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ON INTERMEDIAL REFERENCES IN PAUL AUSTER'S AND WAYNE WANG'S SMOKE (1995)

***Keywords**: intermediality; narrative; adaptation; heterotopias; narrative identity; film; literature; Paul Auster*
***Abstract**: The essay proposes to analyze the aspects of border crossing between different media forms in Paul Auster's and Wayne Wang's* Smoke*, looking at their interrelation and intermediation in particular. Drawing on Foucault's notion of "heterotopias," the text will address the question whether these media forms (painting, photography, and theatre) instead of dominating one another, can reinterpret, influence, and preserve each other. The essay also proposes to discuss the ways in which the aspects of intermediation between different media forms can stimulate the formation of (narrative) identity in the film's fictional world.*

"The material world is an illusion. It doesn't matter if
they're there or not. The world is in my head."
Rashid Cole (*Three Films* 42)

Introduction

In 1990 Paul Auster was asked to write a Christmas story for *The New York Times*. The outcome "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story," became the source of his screenplay for *Smoke* (1995). The movie came into being as a result of the collaboration between Wayne Wang and Paul Auster. It consists of a series of interconnected brief sketches set in and around Auggie Wren's cigar shop in Brooklyn. The intertwined lives of the four major characters structure the main subplots: Paul Benjamin (starring William Hurt) is an isolated writer, suffering from a writer's block in response to the trauma caused by his wife's death; Rashid (Harold Perrineau Junior) is an intelligent but troubled young orphan, searching for his father; Ruby (Stockard Channing) is Auggie's former lover, who wears an eye patch and asks for Auggie's help to save their daughter from her self-destructive life; and finally Cyrus (Forest Whitaker), Rashid's long-lost father becomes the centre of attention. All the characters, all the life stories are connected through the figure of Auggie (Harvey Keitel). The film embeds different media forms (painting, photography, and theatre), and the continuity of the storyline, the subtlety of sub-plots greatly depend on the skilful balancing between the use of mise-en-scene and reduced montage.

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This essay proposes to analyze the aspects of border crossing between these above-mentioned media forms in the movie, looking at their interrelation and intermediation in particular. Drawing on Foucault's notion of "heterotopias," the text will address the question whether these media forms can reinterpret and influence each other in a state of in-between existence. By the state of "in-between existence" a mutual influence is meant, a relationship in which media do not exclude or dominate but reinterpret and still preserve one another. The essay also proposes to discuss the ways in which the aspects of intermediation between different media forms can stimulate the formation of (narrative) identity in the film's fictional world.

Intermediality 1: Film, Photography, and Narrative Identity

The first and most obvious form of intermediation one can see in *Smoke* is the mixture of theatrical composition and the art of photography within the context of a motion picture. Characters' composition around Auggie, their treatment in mise-en-scene, the use of perspective, subdued lighting, and frontality of the main subject, Auggie, evoke a tableau, which—according to Jacobson—is reminiscent of a Renaissance painting,[1] thus bringing about communication and interaction between the viewer and the work of art (12-13). Moreover, the framed posters and photographs which decorate the cigar shop have smoking and tobacco as their subject matter, and generate an art gallery atmosphere, where pictures/posters are static as well as humans are. The composition of the figures around Auggie does in fact directly recall the pictures hanging on the wall behind the characters. This also draws the attention to the many layers of representation and self reflexivity, duplicating the experience of watching a movie: we enter a space of "make-believe."

Interpreting Bazin's theories about the effects of film and live-theater Christine Jacobson states that in *Smoke* immediate spectator engagement is realized through the introduction of theatrical elements. The traditional film narrative is altered as the movie has the structure which is reminiscent of a play of five acts. At the same time, narrative continuity is maintained by the witty usage of dialogue and periods of silence, as well as by the exclusion of emotional manipulation through musical score (22). Indeed, theatrical elements play an important part in drawing the audience into the world of the film, for example the image of the subway train coming and leaving functions as a means of framing, as a symbolic rise of curtains, starting and ending the motion picture. Antoine Traisnel argues that in *Smoke* dialogues serve as bridges between diegesis and reality (8). When discussing classical theatrical elements in the film, Traisnel states that "the classical theatre already instituted as a convention that the introduction of a play should put the spectator in the middle of a crisis, to create the illusion that the diegetic world existed before the intervention of the camera's gaze, to make the scenes appear credible

