

Apêndices



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Centro de Estudios Interculturale

www.iscap.ipp.pt/cei

Centro de Estudos Interculturais (CEI)
ISCAP, Gab. 333
Rua Jaime Lopes Amorim
4465-004 S. Mamede Infesta, Portugal
Tel: +351 22 905 0037
E-mail: cei@iscap.ipp.pt
Facebook: Centro de Estudos Interculturais
Twitter: ISCAPCEI

Presentación y Objetivos:

Desde 2007, el Centro de Estudios Interculturales (CEI) del ISCAP lleva a cabo la investigación básica y aplicada y coopera con instituciones nacionales y extranjeras en actividades de carácter científico, técnico y cultural. El CEI incluye en su nombre y objetivos el panorama generado por la investigación intercultural y transdisciplinar que desarrolla, por las oportunidades de intercambio que crea y las iniciativas editoriales que realiza. El equipo del CEI es formado por profesores y estudiantes del ISCAP e investigadores de otras instituciones nacionales y extranjeras, teniendo aún en cuenta un reputado Comité Científico Asesor.

El CEI organiza conferencias, proyectos, tesis y pasantías para estudiantes de grado y máster; cuenta con una biblioteca especializada abierta a toda la comunidad; y promueve la participación de sus colaboradores en conferencias y publicaciones nacionales e internacionales. Cada año se concede el Premio CEI para el mejor trabajo final de Máster en Traducción e Interpretación Especializados, celebrado en ISCAP.

El CEI es un centro de investigación del Instituto de Estudios de Literatura Tradicional de la Universidad Nueva de Lisboa y mantiene alianzas con lo CEMRI de la Universidade Aberta, Universidades de Vigo, Bretagne, Spiru Haret y Tehnica of Bucharest, Franche-Comté, Bourgogne-Dijon, Paris-Nanterre, Angers, Paraíba, Paraná, Jaén, Castilla la Mancha, Nicolas Copernicus-Torun, Artois, Barcelona, Letonia, Macao, Mozambique, Kuban State University, Skopje, Delaware State University y también con la Unyleya (Grupo Leya) y la Asociación Nacional de Empresarias, la Asociación Luso-Turca y el Centro Brasileño para la Investigación, Proyectos e Innovación del IPP. El CEI es miembro fundador de la ECREA *Women's Network*.

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Representaciones Interculturales de Género

Narrativas de Vida entre Este y Oeste

Geografías Literarias

Representaciones de Portugal en la Literatura No Portuguesa

Cultura Visual e Intermodalidad

2. Representaciones Culturales

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Representaciones Interculturales en Narrativas Militares del Siglo XIX

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Traducción Jurídica

Constitucionalismo Europeo y la Cuestión de la Lenguaje

La Investigación Multimedia en la Educación, Narrativas Digitales, Relatos de Vida, Identidad y Self

Traducción e Interpretación, Identidad e Ideología

Confíe en el Cuento Y en el Cuentista: Narrativas de los Profesores de Lenguas entre Culturas

Conferencias & Congresos:

II Congreso Internacional “**Las mujeres en el Imperio Colonial Portugués**”, ISCAP, 20-22 Noviembre 2006.

I Congreso Internacional de Estudios Interculturales, ISCAP, 9 Diciembre 2008.

Conferencia “**Colonialismo y Interculturalidad**”, ISCAP, 6 Febrero 2009.

Conferencia “**Interculturalidad en las artes y los medios de comunicación**”, ISCAP, 29 Abril 2009.

Conferencia “**Las palabras del Mar / Las palabras de la Ría**”, Museu Marítimo de Ílhavo, 23 Octubre 2009.

ECREA Workshop “**Gender in European Academia**”, ISCAP, 25 Noviembre 2009.

Conferencia “**La Globalización Lusófona. Perspectivas Interculturales**”, ISCAP, 18 Junio 2010.

Conferencia “**Puentes Interculturales. Traducción y Cooperación**”, ISCAP, 9 Julio 2010.

Conferencia Internacional “**InterCulturas & InterArtes**”, ISCAP, 14 Enero 2011.

II Congreso Internacional de Estudios Interculturales, ISCAP, 25-27 Mayo 2011.

Conferencia “**Cultura Visual Urbana e Expresiones de Arte Popular**”, ISCAP, 17-18 Noviembre 2011.

I & II Foro Internacional de Comunicación Intercultural, ISCAP, Mayo 2012 y 2013.

Conferencia “**Dinámicas Interculturales a Oriente**”, ISCAP, 14 Diciembre 2012.

Conferencia “**Educación, Ciencia y Cultura en la Era Digital**”, ISCAP, 19 Febrero 2014

Workshop “**La Narrativa Digital: Viviendo la Interculturalidad**”. ISCAP, 7 Mayo 2014

Conferencia “**El Marketing Entre Culturas**”. ISCAP, 14 Mayo 2014.

I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII Ciclos de Conferencias 2007-2015

Libros:

- ***Eastwards / Westwards: Which Direction for Gender Studies in the 21st Century?*** Cambridge Scholars Publishing (CSP), 2007.

“An intellectual journey that is simultaneously exciting and disturbing.” (Barbara Andaya, Univ. of Hawai‘i)

- ***Condição Feminina no Império Colonial Português***. Edições Politema, 2008.

“Este libro es uno de esos que sorprende. Por la calidad, por la diversidad, por la coraje.” (Público)

- ***Women in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: The Theatre of Shadows***. CSP, 2008.

“Recent and very challenging feminist work on the position of women in the Portuguese colonial empire.” (*International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter*)

- ***From Here to Diversity: Globalization and Intercultural Dialogues***. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

Libro del Mes del CPS – Social Sciences – Agosto 2012.

Invitado por el gobierno del Azerbaiyán para el *II Foro Mundial Sobre Dialogo Intercultural*, Baku, Junio 2013.

- ***Diálogos Interculturais: Os Novos Rumos da Viagem***. Vida Económica, 2011.

“Un gran cruce de conocimiento.” (*Jornal de Notícias*)

- ***In Permanent Transit: Discourses and Maps of the Intercultural Experience***. CSP, 2012.

“A well-choreographed series of essays on a very poignant theme” (*Journal of International and Global Studies*)

- ***Entre Margens e Centros: Textos e Práticas das Novas Interculturas***. Afrontamento, 2013.

- ***Intercultural Communication, Representations and Practices: A Global Approach***. Unyleya, 2014.

- ***Popular and Visual Culture: Design, Circulation and Consumption***. CSP, 2014.

- ***E-REI, Revista Electrónica de Estudios Interculturales***

VIII Ciclo de Conferencias 2014/2015

15 Septiembre 2014 – 15.00 <i>Potentials and Barriers in Intercultural Understanding</i> Adrian Holliday (Canterbury Christ Church University)	17 Octubre 2014 – 16.00 <i>Culturas Juveniles, Espacios Públicos Y Circuitos Digitales: Una Reflexión</i> Ricardo Campos (CEI & CEMRI – Univ. Aberta)	14 Noviembre 2014 – 16.00 <i>La Imagen de la Alemania en los Media Portugueses Durante la Queda del Muro de Berlín</i> Marco Furtado (CEI – ISCAP)
12 Diciembre 2014 – 16.00 <i>Po-ex.net: Un modelo y una Propuesta de Taxonomía para Archivos Digitales de Literatura Experimental y Electrónica</i> Rui Torres (Univ. Fernando Pessoa)	16 Enero 2015 – 16.00 <i>FÓRO JOVENES INVESTIGADORES DEL CEI</i>	13 Marzo 2015 – 16.00 <i>Viajes por España: Espacios vividos, espacios ficcionados</i> Sara Pascoal (CEI – ISCAP) & <i>Inmigrantes Chinos: Una reflexión sobre el significado de comunidad</i> Isabel Pinto (CEI)
17 Abril 2015 – 16.00 <i>Economía y arte en revistas de vanguardia en Inglaterra y Alemania durante la I Guerra Mundial</i> Manuela Veloso (CEI – ISCAP)	15 Mayo 2015 – 16.00 <i>Portuguese-Romanian Intercultural Connections</i> Luiza Marinescu (University Spiru Haret, Bucarest)	12 Junio 2015 – 16.00 <i>Coloquio Interdisciplinar</i> <i>CEI – IELT (FCSH/UNL)</i>

ISCAP



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“Educação, Ciência e Cultura na era Digital”

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Paula Peres

Revisão e formatação:

Hermano Moura

Centro de Estudos Interculturais

Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto

Gabinete 333

Rua Jaime Lopes Amorim

4465-004 S. Mamede Infesta

Portugal

Tlf: +351 22 905 00 37 (ext. 333)

URL: www.iscap.ipp.pt/cei

E-mail: cei@iscap.ipp.pt

Facebook: Centro de Estudos Interculturais

Twitter: ISCAPCEI

ÍNDICE GERAL

Introdução

Paula Peres e Clara Sarmento	v
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Capítulo 1

Reflexões sobre a prática docente no Programa Um Computador Por Aluno

Ana Maria Ribas.....	1
Introdução.....	1
Formação docente e tecnologias da informação e comunicação	3
O debate sobre a prática docente no PROUCA	7
Considerações finais.....	17

Capítulo 2

Cultura e comunicação na educação online

Paula Peres	19
Contextos sociais	19
Sociedades digitais	20
Aprendizagem global	21

Capítulo 3

Formação continuada de professores no ciberespaço: Uma perspectiva intercultural

Maria Cristina Lima Paniago Lopes	
Rosimeire Martins Régis dos Santos	25
Introdução.....	25
Formação continuada no ciberespaço.....	26
Formação continuada intercultural	27
Considerações.....	30

Bibliografia	31
---------------------------	-----------

Notas Biográficas	35
--------------------------------	-----------

Índice Remissivo	37
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INTRODUÇÃO

EDUCAÇÃO, TECNOLOGIA E CULTURA NA CONTEMPORANEIDADE

PAULA PERES E CLARA SARMENTO

O PROJECTO DE DIVULGAÇÃO *EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E CULTURA NA ERA DIGITAL* pretende promover a reflexão sobre as tendências contemporâneas e os problemas estratégicos da tecnologia e da educação nos fluxos interculturais da globalização. A presente edição ensaia uma análise crítica das variações culturais no âmbito tecnológico e da relação entre o homem e a tecnologia, enquanto processo de socialização e de apropriação.

Nenhum indivíduo isolado pode ser interculturalmente competente. Somente através da construção conjunta de relações onde o diálogo e a atenção recíproca prevalecem será possível adquirir e praticar as competências interculturais. Os custos da incompetência intercultural são elevados e incluem todos os perigos que advêm do conflito e da guerra, pelo que é vital investir em actividades que permitam esclarecer, ensinar, promover, aprovar e apoiar um frutífero diálogo intercultural. O futuro da diversidade cultural depende de acções presentes que fomentem o conhecimento e o respeito pelos indivíduos e pelas sociedades, com as suas identidades e epistemologias próprias.

A competência intercultural é adquirida por meio de experiências de educação e de vida, em oportunidades de aprendizagem formal e informal, em presença ou mediadas pelas tecnologias da era digital. As inúmeras formas de comunicação e de conhecimento que as novas tecnologias permitem servem como ferramentas decisivas para o encontro entre membros de diferentes horizontes culturais que, de outro modo, dificilmente poderiam comunicar entre si. São sem dúvida muitos os desafios que o diálogo intercultural enfrenta mas, à medida que a globalização aproxima fronteiras, cresce a motivação para cultivar as competências interculturais e combater as representações do “outro” através de vagos estereótipos.

A questão permanece quanto ao equilíbrio entre o fluxo maciço de informação no mundo contemporâneo e a persistente fragilidade do sentido de comunidade. Na busca desse equilíbrio situa-se a reflexão crítica que aqui se ensaia, relevante sobretudo quando existem diferentes culturas em co-presença. O mundo está aparentemente mais uno e as possibilidades de diálogo parecem expandir-se sem obstáculos – objectivo primordial da tecnologia ao serviço da educação – apesar de ser ainda difícil alcançar a unidade na diversidade, através de linhas comuns de compreensão intelectual.

A diversidade cultural não é, de forma alguma, incompatível com o progresso e o desenvolvimento. Na verdade, a emergência da chamada “sociedade do conhecimento” implica só por si toda uma diversidade de epistemologias e suas fontes de produção. A fim de possibilitar uma coexistência harmoniosa entre elas, é necessário promover competências interculturais, incluindo as que são inerentes às práticas quotidianas das comunidades. Para tal, a educação e a ciência devem reconhecer e integrar a diversidade de conteúdos e de métodos de ensino existentes, neles incluindo os modos tradicionais de transmissão de conhecimento ligados a culturas específicas, que poderão também beneficiar das tecnologias e ferramentas da globalização.

Só assim será possível desenvolver medidas que permitam aos membros de grupos marginalizados participar em projectos destinados a combater os estereótipos culturais, desenvolver espaços de ensino reais ou virtuais e realizar uma efectiva interacção cultural, especialmente em países onde existe algum tipo de conflito entre comunidades.

A pluralidade de meios é um pré-requisito para a promoção do diálogo intercultural e é, portanto, crucial para o acesso generalizado ao ensino. A pluralidade de meios permite a expressão de diferentes opiniões, culturas, línguas e grupos, em qualquer sociedade. Mas a tolerância, transparência e equidade face a todas essas diferenças só pode ser uma realidade se estiver sustentada na informação e na educação generalizadas.

Deste modo, o conhecimento e a consciência alimentados pela educação criam pontes entre culturas e criam férteis terrenos comuns onde a ciência e a tecnologia tornam-se capazes de gerar, antes de mais, verdadeira comunicação e compreensão intercultural.

Na sua contribuição para a comunicação e a compreensão entre culturas, as páginas de *EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E CULTURA NA ERA DIGITAL* ABREM COM O CAPÍTULO “Reflexões Sobre a Prática Docente no Programa um Computador por Aluno – Prouca”, onde são discutidas práticas docentes inovadoras numa escola pública brasileira. O “Programa um Computador por Aluno” (Prouca) prevê a distribuição de computadores portáteis aos alunos da rede pública brasileira, com foco na inclusão digital e no uso das tecnologias da informação e da comunicação. O texto resume um processo de investigação qualitativa, cujos resultados demonstraram que a presença dos computadores portáteis na escola trouxe consigo dúvidas, inseguranças e receios de trabalhar com algo desconhecido. O estudo revela ainda uma necessidade de mudança nas práticas docentes de cunho organizacional, técnico e pedagógico, nas aulas mediadas pelo computador. Por essa razão, defende-se a necessidade de investir tempo, meios técnicos e planeamento na reorganização dos curricula, de modo a explorar todo o potencial destas novas práticas pedagógicas.

Introdução

O segundo capítulo aborda a questão da “Cultura e Comunicação na Educação Online”, convidando à reflexão sobre a relação entre os contextos sociais e as tecnologias digitais, bem como sobre a criação de sociedades de informação, comunicação e aprendizagem, tanto a nível local como global. Considerando a aprendizagem como algo que resulta da forma como se aceita ou rejeita a mensagem comunicada, o capítulo analisa ainda alguns aspectos da comunicação educacional num ambiente global.

O terceiro e último capítulo, “Formação Continuada de Professores no Ciberespaço: Uma Perspectiva Intercultural”, demonstra as possibilidades de formação que se abrem aos docentes na contemporaneidade global, baseando-se numa investigação qualitativa sob a forma de etnografia virtual. Inclui a descrição de procedimentos metodológicos, como a captura dos diálogos e das interações entre os sujeitos participantes da formação contínua virtual na rede social *facebook*. Explicita conceitos de formação contínua no ciberespaço e de formação contínua intercultural e analisa os resultados obtidos. Estes indicam que, apesar de nem sempre as infra-estruturas tecnológicas serem as mais adequadas, os computadores e a internet tornam-se elementos indissociáveis da formação e da prática docente. Os docentes percebem a importância da utilização dos recursos tecnológicos, estão dispostos a experimentá-los nas suas práticas, encaram-nos como fontes de actualização permanente e reflectem sobre a natureza da internet e das tecnologias e sobre o seu impacto no processo de ensino-aprendizagem em diferentes contextos culturais.

EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E CULTURA NA ERA DIGITAL faz parte do programa de investigação do Centro de Estudos Interculturais (CEI) do Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Instituto Politécnico do Porto (ISCAP-IPP). Todas as informações sobre o CEI estão disponíveis em: www.iscap.ipp.pt/cei.

Esta publicação teve origem nos trabalhos apresentados no Colóquio “Educação, Ciência e Cultura na Era Digital”, que o CEI realizou e acolheu no ISCAP-IPP, a 19 Fevereiro 2014, em mais uma colaboração com o Centro de Estudos das Migrações e das Relações Interculturais (CEMRI) da Universidade Aberta.

Neste volume, preservou-se a grafia dos originais e todos os textos são da exclusiva responsabilidade dos seus autores.

As actividades do CEI contam com o apoio da Presidência do ISCAP-IPP, a quem as responsáveis por esta publicação exprimem o seu sincero reconhecimento. Estão também gratas pelo trabalho de revisão e edição levado a cabo por Hermano Henrique Marques Esteves de Moura, finalista do Mestrado em Tradução e Interpretação Especializadas do ISCAP-IPP.

Paula Peres e Clara Sarmento
Dezembro de 2014

CAPITULO 1

REFLEXÕES SOBRE A PRÁTICA DOCENTE NO PROGRAMA UM COMPUTADOR POR ALUNO¹

ANA MARIA RIBAS

INTRODUÇÃO

O presente artigo traz um recorte da dissertação intitulada Programa um Computador por Aluno (PROUCA): Formação e Prática Docente desenvolvida na linha de pesquisa Práticas Pedagógicas e Suas Relações com a Formação Docente do curso de Mestrado do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da Universidade Católica Dom Bosco em Campo Grande-MS. Neste recorte a finalidade é discutir a prática docente no PROUCA, em uma escola pública estadual de Terenos-MS.

Esta instituição escolar² com 343 alunos matriculados em 2010 foi contemplada com o Programa Um computador por aluno – PROUCA – do Ministério da Educação - MEC em parceria com a Secretaria Estadual de Educação de Mato Grosso do Sul. Este programa prevê a distribuição de computadores portáteis aos alunos da rede pública com foco na inclusão digital e integração das ações na escola para o uso das tecnologias da informação e da comunicação (TIC). A escola foi beneficiada com 400 computadores portáteis/laptops modelo ClassMatePC com memória RAM de 512 MB, tela de LCD com sete polegadas, *software* livre com código aberto, editor de textos, planilhas, apresentação de slides e todos eles conectados à rede mundial de computadores por meio do dispositivo *wireless* para toda a comunidade escolar.

Diante disso, surgem desafios marcados por mudanças relacionadas com a prática pedagógica dos professores, os quais estão sendo impelidos a romper com suas práticas de utilização de um único laboratório padrão com 20 máquinas e a lidar com alunos tendo em mãos um computador portátil/laptop conectado à internet na sala de aula (Figura 1).

A pesquisa define-se do ponto de vista metodológico como uma investigação com abordagem qualitativa. Entendemos por abordagem qualitativa, segundo Bogdan e Biklen (1982), a que apresenta cinco características básicas: dados descritivos; inserção direta do pesquisador no ambiente pesquisado, sempre preocupado em apresentar a perspectiva dos participantes da pesquisa; foco no processo e não no produto; valorização do ambiente natural como provedor de dados; e o pesquisador como o principal instrumento de investigação.

Concordamos ainda com Bogdan e Biklen (1994: 49), quando afirmam que a abordagem da investigação qualitativa exige que o mundo seja examinado com ideia de que nada é trivial, que tudo tem um potencial para constituir uma pista que nos permita estabelecer uma compreensão mais esclarecedora do nosso objeto de estudo.

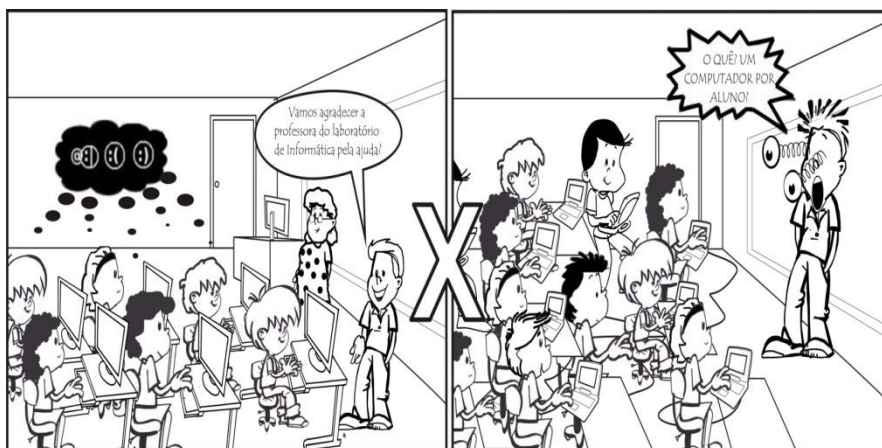


Fig. 1: Problema da pesquisa
Fonte: Autora

Nesse sentido, a pesquisa com abordagem qualitativa implica um contato direto do pesquisador com o objeto. A imersão do pesquisador com rigor científico em informações ricas e detalhadas que contribuem para o aprofundamento da compreensão do contexto no qual ocorre o fenômeno que está sendo estudado.

Os sujeitos da pesquisa são professoras do ensino fundamental e médio que concluíram o curso oferecido pelo PROUCA em 2011. Consiste em três professoras dos anos iniciais do ensino fundamental, três professoras dos anos

¹ Pesquisa financiada pelo Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico-CNPQ.

² A Escola possui 24 professores e esta inserida na fase Piloto do PROUCA.

finais do ensino fundamental e duas professoras do ensino médio. Os sujeitos concordaram em participar na pesquisa mediante os esclarecimentos dos objetivos, fundamentados nas normas do Comitê de Ética da Universidade, bem como assinatura do termo de consentimento livre e esclarecido.

Os dados coletados para essa pesquisa se deram por meio de entrevista semiestruturada durante o segundo semestre de 2012 com foco na prática docente no PROUCA.

Os excertos das entrevistas foram transcritos sem qualquer alteração. No sentido de manter o anonimato identificamos os sujeitos com nomes dos *softwares* existentes no *laptop*. Ressaltamos que a escolha dos nomes não visa criar um estereótipo das professoras e sim dar visibilidade e voz aos diálogos produzidos nesta pesquisa.

Outro compromisso assumido é a não divulgação do ano e/ou turma em que as professoras atuam, bem como o nome das disciplinas ministradas, que se justifica pelo fato da escola ser pequena e ter apenas um professor de cada área do currículo, logo, se as referíssemos, isso provavelmente acabaria com o anonimato.

Para atender ao objetivo desta pesquisa, este artigo foi organizado da seguinte forma: primeiro realizamos uma discussão partindo do princípio de que a formação continuada pode influenciar a prática docente para o uso das tecnologias na educação. Em seguida, debatemos a prática docente no PROUCA. Por fim, tecemos algumas considerações sobre a prática docente de uma escola pública estadual em que todos os alunos e professores têm à disposição um computador portátil.

FORMAÇÃO DOCENTE E TECNOLOGIAS DA INFORMAÇÃO E COMUNICAÇÃO

Para Bruno e Teixeira (2010: 154) “podemos qualificar o cenário atual como: midiático, informacional, tecnológico, pós-moderno, globalizado, cibercultural”. Assim, a sociedade é marcada pelo excesso e velocidade da informação e mudanças nas relações de tempo e de espaço. Estes avanços das tecnologias da informação e comunicação (TIC)³ suscitam mudanças em todas as esferas da sociedade e a escola não está imune a este processo de transformação. Por esse prisma, Cunha (1998) afirma que o professor encara muitos desafios, entre eles, as novas tecnologias.

