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Disorienting Visualisations: Adapting Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

Matt Kimmich

The universe of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, a metafictional detective story, is primarily textual in nature; nevertheless, this novel was chosen to be translated into comic book form by David Mazzucchelli and Paul Karasik. In his introduction to the graphic novel, Art Spiegelman writes: "*City of Glass* is a surprisingly nonvisual work at its core, a complex web of words and abstract ideas in playfully shifting narrative styles." Translating a verbal narrative into a visual narrative is always a challenging task, and too often visual adaptations – whether films or comic books – end up as little more than simplified retellings of plots. Critics agreed, however, that Mazzucchelli and Karasik succeeded in crafting a translation that captures the crystalline quality of Auster's narrative, yet also adds new resonances to a story concerned with the limits of language in representing adequately an individual's reality and identity. This paper examines the visual techniques used to translate and elaborate on Auster's textual universe.

> When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less. The question is, said Alice, whether you *can* make words mean so many different things. The question is, said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be master – that's all. (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)[1]

The medium that is variously referred to as the "comic," "comic book," "cartoon" or "graphic novel" has come a long way from its various points of origin. Comics have been regarded for much of their existence as "crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare" (3) in the words of comic artist, theorist and apologist Scott McCloud. They may still bear this stigma in some circles, yet the medium's best and

[1] Quoted in Auster 98.

most interesting proponents and their works are worthwhile objects of study and analysis, not only for the academic field of cultural studies but indeed for literary critics. As Art Spiegelman writes in his introduction to the comic adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, the work I will be discussing in this paper, "[c]omics may no longer be the 'real' name for a narrative medium that intimately intertwines words and pictures but isn't necessarily comic in tone" (Karasik and Mazzucchelli i). It has been fifteen years since Spiegelman's *Maus*, a comicbook fable of the Holocaust, won the Pulitzer Prize; since then writers and artists working in the medium have been the subject of studies, for instance Will Eisner, the grand old man of comics; Neil Gaiman, author of the metafictional ten-volume work *Sandman*; or Alan Moore, Northern English wild man, some of whose rich and subversive works recall those of a Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo in their postmodernist complexity.

Comics are of special interest to this collection, I would argue, since they are inherently intermedial, usually combining words and graphics. In this, they share some similarities with film, as David Coughlan points out in his recent *Modern Fiction Studies* article on *City of Glass* (835), yet there are also noteworthy differences, making comics an intermediary form between the two media, literature and film, in some respects. There are comics that do without words, admittedly, but even they share other common qualities with written language, first and foremost in that they are spatially sequential – that is, as words are ordered sequentially to create sentences in literature, comics order visual representations (or abstractions) in sequence, and both comics and written language create this sequence in space rather than in time, as films do (see McCloud 7).[2] Both comics and literature are experienced by audiences who read, and who thus determine the reading pace, whereas film audiences have less or no control over a film's pace. Accordingly, *story time* and *discourse time* – "erzählte Zeit" and "Erzählzeit" – do not correspond, as the reader is in control of the reading process, whereas films control their audience's reception to a much larger extent.[3]

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[2] In addition, comics are conventionally oriented in the same way as written texts, e.g. left to right and top to bottom in Western comics, underlining their connection to written language.

[3] Even in the age of DVDs and remote controls, a film viewer still has limited control over these narrative aspects in comparison to readers.

More central to this paper, however, is the following: comics are less representational than film, or at the very least they represent in a more stylised, more abstracted way. Film (excluding animation) by and large embraces the illusion that what we see on the screen is real: either it is a photographic reproduction of reality, or these days it may be visual effects striving for a cinematic version of what Roland Barthes called the "reality effect" (Barthes 141-48). Film conventionally adheres to the representational fallacy; we are supposed to accept the image on the screen as a true-to-life reproduction of the "real thing" it represents. Comics, on the other hand, do not reproduce directly, they recreate what they represent, which already introduces a much larger element of stylisation and interpretation. Even if they endeavour to depict reality, or a version thereof, the means by which they do so is that of abstraction, as the most realistically drawn and shaded human figure, for instance, remains recognisably a drawing. We need to see this on a continuum: words as signifiers are at the greatest remove from what they stand for, showing the largest degree of abstraction – the word "face," for instance, does not resemble what it signifies. The photographic realism of film, coupled with its high-fidelity reproduction of sound, minimises the distance and abstraction. Comics fall in between these two, but they are arguably closer to the written word in some ways (cf. McCloud 48). Film *records* reality through an optical process, but the drawings of a comic book construct and revise whatever reality they depict. With words, as with comic book drawings, there is no corresponding real-world object that is reproduced directly. In material terms, comics and literature both create the worlds they depict from scratch, a fact that comics do not hide. The distinction between sign and referent is made overt.