[1] Jacobson argues that subject composition in mise-en-scene treatment forms a visual sub-textual parody of the development of visual arts, starting with Renaissance painting, then Northern Renaissance (horizontal composition and foreground figure) as suggested in the compositions in the series of Paul and Rashid's dialogue shots and then Baroque-diagonal compositions between Auggie and Paul-Benjamin in the diner while discussing the Christmas story (13).

and veracious, to prove that the characters exist beyond the narrative frames" (8). Accordingly, *Smoke* is organized around casual dialogues that appear veracious, and puzzle the spectator with a minimum of information revealed. For example, Smoke begins with the first line of a dialogue: "I'll tell you why they are not going anywhere" (*Three Films* 26). "Why? And who?" the viewer wonders. This type of veracious dialogue provides the characters a reality that exists before the beginning of the movie.

Susan Sontag states that a film does not become theatrical only by means of dialogue, static camera positions and exclusively indoor actions, but the narration has to be coyly self-conscious ("Theatre and Film" 106). Accordingly, *Smoke* doesn't follow the traditional storytelling techniques, but feeds on coincidences and simultaneous events; the always talking characters move in and out of Auggie's store, picking up and abandoning stories. Hence the reciprocal impact of film and theatre: adapting theatrical devices for the screen functions as an intermedial reference and attempts to install a mediated vision onto the screen, to capture the audience's attention and to have control over the illusions in a two-dimensional context.

According to Rajewsky, "intermedial references, then, can be distinguished from intramedial (and thus intertextual) ones by the fact that a given media product cannot *use* or genuinely *reproduce* elements or structures of a different medial system through its own media-specific means; it can only *evoke* or *imitate* them. Consequently, an intermedial reference can only generate an *illusion* of another medium's specific practices" (55). And yet, it is precisely this illusion that determines in the recipient a sense of a theatrical presence. The evocation of the theatrical medium is not achieved merely by means of subjective associations that may (or may not) be elicited in the spectator's mind. Rather, the placement on screen of the characters and theatrical elements explicitly designates theatre as the medial system being referred to, therefore it signifies the whole mise-en-scene as an intermedial reference to theatre.

Another allusion to the theatrical elements is expressed in the way characters are playing roles within the film's diegetic reality. The best example is Rashid's character, carrying out a performance within a performance. The young boy's carefully constructed system of lies provides him a set of identities: he is Rashid, as well as Thomas Cole, but he introduces himself as Paul Benjamin when first talking to his father Cyrus, and assumes the role of a father to Paul in a later scene. The intermedial reference to theatre is the major factor in constructing Rashid's identity: he is a good actor and never reveals his true feelings. His self conscious utterances are reminiscent of a dramatic speech. His theatrical language is nothing but a means to generate an emotion so that his listeners, especially Paul, can inextricably relate to him. When Paul distractedly steps right into the oncoming traffic, Rashid saves him and claims that "it's a law of the universe. If I let you walk away, the moon will spin out of orbit [...] pestilence will reign over the city for a hundred years" (*Three Films* 37). An intense bond soon develops between them and as they cannot face society's restriction they become lonely exiles living in Paul's apartment. As Rashid declares: "That's because we don't belong anywhere. You don't fit into your world, and I don't fit into mine. We are the outcasts of the universe" (90).

Removing the layers of false identities and getting close to Rashid's wounded heart is not an easy task, as Paul cries out in his desperation: "Cut it out, will you? Just

cut it out and come back here" (*Three Films* 87), meaning to leave all the role-play and tell the truth. I also read this statement as a self reflexive enunciation: it refers to the attempt of one medium (film) to *cut out* the exaggerated use of other media devices (theatre performance), and to restore the balance in which they can coexist.

Both media (film and theatre) are based on scene-building, on images connected to each other. Sontag argues that there is no peculiarly "cinematic" as opposed to "theatrical" mode of linking images as one shot is preceded as well as followed by another ("Theatre and Film" 108). However, editing brings about new ways of linking images: cuts, change of angles, and montage introduce the discontinuous use of space and time, thus establishing the rhythm and speed.

