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The Fecundity of the Void: A Žižekian Reading of Subjectivity and Narrative Architecture in Paul Auster's 4321

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines Paul Auster's 4321 in order to challenge the conventional assumption that narrative fragmentation signifies purely destructive trauma. Instead, it argues that the novel's polyphonic structure functions as a creative enactment of the fecundity inherent in the Žižekian concept of the void.

Methods: Employing a post-Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, this interdisciplinary analysis draws on Slavoj Žižek's theoretical concepts of the Divided Subject, the Real, and the Act. The study focuses on the novel's distinctive structural design, particularly the quadrupling of the protagonist, Archibald Isaac Ferguson, and the symbolic function of the "blank chapters" that follow the deaths of his parallel selves.

Results: The analysis demonstrates that the four parallel lives do not represent the fragmentation of a preexisting unified subject. Rather, they illustrate that subjectivity is grounded in constitutive lack—a "hollowed-out virtual space" that enables ontological plurality. Furthermore, the blank chapters operate as a structural manifestation of the Real, the traumatic kernel that resists symbolization. In this way, the novel incorporates absence into its formal structure as an articulate silence, transforming void into generative narrative potential.

Conclusions: The study concludes that Auster's narrative strategy presents subjectivity as a retrospective construction emerging from the productive tension of the void. By identifying Ferguson 4's authorial emergence as a radical Žižekian Act, the analysis reconceptualizes traumatic nothingness as a fertile ground for symbolic reinvention. Ultimately, 4321 demonstrates that the void is not a deficit to be overcome but the foundational space through which new identity becomes possible.

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Introduction

Paul Auster's monumental novel *4321* (2017) represents the zenith of a career-long inquiry into the instability of the self. While his earlier works, such as *The New York Trilogy* (1987) and *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), feature characters who dissolve into doubles or "triads of selves", *4321* elevates this obsession to a comprehensive "anatomy of ontological plurality" (Hugonnier and Siegumfeldt, 2017, p. 1). By structuring the novel around four distinct, yet subtly interconnected narratives of a single protagonist, Archibald Isaac Ferguson, Auster constructs what Moseley (2018) have termed a "polyphonic architecture" (157). Each of these parallel biographies is explicitly numbered, starting from 1.1 and progressing through to 7.4 across the book's extensive length which serves as "a parable about human destiny and the endlessly forking paths a person must confront while he walks through life" (Moseley, 2018, p.157).

This structural choice transforms the recurring Austerian motif of the double into an inclusive analysis of multiplicity tracing the divergent paths of a single individual from a shared starting point. Auster sticks to chronological order, proceeding methodically from Ferguson's childhood to his early 20s, focusing on fairly conventional coming-of-age subjects: family, friends, school, sports and politics. While these parallel biographies explicitly explore the "forking paths" of human destiny, their divergence is driven by the profound contingency of chance rather than a linear fate. In fact, to read this structure merely as a "what-if" experiment in chance or a sociological catalogue of 20th-century America is to overlook the profound psychoanalytic operation at work in the text.

The central tension of the novel lies in its radical fragmentation. Traditional literary trauma theory, exemplified by Cathy Caruth (1996), might interpret this splintering of the self as a wound that cries out (115)—a symptom of an unassimilated experience that shatters the coherent subject (Balaev, 2014, p. 360). From this perspective, the divergent lives of Archie Ferguson are evidence of a psyche under siege, repeating the trauma of loss through endless variation. However, this study proposes a shift in theoretical register: from the trauma of the wound to the fecundity of the void.

Drawing on the psychoanalytic philosophy of Slavoj Žižek, particularly his reinterpretation of the Lacanian Subject and the Real, this study argues that the fragmentation in *4321* is not a pathological failure to be whole, but a productive ontological condition. Žižek in his dialogue with Laclou and Butler posits that

the subject is not a unified agent who loses its way, but is inherently a void— “an empty space ... through its very emptiness, produces a series crucial effects in the structuration or destructuration of social relations. In this sense it is both an impossible and a necessary object” (Butler et al., 2000, p. 58). For him, the subject is defined as a “hollowed-out virtual space” or a “constitutive lack” (Butler, 2014, p. 90)—an anonymous emptiness that serves as the very condition of possibility for the various masks or versions of identity to emerge. As Ferguson 3 realizes shortly before his death, he is “not just one person but a collection of contradictory selves... a generous self and a selfish self, so many different selves that in the end he was as large as everyone or as small as no one” (Auster, 2017, pp. 975-76).