Kenski (2003, 2010) defende a ideia da necessidade dos professores aproveitarem este momento para a adoção de uma postura de enfrentamento a estes desafios e transformarem essa infinidade de ferramentas proporcionadas pelo advento das tecnologias em possibilidades significativas no ensino. Esta mesma pesquisadora discute que as TIC no ambiente escolar provocam novas formas de ensinar e aprender. Isso significa que o ensino não ocorre na sala de aula somente centrado na figura do professor. As TIC presentes no processo educacional podem aproximar pessoas, aprender e ensinar de forma colaborativa, interativa e coletiva.

Tendo em vista este constante cenário de transformações, a formação de professores assume um papel fundamental para atendimento às novas demandas das gerações acostumadas ao uso constante das tecnologias. O grande desafio da formação não está centrado apenas na disponibilização de tecnologias para utilização no espaço escolar e sim na compreensão pedagógica destes recursos tecnológicos nas práticas pedagógicas.

Portanto, defendemos uma formação permanente que não enxerga a tecnologia como salvadora dos problemas educacionais. Não acreditamos, assim como Barreto (2009), em uma formação que enxerga as TIC como um fetiche, com poderes e solução para realizar os sonhos, desejos e fantasias da/ na educação. Barreto (2006: 2) conclui que “[...] é como se a sua simples presença, em uma espécie de passe de mágica, resultasse em diferenças substantivas nos mais variados processos de ensinar-aprender”. Contribuem para esta discussão Sancho e Hernandez (2006), que criticam a postura do professor tecnófilo, o qual acredita na possibilidade das tecnologias sanarem imediatamente as angústias, perplexidades e todos os problemas existentes no cotidiano escolar.

Também não concordamos em apoiar a postura de um professor tecnófobo, que repudia as possibilidades pedagógicas das TIC, enxergando-as como algo prejudicial na educação, a todo o momento temendo ser substituído por elas, negando o seu próprio valor profissional na educação.

O reconhecimento da inserção das TIC no processo educacional pode ser uma forma de descentralização do poder do professor, uma forma de pensar a educação em uma relação dialógica, sem incorrer em práticas mecanicistas e ditadoras. Em outras palavras, é necessário fundamentar teoricamente ideias para debate e construção de um trabalho pedagógico com as TIC voltado para os problemas educacionais.

Sob este prisma, Sancho e Hernandez (2006: 279) propõem que:

A comunidade escolar se depara com três caminhos: repelir as tecnologias e tentar ficar fora do processo; apropriar-se da técnica e transformar a vida em uma corrida atrás do novo; ou apropriar-se dos processos, desenvolvendo habilidades que permitam o controle das tecnologias e de seus efeitos. Consideramos a terceira opção como a que melhor viabiliza uma formação intelectual, emocional e corporal do cidadão, que lhe permita criar, planejar e interferir na sociedade.

Por conseguinte, a formação de professores deve conceber as TIC como ambientes propícios à construção de conhecimento, rejeitando a perspectiva de transmissão de saberes, que seja capaz de gerar movimentos não lineares, refletindo sobre suas práticas no contexto social.

Para Sampaio e Leite (2008: 10) “a escola, como parte importante desse mundo, cujas referências de poder e conhecimento têm se alterado fortemente, não pode ignorar esse processo”, ou seja, um processo que orienta uma

³ Estas abrangem as tecnologias computacionais, a telefonia móvel e a internet.

educação de acordo com as necessidades da sociedade em que está inserida, primando por uma base crítica e reflexiva da realidade. No entendimento de Sampaio e Leite (2008: 102), isto somente é possível se a formação “[...] for baseada em um conhecimento que permita ao professor interpretar, refletir e dominar criticamente a tecnologia” (id., 2008: 102). Para Belloni (2003: 77)

[...] a perspectiva da formação de professores exige esta reflexão sobre como integrar as TIC à educação como caminho para pensar como formar professores enquanto futuros usuários ativos e críticos [...]

Orientado por esta perspectiva crítica para o domínio das tecnologias, Barreto (2009) critica os programas de formação que têm como referência a formação de professores como usuários consumidores, formações que não atendem as necessidades reais da escola e impõem ainda modelos homogêneos, preocupando-se apenas em atingir números quantitativos.

Complementando, Barreto (2009: 115) afirma:

[...] para tanto, é preciso questionar as expressões que, a um só tempo, sustentam a defesa de perspectivas messiânicas e apontam para atalhos que aliam reducionismo a sofisticação tecnológica. [...] é preciso instituir espaços de trocas sistemáticas entre os sujeitos para o encaminhamento de perguntas como: quais tecnologias? Para quem? Para quê? Em que termos?

A partir da análise de Sampaio e Leite (2008), Belloni (2003) e Barreto (2009), podemos elencar alguns elementos na formação de professores para a inserção das TIC. Uma formação que privilegia apenas o domínio tecnológico das ferramentas, fundamentada na racionalidade técnica não é suficiente para entender as constantes transformações da sociedade. Portanto, é primordial uma formação que não seja amarrada em teorias e práticas tradicionais de ensino, que combata as ideologias dominantes, que apoie os professores na construção de uma visão crítica e emancipatória das TIC no âmbito escolar.

Desta forma concebemos uma formação docente que se desdobra numa postura que pressupõe o docente como “intelectual crítico” (Contreiras, 2002) e o aluno como autor de conhecimentos, ambos capazes de refletir sobre os aspectos positivos e negativos das tecnologias da informação e comunicação e que não enxergam as TIC como um imperativo em suas práticas.

Almeida e Prado (1999) advogam a ideia de que a formação de professores com pressupostos baseados na reflexão sobre a prática torna-se mais relevante do que a aquisição de modernos artefatos tecnológicos. Cabe trazer um questionamento: o que adianta a escola adquirir modernos equipamentos, se não suscitam novos desafios para a produção de conhecimentos, se a prática do professor continua a mesma?

Nesse entendimento, a formação perpassa pela compreensão emancipatória das possibilidades pedagógicas oferecidas pelas tecnologias da informação e comunicação, construída a partir da realidade concreta de seus sujeitos, tendo como alicerce os pressupostos teórico-metodológicos que devem ser mobilizados no processo pedagógico.

Acreditamos que um dos possíveis pontos de discussão sobre a formação de professores, quanto à inserção das tecnologias da informação e comunicação em suas práticas pedagógicas, são os movimentos numa perspectiva crítica e reflexiva, que podem garantir o desenvolvimento de práticas voltadas para o protagonismo, que considera os envolvidos como sujeitos passíveis de (re)escrever, (re)construir suas histórias e não como fantoches da sociedade vigente.

Almeida e Valente (2011: 10) enfatizam:

é necessário repensar o papel da escola neste mundo digital o qual vem atribuindo aos educadores múltiplos dilemas de natureza epistemológica e teórico-metodológica, considerando-se a prática desses profissionais

Nas palavras de Almeida e Valente (2011), podemos inferir que é inegável o destaque do computador, neste mundo digital, como um processo que envolve diversas competências na vida dos professores e alunos. Teremos uma pausa nesta dissertação para repensar o papel desta máquina na educação, nossa próxima discussão.

O DEBATE SOBRE A PRÁTICA DOCENTE NO PROUCA

A inserção do *laptop* no contexto escolar lança aos educadores desafios relacionados com a prática docente. Ouvir pode revelar as lacunas e as possibilidades pedagógicas do computador no processo de ensino e aprendizagem, sobretudo nesta experiência brasileira de implantação do PROUCA.

Nesse sentido, a professora Squeak relata que a chegada dos *laptops* à escola trouxe consigo dúvidas, insegurança e o medo de trabalhar com algo desconhecido. Por outro lado, enxerga-a como um desafio para a sua prática pedagógica.

Houve mudança sim na minha prática pedagógica, eu acredito, são os desafios, e eu creio que este desafio veio para um crescimento. Foi gerado um medo, normal como em todo desafio, será que vou conseguir, será que vai dar certo?

A professora TuxPaint percebe que os alunos preferem as aulas com os *laptops* a uma aula com lousa e livro. Consequentemente, isso a faz planejar mais aulas com os computadores portáteis para atender as necessidades dos seus alunos.

Prática docente no Programa Um Computador Por Aluno

Eu vejo assim que quando a gente vai trabalhar tanto na sala de informática ou laptop, os alunos eles ficam assim mais diferentes, do que a gente tá lá, com uma aula com livro, lousa e com explicação. Quando você vai para o laptop, você percebe que eles ficam mais atentos. Porque eles gostam da tecnologia. Acho que isso muda totalmente a prática pedagógica da gente porque antes era só lousa e livro, livro e lousa.

Sob estes aspectos, Almeida e Valente (2011) argumentam a necessidade de formações com movimentos de aliar a teoria à prática e a prática à teoria. Desta maneira, o professor pode deixar de lado o medo e refletir sobre suas próprias práticas, aprendendo mediante às situações problemáticas vivenciadas na sala de aula com o *laptop*. Kenski (2013: 91) defende a ideia:

formar professores com qualidade e conhecimento teórico e prático para atuar em múltiplas frentes, além dos espaços tradicionais da educação [...] é uma necessidade que a nova cultura e a nova sociedade exigem

A professora KLogo reconhece as mudanças na sua prática pedagógica quando pensa na elaboração do planejamento. Preocupa-se em desenvolver aulas criativas com foco na aprendizagem dos alunos. Além disso, expressa uma dificuldade em integrar o *laptop* na sua prática pedagógica quando considera a sala de aula, a sala de tecnologia e as aulas com *laptop* como ambientes fragmentados, conforme relato a seguir.

Quando eu vou fazer o meu planejamento eu tenho que pensar nele muito bem, porque na verdade eu tenho três possibilidades. Eu tenho a sala de Tecnologias, tenho o LAPTOP e tenho a minha prática de sala de aula sem os recursos tecnológicos. Então eu tenho que pensar na dinâmica, na didática, como eu vou transferir aquele conteúdo para que saia uma aula bem preparada. [...] eu fico pensando não é fácil, não você tem que ter criatividade. Puxa como é que vou trabalhar com o laptop. Aí já sai um monte de interrogação e se eu fizer isso, corremos todos os riscos de dar certo ou não. Mas, creio que mudou sim, houve uma mudança.

Ao considerar as necessidades da integração do computador às práticas pedagógicas, Valente (1997), defende que a formação deve criar condições para que o professor compreenda a integração do computador a sua prática pedagógica com uma abordagem integradora de conteúdos e não uma prática fragmentada do ensino.

[...] deve-se criar condições para que o professor saiba recontextualizar o aprendizado e a experiência vivida durante a sua formação para a sua realidade de sala de aula compatibilizando as necessidades de seus alunos e os objetivos pedagógicos que se dispõe a atingir” (Valente, 1997: 14)

A professora Planilha Eletrônica destaca em seu depoimento que sempre inovou nas suas práticas pedagógicas. Por essa razão, acredita que não houve mudanças na sua prática pedagógica. Argumenta que os *laptops* contribuem para que os alunos tenham oportunidades iguais na realização das atividades, o que não acontece no laboratório de informática da escola. Outro ponto evidenciado pela professora é a possibilidade de exploração dos recursos do *laptop*.

Eu acho que contribuiu, não mudou, acrescentou. Contribuiu assim, porque agora todos os meus alunos podem realmente fazer uma atividade, talvez por este ângulo, contribuiu para as aulas, sim. Durante o meu planejamento, continuo fazendo as mesmas coisas, sempre inovei. Vejo que estou adquirindo novas experiências. Não mudei, quando chegou o laptop, passei apenas a usá-lo mais que a sala de tecnologia, vejo que com o laptop a gente pode usar mais os recursos tecnológicos, não fico só limitado ao laboratório.

Para explicar esse contexto, embasamo-nos na afirmação de Almeida e Prado (2011: 38)

O uso do *laptop* educacional permite romper com o isolamento das atividades desenvolvidas em laboratórios e integrar ao trabalho pedagógico [...], flexibilizando os tempos de aprender [...]

Ainda sob este cenário, as professoras KWord, KPresenter e TuxMath relatam as dificuldades enfrentadas no PROUCA relacionadas com as suas práticas pedagógicas. Pela fisionomia e suspiros ao longo das suas falas, as entrevistas, em alguns momentos, têm tons de desabafo. A partir destes diálogos, identificamos problemas de conectividade existentes na escola.

Notamos a angústia e a frustração das Professoras KWord, KPresenter, quando argumentam que necessitam de mais tempo para o planejamento, sentem que poderiam aperfeiçoar as suas práticas pedagógicas se a escola disponibilizasse de uma boa internet para o desenvolvimento das atividades com o *laptop*.

Na minha prática perco mais tempo para elaborar coisas que poderiam ser aplicados em determinados conteúdos. Se a internet funcionasse com a rapidez que deveria, seria uma ferramenta magnífica em sala de aula. Na hora poderíamos fazer o planejamento, já pegava o endereço, poderíamos pesquisar em sites rapidinhos. Mas e aí..., não é possível. Acho que mudaria mais a minha prática se correspondesse às nossas expectativas, rapidez na internet (Professora KWord).

Então, mudou e não mudou. Mudou porque agora eu preciso de mais tempo para pesquisar, planejar minha aula e também porque temos mais uma ferramenta e não mudou mais porque não temos internet. Para falar a verdade, sem o laptop minha prática seria a mesma. Minha principal dificuldade com o laptop é a internet mesmo (Professora KPresenter).

As falas das professoras KWord e KPresenter descortinam um problema percorrido nessa trajetória tanto de ordem técnica como pedagógica, como professoras sabemos e não podemos negar nosso posicionamento político. Portanto, é

inaceitável que os professores planejem aulas e se deparem com situações que causam perdas para os alunos e para a sua própria prática pedagógica. Queremos reafirmar que não podemos negar ao professor o direito ao planejamento e à inserção das tecnologias durante as suas atividades pedagógicas.

Nessa perspectiva, Kenski (2006) aponta:

[...] o uso das tecnologias digitais no ensino pelas escolas requer que ela esteja preparada para realizar investimentos consideráveis em equipamentos e, sobretudo, na viabilização das condições de acesso e de uso dessas máquinas. No atual momento tecnológico, não basta às escolas a posse de computadores e softwares para o uso em atividades de ensino. É preciso também que esses computadores estejam interligados e em condições de acessar a Internet e todos os demais sistemas e serviços disponíveis nas redes (Kenski; 2006: 70).

Esta mesma pesquisadora defende que a rotina das escolas sofre alterações à medida que estas são inseridas em um ambiente tecnológico. Para tanto, os professores necessitam de dedicar mais tempo aos estudos e pesquisas, para que integrem as TIC às suas práticas pedagógicas (Kenski, 2003).

Concordamos que o panorama da escola sofre alterações com a presença dos *laptops* e que os professores necessitam de buscar aperfeiçoamento continuado quanto ao uso das tecnologias para que ocorram mudanças significativas em suas práticas docentes. Entretanto, não podemos nos furtar à discussão da infraestrutura. Os professores necessitam de boas condições de trabalho para o surgimento de novas concepções pedagógicas. Imbernón (2011) sustenta que a falta de condições de trabalho na escola, referindo-se a espaços, salas de aula e material inadequados, prejudicam o funcionamento das atividades na escola.

Por esta razão, a ausência da internet no ambiente escolar gera um grande descontentamento. A professora TuxMath revela na entrevista que o *laptop* sem conectividade torna-se um penduricalho, um adorno para suas aulas. Com isto, eleva a sua preferência para a utilização do laboratório de informática.

Para mim, é um alibi para trabalhar com os alunos. É um recurso a mais, não tive que me reinventar, é um computador, além disso, a gente utiliza também sala de tecnologia, porque não temos internet no laptop. Estamos sem internet prefiro usar a sala de tecnologia, o laboratório tem mais recursos por causa da internet.

Devido à falta de conectividade nos *laptops*, a professora KWord considera uma aula de informática significativa somente as aulas realizadas no laboratório. A subutilização do *laptop* é apontada pela professora ao comparar os recursos do *laptop* a um livro para as suas “aulas comuns”. A professora conceitua como “aulas comuns” as aulas ministradas somente com o quadro, livro e giz. Em sua prática pedagógica, os computadores portáteis são usados para a reprodução de atividades que poderiam ser realizadas com o lápis e o papel.

A questão do laptop, como eu falei, uso como auxílio a sala de tecnologia ou as aulas comuns, né. Eu passo os conteúdos, depois utilizo o laptop como se fosse uma tarefa para recordar determinado na minha área. Eu, por exemplo, passo a teoria no quadro e depois eu utilizo o laptop para formar frases, coisas assim, que reforcem o meu conteúdo. Sempre voltado ao conteúdo, pra mim o laptop está no currículo, como se fosse um livro ali, mas a internet faz muita falta com certeza. Aula de informática, mesmo é no laboratório.

A professora KolourPaint ressalta que sua prática não mudou, enxerga o computador como um complemento para as suas aulas, articulado ao livro e quadro. A sua relação com os recursos do *laptop* para a criação de um novo ambiente de aprendizagem é distante, ressalta como suficiente a sua própria prática para a aprendizagem do aluno, independentemente da presença ou não do *laptop*.

Quando os computadores chegaram, não mudei minha prática, pra mim ele é um complemento, não mudou nada assim, veio uma ferramenta a mais para você trabalhar, então, por exemplo: você trabalha um texto com um aluno no quadro, e você pode trabalhar aquele texto no computador, peço para eles digitarem [...] Minha prática não mudou uso o quadro, o livro, o laptop. Comigo o aluno aprende de qualquer jeito, com ou sem laptop (risos)!

As vozes das professoras TuxPaint, KWord e KolourPaint aproximam-se de uma prática pedagógica centrada na reprodução e transmissão de conhecimentos, sem ampliação dos espaços de aprendizagem e em consonância com os mesmos caminhos percorridos pela educação tradicional. Para Cysneiros (1999) as reais mudanças na escola com a exploração dos recursos tecnológicos ocorrem quando se alteram as rotinas da escola, caso contrário, são apenas aparências, o velho com roupas novas.

Nesse sentido, corrobora Valente (1999), o computador, no paradigma construcionista, enfatiza a criação de ambientes de aprendizagem em que o aluno pode interagir e construir conhecimentos por meio do computador.

Desta maneira, o aluno tem condições de explorar ambientes como *sites*, *softwares*, ou até mesmo aplicativos com chances de não seguir um enredo mecânico previamente determinado pelo professor ou pelos programas existentes no computador, esquivando-se de exercícios óbvios, de repetição do tipo pergunta e resposta que não enxerga o aluno como sujeito ativo.

Não queremos culpabilizar as professoras por este cenário apresentado. Discutimos anteriormente que as condições de trabalho têm consequências na prática pedagógica dos professores. Imbernón (2011) afirma que é preciso formar o professor para as “mudanças e incertezas”. Por essa razão, defende que é necessário:

Prática docente no Programa Um Computador Por Aluno

[...] formar um professor como um profissional prático-reflexivo que se defronta com situações de incerteza, contextualizadas e únicas, que recorre à investigação como uma forma de decidir e intervir praticamente em tais situações, que faz emergir novos discursos teóricos e concepções alternativas de formação (Imbernón, 2011: 41)

Encontramos no depoimento da professora KPresenter esta forma de lidar com as situações de incerteza, denominada por ela como “estratégia”. A professora integra o *laptop* com outros recursos existentes na sala de aula para tentar minimizar os obstáculos vivenciados pela falta da internet, entretanto, declara que com a *internet* poderia desenvolver melhor o trabalho com os alunos.

Se eu não tenho internet, não deixo de utilizar o laptop. Normalmente eu não conto com ela mesmo. Nos meus planejamentos, procuro integrar com os recursos que eu tenho na sala de aula, como o livro, um DVD, um filme relacionado ao assunto. Posso pedir para eles um texto informativo sobre o conteúdo, uma apresentação, sei lá, tem tantas coisas. Não é uma estratégia? Sempre falo isso para minha coordenadora. O melhor, claro, seria se tivéssemos uma internet boa e rápida, mas é o que temos para hoje.

Os depoimentos das professoras KPresenter e Planilha Eletrônica durante as entrevistas relatam as dificuldades técnicas na prática pedagógica do PROUCA. Estes obstáculos, para as professoras TuxPaint e TuxMath, prejudicam os conteúdos das suas disciplinas. As falas das professoras sugerem a necessidade da reorganização do currículo no tempo e espaço: 50 minutos de aula não são suficientes para o desenvolvimento das aulas.

Às vezes a gente não quer usar o laptop, devido as dificuldades técnicas mesmo, isso cansa, perco meu tempo, uma frustração quando não é bem sucedida sua aula, sua atividade (Professora KPresenter).

Dificuldades para usar o laptop nas aulas, eu tenho. Acho que todos têm. Teve um dia que dei aula para o sétimo ano, sala cheia e aí nós estávamos estudando um determinado conteúdo e gostaria que eles assistissem um vídeo. E não foi possível porque estava muita lenta a internet. Foi muito frustrante, Ouvi isso dos alunos “ai esse negócio não presta, não presta”. Então este dia foi horrível, a internet que não dava certo. O que aconteceu que eu percebo, os nossos alunos às vezes tem uma aversão ao laptop porque eles tiveram várias atividades que não conseguiram concluir por conta da internet (Professora Planilha Eletrônica).

Tem professor que não usa porque dá um pouquinho de trabalho. Como eu já falei, digamos assim que eu chegue numa sala que tenha 20 alunos, talvez oito desses 20 alunos recebam computadores descarregados, às vezes tem uma deficiência no carregamento. Aí você tem que dedicar 20 minutos para organizar tudo. Isso prejudica o conteúdo, que é o que a gente não quer (Professora TuxMath).

Sendo sincera eu estou preferindo a sala de tecnologia, porque lá tem uma professora gerenciadora, ela me ajuda, eu me sinto mais segura caso ocorra algum problema. Na sala de aula, mesmo com a ajuda dos alunos, eu me sinto sozinha. É mais difícil! Pensa pegar o laptop no armário colocar a extensão, ligar tudinho. Eu tenho um tempo de aula de 50 min. Quando tenho aula com o laptop devo ter no máximo de 20 a 30 minutos de aula. No laboratório está tudo arrumadinho, com rede, parece que a aula rende mais (Professora TuxPaint).

Os depoimentos das professoras KPresenter, Planilha Eletrônica, TuxPaint e TuxMath, nos chamam sem dúvida a atenção para problemas técnicos, mas também evidenciam as mudanças no ambiente escolar a partir da utilização das tecnologias. Estes aspectos apontados pelas professoras nos remetem para as ideias de Kenski (2006: 41):

[...] abrir-se para novas educações, resultantes de mudanças estruturais nas formas de ensinar e aprender possibilitadas pela atualidade tecnológica é o desafio a ser assumido por toda a sociedade

Nesse sentido, contribuem os estudos de Mendes e Almeida (2011: 57):

a flexibilidade para lidar com esse novo movimento que se instala na sala de aula quando se utiliza o laptop indica uma nova forma de trabalhar o currículo, pois muda o espaço e as relações entre alunos, influenciando no desenvolvimento do currículo[...]

As professoras KWord e KLogo tecem considerações sobre os problemas técnicos apresentados no *laptop* relacionados à duração da bateria. Este fato resulta na diminuição dos espaços de aprendizagem e na dependência de reservas de horário, tendo a mesma metodologia do laboratório de informática.

