

<b>Title:</b>	<b>A Labyrinth of Nothingness: Contours of Meaning in Paul Auster's <i>The New York Trilogy</i></b>
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## **Abstract**

If the labyrinth of life is but a bundle of chaos, humanity would descend into mayhem. To avoid tumbling into existential void, the essence of the human experience is then to find purpose. As readers would scour novels for meaning, humanity would gather empirical evidence to verify that life follows meaningful principles or patterns. However, these pillars of meaning collapse in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. Definitions of the crime fiction genre are deconstructed, and logic leads nowhere near the truth. This project hopes to travel further than the conventional frames of literary theory, to transcend the many postmodernist analyses of the *Trilogy*. Instead of being a mere parody of literary form, the *Trilogy* is a parody of humanity's method of perceiving reality: inductive reasoning.

This project highlights the perspective of such a meaning-making process, to contend that inductive reasoning is essentially to see in hindsight, imbuing meaning to events of the past. Such a motif of bearing and direction manifests in the *Trilogy* as its backwards narrative structure, as well as its overarching themes of reconstruction and memory. Ultimately, seeing in retrospect only *seems* to bring clarity, as meaning is malleable by our subjective, innate desire for purpose. Perhaps by revealing the inherent folly behind humanity's way of rationalizing reality, the *Trilogy* may bring us closer to deciphering, or better, embracing the irreconcilable mysteries in reality.

## Reflection

I had nothing to begin with when I started this project, and I was paralyzed by my inactivity. Maybe it was the pressure of wanting to create something spectacular to conclude my time in university, or the frustration that everything unique had been exhausted. Throughout these 4 years, the more essays and presentations I did, the more I felt like an impostor and a fraud, unsure of whether I had any creativity at all. Ironically, this overwhelming feeling of existential angst became the foundation of my project, which allowed me to explore the notion of meaninglessness. Nothing felt more satisfying than to put this inexplicable feeling to words.

I would like to thank Professor Huddart, who nudged me along the way when I had ideas flying everywhere. I am grateful for his encouragement, especially when my frustrated face showed up on the Zoom meetings screen. Though this project has brought me no closer to answering these questions about myself—if there ever is an answer at all—the warm company of literature reassured me that I was not alone.