The present study contends that 4321 is a structural enactment of the Žižekian “Parallax View”. Žižek (2006) claims that the true subject is not located within any single version of Archie’s life, but exists as the empty space or gap between these competing narratives. Therefore, Auster’s narrative architecture performatively enacts this Žižekian reality through its formal integration of the traumatic Real. Here, the four Fergusons do not represent four potential wholes, but rather the shifting perspectives that circle a central, “constitutive lack” (Butler, 2014, p. 90). This lack is made physically manifest in the novel’s “blank chapters”—the pages dedicated to the Ferguson 2 and 3 who die young. Rather than mere silences, these blank spaces function as the eruption of the Real within the symbolic order of the text. They are not mere silences of loss, nor absences to be mourned, but the “articulate silence” (Deshmukh, 2019, p. 10) that propels the surviving Ferguson toward the creative act, and gives the entire Symbolic structure of the text its consistency. Through this lens, the act of fragmentation is not a tragedy of the past, but the “fertile ground” upon which a new, multi-versioned subjectivity is authored (Shostak, 2009, p. 80).

By analyzing the novel’s unique narrative architecture through this Žižekian lens, it can be clarified that Auster moves beyond the melancholia of lost possibilities. The novel, in fact, demonstrates a fecundity of fragmentation which merely occurs through the acceptance of the void, and the death of the imaginary doubles, that the subject (Ferguson 4, the writer) can emerge. The narrative thus transitions from a site of traumatic repetition to one of creative genesis, proving that the “self” is not a pre-existing unity lost to history, but a retrospective construction born from the productive tension of the void (Schönfelder, 2013, p. 85).

Literature Review: The Žižekian Subject and the Narrative Architecture of *4321*

The following literature review situates Paul Auster's *4321* at the intersection of contemporary Austerian criticism and post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. By moving away from traditional trauma-centric models that view fragmentation as a purely destructive wound, this section explores the novel's "polyphonic architecture" as the presentation of the Žižekian void and its inherent fecundity (Moseley, 2018, p.157).

Critical reception of *4321* often contextualizes the novel as the "zenith" of Auster's career-long investigation into the instability of the self. Ilana Shiloh (2020) in his article entitled "*4321*, The Book of Endlessly Forking Paths" have long identified a "fluidity of identity" (8) within Auster's work, populated by doubles and alter egos that challenge the notion of a stable, unified subject. In his study, Ilana Shiloh examines *4321* as a masterful application of counterfactual thinking, where the narrative explores "what might have been" by following four parallel versions of the same protagonist's life. The text highlights how Auster utilizes a Borgesian structure of forking paths to suggest that reality encompasses not only lived facts but also unfulfilled potential and the fluidity of human identity (Shiloh, 2020, p. 2). He asserts that Auster grounds four diverging life stories in meticulous historical detail, and achieves a "paradoxical realism" (4) that reflects the rational way humans imagine alternative outcomes to life's many accidents. Ultimately, the article argues that the novel serves as a metafictional exploration of the writing process, demonstrating how literature can broaden our understanding of existence by being in "two places at the same time" (9).

In "Anatomy of ontological plurality", Hugonnier and Siegmundfeldt (2017), on the other side, argue that *4321* transforms the recurring motifs into a comprehensive "anatomy of ontological plurality" (1). While earlier critics frequently viewed Auster's fragmented characters as symptoms of a "shattered psyche", recent scholarship suggests a shift toward seeing these identities as a "collection of contradictory selves". Tanritanir (2017) describes this as the "self with a thousand masks", where individuals adopt multiple identities to navigate a world where they feel "as large as everyone or as small as no one". Furthermore, Berge (2018) emphasizes the concept of the "narrated self", suggesting that identity is not a pre-existing essence but a construction achieved through the continuous process of storytelling.

The novel's unique formal structure—its parallel lives and structural gaps—finds significant resonance in theories regarding the Real and narrative silence. As mentioned, Larkin Moseley

(2018) identifies the novel's narrative architecture as a "parable about human destiny and the endlessly forking paths" (158). However, the most radical architectural feature is the inclusion of blank chapters following the deaths of the parallel Fergusons. Rather than representing a failure of language, Deshmukh (2019) in "A listening to the void: Blank spaces in Paul Auster's 4321" argues that these blank pages function as an "articulate silence"—a musical "pedal point" that ensures the "presence of the absence" (10) is felt throughout the entire text. From a Žižekian perspective (1989), these chapters represent the "traumatic Real"—the horrifying void that shatters the Symbolic order of the narrative. As Butler (2014) notes, the blank page becomes a "sublime object", an embodiment of the lack that paradoxically gives the entire Symbolic structure of the novel its consistency.

