. But as I was working on the first part, the letters from my first wife, my long-ago ex-wife, were coming in... Those were my thoughts, and this was how this crazy book was composed. *I've never seen a book with pictures like at the end, pictures related to things you've read before.* (Cochoy and Vallas, italics mine)

- 4 From these remarks we can conclude that the autobiographical material of *Report from the Interior*, which is necessarily about growth, itself grew in an organic way and was edited intuitively. First came words (in the wake of those of *Winter Journal* published a year before), words that relate to traces of the past, a tracing process represented as a visual examination ("hold up the shards to the light and have a look at them", 5<sup>1</sup>); then came words about film images; then some of those film images themselves. To all this were subsequently added—but we do not know in which order—images about the original set of words (the first section); then more words taken from letters recently retrieved; and these words called in turn for more images. An organic, intuitive growth, a to and fro. If *Report from the Interior* were a visual artwork, we could describe it as a piece to which panels were successively added, a triptych (before the integration of "Time Capsule") that turned into a quadriptych (the final publication). This polymorphic play seems indeed to be a direct manifestation of the project's incipient energy: a play between self and former self, between self and other, between the verbal and its other, the visual; a game representing the self as other; a game to be taken seriously, as seriously as baseball by an ardent nine-year-old.

## 1. Images + Text = ?

- 5 Auster tells us that he doesn't like pictures in the middle of a text, and so he put them at the end, although the result strikes him as unusual (see italicized segment in the quotation above). For the sake of argument, we will begin by drafting a number of speculations as to how readers deal with the album. Will they feel inclined or, once they notice their existence, even *compelled*, to literally follow the images one by one in sequence while reading the narratives? That is what this particular reader felt obliged to do in order to attempt to chart the connections between album and text. But such a sustained effort may prove fastidious and not necessarily fully rewarding to the reader.

It is not unlikely that the reader who embarks on it may abandon it or perform it merely intermittently. Sometimes, in this process, it will seem to the reader that the compelling character of the text is diminished by the (disappointing?) flatness or the general-purpose quality of the corresponding images—we might find, for instance, that Image 33 of the radio adds little to the story of the smashing of “that old Philco” (54). Sometimes the images do not live up to the words: Image 39 with its nineteenth-century cliché illustration of Thanksgiving speaks of a “warm welcoming” native American culture but does nothing to represent the source of that welcoming culture, the “Great Spirit.” Moreover, if one is looking for a constant parallel visual thread, one may be disappointed to remark that many of the strongest images created by the text itself fail to show up in the album. A case in point is the image of the little reed emerging from the water through which James Allen continues to breathe as he escapes down the river. Despite its importance on which Auster insists (“of all the shots in the film, this is the one that has stayed with you most persistently, the one that comes back to you first whenever you think about watching the film, a shot that carries all the weight of something from a nightmare, a *haunted image*,” 156), the shot does not appear in the album. Nor do the emblems in the following assertion: “Sixty years later, you can still see the black cars and the white house. In your mind, they are the quintessential emblems of grief” (67). In both these cases omission from the album may seem, of course, on second thoughts like a good decision as the latter image (if replicated) would necessarily fall short of the memory and the former might add little through its inclusion: it was remembered as a shot, because of its place in the montage; without the montage, it might fail to stir an emotional response. Indeed, readers may feel that they should have been trusted all through the book to come up with their ‘own’ images, the images generated in their minds by the writing.