The notion of the rhythm means duration of scenes, frequency of cuts in the case of movies. Gerard Genette also employs this term in his theory of narrative discourse as a means of analysing repetitions as well as determining the relationship between events and their narrative time.[2] In *Smoke*, the frequent pauses in dialogues keep breaking the narrative, thus the latter becomes composed and organized around a series of still moments. These pauses/silences signify the pensiveness of the characters, their momentary standstills, and always entail a next shot, a moving, shifting scene, hence the continuity of storytelling.

The incorporation of another kind of still moments—the black and white photographs taken by Auggie—also compel the spectator to engage with the story actively and confront its key themes. Auggie's hobby consists of a weird, daily ritual: for years, he has been taking pictures in front of his cigar shop, from the same angle at exactly 8 a.m. He shows his photo album to Paul and explains to him that this is his "project," his "life's work" (*Three Films* 50). Paul is amazed and remarks that all the photographs are the same, until he accidentally sees his wife in a picture and becomes overwhelmed by grief. Auggie claims that Paul is going too fast, he does not look at the pictures at all, he needs to slow down to understand the meaning, because each photograph is different: people are dressed according to different seasons, light is changing and coming from different angles, weekdays are followed by weekends.

Recording his "little spot" becomes of crucial importance for him, as he says: "That's why I can never take a vacation. I've got to be in my spot every morning" (*Three Films* 50). Thus, Auggie Wren's identity is constructed in and through the act of storytelling. Auggie telling the story of other people with his photo album is a process of Auggie's actual identity construction. Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity points to the idea of a self as a storied self, as an entity made up of stories told, indeed, entangled in the stories that a person relates or that are told about him. Auggie's narrative identity can be understood as his solution of the task to make his own person understandable and accountable in his life story: he is telling stories that are related to his self-understanding by making use of the photographic medium. Through this photographic storytelling Auggie is able to locate himself in the world, and more, he can provide ways for characters to reconnect to their environment and to each other. Auggie's identity as an

[2] Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.

artist consists of his sequential narrative strategies. Looking at the photographs and creating a mental juxtaposition of these, function as means of gaining deeper personal and aesthetic understanding. The term *sequential narrative* is used in comics, but Maxim Douglas claims that "sequential narrative art is more a description of a method of communication than of the more overt and obvious potential physical traits of the medium such as pulp and ink. It is the visual creation of a narrative event specifically via juxtaposition in space" (5). Auggie's sequence-based images, by way of editing (the same time, the same angle) and text (the exact date written under each photograph), create relationships between themselves and ultimately tell stories that the single image cannot. The narrative is contained in what is *not* presented by these images, in what happens in the viewer's mind when s/he juxtaposes them. Auggie's art mirrors the sequential narrative structure of the film: several different, but interconnected stories run parallel and become linked at the end. When Auggie reveals his true self to Paul, he actually exposes his artistic identity:

> "Paul: So you're not just some guy who pushes coins across the counter.
> Auggie: That's what people see, but that ain't necessarily what I am." (*Three Films* 48)

Auggie claims: "seeing as how I've read your books, I don't see why I shouldn't share my pictures with you" (49) that is to suggest that the two media (literature and photography) can co-exist on the same level.

Auggie constructs his identity in the process of narrating, through inserting photographs into the story (intermedial imitation) and constantly discussing another medium—photography and literature—in his text (intermedial thematization). The photograph motif functions directly as individual reference (i.e., reference of a medial product to another individual medial product), that is a reference in a cinematic text to photography through the evocation of certain photographic techniques: composition, centre of interest, subject angle, and camera perspective. Analysing this type of media combination, Rajewsky claims that "rather than combining different medial forms of articulation, the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium" and there is always an "illusion-forming quality inherent in them" (*Intermediality* 53-54). With several factors contributing to its overall effect (zooming in, editing, dissolving images while Paul looks at the pictures, presenting images to the spectator in a slide show), the photographic sequence in *Smoke* as a whole inevitably reminds the viewer of motion pictures, more precisely of a parallel editing, thus providing contracted narrative information.

It is precisely the means of creating illusions (in this case photography) which serves as illusion breakers, triggering the audience's reaction, determining them to get out of the imaginary world. According to Mark Brown the notion of *illusion* in Auster's film work can "provide stable points of reference for identity, as secure coordinates on which [one can] anchor self-formation"(160). While for Auggie's case this might be true—as his photographic storytelling becomes a way to forge supportive friendships and to connect with his environment— for Paul it is precisely the breaking of illusions which reconnects him with the energizing task of writing, thus rebuilding his identity.