The transition from destructive fragmentation to "fecundity" is most visible in the role of Ferguson 4, the sole survivor and author-figure. Debra Shostak (2009) observes that Auster's narrators often shift from "melancholia" to "mourning", achieving a "provisional wholeness of self" through the act of writing. Benziman (2019) further suggests that for Auster, writing is a process of "constructing and deconstructing the self" that allows the protagonist to confront the "absent or invisible father" and other personal traumas (468). Ferguson 4's decision to write the lives and deaths of his parallel selves is a radical Žižekian Act. Instead of attempting to "patch over" the holes left by trauma, he incorporates the void directly into the novel's architecture. This is not a passive repetition of loss, but an "active narrative engagement" that facilitates a therapeutic reinvention. The fecundity of the work lies in this ability to transform the "nothingness" of the void into a fertile ground for new narratives, proving that subjectivity is most clearly defined in its creative mastery over its own internal division.

Theoretical Framework: Žižek's Post-Lacanian Subjectivity

To understand the narrative architecture of *4321*, it is necessary to establish the specific coordinates of subjectivity as defined by Slavoj Žižek. Moving away from traditional models that view the individual as a stable or whole entity, Žižekian theory posits that "the subject is not a unified, self-conscious agent, but is inherently divided" (Myers, 2003, p. 112). This division is not an external accident but is the very definition of the subject itself.

The Void of Subjectivity

In the Žižekian framework, the subject is famously defined as an “empty space” or “void” (Butler et al., 2000, p. 58). Rather than a “centered subject” possessing total control over its actions and thoughts, the subject is seen as “the hollowed-out virtual space of an insubstantial, anonymous, faceless emptiness” (Butler, 2014, p. 38), often referred to as “the void called subject” which is the essential foundation of being; if one were to strip away all distinctive characteristics, particular needs, and specific beliefs, the remainder is this pure form of consciousness—the subject.

For Žižek, the subject is the Void. Drawing on the Cartesian *Cogito*, Žižek (2000) posits that the “I” is not a substantive thing, but “the hollowed-out virtual space of an insubstantial, anonymous, faceless emptiness serving as a condition of possibility” for the manifest comings and goings of the fragments of the disunified ‘postmodern’ person (Butler, 2014, p. 38). While the subject is an empty space, it compels the individual to adopt “masks” or symbolic strategies” to provide a semblance of consistency (Tanritanir, 2017, p. 434). This distinction is vital for reading Auster’s protagonist. Archie Ferguson’s collection of contradictory selves is not a failure of identity; it is the exposure of this fundamental Void of Subjectivity. The subject is the “night of the world”, an empty screen onto which the multiple narratives of *4321* are projected.

Subjectivity, therefore, is the process of attempting to fill this inherent lack through the Symbolic Order, even though such a filling is never complete. Identity is not an internal core but a retrospective construction that emerges as the subject attempts to bridge the gap between its anonymous emptiness and the social roles it performs.

The Symbolic and the Real

Žižek locates the subject at the volatile interface between two significant Lacanian orders: the Symbolic and the Real. The Symbolic Order is the domain of language, law, and social reality. It is through the Symbolic that “language brings things into existence”, transforming the world into something that can be named, discussed, and thought about (Fink, 1995, p. 25). The Symbolic works upon the Real, introducing a cut into it to categorize and make sense of existence. Conversely, the Real is that which “resists symbolization” (Homer, 2005, p. 83). It is meaningless and senseless, persisting as a traumatic kernel that the Symbolic order cannot fully assimilate or explain away. The Real is often experienced as an uncanny eruption—violent or disruptive events that shatter the smooth, coherent story that society and the individual tells itself.

Subjectivity is founded upon this lack or blind spot—the inability to fully articulate one’s dependency on the Symbolic order and the persistent presence of the Real. In Žižek’s view, “reality” (the world we name) is actually an “ideological fantasy” designed to cover over the horrifying void of the Real (Wood, 2012, p. 272). True subjectivity is found only in the “delay between seeing and recognizing”, (Butler, 2014, p. 238) in that momentary gap where the masks of the Symbolic Order have not yet been donned to cover the underlying void.