- 6 So, if it is unlikely that the reader will studiously follow the sequence of pictures in strict adherence to the unfolding of the text (indeed the sequence is not exact, the images are often placed slightly out of order), how then will the pictures be used or perused? Will the reader flick through them, or some of them, at another moment and consciously attempt (“Do that. Try to do that,” 5), or merely begin without any deliberation, to reconstruct the narrative? Could the reader who has not yet followed the full development of each chapter find an interest in flicking through the text to find within its full context the caption of an image that has captured her or his attention (performing chance, as it were)? Are the images to serve as temporary exits, break-off points when you look up and away from a book in order to let it linger in your mind; and could the pictures then serve equally as points of re-entry into the text like bookmarks to help you resume your reading?
- 7 Would a potential reader, in a bookstore for instance, begin to apprehend the book, to seize its texture, and to size it up by appreciating it through pictures perceived to function as teasers or paratextual extracts? Do the images of the Café de Flore (Image 98), Columbia University (99), or Ratner’s (106) draw readers into the book? And do the shots from *The Shrinking Man* make one want to see the film and/or to read the text about the film? These questions cannot really be answered; our hope is that they will have enlightened the book by formulating some of the questions raised by ways of experiencing its last section.
- 8 But, should the album be considered as a unit and read in continuity? It might seem more logical to divide the album into three sections, one for each of the previous and

corresponding chapters, or at least into two sections with the second (double-feature) film section as separate. The pictures corresponding to "Two Blows to the Head" distinguish themselves from the sequence of images because they manifestly tell a story with a specific plot and achieve a visual unity through the recurrence of a repeated male hero and in each case a specific photographic grayscale—lighter in one case, darker in the other. But running counter to this specificity there is firstly the relatively small number of images for each film story (11 in the first case, 10 in the second), representing in total less than 20% of the total album<sup>2</sup>. But in the longer sequence formed by 1 and 3 into which the two film narratives are inserted, there are already other film images, as well as images of film stars; there are also sports stars, advertising images, and electoral campaigns; there are portraits of great men and great writers; scenes from the bible and heroic paintings such as *Washington Crossing the Delaware*; and news images of a dramatic nature. In other words, there is not on one side a set of stills from movie fictions and on the other side images of the real, documentary evidence of history; there is, rather, an overall sequence of images where the fictional is as present as the real, where the fabulous and the dramatic already have a firm holding. So although we can indeed identify *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, the album is in total a patchwork of images of various types, with a strong bias throughout towards fable, a visual patchwork characterized by an overall tonal unity of black and white.

- 9 Reading the album as a unit, however, is one option; partial engagement is another. Maybe one or more of the images in particular will stand out and touch the reader in the way to which Roland Barthes has forever given the dignified name of 'punctum'. Indeed this particular, singular reading which detaches one image from the album is probably one of the album's inevitable effects; one of these images may capture the viewer and give him or her a door that opens on to the writer's past, but also onto his own past; the door may lead from the reader's past to that of the writer, the image thus functioning as an objective correlative of a feeling. Readers may be moved for example by the photograph of two American soldiers in Korea, one body wrapped in another, three hands visible, the middle one holding a head in a gesture of infinite consolation (Image 28). Or maybe it will be by the movement of hands and gazes between little<sup>3</sup> George Washington and his giant-like father (Image 35). Do we stop at their decorous shoes? And are we moved to see a link between this filial scene and that between Abraham and Isaac (Image 62) where the knife is in a place symmetrically opposite to the axe we had noticed in the bottom right of the former image? But then, we wonder, do founding fathers collude, and occupy a proximate space in the "internal geography of ... boyhood" (45)?
- 10 Among the other candidates for emotional investment the reader may elect the fierce scene between Cain and his brother (Image 60); the "Brobdingnagian" (124) cat attacking the small man (Image 74 or 75); the blood on the shirt of the Freedom Riders (80), brothers despite their skin color. There are also the flaming shacks in front of Capitol Hill (83) and the firemen and the smoke in front of Hartley's of Newark (95), the double page image of an empty roller coaster at Coney Island (102), and the empty tables at Ratner's (107). Naming these images thus in succession brings out a proximity we do not necessarily register although we have suspected some cohesion since the opening images and their tale, their Genesis, of planets and animals. If engagement with one image has brought us back once again to the rest of the album, what then is the story relayed by the group of items in the album? A story of violence and of family;

a story of growing up (and of its opposite); a story of heroism; and a story of solitude. But, when we conceptualize it in these terms, the story loses its force, it has become too general. Its force is perhaps to work in a random diffuse way, as an atmosphere to the reading. The visual story is a tonal atmosphere or an envelope to the verbal texts; the whole becomes a version of the "secret letters" (23) addressed from the interior, addressed like a diary to the "future self" (179).