Devido ao problema da bateria, se um professor utiliza nos primeiros tempos e a minha aula é no terceiro impossível usá-lo neste dia. Então, sempre esbarro com o problema da bateria. Por esta razão, temos que agendar, é a única forma para dar certo, por isso eu concordo (Professora KWord)

Para usar o laptop você tem que seguir uma programação da professora da sala de tecnologia, não tenho muita autonomia, ela que programa, ela que faz o horário para cada professor, não posso chegar e falar assim “quero usar o laptop amanhã, não tem como”, tem que respeitar a programação. Desse jeito, eu acho melhor, porque cada um sabe o seu horário, ninguém vai pegar o laptop na aula da outra, gosto da organização, da programação com relação a isso. Porque a bateria não dura muito, se um professor usar nos dois primeiros tempos, com certeza na próxima aula não teremos mais bateria, ano passado isso já aconteceu comigo (Professora KLogo)

Portanto, as professoras não têm à disposição o *laptop* para uso o tempo todo, independentemente de horário, diminuindo suas potencialidades. Para Mendes e Almeida (2011) a presença e disponibilidade do *laptop* o tempo todo em sala de aula facilitam a sua utilização pelos professores, potencializando a inovação das atividades e cultura tecnológica na escola.

Não podemos deixar de registrar que apesar da existência destas dificuldades de cunho organizacional, técnico e pedagógico, as professoras não deixam de utilizar o *laptop*, que integram com outros recursos em sala de aula, como o livro, o quadro e os próprios recursos do *laptop*. Todas as atividades propostas pelos professores, sejam lúdicas ou apenas a digitação de um texto, têm objetivos relacionados com o conteúdo que está sendo ministrado. Sendo assim, é necessário retomar o que discutimos anteriormente sobre uma formação para a mudança e a incerteza (Imbernón, 2011).

Os relatos a seguir apontam para o confronto dos professores mediante estas situações de incerteza, neste caso, a dificuldade de conexão à internet. Os professores esforçam-se para mediar as suas aulas de uma forma que propicie o diálogo, interação e colaboração, integrando as suas aulas com os recursos disponíveis no *laptop*.

Na ausência da internet trabalho mais com o KWord, KPresenter e às vezes eu uso aquele recurso da pintura, mas para ilustrar um texto tudo dentro do conteúdo (Professora TuxMath)

Realizamos um projeto aqui na escola devido à sujeira que existia na escola, conversamos com eles: você sabe se a escola está limpa? Você joga o lixo no lugar certo? Os alunos usaram o *laptop* para fotografar o pátio da escola onde o lixo era descartado de maneira errada, aí eles saíram procurando lixo por toda a escola. Discutíamos o que poderíamos fazer para diminuir o lixo na escola ou até mesmo para melhorar. Este projeto nós apresentamos em um seminário, foi bem legal, porque partiu da realidade deles (Professora KPresenter)

Como eles estão aprendendo os números e a ler também, trabalhamos com aqueles joguinhos que tem no *laptop*. As crianças adoram e eu vejo que eles aprendem mesmo! (Professora KLogo)

Semana passada eu tive uma aula com o *laptop*. Eles copiaram um texto, copiam bonitinho. Primeiro eu ditei, depois passei no quadro, os que copiaram, ficaram bonitinho, interessante. Você sabe que dá até para salvar. Então eles salvaram. Quando terminaram de copiar vem perguntar pra mim “tá certo, professora? Professora porque está vermelho aqui embaixo da letra?” Aí eu explico o motivo, sempre questionam (Professora, KolourPaint)

Contribui para esta discussão, Imbernón (2011: 43 e 44):

é preciso desenvolver novas práticas alternativas baseadas na verdadeira autonomia e colegialidade [...] que permitam vislumbrar novas formas de entender a profissão

Consideramos também uma dessas novas práticas, a aula da professora Planilha Eletrônica. Ela propôs uma pesquisa aos alunos e explorou as características de mobilidade do *laptop*. No depoimento da professora podemos enxergar que a utilização do *laptop*, explorando os seus aspectos relacionados à mobilidade, pode romper com o ensino forjado entre quatro paredes.

Fiz uma pesquisa, foi o pessoal do oitavo ano, era uma sala numerosa, então se eles vem para o laboratório, nem sempre tem computador para todos, nem todos vão fazer a atividade realmente, sempre um vai fazer e outro só observar, porque sentam em dupla. Com o *laptop* temos a possibilidade de que cada um vai fazer sua atividade, personalizar sua atividade [...] então o *laptop*, me dá esta possibilidade também de sair da sala. Fomos para aqueles banquinhos ali ó, para depois pesquisarmos na internet, que não estava tão rápida, mas deu para ser feito. A gente não pode ficar preso apenas aos problemas da internet, quando acabaram, cada um queria olhar o do outro «olha que legal» e aí um descobre um recurso «como é que faz isso?» eu não sabia, não me lembro muito bem, mas eu lembro assim

Almeida e Prado (2011) defendem que outro cenário se abre com a inserção do *laptop* na educação, pois este propõe um ensino orientado para a conectividade, interatividade, mobilidade e imersão. Essas características rompem com a aprendizagem isolada do laboratório de informática, abrindo novos espaços de aprendizagem no ambiente escolar. Contribuindo para as reflexões apresentadas, para Zucker e Hug (2008) os *laptops* podem modificar a prática dos professores, alterando a forma como são organizadas as atividades em sala de aula.

No entrelaçamento das várias vozes que foram constituindo este estudo, indagamos às professoras “O que aconteceria se a escola não tivesse mais acesso ao *laptop*”. As professoras defendem a permanência do programa na escola, reconhecem a importância dos *laptops* para os alunos e para a sua prática pedagógica, conforme mostram os depoimentos a seguir.

Eu vejo assim, eles vão ficar tristes, porque não vai ter aquela ferramenta, aquele recurso, aquela aula diferenciada, por mais que tenha a sala de tecnologia, não terá o lepinha, o nome carinhoso que os alunos deram para ele. Já faz parte da escola (Professora KLogo)

Se tirarem o PROUCA da escola, os alunos ficariam tristes com certeza, bem chateados, o computador já faz parte da rotina deles, não é mais novidade, é natural para eles, que permaneça. Se tirar há uma grande possibilidade de ficarem chateados, não pode tirar, não (Professora Planilha Eletrônica)

Acho que iriam ficar tristes. Até a gente porque, nós sabemos que o armário está ali, cada um com o *laptop* do aluno, por mais que tenhamos dificuldade, ele faz parte da escola, do nosso meio (Professora KolourPaint)

Prática docente no Programa Um Computador Por Aluno

O laptop já faz parte das aulas, o PROUCA já faz parte com certeza e para os professores também faria falta, é mais um recurso. É um projeto muito bom, mas o que peca é a formação do professor, a ideia é excelente, se o professor souber utilizar (Professora TuxPaint)

Estamos nos habituando ainda no PROUCA, primeiro teve a fase do choque, depois a fase, será que vai dar certo, depois surgiu os problemas, lógico de sempre, mas agora mesmo a gente resistindo, tem algumas aulas que nós precisamos do laptop. Às vezes a gente não quer aceitar, devido às dificuldades técnicas do laptop, isso cansa, perco meu tempo, uma frustração quando não é bem sucedida sua aula (Professora KPresenter)

Os alunos já acostumaram a usar o laptop e nós também, (risos) não pode mais tirar ele daqui não. Não consigo enxergar minha prática sem o laptop o que precisamos é de mais formação, tem vários aplicativos que a gente ainda não sabe, não temos muito tempo para mexer, para tá buscando. Não seria uma boa ideia tirar o laptop de nós, (risos). Voltaríamos a estaca zero, acho que os alunos aprendem bastante, o MEC não pode retirar o laptop mais da escola (Professora TuxPaint).

Diante dos depoimentos coletados, evidencia-se que os *laptops* possibilitam às professoras uma nova forma de enxergarem as tecnologias da informação e comunicação, em especial, as relacionadas ao *laptop* e internet. Apesar de todas as dificuldades enfrentadas nas suas práticas pedagógicas com o *laptop*, ressaltam a importância deste programa para os alunos. Não conseguem pensar na escola sem os *laptops*, ou seja, estes já estão inseridos no ambiente escolar, tornaram-se invisíveis, algo normal integrado à rotina da escola. Para Kenski (2003: 18)

As tecnologias estão tão próximas e presentes que nem percebemos mais que não são coisas naturais

Acreditam que a formação continuada pode ser um importante passo para a exploração das possibilidades pedagógicas do *laptop*. Dos depoimentos, podemos inferir que para as professoras a inserção dos *laptops* não significa o aperfeiçoamento das suas práticas pedagógicas. As professoras protestam em alta voz e/ou com veemência por mudanças na formação de docentes.

De forma análoga Kenski (2013: 96) defende que

É necessário operar mudanças radicais na formação docente. Utilizar uma tecnologia em sala de aula não é sinônimo de inovação nem de mudança significativa nas práticas tradicionais de ensino [...] Não é a tecnologia que transforma a educação e sim os principais autores que fazem uso desses recursos tecnológicos, professores e alunos

CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

O desejo de compreender melhor os desafios da presença das tecnologias da informação e comunicação no ambiente escolar, sobretudo a inserção do computador, motivou-nos a mergulhar nessa temática. As inquietações ficaram mais evidentes quando nos deparamos com o Programa Um Computador por Aluno (PROUCA), que prevê a distribuição de computadores portáteis a todos os alunos no ambiente escolar. Nessa perspectiva, professoras que antes estavam acostumadas com laboratórios de informática são desafiadas a inserir os *laptops* nas suas práticas pedagógicas.

A presença dos computadores portáteis na escola trouxe consigo dúvidas, insegurança e o medo de trabalhar com algo desconhecido. As professoras perceberam mudanças nas suas práticas pedagógicas de cunho organizacional, técnico e pedagógico nas aulas mediadas pelo *laptop*. Passaram a enxergar o *laptop* como um desafio. Por essa razão, argumentaram que necessitam de mais tempo para o planejamento, sugerem a necessidade da reorganização do currículo no tempo e espaço. Sentem que poderiam aperfeiçoar as suas práticas pedagógicas se a escola disponibilizasse de uma boa conectividade para o desenvolvimento das atividades.

Além dessas questões apresentadas, a pesquisa efetuada mostrou que o PROUCA enfrenta ainda desafios quanto à infraestrutura e à formação de professores. Nesse sentido, consideramos fundamental, para o avanço do PROUCA, investimento para aperfeiçoamento da conectividade e capacidade técnica do *laptop*, bem como implementação de formações reflexivas que não visam apenas atualização científica, pedagógica e didática, mas a possibilidade de criação de espaços participativos e reflexivos nas escolas.

Por fim, sugerimos a possibilidade de novos estudos sobre esse campo vasto e rico de pesquisa: compreender a cultura digital instalada na escola, investigar as implicações do *laptop* na aprendizagem dos alunos e analisar a prática de avaliação dos professores com o PROUCA, bem como pesquisas relacionadas ao letramento das informações no contexto educacional.

CAPITULO 2

CULTURA E COMUNICAÇÃO NA EDUCAÇÃO ONLINE

PAULA PERES

Contextos societais

Não importa como chamemos o momento histórico-cultural que estamos a viver, o que é certo é que este está marcado por transformações de toda ordem, em qualquer parte do mundo. Importa por isso reconhecer as mudanças surpreendentes suscitadas pelo advento das Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação (TIC). Estas tiveram seus primórdios com o telégrafo e as ondas radiofónicas, mas o seu “boom” foi consolidado especialmente a partir dos anos 60, após a eclosão do fenómeno televisivo e, mais tarde, com o aperfeiçoamento do computador e o surgimento da internet.

O conceito de sociedade global traduz-se por um conjunto de “sociedades globais” que se tocam, mas que também se excluem. A globalização acentuada pelas inovações tecnológicas, faz com que as regiões locais participem de fenómenos globais – de consumo e mediáticos – mas podem, e eu diria devem, manter as suas especificidades regionais. Portanto, no passado falamos de revolução agrícola, industrial e tecnológica e atualmente podemos, da mesma forma, falar de revolução na sociedade no espaço da cibercultura.

O ciberespaço abre caminhos para a cibercultura, na qual a produção e a disseminação de informações é pautada pelo dispositivo comunicacional todos-todos. Assim, não há apenas um emissor, mas milhares. A metáfora da aldeia global traduz o progresso tecnológico no sentido de conduzir o planeta à mesma situação de uma aldeia, ou seja, à possibilidade de se intercomunicar diretamente com qualquer pessoa que nela vive. Por este princípio, o mundo estaria interligado, com estreitas relações económicas, políticas e sociais, fruto da evolução das TIC.

Pode-se, assim, visualizar numa sociedade diferentes dinâmicas nas relações que envolvem troca de informações, migrando do meio geográfico (físico) para o meio virtual.

Apesar de o mundo parecer unificado pelas redes e pela transposição das fronteiras, o conceito de sociedade mundial não elimina o fato de existirem sociedades particulares, com culturas, etnias e tradições próprias – a noção de coexistência entre global e local.

Haverá tantas sociedades da informação quantas as sociedades, porque a sociedade usará as tecnologias de acordo com suas necessidades prioritárias específicas.

A construção de uma sociedade mundial da informação implica também a expansão das oportunidades de cada sociedade para realçar sua diferença.

Sociedades digitais

E tudo isso dependerá de uma imensa infraestrutura, construída ao nível mundial. A infraestrutura montada para integração das diversas sociedades já é realidade hoje. Porém, os países produtores de tecnologia detêm a vantagem sobre os países mais pobres que participam no processo como consumidores.

Desenvolvimento de equipamentos cada vez mais eficazes permite o aperfeiçoamento das organizações, catalogação e armazenamento de informações.

As múltiplas formas de pesquisa na internet possibilitam o acesso a bens culturais por um público cada vez maior. O acervo historicamente acumulado tem lugar amplo e seguro para sua preservação no ciberespaço. O acesso às obras está facilitado e o número de bibliotecas virtuais tem vindo a crescer imenso. Esta tecnologia *web* também pode e deve estar a serviço da capacitação/formação da população.

A educação à distância já está presente e caminha como alternativa concreta em termos de formação e/ou aperfeiçoamento de segmentos expressivos da população.

Não obstante as instituições de ensino, encontramos uma forte presença cultural de tradições, rituais e símbolos que é necessário preservar como própria da uma identidade institucional.

Considerando a globalidade da aprendizagem *online*, é mais do que nunca importante reconhecer que não há dois sujeitos iguais. É indispensável que os sujeitos partilhem o mesmo código para codificar e decodificar mensagens. É também necessário que estas mensagens sejam motivadoras para despertar a atenção de todos os envolvidos no processo de aprendizagem. É indispensável que mantenha um canal de comunicação aberto e partilhado para que não haja distorções na mensagem. Finalmente, é necessária a criação de um contexto que estimule e permita a comunicação.

Como fatores que ameaçam a comunicação ao nível do emissor e receptor podemos referir a construção da ideia (campo da construção mental), a codificação (língua, capacidade verbal), a expressão (pronúncia, gaguez, dificuldade

na comunicação oral qualquer língua), a audição, a descodificação (desconhecimento da língua), a interpretação (integrar a mensagem no seu quadro referencial).

Como fatores que ameaçam a comunicação ao nível do contexto, há contextos que incentivam a comunicação e outros que não. Uma conversa entre dois sujeitos numa discoteca é diferente de uma numa sala de leitura. No âmbito do ensino à distância, cada tecnologia tem as suas potencialidades e estas devem ser utilizadas em diferentes contextos.

Como fatores que ameaçam a comunicação ao nível do meio, é necessária uma coerência entre o tipo de mensagem e os objetivos, sob pena de afetar a qualidade da comunicação.

Imagine-se um professor a enviar cartas aos alunos com as explicações. Não será certamente o meio mais apropriado. Ou um professor a explicar por voz como um programa informático funciona. Mais uma vez não é o melhor meio, seria melhor uma demonstração.

Como fator que ameaça a comunicação ao nível da mensagem há que referir que a própria mensagem pode dificultar a comunicação. Se não for oportuna, pertinente, motivadora, pode não suscitar a atenção do recetor. Se for demasiado dissonante do quadro referencial do recetor é provável que este a recuse. Os valores culturais e éticos do recetor podem provocar uma forte recusa, não chegando mesmo a ouvir o que se pretende dizer.

Aprendizagem global

A aprendizagem traduz a forma como se aceita ou rejeita a mensagem comunicada.

A capacidade de memorização é um obstáculo à aprendizagem, que começa a fazer sentir-se a partir dos 30 anos. Os adultos aprendem tanto melhor quanto menos precisarem de confiar na sua memória e mais relacionadas as matérias estiverem com os seus temas de interesse. Por outro lado, é determinante a assimilação de conhecimentos pela sua experiência em vez de grandes formulações teóricas de cariz abstrato. Nos adultos também é menor a resistência ao fracasso, devendo haver o cuidado de criar situações de reforço positivo. A estratégia de tentativa-erro poderá ter êxito na criança e no jovem mas poderá não constituir uma pedagogia de sucesso no adulto. Um uso excessivo da expressão oral poderá fazer com que os formandos percam a mensagem. Retemos melhor o que vemos do que o que ouvimos e ainda melhor o que fazemos. As crianças têm uma capacidade espantosa para fazerem coisas sem qualquer utilidade prática. Basta olhar para os currículos da escola, para as noções e conceitos que têm que saber, normalmente memorizados. O adulto não tem essa mesma capacidade e reage mal a longos períodos de trabalho sobre questões que nada têm a ver com as questões do seu quotidiano. Os cenários e exemplos devem ilustrar situações profissionais que experimentam nos seus postos de trabalho.

A experiência dos formandos pode funcionar positivamente. O formador deve explorar o facto de estar perante um grupo de adultos, certamente com muitas experiências diferentes, que lhes proporcionaram determinadas “certezas” mais ou menos definidas.

Em qualquer processo de aprendizagem (global ou local) importa compreender cada sujeito como uma entidade complexa, resultante da combinação de fatores biológicos e psicológicos, resultante das experiências vividas, que deixam marcas positivas ou negativas mais superficiais ou mais profundas.

Os adultos normalmente apresentam maiores diferenças individuais do que as crianças e jovens. Isto porque cada um transporta consigo um repertório, isto é, um quadro referencial com grande rigidez, um conjunto de experiências e vivências das quais muitas são significativamente marcantes para condicionarem o comportamento e atitudes.

Esta mistura de estruturas biológicas e psicológicas, amadurecidas em processos complexos de influências sociais e culturais, cimentadas por experiências de pequenas e grandes vitórias e derrotas a que o sujeito atribuiu cargas efetivas positivas ou negativas, produz indivíduos únicos.

Um grupo de trabalho com 20 pessoas adultas é um espaço onde coabitam 20 histórias diferentes, 20 maneiras de ver o mundo. Cada sujeito é uma entidade própria, individual e diferente. Tem as suas habilidades e capacidades, as suas motivações como também tem as suas dificuldades, as suas dúvidas e os seu receios.

Por tudo isto, cada um terá um ritmo de aprendizagem próprio, favorecido e dificultado por diferentes fatores. As crianças em grupos homogêneos atingem os mesmos resultados em períodos de tempo semelhantes. Os adultos necessitam de tempos diferentes para chegarem aos mesmos resultados.

Por outro lado, de forma geral, reagem mal a situações de competitividade, sentindo-se pressionados, em *stress*, o que provoca um bloqueio à aprendizagem e os resultados baixam. Procuram evitar tanto quanto possível exporem-se às críticas do formador ou do grupo.

Por tudo isto é importante que o formador, em cada grupo, sinta que há uma resposta adequada a cada situação e que todos têm espaço e oportunidade para se exprimirem à sua maneira sem que isso signifique obrigatoriamente a não consecução dos objetivos. Nos dias de hoje, o currículo deve-se voltar para a formação de cidadãos críticos, comprometidos com a valorização da diversidade cultural, da cidadania e aptos a se inserirem num mundo global e plural. O currículo, na visão multicultural, deve trabalhar em prol da formação das identidades abertas à pluralidade cultural.

Falar em aprendizagem global ou educação global não implica as mesmas necessidades formativas, pois muitas vezes o conteúdo globalizado não traduz as diferenças locais. Cada sociedade continuará a produzir os seus conteúdos. Quando alguém lê uma ideia, aplica sua experiência, reescreve aquele conceito, estamos a falar de semiótica e, portanto, da criação de elementos novos, novas ideias, novos conceitos, ou seja, outro conteúdo.

CAPITULO 3

FORMAÇÃO CONTINUADA DE PROFESSORES NO CIBERESPAÇO

ROSIMEIRE MARTINS RÉGIS SANTOS
E MARIA CRISTINA PANIAGO

Introdução

O objetivo deste artigo consiste em demonstrar as possibilidades da formação continuada de professores no ciberespaço em uma perspectiva intercultural.

O artigo tem sua gênese em pesquisas, efetuadas pelas autoras, relacionadas com professores indígenas e não indígenas. Optamos por uma abordagem de pesquisa qualitativa sob a forma de etnografia virtual.

Na formação continuada no *facebook* do grupo participam aproximadamente oito professores indígenas e oito professores não indígenas e tem como objetivo abrir espaço para reconstrução e ressignificação de concepções sobre teorias e práticas docentes relacionadas às tecnologias de informação e comunicação e redes sociais inseridas no contexto educacional⁴.

Com os avanços das Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação (TIC), é possível, hoje, colocar diferentes pessoas em contato, ao mesmo tempo, rompendo barreiras geográficas e temporais. Com isso, surgem espaços de aprendizagem virtual com novos formatos de prática pedagógica, bem como de propostas de formação continuada para professores de todos os níveis de ensino, propostas que podem contribuir para a aprendizagem, a troca de experiências e a construção de conhecimento de maneira colaborativa e em contextos interculturais em rede.

Ponte (2000), ao analisar os desafios que as tecnologias de informação e comunicação (TIC) colocam à formação de professores, ressalta que elas e o ciberespaço⁵ surgem como um novo espaço pedagógico que oferece grandes possibilidades e desafios para a atividade cognitiva, afetiva e social dos alunos e dos professores de todos os níveis de ensino.

Partindo do entendimento que o mundo contemporâneo exige novas e múltiplas formas de compreender e interagir no mundo, precisamos de pensar em construir processos de negociação entre as culturas, valorizando seus conhecimentos e proporcionando aprendizagem mútua. Ao pensar sobre tais exigências, propusemos uma formação continuada utilizando a rede social *facebook* como espaço de troca de experiências e conhecimento.

Pensamos que as redes sociais virtuais na educação são um importante recurso de comunicação, interação e compartilhamento de ideias, informações e conhecimentos, além da possibilidade do trabalho colaborativo. Segundo Soares e Almeida (2005: 3):

Uma rede virtual ou um ambiente de aprendizagem pode ser concebido de forma a romper com as práticas usuais e tradicionais de ensino-aprendizagem como transmissão e passividade do aluno e possibilitar a construção de uma cultura informatizada e um saber cooperativo, onde a interação e a comunicação são fontes da construção da aprendizagem.

Neste sentido, como possibilidade de romper com práticas tradicionais, utilizamos na formação a rede social *facebook*, que permite aos participantes realizar trocas, discussões, compartilhar informações e experiências, traçar os rumos do grupo de forma coletiva. São esses movimentos que levam o grupo a novos tópicos de discussão ou novos caminhos de experimentação na construção do conhecimento de diversos saberes por meio de interações desenvolvidas na rede.

Assim sendo, cabe ao professor apropriar-se das tecnologias de informação e comunicação refletindo sobre suas possibilidades, propondo atividades e estratégias diferenciadas ao utilizar essas redes.

Formação continuada no ciberespaço

Alguns autores como Almeida (2007; 2003), Santos (2006), Ramal (2002), Gutierrez (2010), Belloni (2008), Okada (2011), Kenski (2007), Recuero (2009), Lemos (2008), entre outros, têm discutido sobre a potencialidade das

⁴<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Formacaocontinuadatecnologicaintercultural>

⁵ Ciberespaço, na concepção de Lévy (1998: 104), é o universo das redes digitais como lugar de encontros e de aventuras, terreno de conflitos mundiais, nova fronteira econômica e cultural.

Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação na educação com o propósito de socialização e democratização do saber e levando em consideração as possibilidades pedagógicas de formação continuada, registros e trocas em rede.

