

A Study of the Intricate Interplay of Aesthetic Illusions in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on Paul Auster's iconic novel *City of Glass* (1985), which is a component of his well-known *The New York Trilogy* (1987), and the idea of aesthetic illusions as a thematic suspense. The approach is based on the notion of aesthetic illusion, which shows the way illusory outlines are perceived. The purpose of the study is to clarify how Auster skillfully employs the Kanizsa Triangle to weave the theme of aesthetic illusions, resulting in a compelling sense of tension and ontological ambiguity that permeates the stories.

Keywords: Aesthetic Illusion, Kanizsa Triangle, Thematic Suspense, Ontological Ambiguity.

Introduction

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) is a novel of his famed *The New York Trilogy* (1987), which has long been praised for its examination of the nature of reality, identity, and the role of

the writer. At the heart of these stories is the reoccurring topic of aesthetic illusions, which acts as an effective tool for creating a feeling of thematic suspense and ontological uncertainty. The topic of aesthetic illusions in Auster's works may be explored more closely using the Kanizsa Triangle, which investigates the perceptual phenomena of illusory outlines (Cupchik 2001). This theory holds that the human mind has an extraordinary ability to recognize patterns and forms even in the lack of unambiguous visual clues, resulting in the production of illusory outlines.

Objectives and Theory

The objectives of this article will look at how Auster uses the idea of aesthetic illusions to create a feeling of thematic suspense and ontological uncertainty in *City of Glass*. The analysis will look at how the author uses the Kanizsa Triangle-like phenomenon to challenge the reader's view of reality, as well as how Aesthetic Illusion reflects the nature of identity and the creative endeavor.

Key Notions

The protagonist, Quinn, is a detective with a secret: he no longer exists for anyone but himself and no longer wishes to be dead. His private-eye narrator, Max Work, has solved numerous crimes and becomes close to Quinn. Quinn's interest in his stories is not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories. He pretends to be Work while writing his books.

In this text, Daniel Quinn, a renowned psychologist, is tasked with studying the geography of Nantucket to prevent Virginia Stillman from escaping. He encounters a mysterious man named Stillman, who seems bald and unsure of his authenticity. Quinn calls Virginia Stillman, who gives him a full report, and heads home to 107th Street. He records every detail about Stillman, including gestures, objects, and timetables, to keep his eyes fixed on him. He continues following Stillman for nine days, with brief conversations with Virginia Stillman. The text explores themes of identity, guilt, and the consequences of pursuing one's own desires. The object of understanding Stillman is to anticipate his next actions, but Quinn has failed in this endeavor. Quinn, disillusioned by Stillman's life, sketches a map of the area he had wandered in and realizes that he has created maps that resemble letters. In a meeting with Stillman in Riverside Park, Quinn reveals that the world is inherently broken, and people have lost their sense of purpose and language. Quinn believes that the burning bush is the key to understanding the world (Auster, 1-70).

In this text, Quinn and Stillman discuss their past experiences and the events that led to their current situation. Quinn, a father, recalls a time when a waitress presented herself as another Henry Dark, but Stillman did not recognize him. He took the name Paul Auster and thought about him as a possible detective. Quinn hoped that Auster would help with the case and make a clean sheet of it. Quinn realized he was no longer following Stillman. He found Auster's apartment on the eleventh floor and shared his experiences with Stillman, including his phone calls, acceptance of the case, and his relationship with Stillman. As Quinn's life becomes less detailed, he remains mostly in the alley, observing the Stillman's activities. He wonders why he took Auster's word for Stillman's death and what would have happened if he had followed the second Stillman instead of the first. As darkness grows, Quinn's life becomes less meaningful, and he loses interest in him. Auster, who heard him out, explains his situation to the protagonist, who becomes angry at Auster's indifference towards Quinn (Auster, 71-148).

Intertextual Context: Aesthetic Illusion in *City of Glass*

Auster's works explore aesthetic illusions as part of a larger intertextual framework that explores perception, reality and representation, and the reader's role in meaning production. His narrative methods blur the lines between author, character, and narrator, adding ontological ambiguity. The Kanizsa triangle illusion, a fascinating occurrence, is significant because it illuminates the intricacies of reality and human perception. (Kurraz 2023). The brain's ability to create a geometric design from bits and pieces emphasizes the interpretative and active nature of visual processing. This illusion suggests that our senses are formed by the brain's natural tendency to organize and make sense of sensory information, challenging the idea that our experience of the world is a direct and unmediated depiction of objective reality. (Ito.et.al. 2023; Eagleman 2001). This fascinating occurrence that has captured the interest of both philosophers and visual scientists is the Kanizsa triangle illusion.