## 2. Interiority and Disappearance

- 11 At the center of the book that sets out to explore "how you lived inside yourself as a small boy" (4) is the question of interiority and exteriority. At age 10, the boy is still represented as "walled off from the world" (105); adolescence is a time "when the rift between one's inner self and the self one presents to the world is never wider" (90); this interiority is heightened by a family situation that set his sister "spinning off into madness", and where his parents did not communicate: "to be a part of that disaster drove you inward, turning you into a man who has spent the better part of his life sitting alone in a room" (48). The inwardness of childhood has been prolonged into the life of the adult writer.
- 12 The book registers the encounter of the inner world of childhood with the bigger outside world in terms of a number of shocks. First there is the "jolt" (14) produced by *War of the Worlds*, then there are the "blows to the head" administered by the films to which section two is devoted. Before the telling of the second film we read "the film blasted in on you and altered the composition of your inner world" (135) and following the retelling of the first "the world has changed its shape within you" (131). So there is not merely shock and opposition, there is integration: the outside world is taken in. Images play an important role in this formative process of internalization as the stories of these three movies attest. Images will also play a role in the attempt to go back and retrieve that interior world in order to represent it. It is this double role, this role perhaps as double agent, that we will proceed to examine. However we must first unfold a major theme linked to the question of interiority—that of hiding, of invisibility, or of disappearance.
- 13 The theme of disappearance brings many threads under one topic. There is the question of Jewish identity both in terms of the history of World War 2 and of the invisibility of Jews in American life where "disappearance" meant absorption into Christian society (68), provoking after the war in the generation of Auster's parents the fear that "Judaism in America would fade away to nothing" (74). There is the generic fear of death expressed with regard to the shrinking man ("no longer visible", 173), to the fugitive Carey ("no longer visible", 130) and even more violently with regard to the earthlings under attack from Martians: "Obliterated, dematerialized, reduced to a shadow on the ground, and then the shadow would vanish as well, as if that person had never been there, had never been alive" (15). There is also a cultural trope from the late nineteenth century that the boy growing up in mid-twentieth century America takes on board, integrating it into his games and his imagination, the theme of the Vanishing American. Indeed, as the boy becomes politically aware and when he has begun to "exclude" (72) himself (somewhat) from the American story because of his Jewish identity, he casts himself in the role of this among other outcasts. This casting operation might mean that, with the requisite distortion and displacement, *Shrinking*



*Man* may be taken here as a reconfiguration of the disappearance of Native Americans, just as *Fugitive* evokes the enchainment of African Americans and, perhaps, *War of the Worlds* the Holocaust.

- 14 The author provides an account of an absence to himself that first occurs in front of *War of the Worlds*: “No longer inside your own body in the way one disappears from oneself in the grip of a dream” (14). Such curious absences occur elsewhere than at a movie theatre, although they are related to a sense of confusion between reality and representation (“not sure if the world in front of you was real or a figment of someone else’s imagination” 44). He calls these mental fugues “daze” where he feels like “a phantom without weight or substance, an uninhabited shell of flesh and bone, a nonperson” (45). This tendency to “vanish from your own consciousness” still comes back to the author for a number of seconds: “As if you were slipping into another dimension, a new configuration of time and space, looking at your own life with blank indifferent eyes—or else rehearsing your death, learning what happens to you when you disappear” (45). We might therefore posit that these spells have something to do with the journey of writing, and particularly to its address to the future self, the self beyond death. Thus we may be led to think that this ‘non-personal’ album from which the author is visually absent—and where the “indifferent” quality of the images may stand for or infer a viewer with “blank indifferent eyes”—may thus be a rehearsal for his own ultimate disappearance.