As pessoas estão adaptando-se aos novos tempos, utilizando a rede para formar novos padrões de interação e criando novas formas de sociabilidade e novas organizações sociais.

Acreditamos que as tecnologias, tal como a internet e as redes sociais, oferecem possibilidades de transformação em nossas relações com os outros e que a conectividade que elas proporcionam é central no nosso dia-a-dia. Novas maneiras de estarmos juntos emergem nos ambientes virtuais, propiciando diferentes possibilidades de produzirmos conhecimentos que sejam pertinentes e adequados à realidade contemporânea na qual estamos inseridos.

Por outro lado, sendo uma rede social, na qual trocamos ideias com outros integrantes, ela permite que tenhamos diferentes formas de organização do pensamento, e, com esta interação, aprofundemos os conhecimentos, possibilitando aos integrantes da rede alcançar liberdade para ir e vir, navegando nas informações disponíveis a qualquer momento, em qualquer lugar, aperfeiçoando conteúdos em constante formação.

Kenski (2007) sublinha que surgem outras maneiras de se fazer educação, pois surgem novos papéis, novas formas de relacionamento, novas oportunidades e resultados, tanto para professores como para alunos. Nesse sentido, Bressane (2006) alega que a nova realidade educacional precisa de ser:

[...] conhecida, vivenciada e apreendida criticamente pelos educadores. É preciso que todos possam ter a necessária fluência e compreensão do ensino mediado pelas tecnologias de informação e comunicação e outras redes para saber melhor aproveitá-las em suas atividades rotineiras de ensino, para ousar e transformar. (Bressane, 2006: 130)

Na concepção de Okada (2011: 12), as redes sociais podem ampliar suas construções coletivas de conhecimento, quando coaprendentes, educadores, pesquisadores e profissionais contribuem com novas coautorias de produções abertas, *feedback* coletivo compartilhado.

Formação continuada intercultural

Autores como Canen e Moreira (2001), Candau (1998) e Fleuri (2000; 2003) defendem uma proposta de formação de professores/as fundamentada na perspectiva intercultural; acreditam que somente com uma formação voltada para a diversidade cultural professores/as podem colaborar para desestabilizar o papel homogeneizador da cultura escolar e eliminar o preconceito e a discriminação na escola e na sociedade.

Segundo Fleuri (2003), a perspectiva intercultural de educação não se caracteriza como uma disciplina a mais no currículo de formação do/a professor/a, mas sim como um meio para pensar, propor, produzir e dialogar nas relações de ensino e aprendizagem.

Os excertos⁶ a seguir exemplificam as trocas realizadas no *facebook* que se aproximam de um reconhecimento do diálogo entre culturas diferentes.

[...] os professores podem e devem trocar conhecimentos, experiências, culturas, o diálogo possibilita vários caminhos e metodologias, para que de fato, ocorra o aprendizado de todos os envolvidos neste tão importante processo, a "educação". (Professor A)

[...] sem palavras para expressar o sentimento de agradecimento pelas aulas que serão importantes para cada professor, os conhecimentos obtidos através de troca de experiência. aynapú yakue (Professor C)

[...] nós professores da aldeia podemos reunir e dar sugestões para contribuir com essa formação [...] dando ideias assim que voltarmos em aula dia 16 quarta-feira. (Professor B)

[...] sem dúvida professora todos estamos aprendendo, pois a cada encontro e diálogo há uma nova descoberta que serve p nosso aprendizado. (Professor F)

Faz-se necessário o diálogo intercultural, pois é o reconhecimento da existência do outro (Professor D)

Diálogo intercultural é uma forma de comunicação essencial a todos seres humanos, seja ela de qualquer raça, religião ou credo, uma forma de aliviar as necessidades, buscar auxílio e compartilhar bons e maus momentos [...] (Professor G)

[...] isso é mto importante, a interação do mundo indígena com o mundo em volta, pois se torna uma construção coletiva e troca de experiência!! (Professor A)

Essa interculturalidade vem acompanhada de possibilidades de troca de experiências, intercâmbios, redes de relações e compartilhamentos, valorizando as articulações entre as diferenças culturais e fortalecendo o diálogo intercultural.

É neste sentido que propomos uma formação continuada de professores em um contexto intercultural mediada pelas

⁶Os nomes dos professores identificados por letras são fictícios no sentido de manter o anonimato dos participantes da formação.

Formação continuada de professores

tecnologias de informação e comunicação e redes sociais, possibilitando aos sujeitos em formação pensar, propor, produzir, dialogar na real apropriação educacional das TIC e agregar novos sentidos à formação e ao trabalho docente. Dessa maneira, temos concebido, no *facebook* do grupo, dinâmicas para ouvir os professores/as que vivem o cotidiano escolar e vivenciam as possibilidades e limitações para a utilização das TIC em sala de aula nas suas práticas. Os excertos a seguir evidenciam as reflexões por parte dos professores.

Sinceramente, nós professores deveríamos passar por uma reciclagem, pois as mudanças estão a nossas portas e muitas vezes não sabemos lidar com essas mudanças principalmente a tecnologia, principalmente nossas escolas deveriam estar muito mais preparada e equipada de computadores para receber nossos alunos. (Professor A)

[...] temos que fazer com que as crianças indígenas descubram o quanto a tecnologia esta inserida em nossas vidas. É necessário acompanharmos o avanço da sociedade envolvente. (Professor B)

Este é mais um desafio aos nossos educadores indígenas, utilizar a tecnologia nas nossas escolas, um constante diálogo entre a cultura indígena e os avanços tecnológicos no ensino-aprendizagem (Professor C)

[...] a cada dia estou aprendendo a como utilizar a tecnologia nas metodologias didáticas. (Professor D)

Estou com problema na internet. táh muituuu ruim a conexão e não tá carregando vídeo. Na sexta vou pra cidade e vou postar no cyber. (Professor E)

[...] vejo que infelizmente não foi possível a reunião por skype, pois ainda a tecnologia na aldeia está sendo inserida aos poucos e as dificuldades em utilizá-la de forma eficaz e adequada ao curso ainda é um desafio, mas sugiro marcarmos uma conversa pelo face para abordarmos o tema "Pintura corporal" que foi sugerido fazermos por skype. Acredito que o dia pode ser escolhido pela professora XXX, é só nos avisar a data e horário para entrarmos no face e dialogarmos sobre o tema. O que acham? (Professor E)

Realmente até agora [...] não foram rever sobre a nossa net na nossa escola e além do mais sem computador!!! (Professor F)

[...] através da internet abre-se uma infinidade de possibilidades de aprendizagem, tanto ao aluno quanto ao professor. (Professor G)

Os excertos evidenciam que computadores e internet tornam-se elementos indissociáveis da formação e prática docente. Os professores percebem a importância de serem capazes de utilizar os recursos tecnológicos e estarem familiarizados com estes, demonstram-se interessados e dispostos a experimentar as TIC em suas práticas docentes; enxergam as TIC como fonte de atualização e procuram refletir sobre a natureza da internet e das tecnologias e seu impacto no processo de ensino e aprendizagem em diferentes contextos culturais.

Considerações

Entendemos que a formação continuada sob a perspectiva intercultural constitui-se como um processo permanente de trocas, diálogos, (re) significações, reflexões e questionamentos. Portanto, faz-se necessário pensar que, por estarmos inseridos em uma sociedade digital na qual as tecnologias de informação e comunicação e redes sociais estão presentes, não podemos ignorá-las no processo educacional. Pensando nos professores indígenas e não indígenas, a negação da existência dessas tecnologias pode implicar um processo de exclusão entre as diferentes culturas e contextos, minimizando as possibilidades pedagógicas de uso de tais recursos.

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NOTAS BIOGRÁFICAS

Maria Cristina Lima Paniago Lopes

Professora do Programa de Pós-Graduação Mestrado e Doutorado em Educação na Universidade Católica Dom Bosco (UCDB); Líder do Grupo de Pesquisas e Estudos em Tecnologia Educacional e Educação à Distância (GETED); Pesquisadora visitante da Universidade de Manitoba, Canadá (Estágio Pós-Doutoral), Department of Family Social Science, Faculty of Human Ecology.

Rosimeire Martins Régis Dos Santos

Possui Graduação em Formação de Professores e Pedagogia. Mestre em Educação e Doutoranda em Educação, ambas pela Universidade Católica Dom Bosco (UCDB), integrante do GETED/UCDB – Grupo de Pesquisas e Estudos em Tecnologia Educacional e Educação a Distância. Pesquisadora dos temas: Educação a distância, Formação de professores, Processo de ensino e aprendizagem na EAD e Tecnologias Educacionais. Professora Universitária de cursos de Graduação e Pós-Graduação.

Aninha Ribas

Possui licenciatura em Letras com habilitação em Português/Inglês e respectivas Literaturas, especializações em Língua Inglesa, Planejamento em Tutoria em EAD e Tecnologias em Educação. Mestre em Educação (UCDB-2011), período Sanduíche na Universidade de Manitoba, Canadá - Faculty of Human Ecology de Janeiro a Abril /2013. Integrante do Grupo de Pesquisa e Estudos em Tecnologia Educacional e Educação a Distância - GETED (UCDB), cadastrado no CNPq. Professora da Rede Municipal de Ensino atuando como formadora de professores para a inserção das tecnologias na educação pela Divisão de Tecnologia Educacional/DITEC. Tem experiência na área da Formação e Práticas Docentes, atuando principalmente nos seguintes temas: tecnologia educacional, educação à distância. Pesquisadora dos Temas: Educação à Distância, Formação e Práticas Docentes, Tecnologia Educacional, Redes Sociais, Processo de Ensino e Aprendizagem na EAD.

Clara Sarmento

Doutorada em Cultura Portuguesa e Mestre em Estudos Anglo-Americanos, desenvolve investigação sobre teorias e representações interculturais enquanto directora do Centro de Estudos Interculturais do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, onde é professora coordenadora com tenure e directora do Mestrado em Tradução e Interpretação Especializadas. Directora de linha de investigação, docente de doutoramento e investigadora integrada do IELT da FCSH/Universidade Nova de Lisboa. *Visiting scholar in English* no Departamento de Inglês da Universidade de Brown, EUA, e docência de doutoramento no Instituto Universitário Europeu de Florença. Vencedora do ‘American Club of Lisbon Award for Academic Merit’ e do Prémio para Jovens Cientistas Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra. Investigação pós-doutorada premiada em todas as edições do programa PAPRE do Instituto Politécnico do Porto. É autora de diversos livros, capítulos, artigos e conferências sobre Cultura e Literatura Portuguesa e Anglo-Americana, Estudos Culturais e Interculturais e Estudos de Género.

Paula Peres

Doutorada e pós-doutorada na área das tecnologias educativas, Mestre em Informática e Licenciada em Informática-Matemáticas Aplicadas. Desempenha atualmente funções de docente, na área científica de informática, no Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto/Instituto Politécnico do Porto, ISCAP/IPP. É membro do Centro de Estudos Interculturais do ISCAP/IPP. É coordenadora da Unidade de Inovação em Educação do centro de Investigação em Comunicação e Inovação do ISCAP/IPP, é directora do curso de pós-graduação em Tecnologias para a Comunicação e Inovação Empresarial em regime de b-learning do ISCAP/IPP e coordena o centro de formação e serviços ao exterior do ISCAP/IPP. É membro da unidade de e-Learning do Politécnico do Porto. Assume a responsabilidade científica de vários projetos de investigação na área do e-learning. É membro da comissão científica de várias conferências e iniciativas nacionais e internacionais no âmbito do e-Learning. Tem alguns livros publicados na área de informática e na área do e-Learning. Desenvolve diversas atividades de investigação no contexto da integração das Tecnologias WEB no Ensino Superior que resultam na publicação de diversos artigos científicos. <http://www.linkedin.com/in/paulaperes>.

ÍNDICE REMISSIVO

- adultos
 - formação de, 21, 22
- aprendizagem, v, vii, 7, 11, 15, 18, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30
 - ambiente de, 11
 - espaço de, 11, 13, 15
 - global, 21, 23
 - processo de, 7, 20, 30
 - ritmo de, 22
 - virtual, 25
- bateria [computador portátil], 13, 14
- biblioteca virtual, 20
- cibercultural, 3, 19
- ciberespaço, 19, 20, 25, 26
- computador portátil, 1, 3, 10, 17, *Consulte* laptop
- construção de conhecimento, 5, 25, 26, 27
- construcionismo, 11
- cultural
 - diversidade, v, vi, 23, 28
 - interacção, vi
- currículo, vii, 12, 13, 18, 22, 23, 28
- depoimento, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, *Consulte* entrevista
- entrevista, 3, 9, 10, 12
- escola, vi, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 28, 29, 30
- etnografia virtual, vii, 25
- formação continuada, vii, 3, 17, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30
 - intercultural, vii, 28
 - no ciberespaço, vii, 25, 26
- formação de docentes, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, 25, 28, 29, 30
- globalização, v, 3, 19, 23
- infra-estrutura, 10, 18, 20
- intercultural
 - competência, v
 - contexto, 29
 - diálogo, v, vi, 28, 29
 - fluxo, v
 - perspectiva, vii, 23, 25, 28, 30
- interculturalidade, 29
- internet, vii, 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 27, 29, 30
- laboratório de informática, 1, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, *Consulte* sala de tecnologia
- laptop*, 1, 3, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, *Consulte* computador portátil
- Ministério da Educação, 1
- prática pedagógica, vi, vii, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 30
- professoras, 2, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17
- Programa Um Computador Por Aluno (PROUCA), vi, 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 16, 17, 18
- qualitativa
 - abordagem, 2, 25
 - investigação, vi, vii
- redes sociais, vii, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30
- sala de tecnologia, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, *Consulte* laboratório de informática
- Secretaria Estadual de Educação de Mato Grosso do Sul, 1
- socialização, v
- sociedade digital, 6, 20, 30
- sociedade global, 19, 20, 23
- software*, 1, 3, 9, 11
- tecnófilo, 4
- tecnóforo, 4
- Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação (TIC), vi, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 17, 19, 25, 27, 29, 30
- tradicional
 - ensino, 5, 7, 10, 11, 17, 26

Linguistic Politeness in Communication

Gunta Rozina

Introduction: the phenomenon of linguistic politeness

The group of phenomena associated with politeness is one manifestation of a wider concept of etiquette, and the general view is that polite behaviour is that which follows socially accepted norms of conduct.

Within a thirty year period, linguistic politeness has been studied and defined by different scholars, for example, Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987), and Thomas (1995).

Focusing on the pragmatic use of language, this paper attempts to apply Thomas' (1995) definition of linguistic politeness, which states that linguistic politeness is "the use of situationally appropriate language" (Thomas, 1995:2). Researchers use various terms to refer to politeness phenomena; nevertheless, the terms *linguistic politeness* and *politeness* will be used as synonyms throughout this study.

Since the goal is to investigate a more specific area within politeness phenomena, that of 'polite language', certain difficulties might arise, as polite utterances encode the relationship between information senders, i.e., speakers, and recipients of information, i.e., addressees. On the other hand, polite language is often seen as consisting on the use of a certain type of language to *avoid* being direct, as a way for the speakers to show respect towards addressees. Thus, linguistic politeness strategies can be considered as one of the ways of establishing distance between speakers and their addressees.

On a theoretical level, linguistic politeness has been studied both as a pragmatic and as a sociolinguistic concept.

Fraser (1990) points out that the study of politeness has focused far more on polite linguistic behaviour than on impolite linguistic behaviour. He notes that impolite linguistic behaviour is perceived as discourteous language.

Additionally, it seems that whether an interactant's behaviour is perceived as polite or not is not determined exclusively by the kind of language that he, as a speaker, employs. Contrary to popular belief, polite or impolite language rather depends on the *interpretation* of a particular linguistic behaviour that occurs in social interaction.

It is generally accepted that polite language is used in three situations:

First, people tend to be polite when they are talking to those who possess more power and/or resources. This might refer to those who have control over rewards and/or resources.

Second, people tend to be more polite when they are trying to achieve a goal that they consider to be relatively important.

Third, people appear to be more polite when they communicate with those which are situated at a certain social distance. This is one way to explain why we can be more polite to our friends, neighbors or even strangers in some social situations than, for example, to our family members.

Consequently, what is precisely meant by the term *linguistic politeness* is both a matter of disagreement among the members of a society and an object of study for applied linguistics. One fact remains undisputed: polite linguistic behavior is not something members of a society are born with. Moreover, the accepted social norms show that linguistic politeness is something we have to learn over a long span of time. Considering

the social nature of politeness, it might seem surprising to see that linguistic politeness has been the subject of intensive study in linguistic pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and, to a lesser extent, social theory for more than three decades.

It is generally known that language has two main functions (Halliday, 1973):

- to express referential contents of information,
- to reveal the social meanings of the message.

The linguistic elements employed to reveal the social meanings of the message are those that are connected with the term *linguistic politeness*. These linguistic elements are used, for example, to express such social meanings as who we are, and what our attitude towards events or towards the addressees is.

In regard to the above matter, it should be stated that the main purpose of this study is to analyze selected aspects of linguistic politeness and see how they apply in real life situational contexts. Therefore, the first section of this paper establishes the theoretical background for the study. The second section offers a more detailed examination of the conversational maxim view – one of the models created to describe linguistic politeness phenomena. The third section provides the reader with research data analysis. The fourth section is a discussion of the results. Due to limitations on the volume of this paper, this fourth section narrows down the scope of the discussion and analyses only one of the approaches to linguistic politeness, the application of the maxims of politeness principle (also known as Interpersonal Maxims) in situational contexts. Additionally, this study examines the use of the word *just* as a hedge for purposes of linguistic politeness.

In its conclusion, the paper addresses its main question: how is linguistic politeness practiced in the contexts of its use?

The theoretical background: communicative functions of linguistic politeness

Sohn (1999) has identified the function of *discernment* and the function of *volition* in linguistic politeness.

The function of *discernment* indexes social meanings that relate to situational contexts where social variables, such as setting, power and distance, background, and alike, are involved in interactional processes. The use of discernment politeness is governed by the cultural norms accepted by a society in situational contexts where the speaker's *attitude* towards the addressee is expressed through respect or through recognition of his qualities, e.g.:

- Please accept our sincerest congratulations on your new position;
- I am honored to be Professor Cohen's student;
- I cannot respect a cheat;
- His manners and attitude towards elderly people speak well for his upbringing.
- Your help will be much appreciated.

The function of *volition*, or so-called volitional politeness, is based on the general assumption that people use strategies of linguistic politeness to display situationally appropriate behavior by respecting the conversational partner's *face* needs (Brown and Levinson, 1987), *face* meaning the conversational partner's public image.

Ervin Goffman is known as one of the sociolinguists whose theoretical writings have had a great influence on the development of theories of communication. Through close observation of ordinary interactions, Goffman (1967) established a framework that helps us understand “the taken-for-granted communication process that produce social roles, relationships and structures” (Goffman, 1967: 30).

Since Goffman, the study of linguistic politeness has been mainly associated with four linguistic approaches, which are:

- The social norm view (Fraser, 1990),
- The conversational maxim view (Grice, 1975; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983),
- The face saving view (Brown and Levinson, 1978),
- The conversational contract view (Fraser, 1975).

To narrow down the scope of the discussion, this study concentrates on the social norm view and the conversational maxim view – two approaches to linguistic politeness – and analyses their use in situational contexts in the following section.

Discussion: theoretical views on linguistic politeness

In order to study the *social norm* view, this paper will examine the theoretical contributions by Fraser (1990). According to this scholar, the social norm view is a linguistic approach that states, represents and is characterized by an historical understanding of politeness. Thus, if we assume that the rules of politeness were established as a codified system of linguistic behaviour in the 15th and 16th centuries, we can realize how they implied a wide variety of developments at that time, such as:

- choice of sociably acceptable topics to discuss in public,
- choice of appropriate vocabulary,
- balanced use of talk and silence,
- balance between talking and listening (Watts, 1992).

From our present perspective, the social norm view is based on the assumption that each society and each culture has a specified set of implicit and explicit rules, which underlie appropriate social behaviour in a particular context of application. Barron (2002) asserts that consideration of these norms testifies to “one’s *good manners* and *etiquette*, which make a proper conduct and tactful consideration of others” (Barron, 2002: 4).

Therefore, we can conclude that the behaviour that complies with the social norms characterized by Barron (2002) will be perceived as polite linguistic behaviour.

As regards the *conversational maxim* view, it is seen as a linguistic approach that is associated with the scientific contributions of Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983). This approach studies the linguistic principles that one is expected to follow in order to establish and maintain polite, considerate and cooperative communication.

To examine Grice’s conversational maxims in more detail, it should be noted that this philosopher asserted that there is a particular type of meaning that is inherited. LoCastro (2006) states that Grice assumed as an hypothesis that “meaning is the intended effect a speaker wishes to produce in a hearer by getting a hearer to recognize the intention” (LoCastro, 2006:136). Generally speaking, any interaction should be based on the assumption that the speaker and the hearer contribute rationally to reach the expected

goal of communication. In other words, they, as partners of interaction, follow specified rules of communication. Therefore, Grice (1967) asserts that cooperativeness is the underlying basis for any communication, and he calls this the Cooperative Principle:

“Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1967).

Furthermore, according to Grice, the underlying principles of human behaviour that account for cooperativeness and mutual attention offer a framework that helps us understand how language is used by communication partners. This resulted in Grice’s (1975) proposed *conversational maxims*, which are often referred to as the Cooperative Principle. This concept is based on the idea that, to be considered a cooperative interactional partner, one’s utterance should be based on four principles of communication:

- quality: do not say what you believe to be false and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence;
- quantity: make your contribution as informative as required;
- relation: be relevant;
- manner: be perspicuous and avoid ambiguity of expression.

Concerning the application of Grice’s maxims in the creation of texts, it should be evident that the maxim of quantity has an exceptionally vital function, because it limits the volume of information to an appropriate amount. The maxim of quality pertains to the truth-value of the speaker’s utterance. The maxim of manner involves the use of necessary linguistic devices in order to make the information accurately and precisely displayed in the text. The maxim of relation should be respected in all instances of communication; however, it is the maxim that appears to be most frequently flouted.

In sum, Grice’s concept of communicative cooperation shows the underlying basis of the particular norms, principles and expectations that shape human interaction. The Gricean maxims form a necessary part of the description of linguistic meaning because they explain in what way speakers often “mean more than they say” (Grice, 1975). This explanation, according to Grice, is based on pragmatic implications known as *conversational implicatures*. Grice coined the term *implicature* to refer to the indirectly expressed meaning of a statement. He stated that the meaning can be understood implicitly without being explicitly stated.

So, the basic notions contained in the Gricean maxims are that, in order to be linguistically polite, one is expected to be as truthful and accurate (maxim of quality), informative (maxim of quantity), relevant (maxim of relation) and brief (maxim of manner) as possible. For example:

- Could you pass me just one apple rather than two pears, please?
(In this case, the maxim of quantity means that the speaker gives as much information about the number of apples and pears as is expected.)
- I think you should put on your new pink hat rather than the one you have now: it seems somewhat dated.
(In this case, the maxim of quality means that the speaker sincerely believes that the other hat would look better.)

- Shall I hold the stepladder while you are climbing it?
(In this case, the maxim of relation means that someone is offering to supply assistance in a way that is relevant to the circumstances.)
- I will talk to your landlady immediately to solve the problem of your outstanding rental bill.
(In this case, the maxim of manner means that the helper makes the nature of his/her assistance clear.)

We have so far argued that language in its use has politeness status when interlocutors try to be cooperative while interacting. However, there exists the conventional view (e.g. Kasper, 1990) that use of the maxims of quantity and manner can be observed in transactional discourse with a greater degree of frequency than use of the maxims of quality and relation. The maxims of quality and relation tend to be more typically used for the purposes of interactional discourse:

Conversational behaviour that is consistent with the requirements of transactional discourse will be thus characterized by the close observance of the Cooperative principle. Interactional discourse, by contrast, has as its primary goal the establishment and maintenance of social relationships (Kasper, 1990: 205).