This optical illusion happens when there are no obvious lines or physical limits delineating the edges of a triangle, yet the human visual system nevertheless interprets the presence of a triangle. The observer's mental image of a complete triangle form is vividly created when their brain fills in the blanks. (Bauer 2010)

The relationship between the Kanizsa triangle illusion and Auster's metafictional works goes beyond thematic similarities. Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli's graphic novel

adaptation of *City of Glass* uses a variety of visual techniques that echo the principles underlying the Kanizsa triangle illusion, such as fragmented panels, blurred panel boundaries, and the incorporation of visual ambiguities. These formal methods help to disturb the reader's expectations while also drawing attention to the narrative's created structure, similar to how the Kanizsa triangle illusion disrupts our impression of the coherence of visual reality. The Kanizsa triangle illusion, like Auster's literary works, explores the elusive and fragmented nature of reality, challenging the reader to embark on a profound and unsettling journey of self-reflection and re-evaluation of their assumptions about the nature of existence. This idea is strongly mirrored throughout Paul Auster's works, notably his novel *City of Glass*. In *City of Glass* the protagonist, Daniel Quinn, gets caught up in a web of deceit and self-discovery, resulting in a fragmentation of his identity. (Atkinson 2010)

In Auster's writings, identity is a fundamental issue that questions the concept of an autonomous, pre-existing person. Rather, as they move through the transitional zones between the real and the unreal, the characters struggle with their changing, fleeting identities. The search for meaning in a sometimes-ridiculous world is another theme in Auster's writing. For example, the *City of Glass* graphic novel adaption uses metafictional techniques to challenge the reader's understanding of the story's fiction, undercutting the idea of a consistent, logical narrative voice. The tension between the real and the fantastical, the existence and lack of absolute truth, and the characters' struggles with self-identity are all factors in the overall aesthetic illusion found in Auster's writing. The narrative exploration delves further into these ideas and methodologies, and the inner tensions of the characters reflect the contemporary person's connection with the universe. The story is brought back into the realm of the bizarre by the blending of the magical and the real, rather than moving away from it (Thakur and Khurana 2020). These pieces push the reader to consider the fundamental nature of reality and how meaning is created in a world that is becoming more complicated and fractured.

In Paul Auster's masterwork *City of Glass*, the idea of the Kanizsa Triangle is a potent device that captures the way parody, pastiche, and collage interact with the story. The fractured and elusive aspect of the protagonist's world is mirrored by the Kanizsa Triangle, a famous optical illusion in which the spectator perceives a triangle shape despite the absence of entire lines. The story of *City of Glass* consistently defies reader expectations and raises issues

regarding authorship, identity, and the lines separating fact from fiction, much as the Kanizsa Triangle challenges viewers' perceptions and compels them to make sense of incomplete information. Daniel Quinn, the main character, gets pulled into a convoluted inquiry that progressively erodes his sense of self and makes it harder to distinguish between himself and the elusive person he is supposed to uncover. The way Auster manipulates and subverts detective genre standards in *City of Glass*. The book undermines the reader's presumptions about the protagonist's function and the investigation's goal, demonstrating the parody components in the work.

Paul Auster's books frequently employ a subtle and widespread type of parody, using great philosophers, historical personalities, and literary works to undermine and ridicule the Enlightenment concepts of human nature, social contracts, and national myths that they represent. For example, Auster may mock Peter Martyr, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's views by portraying individuals with fractured, unclear identities that contradict Rousseau's ideas about a pure, fundamental human nature. Auster's writings, which draw on a plethora of literary and philosophical references, call into question the authority and supposed consistency of these canonical sources, putting light on the fragility and inconsistencies that underpin the Enlightenment concepts they represent. (Douthwaite 2016) Similarly, Auster's representations of American historical heroes such as George Washington may be seen as a satirical critique of the heroic, nationalistic image that has grown around these early leaders. In this approach, Auster's writings question the stability and coherence of the social and political ideas that have defined Western thought and society. Auster's novels engage in a self-reflexive process by reflecting on the temperament of writing (Cock 2005). Auster's satirical interpretation of such classic texts extends to his investigations into communication, language, and solitude. The narrative of Egyptian Pharaoh Psamtik's quest to discover the "first" language, as told by Herodotus, may be parodied in Auster's own research into the limits and failings of human expression and connection. Auster's books encourage readers to question the roots of their political, social, and epistemological beliefs via a variety of parodies. (Auster, 46-49)