It is this larger issue – the problematic relationship of signifier and signified – that is one of the central themes of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* as well as of its comic book adaptation. Since the comic medium foregrounds the issue more readily, Auster's novel may be better suited to being adapted as a comic than as a film, even though cinema as a medium has been adapting other media since its inception. In fact, several attempts at writing a film script of *City of Glass* have failed (cf. Karasik and Mazzucchelli ii). Nonetheless, even if the comic book lends itself more to the themes of Auster's work than the conventionally more realistic film, any adaptation – no matter how close its medium is to that of the original – is an interpretative process. Julie Sanders gives the following terms that are related to the practice of adaptation: "Version,

variation, interpretation [. . .], transformation [. . .], revision, rewriting, echo" (10). The term that Spiegelman gives and that I, personally, find most suited, at least to the text I will be discussing, is *translation*, which could be defined as the attempt to achieve an effect or range of effects equivalent to that of the original by means of a different language or sign system. An adequate "translation" from prose to comic form would most likely entail more than a mere illustration of the original text but would attempt to capture that text's tone and feel.[4]

In this respect, the task that Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli set themselves was one of considerable complexity, not to say perverseness. Spiegelman writes: "For all its playful references to pulp fiction, *City of Glass* is a surprisingly nonvisual work at its core, a complex web of words and abstract ideas" (Karasik and Mazzucchelli ii). Auster's novel is a highly self-aware and self-referential work, practically a textbook example of postmodern metafiction in many ways. It is a detective novel, a treatise on the crisis of the sign, the story of a man's social and mental breakdown, but more than any of these it is about a man's doomed attempt to find not just order, but meaning, in the world, and in the absence of order and meaning to bring these about by means of writing.

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* begins with a phone call. The ringing phone is that of Daniel Quinn, a solitary writer whose wife and son are dead; yet the call turns out to be for a "Paul Auster. Of the Auster Detective Agency" (8). Quinn, himself a writer of crime fiction of the hard-boiled sort, finds himself intrigued by this mystery and pretends to be this Paul Auster (unaware of the writer of the same name). He is hired by Virginia Stillman, the wife of Peter Stillman, whose childhood ordeal is one of the many embedded stories in *City of Glass*. As a child, Peter was locked up and kept in a dark room by his father for nine years. Stillman Senior (whose name is also Peter) did this for a lofty reason: his belief is that human language is corrupt, and that man has lost God's original language – a language where a word and what it stood for were one and the same. Auster writes:

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[4] Werner Wolf proposes the term *intermedial transposition*, that is "'transfer' of the content or of formal features from medium a) to medium b)" (Wolf 28); in our case, medium a) is the original novel, medium b) the comic book adaptation.

> Adam's one task in the Garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In that state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall this was no longer true. (52)

Stillman's purpose in keeping his son in isolation is that the child will learn to speak God's prelapsarian language rather than that of man, which he sees as having fallen, just as man has fallen from grace.

Quinn, still posing as the detective Auster, is tasked with protecting the young Stillman, as his father is to be released from prison, where he was incarcerated for the abusive treatment of his son. Two years earlier, Stillman Junior had received a letter from his imprisoned father, threatening him with a "reckoning," and as a consequence Virginia believes that the elder Stillman may be planning to kill his son. As Quinn awaits the newly released man at Grand Central Station, hoping to observe his every step in case he makes a move against his progeny, he finds himself in a dilemma: he sees two different men who fit the description he was given, and he has to decide which one to follow, which means losing sight of the doppelganger, knowing that his decision might be wrong and could endanger the young Peter Stillman's life. Quinn follows the more dishevelled-looking of the two men and records all the details of his days;[5] Stillman wanders the city, collecting discarded and broken objects on his journeys.

Three times Quinn approaches Stillman and introduces himself, using a different name every time; and every time the older man fails to recognise him. On the third day, Quinn assumes the name of Peter Stillman. The old man seems to believe that Quinn is his son, and the last words he bestows on him are: "A father must always teach his son the lessons he has learned. [. . .] I'll be able to die happily now, Peter. [. . .] But you mustn't forget anything" (103/104). On the fourth day, Stillman Sr. fails to show up, and Quinn, left without clues as to where Stillman might be or what his plans are, follows the sole clue he has. He first tracks down the only Paul Auster he can find – apparently the Auster whose novel we are reading, even though he is not its narrator –

[5] Stillman draws maps of the routes Quinn takes. These maps, read by Stillman as letters forming a message, are represented graphically in Auster's novel – an unwitting intermedial foreshadowing of the sustained visualisations of Karasik and Mazzucchelli's adaptation.

and then, unable to get hold of Virginia Stillman, he decides to observe their apartment in order to keep them safe from the elder Stillman. In his vigil over an indefinite length of time, Quinn eventually comes to lose himself. He ceases to be the Daniel Quinn he was before, the writer of detective novels, or any other of his alter egos, defining himself only through his task of observation – and then, after learning of Stillman Sr.'s suicide and finding out that Virginia Stillman's phone has been disconnected, he withdraws into a darkened room, still taking notes, still trying to understand the mystery he had embarked on, until his story comes to an end as the notebook in which he records his thoughts runs out of pages. The novel itself provides a short coda by the unnamed narrator, who is explicitly not identical with the Paul Auster of the story and even says about him: "As for Auster, I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout" (158). He tells how he and Auster found the notebook, yet: "As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now" (158).

