

Multiple Games



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Abstract

This research work focuses on the outstanding literary cross-roads appearing in the work of two key artists in Postmodern late twentieth century who are still at the height of their creation today, namely, Paul Auster and Sophie Calle to demonstrate that their entangled work and lives are a practical example of how Quantum Theory is reflected in Literature and Art. It analyzes basically Auster's *Leviathan*, *Gotham Handbook* and *Ghosts* and conceptualist Sophie Calle's *Double Game* and the way they became entwined throughout a period of two decades which could really be considered an instant under the umbrella of Quantum Theory as model of interpretation in literature and art, following the latest tendency of literary criticism.

Key Words

Paul Auster, Sophie Calle, *Leviathan*, *Double Game*, Quantum Theory.

Juegos Múltiples

Resumen

Este trabajo de investigación está enfocado en la extraordinaria encrucijada existente en la obra de dos artistas postmodernos claves de finales del siglo XX y que hoy en día continúan su obra a muy alto nivel: Paul Auster y Sophie Calle. El estudio pretende demostrar que la enmarañada vida y obra de ambos autores son paradigma de la forma en que la Teoría Cuántica puede reflejarse en la literatura y el arte. Se analizan *Leviathan*, *Gotham Handbook* y *Ghosts* del escritor Paul Auster y *Double Game* de la conceptualista Sophie Calle, cuya creación se entremezcló a lo largo de dos décadas de tal forma que pudiera considerarse un sólo instante en términos cuánticos, siguiendo la dirección en que la crítica literaria apunta actualmente.

Palabras Clave

Paul Auster, Sophie Calle, *Leviathan*, *Double Game*, Teoría Cuántica.

Introduction

This research work is two-fold aimed. First, we want to render attention to the outstanding literary cross-roads appearing in the work of two key artists in Postmodern late twentieth century who are still at the height of their creation today, namely, Paul Auster and Sophie Calle. Second, we would like to demonstrate that their entangled work and lives are a practical example of how Quantum Theory is reflected in Literature and Art.

As Samuel Coale very clearly put it in his *Quirks of the Quantum: Postmodernism and Contemporary American Fiction*:

Much postmodern fiction incorporates underlying concepts and visions of various quantum theories, in so doing creating a new kind of meta-narrative as a basis for such narrative. The focus of several contemporary American novelists' fiction in structure, style, and story parallels and reflects these quantum quandaries. (Coale 2012, 12)

Coale focuses much of his study on how contemporary American fiction reflects the quantum realm by also pointing to Derrida's vision which suggests a flux, a swarm, a realm of randomness, discontinuity and chance in language as *differance*. We should like to recollect here the idea of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic self with its principle of multiplicity which appears in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. If we recall the metaphor of the rhizome used by Deleuze and Guattari, the self is a nomad in constant flux and identity is not a process that goes from point A to point B. The rhizomatic self "rejects any idea of pre-traced destiny, whatever name is given to it - divine, anagogic, historical, economic, structural, hereditary, or syntagmatic" (Deleuze

and Guattari 2004, 13). In this way Deleuze and Guattari establish their theory of a schizophrenic self in constant flee.

Quantum Theory contemplates the possibility of multi-universes or parallel universes in which a person could live different lives depending on the point when these universes split into others; the image is not far from that of the schizophrenic self in constant flee.

Samuel Coale by no means has been the only one to embark in explaining literature under the umbrella of Quantum Theory. In the last twenty-five years quite a few writers, critics and linguists have been using the ideas underlying Quantum Theory to write novels or approach literary texts. We would like to mention only a few: Nicholas Mosley (*Catastrophe Practice*, 1989 and *Hopeful Monsters*, 1990) Katherine Hayles (*The Cosmic Web*, 1984), Susan Strehle (*Fiction in the Quantum Universe*, 1992), Dennis Bohnenkamp (“Post-Einsteinian Physics and Literature: Towards a New Poetics”, 1989), Alfonso Zamorano Aguilar (“Teorías del Caos y Lingüística: Aproximación Caológica a la Comunicación Verbal Humana”, 2012) or María García Lorenzo (“Sobre Ciencia y Literatura”, 2013) among others. All this interest in analyzing literature under Quantum Theory comes to affirm our thesis that it is not bizarre to consider analyzing the multiple games played by Auster and Calle likewise.

Derrida’s or Deleuze’s language theory combined with the latest findings in Quantum Theory strengthened the need of finding a sound example to show how notions like rhizome or quantum entanglement functioned in literature.

In our somewhat intricate path we found a radical example which combined not only the works but the lives of two writers and artists which have entangled their *oeuvre* irremediably: Paul Auster, who is basically a novelist but also a poet, a playwright and a

film director, and Sophie Calle who is considered a conceptual artist, is also a writer, a performer and a photographer. We believe they are the paradigm of how quantum theory affects not only scientific parameters but the whole of our milieu and therefore literature and art.