The Mayflower narrative, which alludes to the American foundation myths in Auster's writings, may be viewed as pastiche, especially if Auster uses it as a stylistic homage or historical allusion rather than with open criticism. Auster uses Miltonic themes of fall and

redemption in his references to *Paradise Lost* by Milton, which might be read as a pastiche that speaks to the problems of his own characters. Cervantes's investigation of truth and fiction in *Don Quixote* would serve as a pastiche in Auster's writings, honoring Quixote's journey while placing it in a postmodern setting. Thomas More's philosophical investigation of an ideal society is reinterpreted inside Auster's own fictional world rather than explicitly attacked; its usage by Auster may be seen as pastiche. (Auster, 55–113)

The work itself might be viewed as a type of “collage” a multi-layered, disjointed portrayal of the human experience where the lines between author and character, fact and fiction, are always blurring. This interpretation expands on the Kanizsa Triangle metaphor. Like the observer of the optical illusion, Auster's *City of Glass* encourages the reader to actively participate in the process of meaning-making by adopting the Kanizsa Triangle as a guiding principle. Auster may juxtapose religious myths with secular storylines by using biblical analogies, creation and fall stories such as that found in Genesis in the Old Testament, in a collage-style approach. A literary collage, in which many philosophical, historical, and religious concepts coexist and interact, might be created by incorporating Montaigne's defense of Christian philosophy into a contemporary setting. Auster often uses the myth of Babel, which fits with the idea of collage since it symbolizes the disintegration of language and communication and is consistent with his larger themes of existential perplexity and misunderstanding are object-oriented Aesthetic interpretations (Eric, 2020). Prometheus and Nimrod are mythological characters. Auster uses a collage approach to weave together diverse tales to enhance his narrative tapestry by making references to these legendary figures (Auster, 46-56).

The true story of Victor of Aveyron, which is frequently brought up in debates about nature vs. nurture, fits within Auster's narrative collage since it combines literary, philosophical, and historical discourses. Transitional Components in Auster's works, where parody, pastiche, and collage frequently coincide the Tower of Babel, some components may blur the lines between categories based on the context. Depending on how Auster employs it in particular situations or themes, it might be classified as a symbol or a narrative device and fall under one of the three categories. These methods are commonly used in Auster's intricate, intertextual style, which reflects his postmodern approach to storytelling.

An Aesthetic Illusion to portray character centered illusion, “City of Glass”

The Kanizsa triangle in Paul Auster's 1985 novel *City of Glass* plays into character-centered issues with their names to create a picture that embodies the idea of beautiful illusion. In *Ghosts* (1986), Blue, the main character, gets caught up in a surveillance mission that causes him to lose his sense of reality and becomes the embodiment of a convoluted psychological delusion. Similar to this, we may utilize the Kanizsa triangle to illustrate the hazy boundaries between reality and illusion in *City of Glass*, emphasizing the characters' changing identities as well as the themes of self-fragmentation and bewilderment. The Kanizsa triangle in the middle represents the gaps in the main character Daniel Quinn's knowledge of both himself and the case he's looking into. Fragmented silhouettes of Quinn, Peter Stillman, and Paul Auster, the character, melt into each other around the triangle, emphasizing their overlapping and fluid identities and freedom. This exemplifies Quinn's loss of identity as he adopts new identities. The background might show Quinn meandering around the streets of New York, while he attempts to piece together the riddle, or it could show a maze of abstract city streets or sharp, angular patterns. The general atmosphere should convey a sense of helplessness, bewilderment, and imprisonment, reflecting the novel's examination of identity and the detective's battle with reality.

City of Glass, is a graphic novel adaptation that employs metafictional strategies to challenge the reader's perception of the narrative. The novel's interplay of parody, pastiche, and collage is echoed in the visual adaptation, which uses the graphic novel medium to capture the fragmented and self-reflexive nature of Auster's work. The Kanizsa Triangle motif, a metaphor for the novel's thematic concerns, is also highlighted. The Kafkaesque elements in the novels contribute to the unsettling atmosphere, reinforcing the Kanizsa Triangle as a symbol of instability and fragmentation. Auster's subversive use of literary devices challenges the reader's perception of narrative voice and ontological stability, creating a fragmented and self-referential text. The novel's reliance on parody and pastiche is evident in its treatment of the detective fiction genre. (Jameson 2001)

Conclusion

This article uses a careful reading of *City of Glass* to show how Auster uses a thematic technique to create a deep feeling of tension and ambiguity through the skillful use of aesthetic illusions that are based on the Kanizsa Triangle. Auster asks us to consider the nature of identity,

the creative process, and the underlying doubts that underpin our comprehension of the universe by questioning the reader's perspective of reality. In conclusion, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* explores the postmodern themes of parody, pastiche, and collage in a way that makes the Kanizsa Triangle a powerful metaphor. The work mirrors the fragmented and elusive nature of the protagonist's trip by asking the reader to consider the nature of borders between fiction and reality through the lens of this optical illusion.

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