In Barthes's analysis the viewer's response to a photograph can be defined in two ways: "studium," or the general knowledge available to every viewer, and the "punctum" which functions as a catalyst for personal memories and experiences a photograph precipitates. Photography is "the impossible science of the unique being" (71), that is it looks like its subject, it resembles the person in the picture, but it is precisely the individuality of its subject which cannot be photographed. At the same time the "punctum" can be a wound, as it evokes something very powerful and unbidden in the viewer.[3] It is the viewer who has a particular understanding of that image and attributes multiple meanings to it. When Paul sees his deceased wife in the photograph, he bursts into tears, saying: "It's Ellen. Look at her. Look at my sweet darling" *(Three Films 52).* He sees his wife as she was, rediscovering her in and after death. This is precisely the sublime inherent in photography: for Paul, "punctum" creates the means to connect his memories with his deeper understanding of death, thus he becomes able to invoke and apprehend his own mortality and death. Consequently, as Martin states "the montage is a celebration of Ellen's existence. It becomes the catalyst for the extrication of Benjamin's internal demons. The associations of the past are diminished" (168-69).

Interpreting Auster's treatment of the subject of photography, Brown demonstrates that for Auster old baseball photographs have the same evocative power as Proust's madeleines (172). In *Smoke*, both Auggie and Paul realize that taking and looking at the photographs became a comfort to them at a distressing and confused time; a point of stillness in a changing world. As with Proust's madeleines, Auggie's photo sequence can trigger recollections across time. For Paul it becomes a catalyst for remembering his own life as it was before Ellen's death.

Conclusively, intermedial indicators help characters in forming their narrative identities: on a motivic level photography is the medium that makes Auggie able to comprehend and locate himself in the world, and it serves as a moment of disruption for Paul Benjamin, as the movie's next scene presents him writing a new story on his typewriter. Thus it initiates a process of Paul's actual identity construction and a way coping/surviving in the act of narrating itself.

Intermediality 2: Non-Place and Shifting Identities

As the film organizes a series of interlinked stories and characters into its framework, the camera view also contributes to a better understanding of the key themes. It follows each character's viewpoint, splitting into many streams, while offering parallel story events. It is however, the richness of the plot that makes multi-level viewings possible and enables the viewers to enjoy and anticipate the media shifts. There are four main narrative lines, each with its own self-contained plot development: Paul Benjamin's working through his grief, Rashid Cole's quest for his father Cyrus, Ruby's and Auggie's project to save their drug addicted daughter Felicity, and finally Auggie Wren's Christmas tale, which, with its hallucinatory mood is both linked to, and stays apart from,

[3] Mirzoeff in his interpretation of Barthes argues that the "punctum" is the way we deal with that ineffable difference in pose that causes us to select one photograph over another, saying that it does or does not look like its subject (74).

the movie. At the same time, there are various sub-stories associated to these four major narrative arcs: Paul telling Rashid the skier's tale, Auggie telling his friends how Paul's wife died, Auggie showing his strange hobby to Paul, Cyrus Cole's tale about how he lost his arm and was estranged from his own son, and Paul's story about weighing smoke associated to weighing the human soul.

The branching narrative structure in *Smoke* is based on the doublings, iterations, and repetitions of characters and motifs. The same applies to the relationship between different media forms embedded in *Smoke*: cinema forms an intermediation with theatre, photography, and literature. In interpreting this alliance based on in-between states, I find Foucault's notion of the "heterotopias" extremely relevant. According to Foucault, it is the mirror which best represents this sort of mixed, joint experience of the heterotopia, since it is a placeless place.[4] The notion of the mirror suggests a relationship in which different media forms do not exclude each other, but have a structure of overlaying, traversing, wrapping up, and mirroring each other. Thus, intermediality can directly be interpreted as heterotopia or non-place, in which different media are brought together and construe the other spaces for each other simultaneously. This can be best expressed by the elements of iterations and doubles. Similarly to mirrors, doubles and other joint elements can be interpreted as self-reflexive configurations of the different media within the film's texture, describing, influencing, and understanding each other.