Multiple Games

We shall start by briefly explaining that for his novel *Leviathan* in 1992, Paul Auster wanted to incorporate a character which was in essence Sophie Calle. He named her Maria Turner (maybe because he *turned* her into Sophie Calle) but first he asked Sophie “for permission to mingle fact with fiction” as it states next to the copyright of the novel. Of course, Paul Auster not only took Sophie exactly as in real life but added some fictitious details. It is at this precise moment that the multiple games of the two authors become rhizomatic or should we say entangled in a quantum way.

Auster’s character, Maria Turner, is an artist whose work defies traditional categorization (just as Sophie Calle’s does). “Her subject was the eye” (Auster 2004, 63), writes Aaron in *Leviathan*, “the drama of watching and being watched, and her pieces exhibited the same qualities one found in Maria herself: meticulous attention to detail, a reliance on arbitrary structures, patience bordering on the unendurable” (idem, 63). Among other projects, Maria hires a detective to watch her and write reports of her movements. When she studies these reports, she feels “as if she had become a stranger, as if she had been turned into an imaginary being” (idem, 63).

Some years later Sophie Calle decided to publish an artist book where she entwines her work to Auster’s, reversing what the American writer had done in his novel. As Sophie Calle explains in her book *Double Game* (1999) where “the author extends special thanks to Paul Auster for permission to mingle fiction with fact,” Paul Auster had slipped some rules of his own when inventing into his portrait of Maria. The first of the three parts of *Double Game* deals with how the life of Maria influenced the life of Sophie. The author writes:

In order to bring Maria and myself closer together, I decided to go by the book. [*Leviathan*] The author imposes on his creature a chromatic regimen which consists in restricting herself to foods of a single color for any given day. I followed his instructions. He has her base whole days on a single letter of the alphabet. I did as she does. (Calle 1999, 10-11)

But Sophie added some more rules of her invention as well. Since Paul Auster had not given Maria any color for Friday in his chromatic diet, Sophie made it yellow and for Saturday she ate pink. This way Sophie Calle re-created Auster's *Leviathan*. She mingled fiction with facts and experienced in her life what Auster's character had in fiction but further re-creating and enriching it as well.

The real facts of Sophie's life that Maria impersonated in the novel were for example when she takes a job as a stripper and invites a friend to take pictures of her to "satisfy her own curiosity about what she looked like" (Auster 2004, 65). Conversely, she herself takes pictures of strangers and composes imaginary biographies. As mentioned before she paid a detective to follow her and write an accurate report of her daily life and to provide with photographic evidence of her existence. These bits borrowed by Auster give the author, as she explains in part two of *Double Game*, the opportunity to present the artistic projects that inspired Auster again and in this way the life of Sophie influences the life of María sharing now exactly the same experiences. The third and most interesting part in *Double Game* is in Sophie Calle's words:

One of the many ways of mingling fact with fiction, or how to try to become a character out of a novel. Since, in *Leviathan*, Auster has taken me as a subject, I imagined swapping roles and taking him as the author of my actions. I asked him to invent a fictive character which I would attempt to resemble. I was in ef-

fect inviting Paul Auster to do what he wanted with me, for a period of up to a year at most. Auster objected that he did not want to take responsibility for what might happen when I acted out the script he had created for me. He preferred to send me “Personal instructions for SC on how to improve life in New York (because she asked...).” I followed his directives. This project is entitled *Gotham Notebook*. (Calle 1999, 234-35)

Sophie Calle installed herself in a phone booth in New York and every day interacted with passers-by and by doing so she affected their lives –she hoped for the better- as well as her own. But, what is more important, she entangled her life with Auster’s, making him do things he had never dreamt of (writing instructions for Sophie to perform) by only shaping an idea and making it real. Her drive altered Auster’s work, at least for some time, and made him responsible for her acts for that period of her life.

Up to this point we have followed the sequence of Auster and Calle’s multiple games, but we have realized that if quantum theory is correct and everything is entangled there must have been a previous entangled instant/reason for Paul Auster to chose Sophie Calle to be Maria Turner, and we believe we have found it.

The rituals Auster has borrowed from Sophie Calle had been performed from 1981 on for a couple of years. *Leviathan* was not written until 1992. Many years had gone by and in between something else must have happened. In 1987 Paul Auster wrote *Ghosts* as part of *The New York Trilogy*. In *Ghosts* Blue is hired by White to follow Black and report on Black’s movements exhaustively which were simply to be written on a notebook. In the course of his watch Blue realizes that Black and White are the same person, so he had been hired by Black to report on himself while he was just writing a book (Blue could watch Black from the window of the flat across the street) and

therefore Blue became Black's double. This situation recalls Sophie Calle's action of hiring a detective to report on herself while she dedicated to follow other people. The detective became a double of Calle the same way Blue became a double of Black.

Here the question is: were the two facts entangled or was one of them previous to the other? Paul Auster could have written *Ghosts* and then realized Calle was doing the same in real life or it could have happened the other way round. No matter which, they continued to be entangled as we have described above.