City of Glass is concerned with a number of intertwined themes. I would locate these themes primarily in a number of crises: the crisis of identity, the crisis of the sign, and the crisis of the reader/writer. Clearly it is futile and, I would argue, even unnecessary to see these crises as separate entities, yet for the purpose of my discussion I will try to present them in an orderly fashion.

The crisis of identity is evoked already on the first pages of the novel, in the writer Daniel Quinn. Quinn's hold on himself is unstable to begin with. Auster writes:

> New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. (4)

However, he does not mind this being lost, it seems, and he embraces the self-alienation that comes with his work. Quinn writes under the pseudonym of William Wilson, his novels narrated by a private eye called "Max Work" (6). Auster describes the relationship between author, alias and character as follows: "In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the

bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work" (6/7). (The pun on work/Work is self-evident.)

The phone call that sets the story in motion adds the name of Paul Auster to the identity markers Quinn collects. In his interactions with Stillman Sr., he also calls himself Henry Dark (a name he takes from the elder Stillman's theological writings) and then takes on the name of both father and son Stillman. Quinn's initials – D.Q. – as well as other hints throughout the novel finally suggest another possible alias for him, namely Don Quixote, his attempt to solve the mysteries of the novel proving equally quixotic.

Even though it is Quinn who seems to make use of these names and identities as one might put on disguises, which suggests that he is in control of them initially, "it is very easy for a profusion of identities to become a confusion of identities" (848), as Coughlan writes. Similarly, the identical names of the two Peter Stillmans as much as the two (potential) Stillman seniors that Quinn is forced to choose between at Grand Central, or indeed the fictional Paul Auster who turns up in the novel, suggest that identity has become unstable. It no longer adheres to its definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

> 2. a. The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.
> *personal identity* (in *Psychology*), the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality.[6]

It is this proliferation of names that leads to the second, more fundamental crisis, namely that of the sign. A name is supposedly a marker of identity, in effect it should serve the same signifying purpose as any word does. It loses this purpose, however, if the relationship between signifier and signified, between a name and the person whose name it is, is no longer clear. What good is, say, "Peter Stillman" as a sign, if this sign may point either to Stillman the elder, Stillman Jr., or even Daniel Quinn in the guise of Peter Stillman? Quinn strips names of their signifying power on purpose when he makes use of them as changing selves:

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[6] *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

> [H]e was no longer Daniel Quinn. He was Paul Auster now, and with every step he took he tried to fit more comfortably into the strictures of that transformation. Auster was no more than a name to him, a husk without content. To be Auster meant being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts. (75)

Stillman Sr. is something of a conundrum in this respect: when Quinn approaches him first, using his own name (effectively an alias, too, as he is following the man in the guise of Auster), Stillman says:

> I see many possibilities for this word, this Quinn, this . . . quintessence . . . of quiddity. Quick, for example. And quill. And quack. And quirk. [. . .] I like your name enormously, Mr. Quinn. It flies off in so many little directions at once. (90)

(The playful stream of alliterative associations goes on for longer than is quoted here.) Yet, despite his enjoyment of wordplay and free association here, Stillman is the one who mourns the loss of God's original language, in which signifier and signified still corresponded. His contradictory attitude is no help to Quinn in his search for stable meaning that comes to fill his entire existence.

It is in this search for meaning that we can see Quinn's personal collapse as the crisis of the writer who, at the same time, is also a reader, an interpreter of signs. Let us return to the phone call that sends Quinn on this mysterious quest: "It is needed now. [. . .] Always the same man. Auster. The one who calls himself Paul Auster" (12). The detective whose assistance the mysterious caller seeks is the author of the novel, suggesting that a writer is best suited to the task of a private eye: to observe. Yet observation is not enough: a detective has to be able to *read* the signs, to infuse them with meaning, as a writer does. It is this which eludes Quinn. The more obsessively he writes down all he observes, the less he finds meaning, coherence or order in what he writes – yet in the end it is only in his writing, his work, that he exists. When he runs out of pages, when he ceases to write, he ceases to be – leaving the nameless narrator to attempt to find meaning in his notes.

Karasik and Mazzucchelli's adaptation endeavours to do more than provide a simple, straightforward illustration of Auster's novel: Spiegelman says, with respect to the series of comics that *City of Glass* inaugurated, that "the goal here was not to create some dumbed down 'Classics Illustrated' versions, but visual 'translations' actually worthy of adult attention" (Karasik and Mazzucchelli ii). The comic, drawn in *ligne claire*

style, is adept at visualising the different voices, narratives and "playfully shifting narrative styles" (ii) in simple yet evocative ways: consider, for instance, the postmodernist intrusion of film noir style and elements, its expressionist play of light and shadow (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 7) as Quinn interacts "with the world [. . .] through the imaginary person of Max Work" (Auster 7), or the way that different fonts and other typographical features suggest different speaking voices. The typewriter font (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 1), for instance, makes overt the fictional, nameless writer's voice, signifying the activity of writing; Stillman Jr.'s jumble of upper and lower case letters (15) evoke his clumsy, jumbled, disoriented and disorienting speech, while Stillman Sr.'s gothic initial letters (72) make his utterances into statements that are more weighty, reminiscent of sermons, perhaps; and the angular font coming from the phone represents its monotonous, mechanical voice (119).[7]