What makes the cinematic text visually heterogeneous is the technique of fade in and out which precedes the appearance of the written words on the screen: titles, consisting of the main characters' names, introduce each act, each story. These inserted titles intrude, interrupt, and cross the diegetic world introducing a way of communication between the film's world and the spectators', "telling" us what we are going to see in the following scene. The embedding of the titles in the cinematic text also serves to establish the loose frame structure, a balancing power which holds together the multiple story-levels and diverging viewpoints. The sections of the four narratives alternate, inviting the viewer not only to make connections between them, but to sense the characters' separateness and isolation. The characters, after whom the strands are named, double each other, mirroring and repeating the same inability to deal with their problems. It is precisely the skier tale which best expresses this mirror structure.

The skier parable first appears in *Ghosts*, the second novella of Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, in which Blue, the private detective, reads this story in a magazine. In *Smoke*, the story is told by Paul to Rashid, during a breakfast. The tale introduces a skier, who dies in an avalanche, and his body is never recovered. Years later, his son, who has become a skier, too, runs down the mountain and accidentally finds the body of the

[4] In the mirror, I *see myself there where I am not*, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I *am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow* that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent. […] From the standpoint of the mirror I *discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there*. […] The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there (24, emphasis added).

father, perfectly intact, "preserved in suspended animation" (*Three Films* 99). When he looks at him more closely "he feels that he is looking into a mirror, that he's looking at himself" (*Three Films* 99). Looking at oneself in the mirror also implies the metaphor of the voyeur, as the characters see themselves in certain roles they are playing: for example Paul plays the role of the father for Rashid. The skier tale is symbolic for their relationship: Paul ends the story with remarking how strange it is that "the father is younger than the son now. The boy has become a man and it turns out that he's older than his own father" (*Three Films* 99). Later, when celebrating Rashid's birthday, they change their roles, and Rashid claims with a straight face that "actually, I'm his [Paul's] father". Paul replies that "it's true. Most people assume I'm his father. It's a logical assumption—given that I'm older than he is and so on. But the fact is, it's the other way around. He's my father and I'm his son" (*Three Films* 104).

Who is the father of whom then? In Auster's oeuvre, the motif of the lost father usually stands for the loss as well as reconstruction of identity. The death of the father is the catalyst of the son's quest for identity. The change of roles here reflects the fact that the father becomes the younger one, the more vulnerable, and thus starts to occupy the place of the child. Rashid being the father of Paul means that he saved Paul's live, symbolically giving him birth, giving him new life. In this sense he resembles the image of Pinocchio, evoked by Paul Auster in his *The Invention of Solitude*. The crucial image for Auster in the Collodi story is "Pinocchio saving Gepetto (swimming away with the old man on his back)" (*Solitude* 133). To be a father means carrying the burdens and providing redemption. Thus the son can become the father, as he "saves the father from the grip of death" (*Solitude* 134). In this sense, Auggie, Paul, and Rashid can be seen as fathers and sons to each other. The image of Pinocchio carrying his father on his back finds its counterpart in the three men's relationship in *Smoke*: they take care and listen to each other, bring each other back to life, and carry each other's burdens.

In the skier's tale the frozen father is symbolic for the absent father, like Auggie and Cyrus. The father appears as the mirror of the son, thus representing the duality which characterizes the Foucauldian "heterotopias," as the son sees himself as belonging to some other space: he is the same with what he sees in the mirror reflection, plus himself. Thus a heterogeneous space occurs, in which the spectators can see the characters both as themselves or as playing roles (Paul and Rashid changing their father-son functions, Auggie playing a role for the grandmother). Also the stories can be divided into those that belong to the diegetic reality of the film (for instance Rashid telling about his past life, Auggie talking about his hobby) or presented as fictitious (skier tale, Sir Walter Raleigh and the weight of smoke). These minor plot events present themselves as crucial elements in the storytelling, because they function as *catalysers* (in Barthes's term), that is to complement, support, and enrich the cardinal functions in the narrative, laying out "areas of safety, rests, luxuries" (qtd in McFarlane 14)[5]. These small actions not only help the scenario progress, but also link the characters.

[5] Seymour Chatman uses the term *satellites* and claims that their function is "that of filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel" (51).