Ulrich Meurer has wisely noted that: "Auster's fifth novel, *Leviathan*, and a series of artworks by the Parisian conceptualist Sophie Calle constitute a seminal moment [...] it transforms the usual linear adaptation process into a multiform constellation whose various units determine and reflect each other" (Meurer 2011, 183). His words have also sense in terms of quantum entanglement by which two particles – no matter how distant they may be – instantly affect each other.

Evija Trofimova in her *Paul Auster's Writing Machine: A Thing To Write With* writes: "in a peculiar way, a part of Auster's life-work merges with that of Calle's" (Trofimova 2014, 110). She continues explaining that this fusion resembles "two spider-webs intersecting and creating a bizarre 'third space' that can be claimed by no one and yet by both, a sort of shared gray area" (idem, 110). Anna Khimasia in an article about the two authors has noted: "Calle not only disrupts the binaries of author/subject and fact/fiction, but simultaneously explores the materiality and temporality of identity in such a way that the latter remains ambiguous" (Khimasia 2007, 11).

Identity has been a crucial quest for the Postmodern artist, and in this sense Paul Auster is emblematic. In an interview for *The Guardian* and explaining what he feels when creating a character Auster says: "It's a question of inhabiting the character, al-

most the way an actor inhabits his role. It's like hearing the music in your head and trying to write it across the page.” (Auster 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/26/fiction.fashion>) Calle’s main work has more to do with performing than with writing and therefore she basically inhabits the character, she is the actor that inhabits her role.

In *Leviathan* when the protagonist and also writer (an alter-ego for Auster) Aaron claims that: “I can only speak about the things I know, the things I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears...” (Auster 2004, 33) he is talking about the function of the novelist. Through the process of writing Auster claims that: “you're actively engaging your own history, all your soul, your memories...” (Auster 2002, *The Guardian*) and allowing imagination to fill in the gaps.

Their games are rhizomatic, fabricating selves in constant flux, mingling fact and fiction first and fiction and fact in second term. If Paul Auster writes fiction based on life experience, Sophie Calle’s conceptual works are called by some authors like Oliver Asselin “autofiction,” (“Autofictions or Elective Identities,” 11) a kind of artistic practice “through which authors create new personalities and identities for themselves, while...maintaining their identity (their real name)” (quoted in *Paul Auster’s Writing Machine: A Thing To Write With*, 116).

Though some decades ago Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault declared the “death of the author” in behalf of the birth of the reader, it seems that many writers like Auster and Calle are stubbornly engaging in their own work-lives and being authorial protagonists. This search for locating their self in an uncertain time/space matrix at the time they explicitly inhabit both their work and biography is a clear echo of what Quantum Theory is revealing of our way of existing.

Conclusions

We have analyzed the entangled works of Paul Auster and Sophie Calle under the umbrella of Quantum Theory and hope to have succeeded in putting through our conviction that theirs is a paradigmatic case.

Our interest in Quantum Theory as a model of interpretation in literature and art is not new but the novelty we aspire here is to apply it to the making of Auster's *Leviathan* and to Calle's performative and conceptual art. This research has also highlighted the interest that several critics have shown in Calle and Auster's assembly – what Deleuze would call an unstable multiplicity or an “unattributable” assemblage.

Most important for our explanation of the boundaries of their multiple games has been the finding of further implications as to when or how it started. We have found deep connections between *Ghosts* and Calle's project of hiring a detective whose report appears in *Double Game* along with black-and-white photographs and which mirror each other creating doubles to watch and report on the lives of characters in the case of the novelist and in live performance in the case of the conceptualist.

Their rhizomatic games and fleeting selves have entangled fact and fiction or better shown the various realities or dimensions that interconnect everything and that quantum theory proclaims to be scientifically possible.

At the beginning of *Double Game*, Calle edits with a red pen the pages she includes from *Leviathan* for her project, and corrects the facts concerning Maria which did not match her own real experience. This way she makes an intervention in Auster's text partially re-writing it. She includes his text in her project with the appendix of the chromatic diet and living whole days by some letters of the alphabet which were Aus-

ter's creation and by doing so Calle is in Trofimova's words: "acknowledging Auster's authoritative–authorial voice at the same time as she strips him of it" (Trofimova 2014, 117). Destruction has always been a first step for creation and Calle is aware of it. To create is to take hold of previous material to break their initial order and make something new. By creating a new order, a cut or split is performed and another dimension appears.

We have encountered the double as a leitmotiv in their search for identity; it is a figure which cannot be told apart from its assumed original and which constitutes, of course, a multiplicity reminding us once more of entanglement and quantum realm. This "realm of the naked eye," as Auster calls it in his long poem *White Spaces*, happens in the story we are re-telling in this paper in a city no other than New York – an epitome for the center of the world, the unique place which could encompass and represent wholeness.

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