Kasper's (1990) view seems to explain the preference for small talk in cases where interactants either do not know their interactional partners or are in a situation of one-to-one communication. Thus, the weather, the purpose of the visit or other related issues of a general nature are, in order to be on safe ground, the topic of discussion in such cases. On the contrary, a telephone conversation, for example, is expected to obey the rules of relevance (maxim of relation) in order to be as informative as possible (maxim of quantity).

As concerns Lakoff's Politeness Principle (1972), it claims that politeness principles allow interactional partners to make use of language's wide descriptive power. According to Lakoff (1973), there are three rules that language users should follow to be linguistically polite.

The most formal rule of linguistic politeness is, according to him:

Rule 1: *Don't impose.*

This rule may have application in situations when two communication partners hold different power and/or status. Imposing on someone in this situation might be interpreted as forcing one's desires on another person to make them act in accordance to those wishes or desires. According to Lakoff's Rule 1, a polite speaker may avoid, mitigate, or apologize for making an addressee do something that he or she is not pleased to do.

Lakoff's Rule 1 is manifest in situations of formal linguistic politeness, as it establishes a formal type of communication.

From the perspective of the current study, Lakoff's Rule 1 can be interpreted as:

- not giving or seeking personal opinions and/or information unless being asked,
- avoiding the reference to family and/or personal matters unless being asked,
- not sharing personal experiences unless being asked,

- not discussing too many personal issues in public, such as financial difficulties or health problems and alike unless being asked,
- avoiding emotional or slangy language.

In formal situations, this rule is clearly visible when a person's title rather than their name is used when addressing them. For example: *Mr., Sir, Madam, Dr., Professor.*

Lakoff's Rule 2 of linguistic politeness has a more informal nature. It is: *Offer options.*

This principle of linguistic politeness may be applied to situations when interactants hold comparatively equal power and status but are not socially close. According to Lakoff, offering options happens when a person expresses himself/herself in such a way that his/her request, opinion or point of view can be ignored without being directly contradicted or rejected. For example (adapted from Green, 1996):

- Some people think buying a Japanese car is an insult to all the unemployed American autoworkers (indirect assertion about buying Japanese cars).
- A: It looks like you and I got into the wrong line.
B: This style also comes in size 14 (implicature: the size you are trying on is too small or too large for you).
- A: Could you perhaps let me see that newspaper for a few seconds?
B: Are you done reading that newspaper? (implicature: please let me have that newspaper, if you are finished with it.)

The examples presented above demonstrate that utterances which an addressee might interpret as an imposition of the speaker's opinion or desire are "phrased in a pragmatically ambiguous way so as to give the speaker a graceful way-out in case the addressee prefers not to agree, or answer" (Green, *ibid.*). Thus, the governing principle underlying informal politeness involves avoidance of a direct style of communication.

Lakoff's Rule 3 of linguistic politeness can be applied if communication aims at establishing a friendly and/or intimate interaction. It says: *Encourage feelings of camaraderie.*

This principle involves linguistic strategies that show active interest, trust and respect for the communication partner. Thus, its presence is seen in:

- communication participants' reference to their own life and/or private problems;
- use of intimate forms of address, epithets or nicknames;
- the presence of straightforward requests, criticism and statements instead of the use of mitigating language devices such as, for example, hedges.

In other words, this rule of linguistic politeness implies that the relationship developed between communication partners is strong and well established; thus, there is no need to use an indirect kind of expression in order to soften statements.

In sum, Lakoff's politeness principles function as descriptive rules of linguistic behavior. They do not deal with injunctions. Lakoff (1973) proposed a set of maxims of *conversational politeness*, now known as the Politeness Principle, which describes how interactional partners are expected to be:

- clear, and
- polite in their conversation.

In addition, it seems that the general pragmatic concept of politeness includes operating principles such as *don't impose* or *give options*.

The use of language in situational contexts, however, shows that many ordinary communication activities, e.g., invitations, offers, proposals, and requests, can actually represent a form of imposition on the receiver. One way by which speakers appear to minimize this kind of imposition is through using hedges, for example:

- We could even have a cup of coffee or *something*.
- I *just* wanted to ask you if I should stay or if I should go.

Concerning the use of Leech's Interpersonal Maxims (also known as the maxims of politeness principle), it should be noted that they underlie the Interpersonal Rhetoric (Leech, 1983). In his contribution, Leech aimed to show how the Gricean Cooperative Principle (1975) and the Politeness Principle postulated by Lakoff (1973) work together. Besides, Leech's Interpersonal Maxims study politeness from the addressee's rather than from the speaker's viewpoint. Leech classified the illocutionary functions that underlie Interpersonal Maxims. They fall into four types (Leech, 1983: 104-105):

The Competitive function: the illocutionary goal of communication works together with the social goal of interaction when performing the speech acts of, e.g., asking, requesting, demanding, and begging.

The Convivial function: the illocutionary goal of communication works together with the social goal of interaction when performing the speech acts of, e.g., offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, and congratulating.

The Collaborative function: the illocutionary goal of communication is unrelated to the social goal of communication when performing speech acts of, e.g., asserting, reporting, announcing, and instructing.

The Conflictive function: the illocutionary goal of communication conflicts with the social goal of communication when performing speech acts of, e.g., threatening, accusing, reprimanding, and cursing.

Regarding the illocutionary functions, it should be added that this paper uses the term *illocution* to refer to the linguistic function performed by the utterance of a sentence; however, the intended effect of speech acts, representing, e.g., requests, offers, commands, etc., is referred to as the *illocutionary force* of the utterance of a sentence.

Looking at the types of illocutionary functions mentioned above from the perspective of linguistic politeness, it should be obvious that the Competitive and the Convivial illocutionary functions refer to the politeness principle. The Competitive illocutionary function tends to avoid strong language in order to achieve linguistic politeness; its purpose is "to reduce the discord [...] between what a speaker wants to achieve, and what is considered as 'good manners' " (Leech, 1983:105). For example, according to our cultural norms, it is considered discourteous to make questions about somebody's salary, age, religion, marital status and things of that nature. However, it is fully accepted social behavior to make questions about information like somebody's name, citizenship, place of residence, etc. When the norms established by the Interpersonal Maxims are observed, mitigation devices are used to reduce the intrinsic discourtesy of the communicative goal in cases such as:

- Could I just borrow a tiny bit of paper? (Instead of: Give me a paper);
- Please note that your water supply will be turned off. It would be inadvisable to draw hot water or to use any appliances connected to the supply. For further advice please telephone us. (Instead of: Interruption of water supply. More inquiries on...)
- We would be most grateful if you kindly accepted our most sincere apologies for the inconveniences caused. (Instead of: Sorry, it's our fault).

The examples mentioned above demonstrate how the external situational context of communication determines both the choice of language and the development of a power-distance relationship between interactants. In particular, an addressee measures what was said and how it goes against his/her expectations of how the writer/speaker should address somebody under those particular circumstances or in a specified situational context.

The second type of illocutionary function, the Convivial function, has an intrinsically courteous nature. This function involves the positive seeking of opportunities for mutual courtesy between interactants, e.g.:

- Please accept my best wishes and congratulations on the occasion of your promotion.
- You are kindly invited to participate in my farewell dinner.
- Luck and blessings and every good thing that can possibly happen to you.
- You see the good in everyone. It must be because there's so much of it in you. Happy birthday!

The third type of illocutionary function, the Collaborative function, is mostly used in written discourse. Thus, considering the principles underlying the Interactional Maxims, the Collaborative illocutionary function seems to be irrelevant for further discussion in the context of the present analysis. Similarly, politeness is irrelevant in the case of Conflictive illocutions, since they are intended to cause offence, and can be something such as a threat, accusation, or reprimand. In addition, it is expected that in the process of socialization language users learn to replace conflictive interaction with other types, in particular with the competitive function. There is, then, good reason to believe that Conflictive illocutions are atypical in polite linguistic behavior under socially accepted norms, rules and circumstances.

Thus, concerning the distinctions between polite and impolite linguistic behavior, we would like to emphasize that the Competitive and Convivial illocutionary functions of the Interpersonal Maxims perform their illocutionary forces by being displayed in corresponding speech acts in relevant situational contexts of communication.

Besides establishing these four types of illocutionary functions, Leech (1983) created a more detailed typology to analyze polite linguistic behavior. According to him, "politeness concerns a relationship between two participants, whom we can call *self* and *other*" (Leech, 1983: 131), where *self* is identified as the speaker and *other* is identified as the hearer. This scholar states that "the label *other* may apply not only to addressees, but also to people designated by third-person pronouns" (ibid.). Leech's Interpersonal Maxims are often referred to as the maxims of politeness principle, and they fall into the following sub-types:

- TACT MAXIM: minimize cost to *other* and maximize benefit to *other*. This maxim can be interpreted as: minimize your own benefit; maximize the hearer's benefit;
- GENEROSITY MAXIM: minimize benefit to *self* and maximize cost to *self*. This maxim can be interpreted as: minimize your own benefit; maximize the hearer's benefit.
- APPROBATION MAXIM: minimize dispraise of *other*; maximize praise of *other*. This maxim can be interpreted as: minimize the hearer's dispraise; maximize the hearer's praise.
- MODESTY MAXIM: minimize praise of *self* and maximize dispraise of *self*. This maxim can be interpreted as: minimize self-praise; maximize self-dispraise.
- AGREEMENT MAXIM: minimize disagreement between *self* and *other* and maximize agreement between *self* and *others*. This maxim can be interpreted as: minimize disagreement; maximize agreement.
- SYMPATHY MAXIM: minimize antipathy between *self* and *other* and maximize sympathy between *self* and *other*. The maxim can be interpreted as: minimize antipathy; maximize sympathy.

To analyze the maxims of politeness principle in practice, the application of the Tact Maxim and of the Generosity Maxim in situational contexts is studied in the empirical part of the present study.

Materials and Methods

For the purposes of this study, randomly selected promotional texts, such as leaflets and booklets advertising accommodation and meal packages for long holidays in hotels, e.g. *IBIS* (in Lithuania and in Portugal), announcements both in the press and in commercials (in Ireland, England, Scotland, USA), notices in public places (e.g. in public transports) and invitational letters were selected as samples of relevant genres. The collected data totaled to 167 units representing the above mentioned genres and amounted to approximately 41 509 words. To investigate the factors that determine the pragmatic functions present in the samples, the study examined them in the context of their use. In order to carry out the analysis of the linguistic politeness principle application in context, this research considered two variables that determine the context of the situation:

- Setting, i.e., “the social and spatial framework within which encounters are situated” (Ochs, 1979: 2),
- Language as context, i.e., “the way the language itself provides a context” (Ochs, 1979: 2).

The instances of application of the politeness principle in situational contexts were analyzed using the theoretical contributions by Leech (1983).

The general method used for this study was that of qualitative research, and two research instruments were employed: situational observation and discourse analysis.

Situational observations were made first, with the purpose of examining the contextual meaning of the statements under analysis; discourse analysis was employed to examine the linguistic approaches and their illocutionary functions in the relevant contexts. This approach was followed throughout the whole study.

Discussion of the Results

Maxims of politeness principle in use

In the context of this research, the conversational maxim view was shown to be one of the most frequently applicable approaches to linguistic politeness in situational contexts of communication. With this in mind, and to narrow the focus of this examination of the linguistic politeness principles, we decided to analyse the application of Leech's maxims of politeness (also known as Interpersonal Maxims) in relevant situational contexts.

The results of this study have shown that, in the majority of cases, two manifestations of the maxims of politeness principle, the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim, have been used in communicative contexts.

The Tact Maxim was employed when the Competitive function with its illocutionary force of requesting or demanding, or the Convivial function with its illocutionary force of offering or inviting, were present.

It is known that the Tact Maxim applies to Searle's *directive* and *commissive* categories of illocutions, which refer to some action that is to be performed by the speaker or by the hearer. According to Searle ([1975] 1979), "directives are intended to produce some effect through action by the hearer". They can be expressed through the language functions of:

- requesting; ordering; commanding;
- advising; recommending;
- inviting.

To construct a scale of increasing degrees of politeness, Leech (1983) recommends using indirect illocutions, because they increase the degree of optionality and tentativeness. For example:

- Answer the door! (a command)
- I want you to answer the door.
- Will you answer the door?
- Can you answer the door?
- Would you mind answering the door?
- Could you possibly answer the door?
- I wonder if you could answer the door.

The sentences presented show an increasing degree of politeness, and demonstrate that indirect illocutions lead to greater politeness. Impolite sentences transform into polite sentences when they become tentative.

In Searle's ([1975] 1979) categorization of illocutionary acts, *commissives* commit to an action that is to be performed in the future.

Analysis of examples demonstrates that indirect illocutions are used for requesting, offering or promising. For example:

- "Could you promise that the universities won't just sit in communities, but they will be actually a part of community", asked Janzen, the University of Minnesota liaison to the Urban Research. (The Minnesota Daily, February 19, 2008) [1];
- I wonder if Sellner asserted that a number of tax breaks are associated with college costs, which many people possibly miss [2] (ibidem).

Concerning the assessment of the commissive nature of utterances, the sentences presented above show how the way sentences are built may suggest very different strategies on the part of the speakers. Both examples provided can be included in Searle's category of commissives: the action will be carried out in the future; however, in sentence [1], the weight and seriousness of a promise is present, but sentence [2] is an indirect assertion, something which might be implemented in the future. It is quite significant to note that both sentences are expressed in a polite manner. This effect is obtained through the application of hedges, such as *just*, *I wonder if*, *possibly*. In this way, hedges admit the possibility of a positive outcome regarding the assertion or promise that is supported by them.

In regards to the use of the Tact Maxim in, e.g., announcements, it should be noted that a deliberate choice of the passive voice was observed when the message was expressing the illocutionary force of a command in the form of a request, in order to fulfill the function of a polite reminder:

- Passengers are strongly requested to unfasten the seat-belts (announcement in a taxi-cab in Belfast),
- The customers are kindly asked to check their umbrella at the door (announcement in a restaurant in Edinburgh),
- Customers are asked to stand still (announcement in London).
- Tenants are requested to take in to account that litter is operated from 6-7 p.m. (note on an apartment house in Belfast)

Additionally, to demonstrate the variations in the use of the Tact Maxim in the context of this analysis, the illocutionary force of inviting, when expressed in a formal register in the active voice, should be mentioned as well, e.g.:

- The Ambassador of the United States of America requests the pleasure of your company at the Reception on June 12, 2013 (invitation).
- We kindly request that you dress down for the upcoming Friday event (invitation with mention of a dress code).

In addition, use of the Tact Maxim was observed in situational contexts where the illocutionary function of expressing a strong recommendation, command or even prohibition was expressed through the illocutionary force of thanking, e.g.:

- We thank you for not stepping on the grass (a sign in a park in London; a command is implied through thanking).
- The Belfast police thank you for no parking here during the clearance time (parking prohibition notice).

To summarize, analysis has demonstrated that the Tact Maxim is one of the most commonly applied maxims of politeness in real life situational contexts of communication.

As regards the employment of another type of politeness principle, the Generosity Maxim, in the genres selected for analysis, the use of this maxim was observed in promotional leaflets and booklets as having the illocutionary function of an offer or invitation.

In his study of politeness principles, Leech (1983: 107) asserted that politeness has an asymmetrical nature: “what is polite with respect to a hearer [...] will be impolite with respect to a speaker and vice versa”. This statement can be supported by offering the following examples:

- She can lend me some money. (impolite)
- I can lend her some money. [1]
- We must come and talk to you. (impolite)
- You must come and talk to us. [2]

Case [1] has the illocutionary function of an offer; case [2] has the illocutionary function of an invitation or proposal. An offer or an invitation represents an illocutionary force that bears a polite nature for two reasons: first, it involves benefit to the hearer, i.e., it minimizes the speaker’s benefit; second, it maximizes the hearer’s benefit, following the Generosity Maxim.

The use of the Generosity Maxim in situational contexts was frequently observed in the hotels’ promotional leaflets and booklets. The examples provided below show how the Generosity Maxim is followed when the illocutionary functions of inviting or recommending are present, thus focusing on the benefits for the customers:

- We work hard to make your life easier (i.e., your benefit is maximized, but our benefit is minimized).
- *IBIS* guarantees you a smooth stay (i.e., your benefit is maximized).
- Your good night’s sleep is our priority (i.e., your benefit is maximized).
- We are committed to providing you the greatest possible comfort (i.e., our benefit is minimized, your benefit is maximized).
- We look after everything- we will look after you 24/7.
- IBIS: your well-being at the best price.

We have so far argued that the illocutionary functions of inviting, requesting, recommending, or even commanding expressed through requesting, are performed observing the maxims of politeness principle by Leech. The Tact and Generosity Maxims usually complement each other when they are used for the purpose of showing linguistic politeness: they are based on the so-called *cost and benefit* scales. In other words, the maxims focus on *other* rather than on *self*. They prioritize the benefit of the *other*, so as to avoid disagreement between interlocutors. They seek consensus and politeness towards the addressee. According to the maxims, the addressee is given the central role in communication. For example, common expressions used as requests in the service industry, such as *What can I do for you?* *Can I help you?* can be fully attributed to the use of the maxims of politeness principle in relevant situational contexts. This practice can be examined by applying the *cost and benefit* scales proposed by Leech. In other words, the Tact and the Generosity Maxims are often associated with the illocutionary force of requesting, ordering, inviting and recommending in situational contexts.

In summation, the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim are a natural pair, as explained above, because they “deal with bipolar scales *the cost – benefit* scales” (Leech,

1983: 132). They are related to the cost and benefit of future actions for both the speaker and the hearer.

It is important to note that the maxims of politeness cannot be seen as the absolute rules of linguistic politeness. They rather reflect more general underlying principles, such as:

- a focus on *other* instead of *self*,
- avoidance of disagreement,
- seeking concord,
- giving more importance to politeness towards an addressee than to politeness towards a third party.

The study of Leech's maxims of politeness principle shows that the illocutionary functions of linguistic politeness should be examined together with the principles governing intercultural communication. Thus, Leech's Maxims can be viewed as:

- a general framework of politeness principles observed in communication;
- accepted linguistic universals governing polite interdiscourse.

However, the pertinence of the maxims varies from culture to culture, and therefore their application from the perspective of interdiscourse communication is relative.

It should be added that linguistic politeness differs from politeness in nonverbal behavior, since nonverbal behavior is considered to be etiquette. To put it differently, etiquette refers to the rules of conduct that are established in any group or community; they represent conventional requirements for social behavior, which involves awareness of how to act in particular situational contexts. However, it shouldn't be assumed that similar forms of the appropriate linguistic strategies function in the same way across cultures. Consequently, we agree with Grundy's (1995) view that:

It is important to separate culturally variable estimates of power, distance and imposition [...] from the strategies and linguistic manifestation of strategies which a universal account of politeness would need to capture (Grundy, 1995: 137).

In addition, according to Fraser (1990), being polite is not a matter of making an addressee 'feel good', or not causing an addressee to 'feel bad', but it is a question "of getting on with the purpose of the interaction within the terms and conditions established in their conversational contract" (Fraser, 1990: 219-220).

Hedges- instruments of linguistic politeness

Some important points should be mentioned regarding the use of hedges as instruments of linguistic politeness. As was mentioned in the second section of this paper, the general pragmatic concept of linguistic politeness includes Lakoffian (1973) principles such as 'don't impose' or 'give options'. Many ordinary speech acts, such as invitations, offers, proposals, and requests, can actually represent a form of imposition on the hearer or on the receiver of the message.

One of the ways by which speakers seem to minimize that kind of imposition is through the use of hedges, in particular, through downgraders. Downgraders are considered to be speaker-oriented hedges, and can be words like, e.g., *just*, *just in case*, *a bit/a few*, *a little/scarcely*, *rather*, or *something, whatever*.

Since linguistic structure reflects the nature of the relationship between speaker and addressee, and because the word *just* is illustrative as one of many linguistic elements which can express relationships of this type, it seems profitable to pay attention to it when discussing the character of linguistic politeness phenomena.

Lee (1987) identifies four major categories of meaning for the word *just*. They are: depreciatory, restrictive, specificatory and emphatic (Lee, 1987: 377-398).

When it is applied in its depreciatory meaning, the word *just* intends to minimize or weaken the significance of an action one might be asked to perform. In other words, *just*, functioning as a speaker-oriented hedge, minimizes the size of the imposition that is made on the hearer.

When *just* is used in its depreciatory meaning, it reveals the attitude of the speaker; the speaker minimizes or weakens the significance of some particular process by relating it to other events explicitly mentioned in the discourse, e.g.:

- "These are not serious problems- *just* a nuisance, don't worry", the police officer said.
- Do these pills do anything for my brain?
B. No, they are *just* for your general health condition.
- I don't feel unwell, I *just* feel seedy.
- I will have a word with your parents *just* about your poor performance in his subject.
- I will check your test *just* to see that it is a pass.
- Your test is *just* a failure, but it does not mean that you are a dropout.

Our interpretation of the examples presented above is as follows: when the hedge *just* is used in its depreciatory meaning, it downplays the situations presented. It seems to minimize the imposition of the whole utterance, thus showing tact or modesty towards the hearer. Besides, it should be noted that the hedge *just* reveals a particular attitudinal meaning with respect to the truth-value of a proposition. This suggests very strongly that *just* is there to avoid or minimize an interactant's "loss of face" (Brown and Levinson, 1978), which is in accordance with the Lakoffian pragmatic concept of linguistic politeness 'don't impose'.

Conclusions

This study has analyzed:

- the communicative functions of linguistic politeness, based on the analysis of theoretical contributions;
- two linguistic approaches, employed for the purpose of the analysis of linguistic politeness, which are the social norm view and the conversational maxim view, in order to examine some of the rules that underlie the practice of linguistic politeness in communication;

- the maxims of politeness principle (also known as Interpersonal Maxims), in order to examine the illocutionary functions associated with the maxims of politeness in situational contexts of their use.

From this study, we can draw several conclusions

1. The linguistic politeness principles convey social meaning; since they are communicated in social contexts where social variables, such as background, setting, power, and distance, are present, they perform the communicative function of discernment.

2. The social norm view and the conversational maxim view are two linguistic approaches that explain the use of linguistic politeness in situational contexts.

3. The illocutionary functions of the maxims of politeness principle, in particular the Competitive function and the Convivial function, are related to the illocutionary force of communication. The Competitive function is related to the illocutionary force of requesting, demanding and commanding in communication, and the Convivial function corresponds to the illocutionary force of offering, inviting and thanking.

4. The external situational context of communication determines which language approach should be preferred. The Competitive function consists on reducing discord in interactional contexts, and the Convivial function is characterized by an attempt to establish courtesy in communication.

5. To develop politeness in linguistic behaviour and to establish a positive communicative relationship between interactants involved in communication, the Tact and Generosity maxims of the Politeness Principle (also known as Interactional Maxims) are used. They imply a scale of politeness in linguistic behavior, which maximizes the *other*, i.e., the addressee's benefit, rather than *self*, i.e., the speaker's benefit. Assigning the central role in communication to the addressee, these maxims are followed with the purpose of avoiding discord and establishing concord in interactional contexts.

6. Hedges, when used as instruments of linguistic politeness, are used for the purpose of presenting a speaker's/writer's proposition as an *opinion* rather than a fact. Hedges offer the possibility of textual manipulation. Within the framework of linguistic politeness, hedges can serve as metalinguistic operators, performing the function of mitigation or softening overdirect or sensitive information. Hedges are the linguistic device used to lessen the impact of an utterance, and their use may be intentional or unintentional.