By holding within unspeakable traumas and memories, characters repeat and double each other's self-doubts, emotional despairs, each of them carrying a burden or a handicap, a reminder of their weaknesses: Ruby has a missing eye covered by an eye patch, Cyrus has a false arm which reminds him of his mistakes, Paul walks like a living-dead, not being able to get back to normal life. Having these physical as well as psychical deficiencies these characters are linked metaphorically, living their lives in self-tormenting and isolation, yet struggling to come to terms with their mistakes, they overcome their weaknesses. They stick together, intermingle, and mirror each other (Ruby's half eye is re-evoked by the blindness of Granny Ethel, Cyrus' false arm finds its counterpart in Paul's temporarily crippled arm), thus providing strength to each other to prevail over all difficulties.

The density of plot events supports this system of allusions and iterations. The narrative carefully builds and then rigorously brings together variations of the individual events into a matrix of parallel narrative cells (see the table below). The means of cross-mediation, for example fading in/out with the images of smoke puffing up, long shots and sudden angle shifts, abrupt breaks in dialogues and storytelling support the dynamic of the movie and make it possible for the different media forms to coexist and infiltrate into each other. It compels the spectator to track down and compare the repetitive and mirroring events, as well as the variations in the outcomes of each event. Conclusively, *Smoke* generates a cognitive interaction from the part of the audience.

Intermediality 3: A Question of Adaptation

With the appearance of cinematic adaptations, motion pictures proved to be the best type of media that could reconstruct the world from a book. Coming to terms with the notion of "adaptation" in the film industry, it is obvious that the word has two connotations. Using it as a verb it defines the process, while regarding it as a noun it describes the product. As a product, it gains the sense of "outcome", to be more exact, what the adaptation has accomplished. In the case of Wang and Auster's movie, the product is the last sequence of *Smoke*—Auggie Wren's Christmas Story—which, being a story inside a story, repeats the characteristics of the skier tale in that it is an adaptation of a literary text.

An adaptation starts with the translation of the literary text into technical text. Each adaptation starts with the interpretation of the source text. It is during the interpretation of the novel that it becomes a different version than how the writer himself imagined it. Therefore the interpretation of the novel's, as part of the process phase of the adaptation, together with the translation, will result that the envisioned product, in this case the black and white movie at the end of *Smoke*, will face "both gains and losses" (Stam qtd in Hutcheon 16) compared to the original text. Conclusively, "adaptors are first interpreters and then creators" (Hutcheon 18).

However, since interpretations result through the filters of the adaptor(s), therefore in some cases when these interpretations become visualized on screen they may not be well received. Once the reader has created an image in his or her mind about how something looks like in a novel, their imagination would be supplied with another viewpoint, in case of an adapted version, with the perspective that of the director's.

The reason why movie adaptations are so popular and favoured by so many people is because of its versatile modes of engagement that it offers. While reading a book, one can imagine or feel, depending on their personal experiences, as it was intended by the carefully selected diction. During reading, one can control the speed of events by reading faster, whereas when reading slower one may grant more time for thinking than reading. However, in a film the pace is given, which is in most cases compressed. The circumstances of time compression require the details to be constructed in such a way to appeal for the viewer's perceptions and tell enough in a maximum of 2 or 3 hours. Therefore through different modes of engagement the viewer is invited to interact, mentally or aurally, by various devices that stimulate the visual and aural senses. For example, music and ambience will manipulate the viewer's feelings about the current pictures shown. As a result of condensation and its versatile modes of engagement, the movie will be able to offer more insight into numerous details that a novel cannot, for example, how to feel the same way a character does. However, the modes of engagement of one media can not replace the modes of engagement of another media. As Hutcheon points out, "each mode, like each medium, *has* its own specificity, if not its own essence" (Hutcheon 24).

In an interview with Stephen Capen, Auster elaborates on the idea whether there is something that books can do and films cannot:

I think that finally good books stay with you a lot longer than even good films. And because there is this connection between the mind of the reader and the words, and you have to work hard to read a book, you have to use your imagination, you're filling in all the details yourself. You're actively engaging your own history, all your soul, your memories, into what you're reading on the page. A film goes by so fast you just don't have time to get inside it in that way. It can be fun, I mean I'm not against movies, and they can be highly entertaining and diverting, and thrilling, but it's not real food the way books are, there are very few films that nurture you the way, nourish you the way, books do. (Capen 6)

What this excerpt divulges is precisely Auster's over-evaluation of the literary medium compared to motion pictures. According to him this difference occurs due to the different modes of engagement of the two media. It is the reception and the level of immersion from the part of the reader/viewer that makes all the difference.