Such stylistic and typographical features are fairly standard in comic books. For now, however, I wish to focus on an issue more specific to *City of Glass* and address how Karasik and Mazzucchelli represent the crises of Auster's novel in their visual-verbal hybrid. Illustration 1 is a witty depiction of the unreliability of the drawn visual sign: in the first panel, we cannot recognise what we are looking at, the fictional "camera lens" (so to speak) being too close to the object. The abstract graphic, a large black oval, echoes the "dead of night" in the written text, perhaps. In the next panel we see what may be an O, a zero, or even an abstract cartoon representation of an eye observing us. The panel that follows shows more of the object, and in combination with the text ("It was a wrong number that started it all . . ." [1]), we may guess that we are looking at a telephone. Panel 4 would seem to confirm this, yet panels 5 and 6 reveal that we have been looking at a two-dimensional symbol, a cartoon in fact, of a phone, printed on the directory on which the actual ringing telephone is placed. This actual phone, however, is just as much a two-dimensional drawing, it is as unreal as the symbol printed on the directory's cover. The representational illusion is undermined, highlighting the potentially misleading quality of signs.[8] As Coughlan writes, "the visual is as capable of misdirection as the verbal" (845).

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[7] Time and space constraints prevent me from examining further the issue of speech bubbles and their different styles.

[8] There are shades in this of Magritte's pipe (cf. McCloud 24-25).

The comic explicitly links the unstable sign to the issue of identity, as Illustration 2 shows. We start with a view of house façades, depicting the New York Quinn inhabits; the frame of the panel may suggest the view from a window. This depiction of façades loses its visual cohesion, dissolving into the "labyrinth of endless steps" that describes Quinn's wanderings through the city, and finally shifts into a fingerprint, ostensibly a unique marker of identity. This fingerprint is revealed to be on the windowpane in Quinn's apartment looking out onto the façade we started on in the first panel. (Note, however, that we never find out whose fingerprint it is; it is a sign whose referent is not revealed and whose existence we can only believe in but never ascertain.) Karasik and Mazzucchelli's means of connecting the themes and motifs is as evocative as it is elegant. (It is also noteworthy that they do not illustrate Quinn's walking through New York here; the point of view remains in the apartment. This is an instance where a straight-forward visual representation of Auster's text is avoided; it also adds an additional layer of meaning to the text in the last panel, ". . . and he had no intention of ever leaving it again.")

The comic frequently implies connections by means of visual echoes and by problematising the visual sign, as I have argued with respect to the zoom out from the phone or the shifting labyrinth of lines. For instance, it elaborates visually on the conflation of the subject and the observer: Karasik and Mazzucchelli make explicit the link between the subject – "I" – and the observer and his instrument – "eye" – when they show Max Work's logo; the dot of the "I" in P.I. (private investigator) is a stylised eye. Arguably, the observer is defined by his purpose: "I see, therefore I am." In comics, this is turned around: "You (the reader) see me, therefore I am." A first-person narrator, an "I," cannot be represented graphically in comics, as any drawn figure is automatically second- or third-person, a "you" or a "he/she." In a graphic novel, the "I" exists at best by implication – a precarious, unstable existence.

Another complex and confounding example of the play with visual echoes and unstable signs can be found in Quinn's meeting with Stillman Jr. Auster writes that, as the man looks at Quinn, the writer feels "that Stillman had become invisible" (18). Something similar happens in the comic, but on the visual level: at one point, the panels close in on Stillman's mouth until the graphic representation becomes incomprehensible (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 15). We know, due to the previous panels, that we are supposedly looking at an extreme close-up of Still-

man's throat, yet in isolation the image could more readily be interpreted as a hole, a vortex or, again, an eye. Throughout Stillman's speech we read his words but see other, possibly unrelated images: an ominous ferryman (Charon, maybe?) emerging from the blank of the panel as if from water, and again we close in, step by step, on his mouth and throat; this visual stream of consciousness continues for a few pages, until we are presented with a jumble of images, each of which is clear in itself (a rabbit in a hat, a broken television set, an inkwell), but their connection to each other or to what is said remains nebulous. As readers, we may suspect that they are arbitrary, yet, like Quinn, we may not be able to dismiss them. They are clues presented for us, and if we could only interpret them we might solve the mystery of Peter Stillman – yet this solution remains out of reach. As Auster writes:

> In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so – which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities [... Even] the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. (9)

Yet this belief, that there *is* meaning in the jumble of signs, is what eventually proves to be Quinn's ruin.

The nine pages of Stillman's speech end on the following two pictures: the first, a cell door from behind which Stillman's speech bubble seems to emanate, echoes the 3x3 grid of panels used for most of the comic, hinting at their order being akin to prison bars; the second shows Stillman as a useless, discarded puppet at the bottom of a pit – connecting him and Quinn, the dummy for his pseudonym William Wilson, more explicitly than the novel has done at this point.