The Žižekian subject exists in a state of alienation from the “Big Other” – the symbolic order. The Big Other acts as the guarantor of meaning—the audience for whom the individuals perform their lives. However, Žižek argues that in the postmodern condition, the Big Other is revealed to be inconsistent or non-existent.

When the symbolic order fails to provide a cohesive narrative, the subject confronts the burden of “imposed freedom” (Žižek, 2000, p. 25). To cope with the “unbearable burden” of this void, the subject engages in the “manic production” of narratives. In this light, the quadrupling of Ferguson can be understood as a response to the silence of the Big Other. The narrative multiplicity is not a celebration of choice, but a desperate attempt to encircle the traumatic void—the Real—that lies at the center of his existence. The “fecundity” of the novel, therefore, arises not from the fullness of the characters’ lives, but from the generative power of the void that separates and connects them.

The Constitutive Lack and the Architecture of Subjectivity

For Žižek, the subject is not a substantial entity but is constituted by a void or a “constitutive lack” (Butler, 2014, p. 90). This means that the division or gap in the self is not an accidental trauma that happens to a person, but is the very core that makes subjectivity possible in the first place. Rather than seeing Ferguson’s four parallel lives as a sign of a broken identity, the constitutive lack explains that this very emptiness is the condition of possibility for the “manifest comings and goings” of his different versions (Butler, 2014, p. 38). Because there is no fixed, true Archie at the center, the subject can manifest as a collection of contradictory selves—strong and weak, impulsive and thoughtful.

Žižek defines subjectivization as the process by which this inherent void is “filled in” by the Symbolic Order. In *4321*, the various roles Archie adopts –the student at Columbia, the athlete,

the writer— are “symbolic strategies” or “masks” donned to provide a “semblance of wholeness” over the underlying emptiness. However, this filling is never complete because the Symbolic Order itself is inconsistent, which is why the narrative must constantly fork into new possibilities.

While the Symbolic Order tries to mask the void, the Real is the “traumatic kernel” that exposes it. The “blank chapters” in the novel’s architecture perform this specific function; they do not represent a “missing” story but serve as a “structural presence of the void”. By refusing to narrate the lives of the deceased Fergusons, the novel forces the reader to confront the horrifying void of the Real that shatters the Symbolic architecture of narrative.

By framing the subject as a constitutive lack, the argument moves from the tragedy of loss to the fecundity of the void. This nothingness is not a dionysian pit of madness but the fertile ground for “therapeutic reinvention”, allowing Ferguson 4 to eventually perform a radical authorial “Act” by cohering his identity around these very gaps.

The Divided Subject: Everyone and No One

If the structure of 4321—four parallel lives diverging from a single birth—is the novel’s architectural conceit, then the nature of the *Subject* occupying that structure is its philosophical engine. A traditional reading, grounded in Caruthian trauma theory, might interpret Archie Ferguson’s fragmentation as a tragic shattering of a coherent self, a “symptomatic acting out” of the primal wound of contingency (Caruth, 1996, p. 2). However, a Žižekian analysis offers a radical inversion: the fragmentation is not a *loss* of the subject, but the very *condition* of its existence.

Here, Ferguson does not suffer from a split personality in the pathological sense; rather, he confronts the ontological truth of the Žižekian subject. For Žižek, the subject is not a substantial entity—a “soul” or “ego” that exists prior to its social entanglements—but is, in its essence, a “void” or a “crack” in the order of being. He posits that if one strips away all particular characteristics (memories, habits, social roles), what remains is not nothing, but the “form of consciousness” itself—the empty screen of subjectivity (Myers, 2003, p. 11). This void compels the individual to adopt “masks” or symbolic identities to provide a semblance of consistency. The four versions of his life are not four separate people, but four masks or symbolic mandates adopted to circle the central void of his existence. This is explicitly articulated by Ferguson 3, who, shortly before his death, experiences a profound moment of self-dissolution:

“[W]hat did it mean to be himself anyway, he wondered, he had several selves inside him, even many selves, a strong self and a weak self, a thoughtful self and an impulsive self, a generous self and a selfish self, so many different selves that in the end he was as large as everyone or as small as no one, and if that was true for him, then it had to be true for everyone else as well, meaning that everyone was everyone and no one at the same time.” (Auster, 2017, pp. 975-76)

This realization—that he is “everyone and no one”—is the precise definition of the Žižekian subject. The “no one” is the constitutive void or the lack of a substantial core, and the “everyone” is the multiplicity of symbolic masks he wears to cover it.