The very unusual ending of the movie aims to bring into evidence its own self-reflexivity: Auggie Wren's Christmas story narrated in black and white footage stays completely separate from the rest of the narrative, symbolically pointing at the origin, at the source of the movie, as the story written by Auster was published in the New York Times in 1990.

In this story, Auggie tracks down a kid who was stealing a magazine from his cigar shop, and eventually ends up in the apartment of Granny Ethel. The blind old lady first thinks it is her grandson visiting her on Christmas Eve, and Auggie starts to play this role for her. He adds that the granny knew he was not Robert, her grandson, but pretended believing his stories. He buys chicken and wine, and they have a great time. When the granny falls asleep, Auggie finds some stolen cameras in the bathroom and decides to take one with him upon leaving. This is the explanation how his strange hobby came into being.

In narrating this story we have the interaction of three media modes of engagement: writing (Auster's original *New York Times* story), telling (by Auggie) and showing (the black and white silent cinema)[6]. Each form of media has its own medium specificity with a number of devices through which they communicate in so far unique ways. Through the combination of different modes of engagement the viewer is invited to interact, mentally or aurally, by various devices that stimulate the visual and aural senses. For example, music (Tom Waits' song provides background music to the black and white images) and ambience will manipulate the viewer's feelings about the current pictures shown, creating a hallucinatory, dreamlike atmosphere.

Every adaptation starts with the translation of the literary text into technical text. As it is a word to image translation, adaptations can be considered as "re-mediations, that is, translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system to another" (Hutcheon 16). The task of the screenwriter, as Abbott argues, is a "surgical art" (Abbot qtd in Hutcheon 19). Thus, transcoding and still remaining loyal to the original text can be a real headache for the screenwriter. Nevertheless, one who has not read the literary text of which adaptation was recently seen, the movie's visuals would later interfere with the reader's imagination, thus making the intimacy of the novel and reader relationship disappear.

In *Smoke*, the interesting fact about adapting this story is that it tends to bring together the three types of "immersibility," which focus on different aspects by "telling, showing and interacting" (Hutcheon 27). In the film, Paul, the writer needs a good story, so Auggie tells him the Christmas tale during a dinner. Paul Auster argues that originally "the story was supposed to be intercut with black-and-white footage that would illustrate what Auggie was saying" (*Three Films* 15). However, the use of a voice-over, and going back and forth between the restaurant and Granny Ehtel's apartment proved to be a choice which simply did not work:

> The words and the images had clashed. You'd settle into listening to Auggie, and then, when the black and white pictures started to roll, you'd get so caught up in the visual information that you'd stop listening to the words. By the time you went back to Auggie's face, you'd have missed a couple of sentences and lost the thread of the story. (*Three Films* 15)

In this sense, *Smoke* can be interpreted as a parody of the adapting process, and also a symbol of the difficulty a screenwriter can face when being engaged in making an adaptation of a literary text. Why is it then that the traditional forms of adaptations do not work in Auster's and Wang's directorial imagination?

The shift of camera views and interchange of parallel settings would have meant the breaking of cinematic illusion. Therefore Auggie is set using with a very little technological apparatus: no montage, no voice-over, no intercuts: just closer and closer shots on Auggie's face. In this way, viewers can become more and more intimate with the character, and at the end of telling his story the extreme close up on Auggie's mouth serves as a means of creating credibility: we must believe everything he says, even if we

[6] I am using the terms "telling" and "showing" as they appear in adaptation theory (Hutcheon 22-27).

know he lies. The borders in the relationship between character and spectator disappear, the camera moves in on Auggie as close as possible. The same technique is used in the case of the skier tale, when Paul is telling the story of the frozen father to Rashid: nothing disturbs and interrupts the creation of illusions. We cannot help listening to these stories with holding our breath, and when we think the limit has been established, suddenly the camera zooms in even closer. As Auster puts it: "the viewer is not at all prepared for it. It's as if the camera is bulldozing through a brick wall, breaking down the last barrier against genuine human intimacy" (*Three Films* 16). Subsequently, this single shot provokes full emotional immersion from the part of the viewer. The story of the frozen father functions as a snapshot, freezing moment, another reference to photography: Paul abruptly ends the story, asking Rashid: "so what are you going to do today?" (*Three Films* 99). The interrupting of the story brings about a shift in the dialogue, thus the birthday party's details can be discussed, preparing the forthcoming father-son mirroring motif. In the Christmas tale, the long storytelling with long shots involved, serves to change, expand, and prolong the pace of the cinematic narrative, thus letting the viewer set his/her imagination going, in this way imitating the function of literary narratives.