The crisis of signs is ubiquitous in the comic. A scene in which Quinn prepares for his observation of the elder Stillman serves as a concise illustration of how Auster's novel addresses the problematic relationship of signifier and signified. Quinn goes to the library to read Stillman's treatise on the language of God. This treatise is represented in the comic in a series of panels in the style of woodcuts (Illustration 3); the panels literalise the fall, both of man and of language, that is postulated by Stillman. While the sequence here is witty and lighthearted – Adam trailing the word "shadow" behind him is a surrealist visual joke – the image of the abyss is echoed later, its tone becoming more serious.

Throughout the comic, visual echoes evoke connections, sometimes apparent a few dozen pages later, but sometimes within a single panel. Sometimes it is not only single images that are revisited but entire sequences, as in the reprise of the labyrinth in the fingerprint, placed after Quinn confesses to Virginia Stillman that he has lost her husband's father (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 85). The fingerprint, standing for both identity, as mentioned earlier, and for criminal evidence, leads to a dead end, a locked door. It does not fulfil its signifying function. Quinn is both locked out and locked in: locked out of his work, and into himself, to find his grasp on himself slipping rapidly.

It is at this point in the story that he visits Auster, ostensibly the author/God of his world, although this is only evident to the reader.[9] It is interesting to note that while Quinn's face is simple and schematic in its depiction, more of a generic Everyman face (72), Auster's is drawn more realistically (89) – he is, perhaps obviously, more real than Quinn, who is both fictional and increasingly less certain of himself, his function and his meaning (cf. Shakar).

As Quinn begins to "lose his grip" (Auster 107), so does the visual structure of the comic, its "syntax," so to speak. For one thing, the narration, mostly focalised through the character, shifts as the nameless author makes himself heard; but the comicbook sign becomes blurred, in this instance literally (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 107). In the indefinite time Quinn spends outside the Stillman's apartment, he turns into a different person; no longer a clean-cut Everyman, he is now indistinguishable from the homeless he has observed in the streets of his New York. Auster writes: "[I]n a matter of months [. . .] he had become someone else" (143). In a film, this would be a mere metaphor, as the character would be played by the same actor throughout, regardless of changes of costume or pasted-on beards; in a comic, where every panel is in effect a new creation, this Quinn is literally someone else. (The multiple mirrors in which he sees himself in the comic, albeit always only partially, can be seen as visual shorthand for his fragmented, fractured self.)

On the last pages of the comic, the visual order that has been established previously is gradually lost, as Quinn spirals towards his own end. The panels lose their anchoring on the page, then their precision of line, becoming increasingly jumbled; if we remember the earlier picture suggesting this order to be akin to confinement, we might think that the

[9] Karasik and Mazzucchelli have resisted the further turn of the metafictional screw of adding themselves as characters to their work.

disorientation is liberating, yet the lack of order frightens the detective/writer/reader of signs, as he still attempts to bring order to his work of observation, the activity by which he has come to define himself. The panels become tilted and finally swirl into the abyss (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 130/131), as did Adam and his verbal-visual shadow in the sequence shown earlier. The panels become the dwindling pages of Quinn's notebook, and indeed, our last piece of evidence of his existence is his final scrawled question: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the notebook?", followed by blackness.

The pages that provide a coda of sorts to Quinn's story no longer rely on the structure provided by neat, regular panels that echoed the character's own need for structure and meaning (Karasik and Mazzucchelli 136). The nameless author, reading the notebooks – the last remains of Quinn and his work – and retelling them for us, feels sympathy for his character (and, ironically, disdain for Auster), but he does not follow him on his search, as Quinn followed Stillman. The final image we have (Illustration 4) is a heap of broken images and signs, of the two Stillmans, of Daniel Quinn and Max Work, and of Humpty Dumpty – who, like Quinn and his alter egos, has failed to master language completely and whose search for an innocent, prelapsarian sign system, whether verbal, visual or both, ends in his own fall, fragmentation and conclusion. Quinn, like Lewis Carroll's egg, can never be put together again.