### 3. Substitution

#### 3.1

- 15 Disappearance is of course the result of forgetting with the passage of time (unless one has access to a time machine or capsule). “Time Capsule,” the third section of Auster’s volume begins with a meditation on the loss of traces, with multiple occurrences of the verb “disappear”. Before performing the prestidigitation of the recovered letters as diary, the author concludes: “nearly every trace of your early existence was wiped out” (178). He observes that there are very few images of his childhood: “No drawings... no class pictures from grade school, no report cards, no summer camp pictures, no home movies, no team pictures... For a person born in the mid-twentieth century ... your life is the least documented of anyone you have ever known” (177).<sup>4</sup> This absence of images may explain why he decided, in the first steps towards creating an album, to add film stills to the narratives through which access is gained to feelings from childhood. For indeed one of the esthetic effects of the pictures from, and the written version of, *Shrinking Man* is to report on a childhood fear of not growing up, of literally and metaphorically growing down, a fear that is referred to explicitly at one point (“you sometimes wondered if you would ever grow up,” 80) but made more palpable through the indirect expression of its terror, by means of a movie which simultaneously expresses the fearful knowledge that growing up leads inevitably to death. Likewise, *The Fugitive* can speak to the child’s mind of both a fear of imprisonment (of being walled up in his own self) and a fear of tragic destiny: Allen’s cruel fate is equated with that of Auster’s friend—the successive trials that form the scenario are like being “struck by lightning” (145), a literal event which gave the narrator his “first lesson in the alchemy of chance [...] [a] “first introduction to the inhuman forces that can turn life into death in a single instant” (134). Interestingly, these film images are more



"interior" than any of the others in the album in so far as they were actually interiorized during the author's childhood. They spoke to him then; they speak of him now. In the absence of images that spoke to him at the time, or of images from that time that might now speak directly of him, the other images from the album, those selected at the time of writing, are asked to speak of him, but indirectly. From this absence, from this loss, there is perhaps, however, something to be gained. The gambit may be that these impersonal images, these generic all-purpose stand-ins, because of their medium or median quality will better serve to mediate with the viewer, enabling the latter to imagine the story's particulars while finding with respect to a general one a story close to his own. This mediation could be analogized in terms of the mathematical operation of translation, where the ready-made image serves as the axis of rotation.

- 16 The implication of this use of found images, of *commons* rather than particulars, could be that there is in a sense nothing particular about Auster's childhood, and nothing rare about his life. Early in the book the author says the motivation for writing is: "Not because you find yourself a rare or exceptional object of study, but precisely because you don't, because you think of yourself as anyone, as everyone" (4). This theme of the author as everyman, of the "you" as everyone, of the modest commonality of human experience is even given a whimsical twist when the author confides (11) that he "thought the words human being were pronounced *human bean*", with humanity represented by "a small common vegetable." Of course the story is more complex, and the young boy will construct himself through images of greatness and glory; his adult writing work (like the movies that he remodels) will explore the presence of the extraordinary within the ordinary (126). The result of using these "small, common" images in the album, however, is to make the reader identify with what is common to all childhoods, where the deities appear in a common map of the sky. The report functions then with common memories such as those that Americans weave into their lives around founding fathers Benjamin Franklin (mentioned but not pictured) and George Washington whose mention in the text ("As if every boy at some point were destined to cut down a tree" 56), is accompanied by not one but three pictures in the album.
- 17 A further deduction might be that images that could be described as of 'medium' or even 'mediocre' quality foreground the process of *mediation* making the reader constantly aware, as much as the writer is aware, that (s)he is in-between and that the journal is a journey from the outside to the inside. Moreover, if such pictures, because of their impersonality, keep the reader outside, it is perhaps to imply that the interior cannot really be fully approached; and if the album generates (as registered during our initial speculations) feelings of disappointment or of lack of fulfillment, and perhaps of melancholy, this complex of feelings is appropriate.