After this mode of telling, the black-and-white sequence starts, retelling and duplicating the same story, through a very unusual method: the narrator is not present and words are also missing. This cinematic narrative continues the chain of visual reading/decoding: we see Auggie's tale now performed on the screen thus proving that all ways of telling the same story can equally construe the visual for us. We know the story already, but the scene becomes heartbreaking, when Tom Wait's melancholic song starts playing, and we can *see* Auggie and Granny Ethel talking to each other, their mouths moving without emitting a sound. Hence the magic of silent cinema: it is the art of illusions, absorbing spectators once again. What emerges here is precisely the reflection on the art of storytelling, subsequently bringing about another mirroring relationship between the literary text and the cinematic structure. In this mise-en-abyme framework, what is originally a literary text becomes another fictitious text presented by Auggie in the film's diegetic reality, which, in its turn is transformed/reproduced into cinema sequence (film in film), in which the fictitious characters (Auggie and Granny Ethel) play their own roles. The same occurs in the case of the skier tale: Paul and Rashid later act out the story, by changing the roles of father and son. This reduplication of mirroring narratives brings about the mirroring coexistence of the different media forms: writing (literary text), (oral story)telling, and showing (cinema). These media forms encapsulate and reflect upon each other, partaking of the pleasures in the usage of mechanisms with which they reveal themselves. As they construe the other spaces for each other, and become the mirror reflections of each other, they generate an in–between space, in which their textures and characters become closely connected. In building a coherent narrative within this intermediate relationship, they recur to the set of signifiers specific for each medium.

The different media forms are brought together simultaneously, following a frame-within-a-frame structure, but the ability to veil the points of border-crossing is also worth mentioning. The mediation/shift from Auggie's powerful storytelling into the silent cinema sequence does not occur abruptly. Black-and-white images are introduced by the scene between Paul and Auggie in the restaurant, the camera eye following the smoke swirling up

to the ceiling. Continuity is smoothly established by the introduction of an extradiegetic element: Tom Wait's song starts playing, while Paul's hands appear on the typewriter, writing: "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story." This image literally functions as a means of connection between two media forms, while, at the same time, it reflects upon its medium specificity. Contrasting the fluidity, that is the continuity of the handwriting, the typewriter exposes the printed letters as they are: different from each other, occupying different spaces[7] on the blank page, thus pointing at their independence and isolation, hence the specificity of the writing medium. Mitchell argues that pure texts literally incorporate visuality the moment they are written or printed in a visible form. Nevertheless, writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and verbal (95)[8], therefore viewers/readers can have access to the forthcoming visual text.

Auggie Wren's Christmas story stands outside the authority of *Smoke*: the first and last word enunciated by this little film is an image, its own title written by the typewriter, and then the narrative is based on the visual representation of talking: mouths moving without emitting sounds, in this sense mocking at, and subverting the authority of the voice-over technique.

My argument was that in *Smoke* different media forms' (film, literature, and photography) interrelation and intermediation can be described with Foucault's notion of "heterotopias," in the sense that these media forms encounter, reinterpret and influence each other in a state of in-between existence. Intermediation between the different forms of storytelling (writing, telling, and visual representation) becomes the explicit theme of the movie, reflected upon and embodied in the always changing father-son relationship of the three main characters: Auggie, Paul, and Rashid. In this mirroring structure, they build up a narrative in which they thematize their intermediary relation through the representational practices and devices of the medium to which they belong. In *Smoke* the different media forms encounter their rival, alien modes of representation, and can intermingle and coexist by overcoming the barriers of their otherness.

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[7] By different spaces I mean the different special characteristics the letters occupy while put on the blank page, as well as the otherness of the medium of writing, as it is – according to Mitchell – caught between two othernesses, voice and vision, the speaking and the seeing subject (114).
[8] Mitchell, talking about the relevance of the sisterhood of the arts (*ut pictura poesis*), states that writing is a medium in which image and text, pictorial and verbal interact, thus it makes language (in the literal sense) visible (113).

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