The Parallax of Identity

The novel’s structure functions as a “Parallax View”—a concept Žižek (2006) uses to describe how the observed object changes depending on the position of the observer. In *4321*, the object is Archie Ferguson, but he can never be fully grasped in any single narrative. He is only visible in the *gap* between the four narratives. This gap can be observed in the divergent fates of his father’s appliance store: in one life it is tragically robbed (Auster, 2017, p. 69); in another, it burns down (Auster, 2017, p. 94); in another, the father dies (Auster, 2017, p. 112). These are not merely plot variations but structural antagonisms that prevent the formation of a single, consistent reality. Ferguson’s identity is fluid not because he is unstable, but because he is the parallax gap itself—the tension between these potential lives.

By creating a protagonist who is a “collection of contradictory selves” (Auster, 2017, p. 241), Auster does not destroy the subject; he liberates it from the tyranny of coherence. The four Archies are distinct attempts to symbolize the Real of his existence. As Žižek (1992) notes, “there is more truth in the mask than in the face beneath it” (156). The truth of Archie Ferguson is not found in seeking the Real version among the four, but in accepting that the *truth is the structure itself*—the void that allows four contradictory masks to exist simultaneously.

The Real of the Blank Pages

If the multiple narratives of *4321* represent the Symbolic order’s attempt to cover the void of subjectivity, the novel’s blank chapters represent the eruption of the Real itself. These empty pages—which occur in the narrative sequence where the lives of the deceased Fergusons - specifically Ferguson 1 and 3- would have continued—are the most radical structural device in Auster’s architecture. They do not merely signify the absence of a character; they materialize the

“articulate silence” (Deshmukh, 2019, p. 10) that underpins the entire text. Trauma theory, particularly in the Caruthian tradition, often emphasizes the “unspeakability” of trauma (Caruth, 1996, p. 36)—the gap in memory where the event occurred. However, a Žižekian reading posits that this gap is not a failure of the text, but its constitutive condition. The blank pages in *4321* function as the *Real* of the novel: they are the “hard core” that resists symbolization absolutely (Homer, 2005, p. 83).

When Ferguson 3 is killed, the narrative does not simply skip his turn; it holds his place with a structural void. As noted in the analysis of the text’s “pedal point” (Deshmukh, 2019, p. 10), these empty spaces ensure that the “presence of the absence” is felt throughout the reading experience. They are the textual equivalent of the Žižekian *Real*—that which “just persists” without meaning, disrupting the symbolic flow of the other lives. By physically embedding these blanks into the rhythm of the novel (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4... 5.1, [void], 5.3, 5.4), Auster forces the reader to encounter the “hole” in reality that the surviving Ferguson is attempting to write around.

Fecundity in the Void

The crucial turn in this analysis is to recognize the fecundity of these blank pages. They are not merely “dead” zones; they are the engine of the novel’s creation (Alford, 2015, p. 67). It is precisely because these versions of himself have been obliterated by the *Real* that Ferguson 4 is compelled to write. In the novel’s metafictional conclusion, Ferguson 4 reveals that he wrote the book “only after the thought of seeing them die had become unbearable to him” (Auster, 2017, p. 863). He explicitly states his goal: “to love those boys as if they were real, to love them as much as he loved himself” (Auster, 2017, p. 863). Here, the blank pages are revealed as the source of the creative act.

Material and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in a post-Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. Drawing primarily on the theoretical work of Slavoj Žižek, the analysis employs the concepts of the Divided Subject, the *Real*, and the Act as its principal analytical tools. These concepts are used to interpret both the narrative structure and the thematic organization of Paul Auster’s *4321*. The theoretical framework allows the study to examine how subjectivity is constructed through absence, rupture, and symbolic reconfiguration within the text.

The research proceeds through a close textual analysis of the novel, focusing on the formal and structural elements that shape the narrative. Particular attention is given to the novel's polyphonic architecture, especially the narrative strategy of presenting four parallel versions of the protagonist, Archibald Isaac Ferguson. Each of these narrative trajectories is examined as a distinct yet interconnected manifestation of subjectivity, allowing the analysis to explore how multiplicity, contingency, and narrative divergence reflect the psychoanalytic notion of the divided subject. Rather than treating the four lives as fragmented versions of a stable identity, the analysis interprets them as narrative enactments of a subject constituted through lack and structural incompleteness. In addition to the quadrupled narrative structure, the study closely analyzes the symbolic role of the "blank chapters" that appear after the deaths of Ferguson's parallel selves. These textual gaps are interpreted through Žižek's conception of the Real as the traumatic kernel that resists symbolization. The analysis considers how these moments of narrative silence function structurally within the novel, transforming absence into a meaningful formal element that interrupts the symbolic order of the text.