7. The maxims of politeness cannot be seen as the absolute rules of linguistic politeness. By reflecting general principles that guide communication, they are commonly applied to seek agreement and to avoid disagreement, thus reducing the risk of miscommunication or of communication breakdown. They have to be understood and applied in accordance with the rules governing intracultural and/or intercultural communication.

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Interculturalismo, Multiculturalismo e Estudos Interculturais: Questionando Definições, Reposicionando Estratégias

Clara Sarmiento⁷

1. Entre a Política e a Ciência: Diálogos Correntes sobre Trânsitos Interculturais.

Este artigo aborda o tema dos estudos interculturais e o conceito de interculturalismo (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Ibanez e Saenz, 2006; Costa e Lacerda, 2007; Sarmiento, 2010; Dervin, Gajardo e Lavanchy, 2011) como movimento, comunicação, dinâmica, encontro entre culturas, com o propósito de discutir as suas consequências pragmáticas académicas e na sociedade em geral. Na sua essência, os objectivos deste artigo são tão científicos quanto políticos, porque o ‘intercultural’ posiciona-se na intersecção do conhecimento e da política (Dervin, Gajardo e Lavanchy, 2011: 1). A viagem intercultural contemporânea é uma viagem global, uma circum-navegação movida à velocidade das novas tecnologias, e o conceito de ‘intercultural’ descreve todas as partidas e chegadas, a transmissão e recepção de informações que estão implícitas na comunicação, na diversidade e no trânsito que o prefixo ‘inter’ sugere. Os trânsitos interculturais sempre estiveram presentes, desde o perverso diálogo intercultural do colonialismo até à actual heteroglossia cultural da internet. Esta é a razão pela qual nos propomos examinar as motivações, características e regulações das interacções culturais no seu movimento perpétuo, desprovido de fronteiras espaciais ou temporais, numa indefinição de limites tão perigosa quanto estimulante. As práticas normativas da investigação moderna na vasta área das Humanidades já não privilegiam as relações de permanência em detrimento de relações de movimento, uma perspectiva que mudou em resultado das intermináveis mobilidades que hoje atravessam o mundo, construídas e mediadas de formas diversas. Como Stuart Hall (1994) o coloca, as noções de pertença e de pátria foram reconceptualizadas em contextos de migração, desterritorialização, diáspora, virtualidade, digitalização e outras conjunturas do mundo globalizado, que tornam ainda mais pertinente o princípio de Hall de que as identidades culturais não são fixas, mas fluidas; não são dadas, mas produzidas.

Deste modo, cruzamos a primeira grande barreira ao trânsito intercultural – a fronteira criada pelo próprio conceito de cultura – evitando a concepção comum do intercultural simplesmente como ‘nós’ *versus* ‘eles’, e afastando-nos do erro fundamental de um interculturalismo que ignora a diversidade e o dinamismo contidos na sua própria definição. Esta abordagem gera um diálogo interdisciplinar entre áreas que tradicionalmente se ignoraram, já que também é intercultural na sua raiz e nos seus temas, não apenas nos objectos que são examinados; porque não se deve temer a alteridade que, afinal, se pretende estudar. Esta noção de ‘intercultural’ funciona como uma espécie de terceiro espaço, para citar Homi Bhabha (1994). Um terceiro espaço de hibridismo,

⁷Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto

clarasarmiento@gmail.com

subversão, transgressão. O hibridismo – e a tradução cultural, que Bhabha vê como sinónimo de hibridismo – é politicamente subversivo. O hibridismo é o espaço onde todas as divisões binárias e antagonismos típicos de concepções políticas e académicas conservadoras, incluindo a clássica oposição entre teoria e prática, política e reflexão crítica, não funcionam. Não funcionam também nos estudos interculturais da forma como os entendemos.

Os interesses convergentes da actualidade estão patentes nas expectativas de editores e leitores e nas relações de poder que moldam o estereótipo da vida académica. Estas noções e expectativas transformam constantemente os resultados de investigadores, na medida em que estes tendem a adaptar as suas práticas e capacidades criativas às pressões profissionais e económicas. No entanto, muitos dos investigadores respondem frequentemente a essas pressões usando as suas próprias estratégias, inovações e subversões, e raramente assumem uma postura passiva no processo de incorporação em sistemas políticos e institucionais de grande escala. Redes e ecos provenientes da comunidade académica internacional difundem-se a grande velocidade pelo globo, e as suas múltiplas formas de interacção cultural trazem consigo as suas próprias formas de manipulação e subversão do poder. Estas acções, levadas a cabo nas ‘periferias’ – e que são, por sua vez, centrais nas vidas e experiências de indivíduos – podem ser designadas e descritas, mais ou menos metaforicamente, como “regiões de fronteira” (Bruner, 1996: 157-79), “limiares” (Davcheva, Byram e Fay, 2011: 144), “campos discursivos de intersecção” (Tsing, 1993), diásporas académicas ou “espaços na berma da estrada” (Stewart, 1996), todos eles reflectindo a natureza dialógica da cultura e dos estudos interculturais. Porque “a abordagem intercultural enfatiza os processos e interacções que unem e definem os indivíduos e os grupos na sua relação uns com os outros” (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006: 476).

Na diversidade cultural contemporânea, o passado e o presente, o global e o local, convergem na análise de conceitos e objectos intimamente relacionados com transformações políticas, económicas, sociais e culturais em curso. A investigação científica é também uma área de intersecções, de constante tradução cultural, isto é, de reinterpretação, de reposicionamento de símbolos e signos nas hierarquias existentes. Nesta reflexão sobre estudos interculturais, encorajamos leituras críticas que procuram ver além dos significados arbitrários, favorecendo interpretações contextualizadas que, na sua incerteza, podem certamente gerar novas hipóteses, teorias e explicações.

Para a feminista americana Judith Butler, o universal – aqui entendido como sinónimo de hegemonia, uma combinação Gramsciana (Gramsci, 1971) de poder e consentimento – só pode ser conceptualizado em articulação com as suas próprias periferias, as supracitadas “zonas de fronteira”, “espaços na berma da estrada” e outras metáforas. Deste modo, aquilo que foi excluído do conceito de universalidade força este mesmo conceito – de fora, das margens – a aceitá-lo e incluí-lo novamente, o que só pode acontecer quando o próprio conceito evoluiu o suficiente para incluir os seus próprios excluídos. Esta pressão acaba por conduzir à rearticulação do corrente conceito de universalidade e do seu poder. Ao processo através do qual a universalidade readmite os seus próprios excluídos, Butler dá o nome de “tradução”. A tradução cultural – quer como “retorno dos excluídos” quer como o hibridismo de Bhabha – é uma força poderosa da democracia contemporânea também no campo académico (Butler, 1996: 45-53; Butler, 2000).

Assim, os estudos interculturais são o lugar onde a ‘sobreposição de culturas’ ocorre, o que é a característica de um sítio de tradução cultural. Este tipo de tradução cultural pode funcionar como esse “retorno dos excluídos”, forçando os limites, acarretando mudanças epistemológicas e abrindo novos espaços de discussão livre e

investigação independente. Porque, para Bhabha, assim como para o sociólogo português Boaventura de Sousa Santos, o potencial para a mudança está localizado nas periferias. Periferias marcadas pelo hibridismo, onde os ‘recém-chegados’ – ‘recém-chegados’ ou ‘excluídos’ como politécnicos e universidades de países e regiões periféricas, como grupos de investigação não convencionais, como jovens mulheres na academia – podem recorrer à subversão para derrubar as estratégias dos poderosos, independentemente de quem eles sejam.

Quando se fala sobre a experiência intercultural, é tentador falar em nome dos ‘outros’ – uma noção que é sempre contingente e relacional, já que ‘nós’ somos o outro dos outros (Cerqueira, 2013) –, mas raramente deixamos realmente esses ‘outros’ falarem por si. No entanto, a verdadeira experiência intercultural acontece quando conseguimos ver-nos a nós próprios e ao nosso trabalho como se fôssemos esses ‘outros’, cuja ‘alteridade’ deriva da sua nacionalidade, género, orientação, historial académico ou área de investigação. Recordemos que Derrida demonstrou como a construção de uma identidade é sempre baseada na exclusão, e que o resultado destes pares dicotómicos é uma violenta hierarquia, como nos binómios ‘homem/mulher’, ‘branco/negro’, ‘colonizador/colonizado’, ‘heterossexual/homossexual’, ‘elite/massas’ e actualmente também ‘ciência e tecnologia/artes e humanidades’. É o propósito da presente reflexão sobre os estudos interculturais, no entanto, destacar o segundo elemento deste binómio e prestar-lhe a merecida atenção científica.

Como se pode concluir, a abordagem comparativa necessária para qualquer tipo de análise intercultural afastou-se de uma noção antropológica de cultura singular em direcção a uma noção de culturas no plural, num diálogo, movimento e tradução permanentes, como Clifford Geertz explica em *Local Knowledge*: “The hallmark of modern consciousness is its enormous multiplicity. For our time and forward, the image of a general orientation or perspective, growing out of humanistic or scientific studies, and shaping the direction of culture, is a chimera. [...] The conception of a ‘new humanism’, of forging some general ‘the best that is being thought and said’ ideology and working it into the curriculum, will then seem not merely implausible but utopian altogether. Possibly, indeed, a bit worrisome” (1993 [1983]: 70).

André Lefevere desenvolveu uma teoria de grelhas culturais, baseada nos trabalhos de Pierre Bourdieu e no seu conceito de capital cultural, que explora o papel e o lugar de textos e discursos numa cultura e o papel que estes poderiam ter em outra cultura. Tal sistema mostraria claramente que os textos passam por todo o tipo de variações de *status* tanto em termos intertemporais como interculturais, e ajudar-nos-ia a explicar algumas das contingências dessas mudanças (Bassnett e Lefevere, 1998). Na mesma ordem de ideias, Sherry Simon faz notar que aqueles espaços que foram antes considerados universais (como a grande tradição humanista, o cânone dos grandes livros, o espaço público associado à comunicação democrática ou o modelo de cultura que sustinha o ideal de cidadania) foram agora expostos como sendo essencialmente uma expressão dos valores do homem branco, europeu, de classe média (Simon, 1996). Esta é a razão pela qual histórias de vida, estudos de caso e documentos sobre indivíduos de todas as idades, educação, género, nacionalidade, orientação e passado devem ser considerados materiais científicos com valor real, capazes de gerar novas teorias abrangentes. As vozes anteriormente silenciadas dos não-brancos, não-Europeus, não-classe média e não-homens, e as narrativas que elas produzem, deveriam assumir um novo papel e um novo estatuto numa grelha cultural moderna, interdisciplinar e transnacional. Mais ainda, escutando as narrativas da vida diária comum, lidas e decifradas no seu próprio contexto, aprendemos sobre experiências reais, necessidades, dúvidas, medos e desejos. Porque as narrativas de vidas reais, produzidas por seres humanos com uma voz, uma cara e um

nome, criam espaços de empatia, e consequentemente, projectos de acção e investigação serão conduzidos com vista à obtenção de resultados úteis e tangíveis, em detrimento de peças estéreis de retórica académica.

Deste modo, práticas e conhecimentos locais e globais – com as suas produções discursivas associadas – não constituem uma dicotomia. Em vez disso, a sua correlação é fonte de uma tensão dinâmica estimulante, já que a busca de conceitos locais gera novos conceitos, que encorajam o desafio da adaptação epistemológica e fenomenológica, sob uma perspectiva genuinamente interdisciplinar e intercultural. Qualquer abordagem deve ser posicionada na rede de contextos ideológicos e materiais de uma dada região, que é sempre um território em evolução. Num mundo pós-colonial, as intersecções do passado e do presente, do global e do local, definem os parâmetros para exploração da negociação e evolução dos conceitos, bem como as forças materiais que influenciam indivíduos, comunidades e nações. ‘Pós-colonial’ é entendido aqui como sinónimo da situação concreta de antigas colónias e poderes coloniais, agora sites algures entre o legado colonial, a tentativa de alcançar uma consciência nacional (re)nova(da) e as políticas do conflito cultural, no qual diferentes grupos tentam em simultâneo estabelecer as suas próprias identidades, sempre sob a forte influência de hegemonias globais. Nas palavras de Bill Ashcroft, “[p]ost-colonial theory may be defined as that branch of contemporary theory that investigates, and develops propositions about, the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonized societies, and the nature of those societies’ responses” (2012: xv). As sociedades pós-coloniais, tanto Ocidentais como Orientais, tanto do Norte como do Sul, são, de acordo com Achille Mbembe, compostas por uma pluralidade de esferas e arenas, cada uma com a sua lógica própria, e, no entanto, com grande propensão a entrecruzarem-se com outras lógicas, em contínua improvisação e negociação (1992: 5). Esta necessidade constante de negociar e construir a identidade, na verdade, dirige a vida na maioria dos territórios do mundo, que as comunidades expressam numa polifonia de narrativas.

O conceito de interculturalismo aqui explorado e a ideia relacionada de experiência intercultural também se desenvolvem a partir de narrativas polifónicas de tensões dinâmicas. Este conceito de interculturalismo pode ser comparado com o conceito de multiculturalismo, este último entendido como um espaço delimitado, estático, no qual diferentes culturas coabitam numa ignorância silenciosa, encerrada em si própria. Mas, na realidade, o espaço multicultural existe em resultado de movimentos interculturais, multidireccionais e recíprocos (aleatórios?) e como tal será aqui discutido (Sarmiento, 2010: x).

Em geral, o multiculturalismo tem sido analisado numa abordagem ontológica, como uma realidade social existente ou desejada. O multiculturalismo tem também sido amplamente sujeito a um estudo político-ideológico, focado tanto na sociedade dominante ou de acolhimento como nos grupos migrantes ou (aleadamente) minoritários. Por outro lado, o interculturalismo é analisável como movimento com uma corrente de consciência subjacente, conforme é manifestado em viagens criticamente despertas, em conhecimento, compreensão e comunicação mútuos. O interculturalismo é, então, e preferencialmente, uma opção hermenêutica, uma abordagem epistemológica. Martine Abdallah-Pretceille afirma claramente que “o interculturalismo é hermenêutica”, porque nenhum facto é intercultural por si próprio, nem o interculturalismo é um atributo do objecto. Só a análise intercultural pode atribuir-lhe esse cariz, através de um paradigma heterogéneo, híbrido e segmentário de pensamento (2006: 480-3).

O multiculturalismo é um julgamento de existência: num mesmo espaço físico ou conceptual, coexistem diferentes pessoas, de diferentes culturas (em termos de memórias, opções, referências, valores, preferências, projectos, expectativas, experiências, práticas

e atitudes), mas – em circunstâncias ideais – elas reconhecem mutuamente o direito de viverem conjuntamente. O multiculturalismo ensina não apenas o direito a partilhar um território, mas também a obrigação de habitar nele de acordo com as culturas desses vários grupos e comunidades. Mas então, o multiculturalismo tende a assumir um carácter utópico, livre de aspectos dilemáticos ou conflituosos, uma vez que é impossível ignorar todos os casos correntes de conflito de normas, valores e práticas, especialmente aqueles que estão enraizados em princípios de conduta potencialmente ou efectivamente incompatíveis. Seguindo este raciocínio, e tendo sempre presente que as utopias são, por definição, irreais, é tentador fingir uma desilusão chocada e partir para a conclusão fácil de que é, de facto, impossível que diferentes culturas coexistam. Assim, quando este discurso se transforma em prática, aqueles que são identificados como ‘agentes da diferença’ podem ser segregados ou, em última instância, eliminados – através da ilegalização, deportação, aprisionamento, assassinato –, em nome do senso comum, para que a sociedade normal(izada) possa prevalecer.

De facto, há implicações políticas na distinção entre multiculturalismo e interculturalismo. O aproveitamento político e o abuso ideológico do conceito de multiculturalismo podem ser ilustrados com o discurso polémico da chanceler alemã Angela Merkel, que declarou a “morte do multiculturalismo”, sem explicar a natureza e as causas desse falhanço. Merkel referia-se à alegada ilusão de que alemães e trabalhadores estrangeiros poderiam viver lado a lado uma vez perdida a esperança de que “eles não permaneceriam”, “eles” sendo os *gastarbeiters*, ou ‘trabalhadores convidados’, que chegaram à Alemanha para colmatar a falta de trabalhadores durante o *boom* económico dos anos 1960 (*The Guardian*, edição online, 17 de Outubro de 2010). No discurso de Merkel, a representação destes grupos e das suas competências é sustentada por uma certa noção partilhada de ‘cultura’, ‘multicultural’, e seus agentes. A “morte do multiculturalismo” implica que os seus agentes, aqueles que trouxeram consigo a multiplicidade e a diferença, também falharam e já não são bem-vindos. Mas a história recente – na Alemanha e noutros lugares – ensinou-nos que as categorias discursivas e os marcadores simbólicos de identidade têm efeitos reais e muito dramáticos na experiência quotidiana de indivíduos e grupos.

De acordo com Meer e Modood (2012), as concepções de interculturalismo têm estabelecido um contraste positivo relativamente ao multiculturalismo a quatro níveis. Em primeiro lugar, como algo mais que a coexistência, o interculturalismo está alegadamente mais direccionado para a interacção e o diálogo que o multiculturalismo. Em segundo lugar, que o interculturalismo é concebido como algo menos ‘grupista’ ou mais propenso à síntese que o multiculturalismo. Em terceiro lugar, que o interculturalismo está mais comprometido com um sentido mais forte do todo, em termos de coisas como a coesão social e a cidadania nacional. Finalmente, que onde o multiculturalismo se pode tornar iliberal e relativista, o interculturalismo é mais inclinado à crítica de práticas culturais iliberais, como parte do processo de diálogo intercultural. Modood vai ainda mais longe, afirmando que o modelo multicultural permitiu a evolução do racismo biológico para o racismo cultural, enfatizando a velha dicotomia entre *self* e outro e produzindo uma ideia de cultura que é naturalista e essencialista, pela homogeneização de identidades (Werbner e Modood, 1999: 3-4). De facto, racismo pode existir sem ‘raça’, actuando através de discursos reducionistas que favorecem a explicação ‘cultural’ em detrimento de outros níveis de análise, e abordando as interacções de uma forma monocausal (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1985). Tais interpretações propõem que as culturas, essencialmente, ocupam lugares diferentes, irregulares, e que a pertença cultural explica comportamentos mutuamente exclusivos e incompatíveis.

Apesar da óbvia dificuldade da tarefa, para clarificar o argumento, é importante estabelecer aqui uma breve perspectiva diacrónica. O conceito de interculturalismo emergiu em França, durante os anos 1970, no contexto específico da migração, devido à necessidade de inclusão das crianças imigrantes e consequente adaptação dos métodos educativos em face de uma sociedade cada vez mais multicultural. Esta simples informação cronológica contém duas concepções já referidas acima, uma vez que o prefixo ‘inter’ pressupõe que duas ou mais culturas interagem, enquanto o prefixo ‘multi’ não pressupõe a hibridização, mas antes a coexistência estratificada e hierárquica de duas culturas. O modelo intercultural começou a ser defendido no mundo francófono e rapidamente se espalhou pela Europa. As escolas, como meios de integração de diferentes comunidades, foram as primeiras instituições a sentirem a necessidade de entendimento intercultural através da prática de mediação sociocultural (Meunier, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Em Portugal, a mediação sociocultural emergiu nos anos 1990, em resultado da entrada do país na antiga Comunidade Económica Europeia. Nesse processo, Portugal estabeleceu contactos com países onde a mediação sociocultural era já uma prática institucional essencial para alcançar a inclusão social e a coesão. Aqui, a mediação sociocultural é essencialmente praticada por ‘agentes de comunicação’ que promovem o diálogo entre culturas e grupos sociais, procurando mitigar diferenças através do seu conhecimento e compreensão.

Por outro lado, o conceito de multiculturalismo prevalece no mundo anglo-saxónico, onde grupos de diferentes matrizes culturais são integrados na vida pública com vista a assegurar a coesão social, mas não a inclusão. Integrar ou assimilar migrantes não é parte do mesmo projecto nacional e societal que criar uma sociedade que ofereça oportunidades semelhantes a todos. E mesmo que isso não se torne imediatamente claro, nem todas as pessoas de nacionalidade estrangeira são rotuladas da mesma forma. Além disso, uma pessoa ‘bem integrada’ é alguém que se tornou ‘como nós’ e assim, implicitamente, nunca será nós (Dervin, Gajardo e Lavanchy, 2011: 7-8). Uma pessoa ‘bem integrada’ é uma que acabou por rejeitar ou esconder aquelas características que podem ser identificadas como ‘estrangeiras’, assim rejeitando ou escondendo uma parte importante (se não a totalidade) da sua identidade, o âmago onde a individualidade de cada um e o seu sentido de lugar pessoal estão ancorados.

É interessante notar que uma parte significativa da literatura existente em inglês sobre multiculturalismo é, na realidade, uma lista exaustiva de diferenças entre um ‘nós’ individual, chocado mas cheio de boa vontade, e um ‘outro’ colectivo, caracterizado como homogéneo e hipersensível a ofensas às suas estranhas tradições. Esta literatura assume a forma de manuais empíricos com propósitos muito pragmáticos: facilitar as relações económicas com parceiros ‘exóticos’, e /ou tornarem-se ferramentas universitárias populares. Partindo invariavelmente de situações artificiais de conflito, desentendimento, falta de comunicação, hostilidade latente e embaraço geral causado pela exposição às normas e práticas culturais do ‘outro’ (ver: Storti, 1994 e 2001; Trompenaars e Hampden Turner, 1997; Dresser, 2005), raramente as explicações dadas equacionam a possibilidade de uma certa acção ser ditada pela consciência do indivíduo. Para os autores que preferem esta abordagem essencialista, parece inconcebível que um comportamento não-ocidental (ou mesmo não-anglo-saxónico) possa derivar de algo que não os simples ditames da tradição e cultura, respeitados sem dissonância ou lugar para a agência de indivíduos autónomos.

Quando se destacam as diferenças inter-grupais em vez das diferenças intra-grupais e inter-individuais, os negócios, a educação, a formação e a comunicação em geral tornam-se estritamente culturalizados. No entanto, deve-se reconhecer que entre a pura recusa da dimensão cultural e o foco excessivo na cultura como o factor determinante do

comportamento, a margem é estreita. Mas qualquer ênfase exagerada nas características ‘diferentes’ dos ‘outros’ conduz ao exotismo, assim como ao vazio comunicacional, e realça, conscientemente ou não, o estereótipo e o preconceito, porque todo o trabalho focado no ‘outro’ é político e expressa relações de poder. Quando um indivíduo – que raramente é o protótipo de um grupo – não se encaixa no modelo esperado (pré-concebido), levantam-se sérias dificuldades, porque na realidade as pessoas não podem ser compreendidas fora do processo de comunicação e troca. Questionar a nossa própria identidade em relação a outros é uma parte integral dos estudos interculturais, já que o trabalho de análise e de aquisição de conhecimento se aplica aos outros tanto como a nós próprios (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006: 476-8).

Na Europa Ocidental, o multiculturalismo faz lembrar a conjunção dos termos ‘imigração’ e ‘cultura’ que, no contexto específico português, presentemente quase sempre invoca as grandes populações recentemente estabelecidas de origem africana, brasileira, chinesa e europeia de leste. Por outro lado, sobretudo nos Estados Unidos da América e no Canadá, termos políticos como multiculturalismo pretendem incluir todos os grupos marcados pela ‘diferença’ e historicamente excluídos, como as mulheres e as minorias sexuais (Young, 1990). Citando Meer e Modood, isto deve-se ao facto de os regimes de cidadania nos países europeus como Portugal incluírem historicamente relações com antigos cidadãos das colónias que são distintos dos regimes de cidadania das nações de colonialismo demográfico. Assim, os migrantes pós-coloniais para a Grã-Bretanha, por exemplo, não são claramente minorias históricas, mas também não são desprovidos de reivindicações históricas sobre a Inglaterra. Ainda assim, o termo ‘multiculturalismo’ veio a significar na Europa, e significa agora em todos os países onde se fala o inglês e em outros, a acomodação política pelo estado e/ou um grupo dominante de todas as culturas minoritárias definidas antes e acima de tudo pela referência à raça, etnia, nacionalidade ou religião. Ainda que alguns grupos resistam a ter as suas aspirações à inclusão reduzidas às dos imigrantes, o significado dominante de multiculturalismo na política ainda se relaciona com questões de identidade e cidadania de grupos de pós-imigração (Meer e Modood, 2012: 181).