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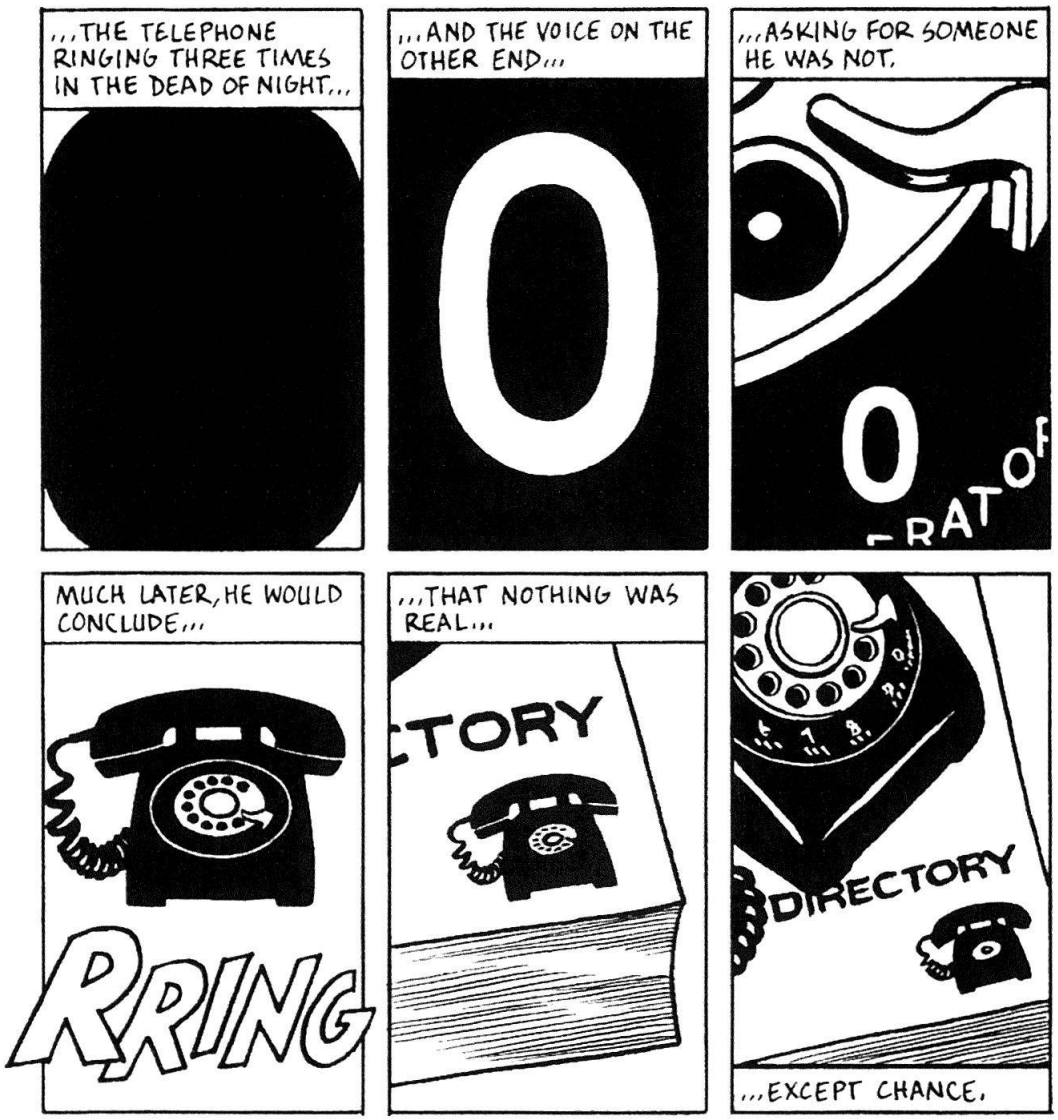

Illustration 1: Karasik and Mazzucchelli 2. Ceci n'est pas un téléphone: playing with the unreliability of the visual sign.