The final stage of the analysis focuses on the emergence of Ferguson 4 as the narrative's authorial figure. This moment is examined through Žižek's concept of the Act, understood as a radical intervention that reconfigures the symbolic field and produces a new subject position. By tracing the relationship between narrative structure, theoretical concepts, and textual moments of rupture, the study aims to demonstrate how *4321* articulates a model of subjectivity grounded in the productive potential of the void.

Results

The Creative Act as a Traverse of Fantasy

The ultimate fecundity of fragmentation in *4321* is realized not in the lives of the characters who die, but in the act of the one who survives. Ferguson 4, revealed as the author of the text, engages in what Žižek would term a genuine Ethical Act: he does not attempt to fill the void of his existence with a false sense of wholeness, but rather constructs his subjectivity *around* the void itself.

For Žižek, the "Act" is a gesture that reconfigures the symbolic order by traversing the fantasy. Ferguson 4 does not write to "recover" the lost selves (which would be impossible); he writes to *construct* a subject capable of surviving the void. The blank pages, therefore, are not *gaps in the*

story; they are the foundation of the story. They demonstrate that the subject is not defined by its fullness, but by how it structures its relationship to the Real. The “fecundity of fragmentation” is thus realized: the blanks do not silence the author; they give him his voice.

Writing as the Sinthome

In classical therapy, the goal might be to “heal” the divided subject, to integrate the fragments into a cohesive whole. However, Auster’s narrative suggests a different path, aligned with Lacan’s concept of the *sinthome*—the symptom that is not to be “cured”, but identified with, as it holds the subject’s reality together (Žižek, 1989, p. 81).

For Ferguson 4, the act of writing the divergent lives of his alter egos is his *sinthome*. In the novel’s final pages, he reflects on the structure of his creation: “three imaginary versions of himself, and then himself thrown in as Number Four for good measure, the author of the book” (Auster, 2017, p. 881). He admits that he creates these narratives “to test himself against the unknown and see if he could survive the struggle” (Auster, 2017, p. 725). By meticulously detailing the lives that *did not* happen, he gives symbolic form to the contingency of his own existence. He is not trying to *find* himself; he is inventing himself through the very fragmentation that trauma theory claims would destroy him. The fecundity here is the realization that the subject is nothing more than the narrative knots tied around the central lack.

The novel’s conclusion offers a profound insight into the nature of the Žižekian Act. Ferguson 4 decides to write the book “only after he had learned to love them... only after the thought of seeing them die had become unbearable to him, and then he would be alone with himself, the last man standing” (Auster, 2017, p. 863).

This “being alone with himself” is not a return to a pre-traumatic unity. It is the acceptance of the radical solitude of the subject who has “traversed the fantasy”. He accepts that the Other – either the other Fergusons, or the other possibilities— does not exist in reality, but must be sustained in fiction to make life bearable. The creative act, therefore, is not a flight *from* the void, but a flight *into* it. By becoming the author of his own fragmentation, Ferguson 4 transforms the traumatic “accident” of the Real into the fecundity of Art.

Discussion

Paul Auster's *4321* stands as a monumental testament to the productive power of the fractured self. By subjecting the novel's "polyphonic architecture" to a Žižekian analysis, this paper has challenged the prevalent Caruthian reading of fragmentation as a purely destructive wound. Instead, it has demonstrated that the novel's quadrupled narrative enacts the fecundity of the void—the generative potential that arises when the subject confronts the constitutive lack of their existence.

The analysis has shown that Archie Ferguson's contradictory selves are not symptoms of a shattered psyche, but symbolic masks that circle the Žižekian Void of Subjectivity. Furthermore, the novel's structural use of "blank chapters" functions as an eruption of the Real, transforming the silence of death into the structural foundation of the narrative. Finally, the emergence of Ferguson 4 as the writer reveals that the only "cure" for the divided subject is the Creative Act itself—the willingness to build a new symbolic order from the fragments of the old. Ultimately, *4321* teaches the reader that they are not persons who lose their way in the chaos of the world. They are, as Žižek posits, the gaps between their multiple potential lives. Definitely, it is in this gap—this articulate silence—that the story begins. Auster's fecundity lies in his refusal to close the wound, proving that it is through the cracks in the self that the light of the narrative pours in.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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