Contestando o mito das nações-estado homogêneas e monoculturais, a ideia de interculturalismo tem sido mais usualmente utilizada em discussões sobre diversidade migrante na área da educação, como referido acima. Até há relativamente pouco tempo, tem estado menos presente no discurso britânico, porque conceitos de relações raciais, igualdade racial e multiculturalismo têm sido mais proeminentes (Gundara e Jacobs, 2000). Todavia, o que a presente formulação de interculturalismo enfatiza é, sem dúvida, a comunicação. De facto, a comunicação é a característica essencial e o meio central pelo qual “an intercultural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds” (Wood, Landry e Bloomfield, 2006: 9). Como os autores sustentam, o multiculturalismo foi fundado sob a crença na tolerância entre culturas, mas não é sempre verdade que os espaços multiculturais são espaços abertos. O interculturalismo, por outro lado, implica abertura – como uma lógica espacial de contacto e dinamismo – e, embora a abertura por si mesma não seja a garantia de interculturalismo, ela estabelece as bases para o seu desenvolvimento (Wood, Landry e Bloomfield, 2006: 7). E aqui, mais uma vez, as noções de diálogo e comunicação são fundamentais. Por um lado, os encontros interculturais promovem entendimento mútuo, permitem a transferência de conhecimentos, expandem horizontes e encorajam uma mente aberta em face da diferença. Por outro lado, podem gerar espaços culturais onde estilos de vida e visões do mundo antagónicas chocam entre si. No geral, estes encontros proporcionam a oportunidade de investigar questões de identidade, discurso e representação, que foram durante demasiado tempo mascaradas pelas noções do

politicamente correcto, da tolerância e do multiculturalismo (Marques, Biscaia e Bastos, 2012: 10).

Se a identidade é moldada pelo reconhecimento e, às vezes, pelo reconhecimento equivocado, então os indivíduos ou os grupos podem sofrer danos reais se a sociedade espelhar uma imagem paralisada, humilhante ou desprezível deles. A falta de reconhecimento ou o mau reconhecimento podem ser uma forma de opressão, aprisionando grupos e indivíduos num modo de existência falsificado, impreciso e incompleto (Taylor, 1994). Isto é, assim, uma ilustração de quão centrais o diálogo e a comunicação são para a diversidade cultural e para o pluralismo social, precisamente porque desafiam as pessoas a compararem e avaliarem os pontos fortes e fracos das suas próprias culturas e modos de vida. A distinção heurística entre alteridade externa e interna tem de ser flexível, na medida em que as duas categorias podem coexistir como recipientes de políticas interculturais. Esta visão do interculturalismo como elemento facilitador de um intercâmbio cultural interactivo e dinâmico debruça-se sobre a tarefa de desenvolver sociedades coesas através da transformação de noções de identidades singulares em noções de identidades múltiplas. Baseado numa profunda partilha de diferenças ao nível da cultura e da experiência, o interculturalismo encoraja a formação de interdependências, que estruturam identidades que vão além das nações ou das etnicidades simplificadas (Booth, 2003: 432).

Nas dinâmicas interculturais, os processos de hibridização, ainda que conscientes das peculiaridades simbólicas, valorizam a essência do universal que cada cultura tem para oferecer, enriquecendo, deste modo, todas as outras (Carneiro, 2006). Os actuais defensores do multiculturalismo acreditam que a diferença não deveria ser vista como uma fonte de problemas, desde que esta diferença seja compreendida e respeitada pelos outros. Por outro lado, os defensores do interculturalismo acreditam que as sociedades modernas deveriam, para bem do seu futuro, aceitar a interacção cultural dentro e fora das fronteiras da nação, o que, aliás, é o curso natural e observável da história, já que a cultura de um povo não é estática, mas antes activa e sujeita a ajustamentos permanentes. De um modo geral, o multiculturalismo parece ter-se tornado no receptáculo no qual as nações ocidentais depositaram as suas ansiedades decorrentes das mudanças sociais e económicas em curso, e que são muito mais profundas que as emergentes das políticas de imigração e integração. No entanto, as notórias deficiências do multiculturalismo requerem a transição para um patamar mais complexo, o do interculturalismo, no contexto de diversidade que hoje caracteriza as sociedades ocidentais. As nações ocidentais têm-se debatido com as consequências da imigração não apenas proveniente das antigas colónias, mas também de populações deslocadas por conflitos armados e instabilidade política, pela procura de trabalho na nova economia mundial, pela era dos fluxos globais e pela mobilidade internacional de trabalhadores de um modo geral.

Uma declaração que assinala o relevo actualmente dado ao interculturalismo pode ser encontrada no sétimo dos “Princípios Básicos Comuns para a política de integração dos imigrantes” da União Europeia (European Commission, 2004), que defende que a interacção frequente entre imigrantes e cidadãos dos estados-membros é um mecanismo fundamental para a integração, sublinhando a importância de fóruns comunitários, diálogo intercultural e informação sobre os imigrantes e as suas culturas. O ponto-chave aqui é o oposto de uma mera celebração da diversidade de culturas como folclore ou como versões étnicas do multiculturalismo clássico. O que está aqui envolvido é o incentivo positivo de encontros efectivos entre diferentes grupos e a criação de diálogo e actividades conjuntas. Claro que isto não significa que o diálogo intercultural não tenha sido parte da filosofia e prática multicultural. Mas torna-se evidente que a ideia de multiculturalismo

sucumbiu com facilidade a uma interpretação de culturas ‘étnicas’, com fronteiras rigidamente definidas e componentes essenciais estáticos, sem divergência interna. Por outras palavras, o multiculturalismo orientou-se em direcção ao essencialismo, ainda que tácita ou implicitamente, como no caso dos supracitados ‘manuais de comunicação intercultural’. O culturalismo radical, no contexto da comunicação intercultural, pode acabar por conduzir à recusa de ver o nosso próprio comportamento como também ele culturalmente contextualizado. Uma explicação possível para isto é que os objectivos epistemológicos e políticos nunca podem realmente coincidir: enquanto a investigação analisa as experiências sociais na sua complexidade, a política espera frequentemente descrições simplificadas e redutoras, capazes de produzir manuais do utilizador, mapas de estradas e ferramentas de gestão de encontros entre culturas, que dão a ilusão de que a ‘alteridade’ pode ser disciplinada (Dervin, Gajardo e Lavanchy, 2011: 18).

O interculturalismo procura pôr em causa esta tendência essencialista – que, por si só, não consegue prevenir completamente –, construindo a percepção da ligação, interacção e cruzamento de crenças, práticas e modos de vida de grupos diferentes (embora não isolados), que são parte de culturas em constante movimento, devido a uma miríade de mudanças resultantes de factores tecnológicos, económicos, políticos e culturais. O interculturalismo também evita a tendência que o multiculturalismo inadvertidamente incentivou para o preconceito de que todas as culturas não-ocidentais partilham poucos dos ideais ocidentais, numa ordem mundial ainda definida pelo chamado ‘choque de civilizações’. Por outro lado, no âmago de qualquer forma de interculturalismo está o claro reconhecimento da interligação cultural, histórica e contemporânea, numa escala global, assim como dos valores partilhados que se desenvolveram ao longo do tempo em espaços geoculturais diferentes.

A par da superfície aparentemente neutra do multiculturalismo, há um discurso político que realça exageradamente, e pode até produzir, as diferenças entre grupos, enquanto reproduz, justifica e encobre a opressão e a desigualdade. O multiculturalismo convencional, na sua essência, normaliza a ideia de que existem diferentes categorias de seres humanos, “essentialized, primordial, and fixed. Furthermore, multiculturalism posits that it is natural to ‘stick with your own kind’” (Kromidas, 2011: 73). No seu estimulante trabalho sobre multiculturalismo, essencialismo e cosmopolitismo crítico em escolas primárias de Nova Iorque, Maria Kromidas descreve um novo multiculturalismo acomodacionista e rotinizado que tem sido hegemonicamente incorporado como o perfeito parceiro ideológico para o capitalismo global, muito longe de qualquer noção de justiça social. Baseando-se profundamente nos trabalhos de Abdallah-Pretceille, Kromidas também contrasta um multiculturalismo que depende de uma concepção de cultura reificada e estática com um interculturalismo que desconstrói esta entidade homogénea, buscando antes uma multiplicidade complexa e dinâmica. O primeiro foca-se em tipologias e categorizações enquanto o último dá relevo a mutações, fusões e relações. O multiculturalismo é obcecado com o ‘outro’ e com o que é necessário saber sobre ele/ela, enquanto o interculturalismo se foca no *self*, questionando a nossa própria identidade em relação aos outros. O objectivo final do primeiro é uma tolerância cautelosa, enquanto o do último é a convivialidade, i.e., e de novo, a comunicação. As mesmas fronteiras que encapsulam a taxonomia estática do multiculturalismo tornam-se o objecto de crítica do interculturalismo (Kromidas, 2011: 75). Para Abdallah-Pretceille, o interculturalismo implica a deslocação da análise em termos de estruturas e estados para uma de situações, processos e fenómenos culturais complexos, inconstantes e arbitrários, tais como a aculturação, assimilação, resistência, identidade ou hibridismo. Em resumo, cultura em acção, em vez de cultura como um objecto: é esse o objectivo da investigação intercultural (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006: 479-81).

2. Textos e Práticas do Diálogo Intercultural: Rumor à Tradução e à Síntese.

Como temos vindo a argumentar, o espaço intercultural é criado e partilhado pela participação, interacção, debate e esforço comum (Gagnon e Iacovino, 2007). O interculturalismo é, por isso, equivalente a integração mútua, compreensão e partilha da cultura um do outro, e à procura de uma plataforma comum para o diálogo e a comunicação multimodal (Baldry e Thibault, 2006). No seu exaustivo trabalho sobre interculturalismo, Ibanez e Saenz argumentam que, para construir identidade na diferença, é necessário praticar o diálogo entre culturas e reflectir sobre ele. Este é também o propósito da nossa abordagem ao interculturalismo e aos estudos interculturais, cuja racionalidade prática e teórica funciona sem hierarquias ou fragmentação. Para que se possa afirmar a interligação de todos os seres humanos e a sua complementaridade mútua, é essencial praticar uma nova ontologia que seja livre de dualismos herdados, tornando-os antes dinâmicos, que transcenda opostos e a sua subordinação implícita, que busque aquilo que é estranho naquilo que é familiar e vice-versa. Esta epistemologia relacional e até dialéctica é crucial para um estudo do interculturalismo que vá além de uma multiplicidade cultural sem significado (Ibanez e Saenz, 2006: 14-15). Usamos aqui o termo ‘dialéctica’ porque, ainda que o conflito seja necessariamente parte do processo intercultural – tanto na prática social como na investigação académica –, uma síntese irá, espera-se, emergir dele.

A perspectiva intercultural de Ibanez e Saenz considera que as culturas são identidades dinâmicas construídas pela abertura à diferença de diversas formas. Assim, o interculturalismo e a capacidade para o diálogo entre culturas não constituem uma mera aceitação passiva do factor multicultural, nem a utopia da harmonização completa, mas antes um componente essencial de todas as culturas que aspiram a declarar-se como tal. Este tipo de diálogo acontece entre indivíduos que falam diferentes linguagens e para os quais as palavras e objectos têm significados diversos. Contudo, isto não se traduz numa nova Torre de Babel nem no caos social, porque existe a tentativa de comunicação e existe algo que é de facto partilhado, que é exactamente o que permite a tomada de consciência das diferenças e a abertura em relação a elas. Quando as diferenças são postas de parte e consideradas como não-existentes, o resultado é um entendimento insuficiente de nós próprios e dos outros. É por isso que é necessário compreender o desafio comunicativo apresentado pela quantidade ilimitada de discursos e textos dentro da estrutura dos estudos interculturais (Ibanez e Saenz, 2006: 15).

Embora a identidade e a diferença não sejam exclusivamente discursivas, elas estão contidas no discurso. Ambas estão englobadas no largo espectro da interacção, e um dos meios mais importantes de interacção para os humanos é a comunicação por uma língua natural. É por esta razão que a língua (ou antes, o reconhecimento da diversidade de linguagens que podem ser usadas para exprimir significados comunicativos) se torna um factor fundamental quando se fala de interculturalismo. Compreender o outro e aquilo que ela ou ele dizem requer uma coincidência de horizontes culturais, a par do reconhecimento da diversidade linguística. Por outro lado, a diversidade linguística está também presente na esfera de uma língua nacional através de diferenças intralinguísticas de carácter social, ideológico e estilístico, assim como através de variações de dialecto e registo. O valor simbólico associado a diferentes línguas ou a variantes de uma língua comum tem de ser interpretado conjuntamente com outros significados partilhados na interacção social, com o objectivo de atingir um entendimento intercultural adequado,

porque os signos interculturais são polissêmicos e o seu significado só pode ser obtido através de uma análise contextualizada, em vez do mero recurso ao dicionário.

A diversidade social e linguística dentro de uma cultura é uma fonte de riqueza que dá o seu contributo para a diversidade resultante da existência de uma pluralidade de culturas no mundo. A competência comunicativa dos utilizadores de uma língua desenvolve-se tanto ao nível intracultural como intercultural. Por outras palavras, os falantes precisam de estar cientes da variedade de registos e da pluralidade de textos e de discursos que existem numa cultura, quer sua quer ‘outra’, seguindo o princípio da auto e hetero-análise característico dos estudos interculturais. A riqueza dos mundos descobertos através da diversidade linguística e significados comunicáveis é tanta que cada tradução é uma tarefa necessariamente imperfeita. Como pré-requisito para o diálogo intercultural, devemos reconhecer as diferentes linguagens utilizadas por outros actores e conhecer as suas “dimensões ocultas” (Hall, 1992 [1966]), mesmo que não consigamos fazê-lo de outra forma que não a tradução, de forma a assimilar a cultura desconhecida como uma variação da nossa própria cultura. Mas as práticas e estilos de tradução que não são verdadeiramente interpretativos podem impedir em vez de facilitar a comunicação intercultural. O poder hegemónico de uma cultura pode ser reforçado se aceitarmos como natural uma tradução na qual as vozes de outras culturas são domesticadas, sem serem compreendidas como originárias de outro lugar. A polifonia cultural tanto pode ser facilitada como estorvada pelo discurso académico, sendo portanto grande a responsabilidade dos estudos conduzidos sobre a coexistência e a interpenetração de vozes de diferentes culturas (Ibanez e Saenz, 2006: 18).

Na moderna Babel da comunicação global, os estudos de tradução assumiram uma posição de destaque e tornaram-se uma área-chave para a compreensão de fenómenos culturais, literários e linguísticos, tanto contemporâneos como passados. Os estudos de tradução constituem um entrecruzamento de disciplinas que esbate distinções profundamente enraizadas entre estudos literários e estudos culturais, hermenêutica e ciências da linguagem, filosofia e sociologia, porque o processo de tradução vai muito além do bom domínio das línguas. Os tradutores competentes são capazes de compreender a relação íntima entre língua, cultura, arte, convenções e discurso, num processo constante de resolução de problemas e antecipação, adaptação e consciencialização.

A diversidade é agora não só mais visível que nunca, mas também mais comunicável. Isto tornou-se gradualmente óbvio com a emergência do Inglês como *lingua franca* num mundo globalizado e com a crescente necessidade de aptidões tradutivas tanto de indivíduos como de instituições. Quando não existem fórmulas fixas que governem em abstracto a prática da tradução, é a própria tradução que deve encontrar soluções específicas para cada tipo de texto. O estudo e a análise crítica da tradução já não se centram no texto traduzido como um produto, mas antes no processo da tradução, i.e., na descrição dos mecanismos de tomada de decisões e nas suas respostas apropriadas às questões levantadas pelo texto fonte. Por conseguinte, o trabalho do tradutor adquire novas dimensões: por um lado, o tradutor estabelece relações que tornam o conhecimento mais acessível, o que aproxima pessoas e culturas; por outro lado, ela/ele interfere directamente na produção literária do seu país, na medida em que recria, de acordo com um modelo pré-determinado, formas e ideias estéticas que serão incluídas na sua tradição. É isto que André Lefevere realça em “Translation. Its Genealogy in the West” quando diz que “together with historiography, anthologizing and criticism it [a tradução] prepares works for inclusion in the canon of world literature. It introduces innovations into a literature. It is the main medium through which one literature influences another. It can be potentially subversive and it can be potentially conservative” (1990: 27). A natureza

subversiva da tradução, enfatizada por Lefevere, cria uma visão renovada da figura do(a) tradutor(a), conferindo-lhe uma importância que não era antes evidente, porque “translation is one of the most obvious forms of image making, of manipulation, that we have” (Lefevere, 1990: 26). Assim, o estudo da tradução pode revelar muito não apenas sobre o mundo literário, mas também sobre o mundo real em que vivemos. Por outras palavras, a tradução é outra via para o estudo do interculturalismo, é uma disciplina crucial de entre o largo âmbito dos estudos interculturais.

A condição do mundo contemporâneo, no qual a multiplicidade social e cultural do ser humano se tornou explícita e visível tanto nas ruas como através dos média, torna o fenómeno da diversidade ubíquo e necessariamente aberto à análise discursiva, etnográfica, antropológica, histórica e semiótica, entre muitas outras abordagens possíveis. A revolução nas tecnologias da comunicação possibilita a qualquer pessoa ser vista, ouvida e lida em qualquer lugar do mundo. A interacção face a face pode agora ser removida do aqui e agora, enquanto sujeitos e objectos das mais remotas áreas do globo ser facilmente acedidos física ou virtualmente, como produtos do turismo, das trocas, da migração, da globalização e dos média. De acordo Ibanez e Saenz, a diversidade é uma realidade adquirida e pode ser percebida pela participação da diferença no mais pequeno contexto cultural. Se a interacção de diferenças assegura a diversidade, é também na base da diferença que a identidade está ancorada: por outras palavras, mais do que uma ameaça à identidade, a diversidade é a sua demonstração (Ibanez e Saenz, 2006: 21).

Como consequência de tal diversidade, os trânsitos interculturais precisam de um mapa delineado por disciplinas que são raramente tomadas em conta numa abordagem conservadora à noção de ‘cultura’. De igual modo, como consequência da inter-relação entre o fenómeno global e as suas dimensões locais, na híbrida sociedade contemporânea, uma comunicação eficaz requer indivíduos que sejam capazes de dominar as aptidões necessárias para lidar com a diferença, assim como para aceitar e tolerar aqueles que não partilham a mesma língua, história ou cultura. Uma das aptidões-chave para a inovação e a inclusão é a interdisciplinaridade e a criatividade. A criatividade é aqui entendida como liberdade de espírito, ausência de preconceito e competências comunicativas que transponham culturas e disciplinas, de forma a gerar uma intervenção produtiva tanto na sociedade como na ciência. As abordagens interdisciplinares e criativas ao fenómeno intercultural seleccionam frequentemente áreas de estudo inesperadas, com as suas próprias metodologias, às quais iremos agora dar realce.

A resistência cultural às imposições da globalização é característica da forma como as comunidades locais preservam e transmitem as suas tradições orais, mitos fundadores e contos étnicos. Assim, o simbolismo cultural, a ética e a estética dos contos populares podem funcionar como ferramenta educativa, particularmente na transmissão de preceitos de coesão social. No período pós-colonial, mas em alguns casos ainda sob o colonialismo, autores e tradutores trabalharam para descolonizar as literaturas locais, procurando torná-las independentes das literaturas dominantes, um longo processo ainda a decorrer. Tais manifestações da memória como parte da identidade, tanto individual como colectiva, são também um factor-chave para o essencial sentido de continuidade, coerência e (re)construção das comunidades. Para o presente estudo, a principal relevância de narrativas de literatura local e oral não é a sua credibilidade como documentos no sentido positivista, porque, e de acordo com Sidney Chalhoub na sua abordagem à ficção literária, isto “searches for reality, interprets and tells true stories about society, but does not have to function as a glass window over, or as a mirror of, the social ‘matter’ represented” (2003: 92; minha tradução). A sua relevância para os estudos interculturais prende-se antes com a procura de significados complexos, com o facto de elas nos permitirem

analisar criticamente os discursos que guiam a lógica da identidade e as práticas que movem (e são movidas por) representações actuais e retrospectivas da realidade.

Appadurai (2006) vê a globalização como um fenómeno fluido e dinâmico relacionado com migrações globais e com a disseminação de imagens, textos e subjectividades por todo um ambiente saturado pelos média, interligado com fluxos a que o autor chama de “scapes”. O nosso tempo é sem dúvida a era de pessoas em movimento, da migração em massa. Mas enquanto mais e mais pessoas cruzam fronteiras, elas estão também a transformar as suas próprias experiências numa herança poderosa de resiliência e auto-conhecimento. Do mesmo modo, os média e as artes em geral – independentemente da forma estética que possam assumir – são testemunhas desse fenómeno, e têm rejeitado rótulos a favor de propostas com perspectivas transnacionais, onde pessoas com diversas origens culturais e múltiplas etnias convergem. Ao mesmo tempo, os académicos também exploram os temas da deslocação como movimentos de transnacionalismo, interculturalismo e dispersão. Isto aproxima-nos do reconhecimento das particularidades e experiências de pessoas em diferentes partes do mundo; do questionamento da forma como académicos e críticos decidem o que o estudo da cultura deve englobar, e consequentemente expandem as suas áreas de investigação; da análise daquilo que as representações dos discursos interculturais nos média nos dizem acerca da natureza contingente das noções de identidade global e local.

O desenvolvimento e extensão dos processos de mediatização e migração, que caracterizam a modernidade globalizada, produzem uma intensificação considerável da desterritorialização, compreendida como uma proliferação de experiências culturais translocalizadas (Hernández, 2002). A desterritorialização, considerada um aspecto central da globalização, implica a presença crescente de formas sociais de contacto e envolvimento que vão além dos limites de um território específico (Giddens, 1990). Consequentemente, uma vez que a cultura está intimamente ligada às práticas, normas e valores que estruturam a vida numa dada sociedade, os estudos interculturais deverão também analisar a forma como essas convenções foram influenciadas, hibridizadas e postas em prática por diferentes culturas como instituições comumente aceites. Dependendo da complexidade dessas normas, a análise intercultural pode focar-se tanto nas regras tácitas da vida quotidiana – aquilo a que se chama ‘senso comum’ – como em complexos sistemas políticos, religiosos, económicos, legais e filosóficos, porque todos estes processos ideológicos actuam tanto ao nível subliminar quanto ao nível consciente, e são as ferramentas através das quais as identidades sociais são construídas. A lei é, em última análise, o sistema de regulação social e cultural por excelência, que oferece múltiplas perspectivas na presente área dos estudos interculturais, desde as análises da intervenção política de cultura cooperativa além-fronteiras à história das leis da escravatura e do seu poder sobre o destino de milhões de seres humanos brutalmente deslocados por todo o globo, ou até, na esfera doméstica, às leis não-ditas do preconceito e do estereótipo de género que impregnam a questão das responsabilidades e trabalho domésticos, em famílias multiculturais que não param de se alargar.