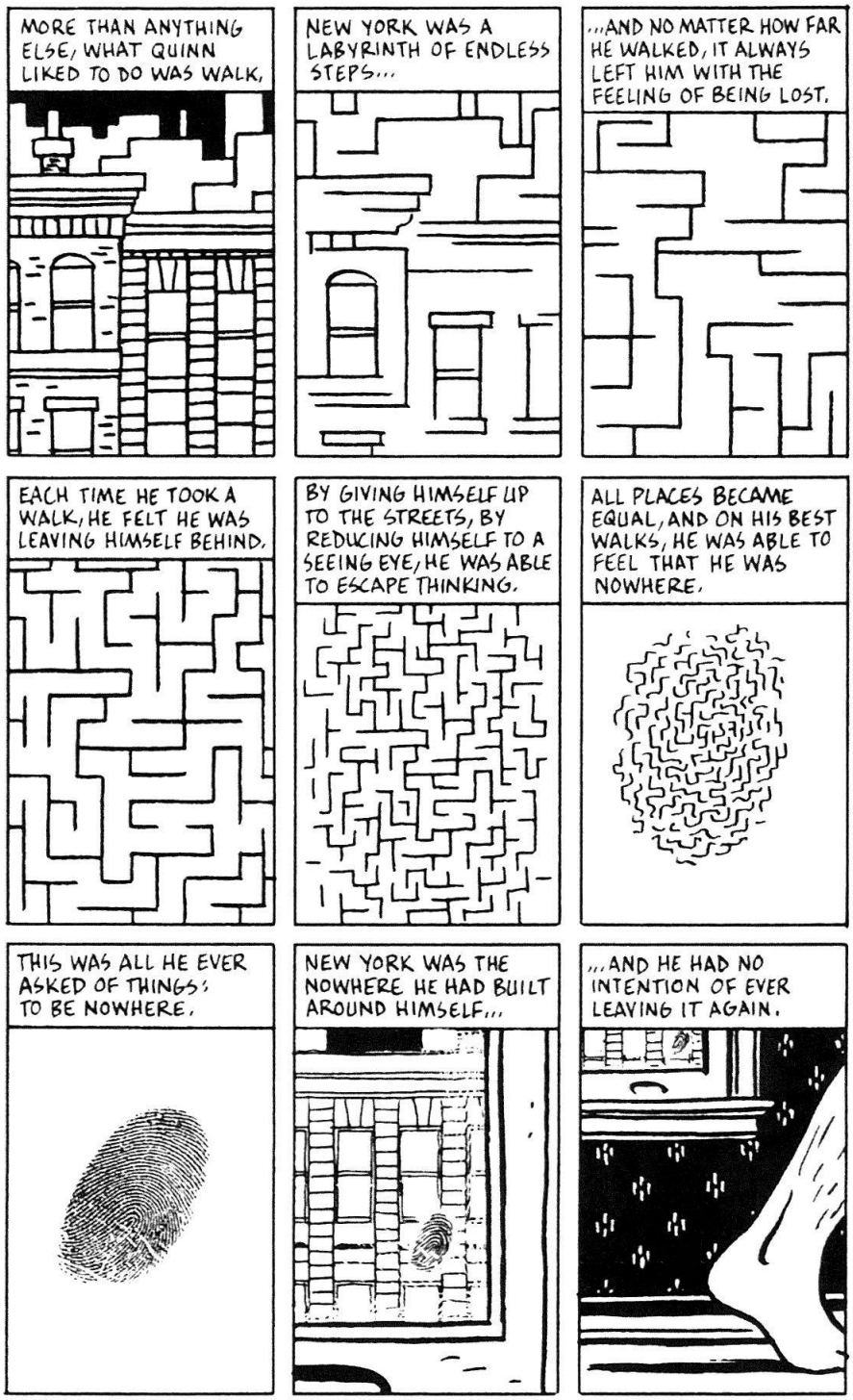

Illustration 2: Karasik and Mazzucchelli 4. Exploring the labyrinth of identity.