### 3.2

- 18 Images 32 and 34 to be found on the same double page (both on the bottom right) tell stories of substitution. The first is of Whitey Ford a Yankee pitcher that the young boy was given the opportunity to meet through the intermediary of his friend Whoops. The young boy is hoping for the transmission of some "forbidden knowledge" (41) about baseball ("hidden secrets about the art of pitching" 40-41), but is left with a

disorienting impression of having shaken hands not with the real Whitey but with a substitute or “facsimile” (42). In the second story it is the boy himself who is suspected of not telling the truth, of inventing “a likely story” (50); in this case, the substitution is that of a rattle that he has created by one far inferior; he is disappointed by this “substitute rattle” (50), ashamed to be associated with it and angry at being accused of telling lies.

- 19 At issue here is the question of truth and of the range of feelings that are produced when one thing is replaced by another. There is anger, disappointment, discomfort with ambiguity, but there is also the possibility of invention, the quality of ornamentation, and the art of deception (the art of pitching a story, we might say). How apt then— both negatively and positively— is the phrase “a likely story” when addressed to the young Paul Auster. Auster’s stories (and the compulsion for storytelling that permeates works such as the film *Smoke*) are frequently unlikely and yet their storytelling is almost always compelling; witness how the beginning of *4321* recycles the most hackneyed of stories from Ellis Island (of how a European speaking only Yiddish becomes Mr. Ferguson) and still manages to make it riveting. We want to believe it or at least to hear it told.
- 20 The question of substitution or of replacement is so elaborately enfolded in *Report from the Interior* that it might even be advanced that it is to be heard in the double “or” of the title (*Report, Interior*), with its discreet internal rhyme and final lingering signifier which rings out the idea of an alternative. The images in the album stand in as *surrogates* for missing or non-existent personal images. Such substitution is akin to the creation of a verbal construct for one’s forgotten experience, where the work of memory is performed as well by imagination; although he insists on truth, this recreation through memory is inherent to Auster’s autobiographical project. Yet, the quotient of invention is even greater in the invention of a childhood album, an album that did not exist.

### 3.3

- 21 How then do the verbal and the visual *replay*, *stand for* or *stand in for* each other? The completed book stands, in the end, for a non-existent album. In the blurb, we read that the “album of pictures” “recapitulates” the story of the author’s boyhood. Inevitably then, this shorter version of the text does not contain all the text (and in particular a great number of the images the latter creates). The process is of course reversed for section two—and for the two pages of section one devoted to *The War of the Worlds*—where the texts tell the story of the films, rather than the reverse, although the images in the album again end up “recapitulating” the text. Within the album, the pictures serve as supports for repeating a small part of the text in captions and, momentarily, the verbal and the visual are perhaps at a par, standing in for each other, in a reversible way. More generally, both image and text, of course, stand for memory; each is a representation. And we might observe moreover that the gap between the visual and the verbal points to the gap between representation and reality. The endless relationship of these two orders is perhaps why we can say that *Report from the Interior* also stands for other books by Paul Auster that have reworked similar mnemonic traces.

## 4. Equations and Equivalents (Conclusion)

### 4.1

- 22 Our initial pragmatic speculations were driven by the desire to make sense of the book as a whole, and by the conviction that "Album" is called to operate not as a section on its own but with regard to that whole. In this reading, the word *operate* is under some pressure, and the conviction at work seeks for something spectacular; it is a belief that section four when performed with the other three sections creates something akin to a silent opera; its premise is that there is meaning to be brought out, a secret to be decoded. In other words, our starting point has been that the entire report, the whole book, is encoded in an interaction between the visual and the verbal; the report of the title has not been totally exteriorized; or to put it better: the book retains some of the opacity of the "internal geography of ... boyhood" (45); it conceals as well as displays; it holds "up the shards to the light" (5) while drawing attention to the shadows.
- 23 It is not unlikely that the conviction behind this effort was based on a false assumption; it is indeed possible that the album is only partially successful, or to put it in the terms that we have been using: inadequately *operational*. Perhaps the album is misleading and deliberately disappointing in a way that, for a visual arts specialist, recalls, for instance, a lot of video art of the 1990s. Perhaps, in other words, it just doesn't work—or doesn't really work. Or maybe it was a half-hearted idea that nonetheless was followed by a full-bodied effort (Auster tells of the expense and time required to compose the album<sup>3</sup>). Maybe it is like the video material (footage from a cash distributor) that Sophie Calle wanted to use for a piece which she finally made about the impossibility of making that very piece, the failure folded inside, the unfolding of the work involving its exposure instead of its enshrinement (*Cash Machine*, 1991). Maybe Auster has found here, or rather placed here at the end of his book by means of found material, a zone of resistance to his writing project, an unredeemed collection of images, a collection of shards that speak by default, a set of items, that, when held to the light, speak of their lack of redemption. In this scenario, we might imagine the author saying to himself, as in the Beckettian imperatives he uses on page 5: "Put into the work a model of its possible failure. Display that failure as the Purloined Letter is displayed in Poe".