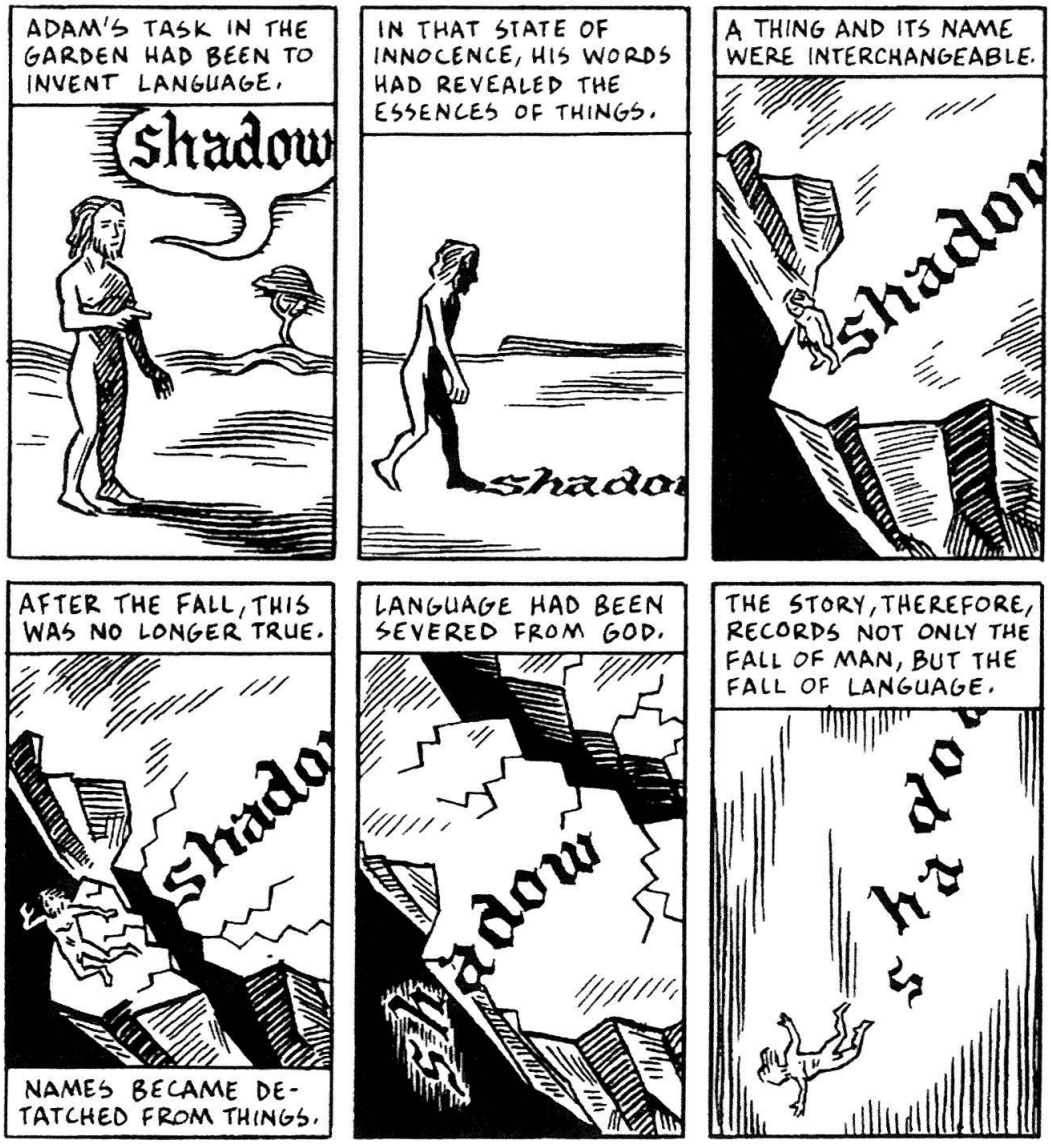

Illustration 3: Karasik and Mazzucchelli 39. "A thing and its name were interchangeable": language before and after the Fall.

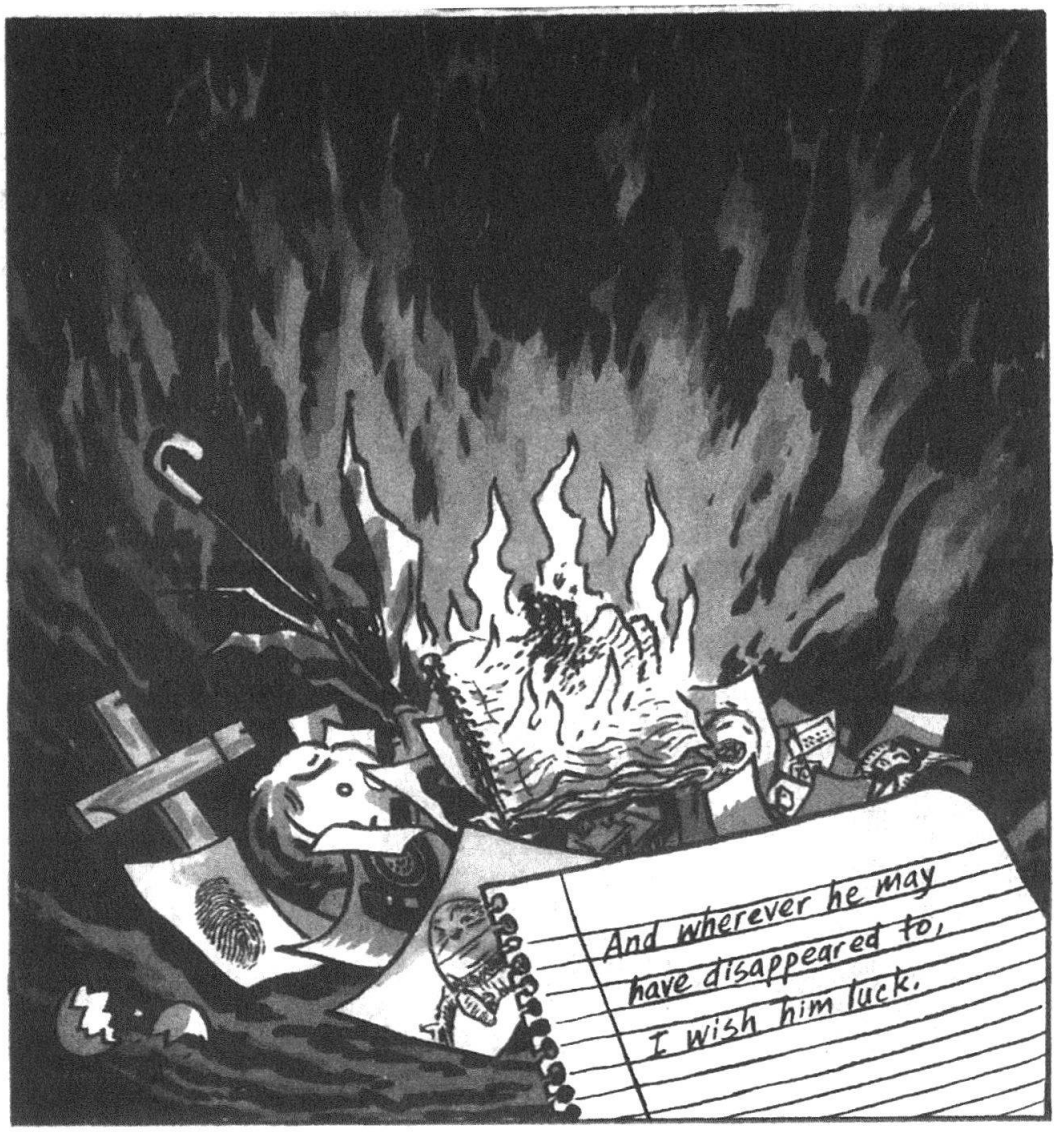

Illustration 4: Karasik and Mazzucchelli 138. In the end, Quinn's sign system becomes a heap of broken, disjointed images.