### 4.2

- 24 Knowing Auster's fondness for, and experience in, film and his early desire (formulated in section three of *Report*) to work in the cinema, perhaps we might take "Album" for the whimsical draft of a storyboard for a film version of the book. Along the same lines, but more pragmatic, the images might be construed to constitute a 'Powerpoint' version of the book, providing a file that would serve as the structure for a reading performance of the work, a set of visual pegs on which to hang the words as they are read aloud by the author or by an actor. Although this is a somewhat fantastical idea, novels today have indeed become material that is remediated by public staging.
- 25 Is "Album", we might ask more seriously, the execution of a *conceit*, or of what in visual art is called a *conceit*? One contemporary practice that has already come to mind is that of French artist Sophie Calle, a convocation justified, it would seem, by the fact that Calle was the model for the character Maria in Auster's *Leviathan* and that Calle

commissioned constraints from Auster for her exhibition *Double-Game* (Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, 2001). In her work, the French visual artist has replaced images with verbal descriptions of them (*Last Seen*, 1991), has had her own movements shadowed by a detective (*The Shadow*, 1981), and has intimate material from her own life relayed by other voices (*Take Care of Yourself*, 2007). She has made vicariousness (experience by proxy) the territory of her art and her work is often founded on a practice of replacement. As Auster's compulsive narratives have often had the driven but arbitrary quality of the constraints that visual artists impose on their works, it might not be impossible to imagine that while composing "Album" for *Report from the Interior*, he has indeed momentarily crossed over into the territory of conceptual artists like Calle.

- 26 Another visual work which comes to mind is, of course, Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules*, hundreds of cardboard boxes containing heterogeneous traces from the artist's everyday existence archived by Warhol during the last 13 years of his life. If there is a link here with Auster's "Album," it is in the unredeemed nature of the assembled collection and the problematic question of how to present them to the public. How indeed does one exhibit Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules*? Do you just let them tell a story, *the* story? Yet, how much will they tell? An invite to a gallery show, a photograph of Grace Jones, an ashtray from a downtown restaurant, a laundry bill, the price tag of a bargain antique.... Warhol himself is the story, of course, and the myth of Warhol is the frame within which the objects take on and dispel an aura, or take on and take off their aura in an endless striptease. At the Musée d'Art Contemporain (MAC) in Marseille (2014-15), the curator Thierry Ollat had the excellent idea of exhibiting eight of Warhol's capsules to the soundtrack of *Songs for 'Drella'*, the album dedicated to Warhol by John Cale and Lou Reed (1989). The visual material was to be experienced in regard to that music, thus giving temporal form to what is intrinsically a forced meditation on the passage of time.
- 27 What Auster's "Album" needs then, perhaps, is a soundtrack, what it calls for is a tune, or a voice. This primacy of voice over image is indeed attested with regard to *The Incredible Shrinking Man*: (Carey's) "voice gives the action its meaning and in the end those words have an even greater and more lasting effect on you than the black and white images flickering before your eyes" (128). Failing the unlikely announcement of a Powerpoint Performance by Paul Auster (in Arles? At the Sorbonne? At the Brooklyn Museum of Art?), readers are left to do their best to replay an interior album on which is recorded (reported) the fugue, the spinning voyage, the home run of Auster's compulsively "uninterrupted narrative" (13). Here is what it sounds like at its best in a "single run-on sentence" (like that of Kafka which impressed the young writer, 62) and tellingly the author has not pictured or punctured this instance with a picture:

The baseball field was in Peter's backyard, not a regulation field, of course, but an open area of worn-out grass and dirt that felt abundant to you at the time, or at least sufficient for games played by nine-year-olds, with stones for bases and a triangle etched into the bare ground for home plate, and on a typical morning there would be eight or ten of you in that yard with your gloves and bats and balls, dividing up into two teams, with the members of each team taking turns fielding various positions because everyone wanted a chance to pitch at least one inning per game, and there were many games, a double-header every day, sometimes even triple-headers, and you all took the games seriously, playing hard, with everybody keeping track of the number of home runs he hit (a fly ball into the bushes beyond left field), and so passed the most engaging hours of that summer, playing on a

makeshift field in your friend's backyard, swatting fifty home runs, a hundred home runs, five hundred home runs into the bushes. (83-84)

- 28 We began by comparing *Report from the Interior* to a game representing the self as other; a game to be taken seriously, as seriously as baseball by an ardent nine-year-old. It is a "doubleheader", as it were, that became a "tripleheader" (84) and then, unthinkably, a quadrupleheader. It is a game that we have also compared to the performance of a number of arts—to the fine arts, indeed, but also to theatre or film and, now, to finish, after the author himself, to music. Auster is writing here about *Winter Journal*, but the metaphor may well apply to its successor: "What it is is a literary work, composed of autobiographical fragments, but trying to attain, I hope, the effect of music [...] things are intersecting in the book in much the way a piece of music works" (Cochoy and Vallas).

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## NOTES

1. The numbers refer to the pages of the Picador edition of *Report from the Interior* and where they refer instead to the numbered images from the album, this is clearly specified.
2. Section 1 commands 67 of the 107 images, more than 60% and section 3 less than 20%. The latter (less visible perhaps) forms a chronological sequence with section 1.
3. In his dress and posture, a literal incarnation of the term "little man" (5).
4. There is of course the cover photograph "Paul Auster at age 6 by Queenie Auster (1953)". If it were in the album itself, we could easily imagine it with the caption "Who were you, little man?" (p. 5).
5. "It took me a long time to find the pictures. I worked on the photos for months. It took longer to find them than to write the section about the films. I was told about a photo researcher, a woman whose sole job in the world is to do this kind of work. She helped me, I had to pay for the

permissions, it was a very complicated business. And we had to get everything in high definition, otherwise the photos wouldn't have been printable" (Cochoy and Vallas).

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## ABSTRACTS

The article is devoted to the final section of Paul Auster's 2013 *Report from the Interior*. We first attempt to imagine the various ways readers integrate the "Album" of images into their experience of the book. Then we go on to examine the role of the visual images in the journey of memory between interior and exterior, and the way these visual images relate to the questions of visibility and disappearance that animate the book. How do such non-personal, medium-quality images mediate memory? The article seeks, finally, to account by analogy for the elaboration and the esthetic effects of this trans-disciplinary work.

L'article est consacré à « Album », la section finale du dernier volume autobiographique de Paul Auster, *Report from the Interior* (2013). Il tente d'imaginer les différentes manières dont cet album d'images visuelles intervient dans la lecture du livre. Il examine le rôle de ces images dans le voyage de la mémoire entre intérieur et extérieur ainsi que leur rapport aux thèmes de la visibilité et de la disparition qui sont centraux au texte. De quelle manière la mémoire est-elle relayée par des images qui ne sont pas des images personnelles et qui sont, de plus, de qualité moyenne ? Quelles analogies avec d'autres pratiques peuvent éclairer cette construction transdisciplinaire à laquelle se livre Auster ?

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** disparition, substitution, commun, intériorité, art conceptuel

**Keywords:** disappearance, surrogate, everyman, interiority, conceptual art

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