A transformação do discurso do multiculturalismo num discurso intercultural reforça princípios que dão ênfase à interligação histórica das culturas. As sociedades nunca foram estáticas ao longo da história, já que sempre se adaptaram e mudaram de acordo com os estímulos recebidos de outras culturas. A principal diferença é que, nos dias de hoje, as trocas e contactos culturais ocorrem de uma forma muito mais rápida e globalizada. Quando Antonio Perotti escreve “the intercultural approach to the teaching of History is critical for the understanding of cultural diversity in European societies” (Perotti, 2003: 58), ele está a fazer uma afirmação com implicações historiográficas, uma vez que a compreensão intercultural implica necessariamente uma procura por expressões

sincréticas, que nos permitam chegar a uma história verdadeiramente universal, composta por todos os grupos em comunicação. Deste modo, a centralidade do diálogo para uma nova ética do intercultural requer não só respeito por outras culturas, mas também a compreensão de quanto elas já têm em comum, como interagiram ao longo do tempo, e como essas semelhanças constituem uma base para o desenvolvimento de novos pontos de vista partilhados.

Tomando como um caso paradigmático a história da expansão portuguesa, torna-se claro que, mesmo num sistema de domínio cultural, “the global interaction provided by the de-compartmentalization of the world was made of reciprocal influences. Europeans left their mark in the world, but while interacting with people overseas they have also suffered significant cultural changes. One should note that contemporary Western culture is in itself the result of hybridization, under the influence of the so-called minority cultures, in a mutual exchange that should not be reduced to mere conflict” (Costa e Lacerda, 2007: 9; my translation). As consequências da expansão portuguesa fizeram-se sentir não apenas pelo império mas também na metrópole dos colonizadores, em casa, devido ao modo como os povos do ultramar, os seus objectos, hábitos e crenças, se inseriram na sociedade portuguesa, deixando traços indeléveis em várias áreas, desde as artes visuais à música popular e erudita, da poesia ao mito, da culinária aos instrumentos de navegação, da filosofia às ciências naturais. Embora os crimes da história colonial sejam óbvios, seria mesmo assim relevante questionar – ainda que cuidadosa e criticamente – o processo de expansão europeia como veículo para a criação de sincretismo, com contribuições de múltiplas fontes, abrangendo similaridades e diferenças, onde fusões aconteceram juntamente com a segregação (Costa e Lacerda, 2007: 21). E aqui estamos a falar de dialéctica e síntese, uma vez mais.

Resulta disto que o mundo colonial e pós-colonial é um espaço de trânsito constante, uma permanente zona de contacto, para citar Boaventura Sousa Santos, uma fronteira global onde práticas e epistemologias periféricas são as primeiras a serem notadas, embora raramente compreendidas. Os encontros e comunicação interculturais – ou tradução – trazem para a zona de contacto os aspectos que cada cultura considera mais centrais ou relevantes (Santos, 2006:121). Identidade, território e discurso intersectam-se e influenciam-se mutuamente, e consequentemente diferentes territórios, como experienciados ou representados através de múltiplos textos e narrativas, são compreendidos das mais diversas formas. Como afirma Michel de Certeau, os territórios são activados através das práticas retóricas daqueles que viajam neles, e as opções discursivas e semióticas de cada indivíduo privilegiam, transformam e omitem elementos espaciais de forma a significarem algo, algo diferente, ou pelo contrário absolutamente nada (1988 [1984]: 196-8).

Qualquer narrativa envolve invariavelmente uma interpretação, já que seleccionar de todo um conjunto de experiências quais os eventos e personagens merecedores de importância é, na verdade, um acto de interpretação por si só. Consequentemente, as narrativas raramente são meras imagens no espelho da realidade experimentada; elas são antes mediadas ideologicamente pelas práticas, personagens e eventos que cada território permite. Mas quando o território espacial e temporal é ainda na sua maioria desconhecido, quando é um espaço instável em constante movimento, com fronteiras culturais esbatidas, quando não existem mediadores ideológicos prévios, tudo tem de ser reorganizado, reapresentado, traduzido para um código inteligível. Por essa razão, nas zonas de contacto intercultural, cada prática cultural decide quais os aspectos que devem ser seleccionados para tradução. Em cada cultura existem elementos que são considerados intraduzíveis para outras culturas, ou demasiado vitais para serem expostos aos perigos e às dúvidas de uma zona de contacto. A questão daquilo que deve ou não ser traduzido não se limita aos

critérios de selecção que cada grupo decide adaptar na zona de contacto. Além da selectividade activa, existe aquilo a que poderemos chamar selectividade passiva, que consiste naquilo que se tornou impronunciável numa dada cultura, devido a longa e severa opressão. Estes são silêncios enraizados, ausências que não podem ser preenchidas mas dão forma às práticas e princípios mais intrínsecos a uma identidade cultural (Santos, 2006: 121), como a escravatura, o racismo, a intolerância religiosa, a opressão colonial ou a subjugação das mulheres, para enumerar apenas alguns.

Tomando novamente como exemplo o espaço colonial português, este tem sido frequentemente representado como mero adjuvante ou antagonista na narrativa dominante da campanha pela conversão religiosa, poder, riqueza e promoção social. As zonas de contacto assim criadas nunca foram verdadeiramente híbridas, já que tudo o que não coube nesta grande narrativa teve muito pouco significado para os actores em palco. Processos semelhantes de silenciamento e produção da não-existência – como o silenciamento das mulheres, minorias, escravos, retornados, comunidades colonizadas e grupos oprimidos em geral – contribuíram para a construção e reforço de assimetrias profundas entre culturas, indivíduos, sociedades e géneros, características do colonialismo e do patriarquismo. Porque, e citando novamente Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “cultures are monolytical only when seen from the outside or from a distance. When seen closer or from within, it is easy to understand that cultures are constituted by many and sometimes conflicting versions of that same culture” (2006: 121; my translation). De facto, “one does not even have to cross one’s national borders to experience cultural complexity. If we, as we must, go beyond traditional approach to culture that narrowly associates cultural identity with national identity, then we easily realize that human communities are not monocultural cocoons but rather multicultural mosaics” (Kumaravadivelu, 2007: 5). Mais do que nunca, os estudos interculturais devem ser praticados tanto ‘em casa’ como no estrangeiro, já que o seu âmbito pode englobar as relações entre culturas ocidentais e orientais distantes, mas também entre culturas marginais e convencionais, jovens e antigas, ricas e pobres, eruditas e populares, todas dentro da mesma sociedade.

Como consequência, há narrativas que estão a emergir gradualmente de silêncios centenários, narrativas que estiveram simplesmente ausentes da história, para adaptar uma vez mais os conceitos desenvolvidos por Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008: 11-43; 2006: 87-125). Narrativas emergentes dão voz a grupos subalternos, a todos esses ‘outros’ que a história está lentamente a reconhecer. Mas as narrativas de ausência devem também ser ouvidas, já que, além de vozes emergentes, ou talvez através (e por causa) delas, é assim que se torna possível ter acesso às narrativas de outro modo silenciadas de vidas privadas, de experiências pessoais, de pensamentos íntimos, da experiência diária vivida nas margens ou debaixo de estruturas sociais dominantes. Estas narrativas geram uma fonte de informação vital que complementa a história oficial e está livre do cânone das grandes narrativas, com o seu subjacente discurso de poder. É então possível entender a infinita diversidade da experiência humana, bem como o risco que ela enfrenta – devido aos limites e exclusões impostos por áreas estritas e isoladas de conhecimento – de desperdício de experiência fundamental, i.e., de ver como não-existent, ou impossíveis, experiências culturais que estão, de facto, disponíveis (as ‘ausentes’) ou que são possíveis (as ‘emergentes’) (Santos, 2008: 33). Aqui podemos recordar o conceito de “limiar”, próximo da noção de ‘fronteiras’ ou ‘limites’. Mas enquanto as fronteiras implicam barreiras óbvias a serem desafiadas, os limiares emergem como subtis construções intelectuais que – surpreendentemente ou não – raramente são parte da rotina académica institucional. Eles implicam acesso, mais que uma linha divisora, e sugerem um potencial

para tornar o território académico mais colaborativo e intelectualmente poderoso, através de novos processos de identificação e interacção (Davcheva, Byram e Fay, 2011: 144).

No entanto, quando privada de uma análise crítica cuidadosa, a diversidade de práticas, conhecimentos e experiências que resulta dessas narrativas pode gerar uma pluralidade difusa de discursos e identidades herméticos, desprovida de qualquer interacção real. Uma vez mais, a tradução intercultural deve estimular a comunicação, gerar inteligibilidades mútuas entre diferentes visões do mundo, encontrar pontos convergentes, assim como divergentes, e partilhar conceitos e epistemologias alternativos, de forma que culturas distantes (tanto no espaço como no tempo) possam compreender-se umas às outras. Porém, há conceitos culturais que não podem ser traduzidos, exemplos de incomunicabilidade e silêncios na comunicação que prevalecerão e que são também uma parte fundamental da tradução em geral e da tradução intercultural em particular, porque o silêncio é simultaneamente construção e resguardo da identidade.

É agora evidente que a tradução fomenta inteligibilidade mútua entre as visões do mundo disponíveis e possíveis reveladas por narrativas de ausência e de emergência. Devido a esta multiplicidade inerente de vozes simultâneas, o processo de tradução intercultural não considera qualquer grupo de experiências nem como uma totalidade exclusiva, nem como uma parte homogénea, mas antes como um espaço virtual de constante transmissão e recepção de informação, já que têm uma existência que vai muito além dessas totalidades e partes. Elas permitem-nos ver o subalterno tanto dentro como fora da relação de subalternidade. Quando as narrativas de ausência e emergência se tornam amplamente conhecidas, a quantidade e a diversidade de experiências disponíveis e possíveis aumenta drasticamente, porque o trabalho de tradução cria transparência, coerência e articulação num mundo que fica enriquecido com essa multiplicidade e heterogeneidade (Santos, 2006: 114, 119).

De novo, a ênfase deste conceito de interculturalismo está na comunicação. A metodologia que defendemos deriva deste foco nos indivíduos em movimento e comunicação, um foco também sustentado em sistemas semióticos, motivações inconscientes e nos significados atribuídos às acções. A comunicação ocorre através de discursos múltiplos, em sobreposição, e até em conflito. Assim, o modelo de comunicação subjacente ao conceito de interculturalismo aqui utilizado é um palimpsesto, uma intertextualidade constante com outros discursos e textos do passado e do presente que irão, por sua vez, ser usados em discursos e textos futuros, em permanente tradução e diálogo entre culturas. O hibridismo da identidade de cada indivíduo tem uma história através do espaço e do tempo, e ainda que a linha espaço-temporal possa, por vezes, desgastar-se, os episódios que são guardados na memória, ela própria uma construção, são o pano de fundo do presente e do futuro, i.e., do processo contínuo de construção da identidade (Marques, Biscaia e Bastos, 2012: 16).

Em suma, existe uma pluralidade infinita de formas de partilhar culturas e de reflectir criticamente sobre a diversidade, uma vez que a globalização e os seus efeitos subsequentes se tornaram parte da experiência quotidiana. Esta é a razão pela qual os estudos interculturais devem atravessar disciplinas, abordando temas aparentemente tão díspares como a problemática de género na história e na vida quotidiana actual, a literatura como uma viagem intercultural, as funções sociais e culturais da lei, as crenças e valores culturais contidos nas narrativas orais, as diásporas e a (in)tolerância religiosas, as leis perversas da escravatura e do colonialismo, os média e a sala de aula, a tradução e as narrativas multimodais, entre outras incontáveis possibilidades. E esta linha de pensamento também implica hibridismo.

O interculturalismo, como o entendemos, é um processo coeso de fazer cultura, e não um mero encontro de características culturais inerentes. Não coloca em destaque regras, estruturas ou explicações, mas antes exceções, instabilidades e apropriações (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986). O interculturalismo centra-se em processos, consciente de que é impossível esgotar resultados e interpretações. Está profundamente envolvido na realidade do dia-a-dia, altera linhas limítrofes, negocia concepções e explora dinâmicas de comunicação transformativas. Como se torna evidente, aqueles que estiverem dispostos a juntar-se ao diálogo intercultural devem seguir novos caminhos para percorrer velhos desafios. Esta experiência intercultural renovada implica uma força dinâmica entre culturas e disciplinas, e esta é a razão pela qual devemos questionar e reposicionar as motivações, discursos, definições, estratégias e regras da interação cultural no seu movimento perene.

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Clara Sarmento

**THE WORDS, THE PAGE, AND THE BOOK:
SYMBOLIC INCIDENCES IN THE LITERARY
CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORKS OF PAUL AUSTER**

**ABBREVIATIONS FOR SOME OF THE WORKS OF PAUL AUSTER
USED IN THIS WORK⁸:**

AH - *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews*. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1992.

CLT - *In the Country of Last Things*. London: Faber and Faber, 1989 [1987].

GW - *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970 - 1979*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991 [1990].

IS - *The Invention of Solitude*. London: Penguin, 1988 [1982].

L - *Leviathan*. London: Faber and Faber, 1993 [1992].

MC - *The Music of Chance*. London: Penguin, 1991 [1990].

MP - *Moon Palace*. London: Penguin, 1989.

MV - *Mr. Vertigo*. London: Penguin, 1994.

NYT - *The New York Trilogy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992 [1987].

RN - *The Red Notebook and Other Writings*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995 [1993].

S - *Smoke and Blue in the Face*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

⁸ Works not listed here will be included in the final bibliography

INTRODUCTION

“The Words, the Page, and the Book: Symbolic Incidences in the Work of Paul Auster” is an essay on the intertextual reading of the extensive literary production of a writer that makes contemporary life in the end-of-century urban universe the main vehicle for his originality. Auster was born in 1947, in Newark, New Jersey, studied in Columbia University, and, after working for a year in an oil tanker, lived in France for four years before returning to New York in 1947. The esthetic and fictional world of Paul Auster is austere¹, composed of reconfigured intrigues and complex motives drawn from the history of American literature and from his own past as a writer. It is thus hard to distinguish the varied intertextual plots that characterize his literary journey, which we will try to summarize, not by its rigid chronological order, but rather by the way his different works illustrate the main themes and inflections that guide that unconventional journey. Auster started his career writing poems and essays for *The New York Review* and for *Harper’s Saturday Review*. In 1987, he obtained critical acclaim for the collection of narratives (*City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*) of *The New York Trilogy*, having then opted by the novel. *The New York Trilogy* is a postmodern deconstruction of fictional genres, particularly of the mystery novel, forming a sequence of simultaneous explorations of multiple questions, from the plot, centered around an oppressive urban context, to the nature of language and the unavoidably connected roles of the writer, the character, and the reader. *The New York Trilogy* narrates its tales with considerable dramatic suspense, but breaks the rules of traditional structure to transform fiction into a veritable research field, simultaneously immersed in contemporary urban social reality and in research on language, writing and literary history. *City of Glass*, for instance, uses the detective story in order to explore themes of identity and the relationship between words and meaning. The mysteries investigated are always revealed to be even more complex, rather than solved. Each story of the trilogy adds a new thread to what was already written and reveals the growing diversification and epistemological confidence of a writer that investigates, among other things, his own identity, and at the same time (de)scribes the quest for nature and for the origins of the literary genre he uses. The

¹ See, for instance: Robert Creeley, "Austerities" in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14:1 (Spring 1994), 35-39; Brian Case, "Austere Auster" in *Time Out* 902 (December 2, 1987), 42; Cheri Fein, "Austerity" in *Details* (April 1989), 127-128; Joan Frank, "The Art of Austerity" in *San Francisco Review of Books* 17:3 (Winter 1992), 20-22.

stories of Auster always have hidden literary roots, where the writer seems to display a canonical desire of building an explicatory tradition. In the trilogy, the fictional ghosts include names like Melville, Thoreau, Poe, Whitman or Hawthorne.

Auster's books are postmodern in that they are fictions that are clearly and reflexively about fiction. However, to read Paul Auster's fiction as a mere illustration of a certain definition of postmodernism would be to severely reduce it. Postmodernism is a global movement visible in almost every cultural manifestation, from Quentin Tarantino's movies to architecture, from the writings of William Burroughs and John Fowles to painting, from philosophy to television. In literature, postmodernism has its roots in the rejection of traditional mimetic fiction and of the values of institutionalized modernism. On the contrary, it favors the sense of artifice, suspicion towards absolute truth, and highlights the fictionality of fiction. Postmodernism's self-ironic attitude appears to be a return to traditional values, but it is in fact a conscious questioning of ancient styles of writing. Postmodernism's deceptive lightness makes it more easily assimilated by the mainstream and by pop culture, which possibly explains Paul Auster's success and the movie adaptations of his fiction. The artificial acceptance of contemporary alienation and the idolization of the art-object have already led to accusations of political irresponsibility. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard² sees the boom of information technologies and the correspondent ease of access to a proliferation of diverse materials of seemingly anonymous origin as an integrant part of postmodern culture and as a contribution to the dissolution of the values of personal identity and responsibility. However, Lyotard considers the multiplicity of styles of postmodernism as part of a massive rejection of the representational conception of art and language. A comparative reading of the paradigmatic *New York Trilogy* with certain features of postmodernism, namely those enumerated by Ihab Hassan³, Douwe

² Jean-François Lyotard, *A Condição Pós-Moderna*, translation by José A. Bragança de Miranda (Lisboa: Gradiva, 1989)

³ Such as, for instance, the concepts of *scriptible* (writerly), performance (happening), silence, exhaustion, process, participation and absence, described by Ihab Hassan in "Postface 1982: Towards a Concept of Postmodernism" in *Critical Essays on American Postmodernism*, edited by Stanley Trachtenberg (New York: G.K.Hall and Co., 1995) pp. 81-92.

Fokkema⁴, Brian McHale⁵ or Jean-François Lyotard, may suggest the presence of a novel that is representative of this movement, but Auster's work is not restricted to this field. If Auster's writing has plenty of epistemology, it also investigates a very large spectrum of ontological and intertextual topics:

Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. (...) an author may, in his or her own life time, easily write both a modernist and postmodernist work. (Contrast Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with his *Finnegans Wake*.) (...) This means that a "period," as I have already intimated, must be perceived in terms *both* of continuity *and* discontinuity, the two perspectives being complementary and partial.

(...) any definition of postmodernism calls upon a fourfold vision of complementarities, embracing continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony⁶.

Auster, a former teacher of creative writing, poet, critic, and translator, has always written near his personal experiences. Hence the presence of so many autobiographical elements in his work, the direct motive for the indiscriminate use of the expression writer-character (or character-writer) in this work. In *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), a meditation about death built around memories of his father and the author's relationship with his own son, Auster also reflects on the relationship between language and individual, on the simultaneous need and solipsism of naming objects. The book is an attempt to proclaim the power of memory in a world that is perpetually escaping our comprehension, exploring contemporary and historical philosophical questions about language, along with the awareness of the way the writer should rebuild it as an instrument of autobiographical and phenomenological expression. Auster's fictional works present a stunning degree of variety, always encompassing the most vast contexts and correspondent ideologies and esthetics. *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) takes place in an urban scenery in disintegration and reveals itself to be an apocalyptic novel with historical themes. *Moon Palace* (1989) is a fascinating work of complex fantasy, a fusion of experimentalism with the American myth. *The Music of Chance* (1990; filmed in 1993 by director Philip Haas) leaves the urban scenery to wander through an endless space of chance, an *on the road*

⁴ Douwe W. Fokkema, *História Literária: Modernismo e Pós-Modernismo*, translation by Abel Barros Baptista (Lisboa: Vega, n.d.).

⁵ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). To McHale, the epistemological dominant is characteristic of modernism, changing to the ontological dominant in postmodernism. Cf. McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 3-11.

⁶ Hassan, "Postface 1982", pp. 84-5.

restricted by the stones of a wall of multiple connotations. *Leviathan* (1992), another experimental work about the simultaneity of life and writing, was followed by *Mr. Vertigo* (1994), a history of America metaphorized in the journey of a young man who learns to fly. *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* (1995) originated the homonymous motion pictures directed by Wayne Wang. In his fiction, Paul Auster combines magical realism with the contemporary world, never allowing the reader to forget that his main theme is the process of writing itself. Among his works there are also translations from French and several volumes of poetry, besides *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979* (1990) and *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews* (1992), compilations of poems and essays which focus on many of the subjects covered in his fiction. Paul Auster deciphers the world as a confuse textual labyrinth, fully aware that to rebuild memories, to beat solitude, to find order in chance, and to discover the living image of objects is the true act of investigation by which the writer is responsible, that is, to discern the order of the universe amidst chaos.

After reading Paul Auster's literary works, two motifs stand out: existential loss and drift, and the isolation of the character that dedicates himself to the task of writing, as if he was confined to the book that controls his existence. When the author's works are taken as a whole, this second motif is clearly prevalent, situating in the space of the character's solitude the motive for his own drift, as if the wandering could also take place within the four walls of a room, like it is narrated within the space of the page and of the book. In this gallery of solitary characters devoted to the task of writing and meditating, some started to stand out as capable of ordering, through that work, an apparently disjointed existential trajectory. Among these, the narrator of *White Spaces*, A., and Samuel Farr-Anna Blume are worthy of special attention. Characters like Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe, Ben Sachs, or Paul Benjamin seem to hesitate between the construction of a universe and self-destruction, as though incapable of fully realizing the infinitely creative power of writing. And what to say of Jim Nashe, a non-writing but constructive entity, who claims, however, to be capable of reading the meaning of his nomadic existence in the stones of a wall, as if these were the words of a text he himself had written? Despite being one of the few protagonists in Auster's fiction which is not directly involved in writing as a profession (and mission), Jim

Nashe seems to be the one that is closest to the poetic persona of *Ground Work* and of the essays of *The Art of Hunger*. Indeed, both in his poems and in his essays, Auster seems to look at writing as a concrete physical endeavor of actual building, as if the words to be aligned in the text-poem were stones to be laid in order to build a wall or some other stone structure.

Fruit of this reflection, the present work examines symbolic meanings in the work of Paul Auster, where stones-words are the genetic substance of a world (re)built through the work of writing, between the four walls of a room. Words build the book in the same way stones build a wall, and that wall outlines a space-time that is closed but which allows for an unlimited mental expansion, like a room or a book. Paul Auster's work reveals itself as an esthetical-literary meta-reflection about the work of writing: the writer exists solely as an entity that produces writing; writing (and its product, the book) occur entirely in the room; the room is the exclusive space of the writer entity, in a circular succession of endless identities. How Paul Auster sees himself as a writer, how he looks at the writing he produces, and how he transposes that attitude into literary discourse is what we shall subsequently try to explore.

In the first chapter ("Walls and Stones: the Music of Words") we shall look at the above mentioned image of writing as a precise work of construction, starting from the raw materials which are words and from the unequivocal relation of correspondence between the written-aligned object and the external referent, concentrating particularly on *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979*, *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews, Laurel and Hardy go to Heaven*, and *The Music of Chance*. The search for truth may be the search for a visual presence and the infinite task of the supreme artist would be to designate every object in the universe, rebuilding it through those reinvented words, like Peter Stillman, an insane and ironic *alter-ego* of the author, which seeks the creation not just of a new world but also of a new language to translate it.

It is inside the closed space of the scene of writing (generically designated by "room" but which, throughout the fiction, can also appear in the form of a house, a studio, an apartment, or a jail cell) that there seems to be more freedom, as the protagonists gains the possibility of enjoying a whole universe built by his work. Since the room is a space that can be filled (White Space), it is a haven of infinite possibilities; there, a

protective alternative universe is created where everything is ordered by imagination. The pages that the character-writer builds turn into the walls of the room that isolate him so that the written genesis can mature and freely expand. The room is like a womb that conceives and gives birth to the written work after a long gestation in solitary confinement. This symbolic figuration is explored in the chapter “The Room that is a Book: the Written Cosmogenesis”, through the analysis of the settings where writing happens mentioned, among others, in *The Red Notebook: True Stories, Prefaces and Interviews*, *Smoke*, *Mr. Vertigo*, *White Spaces*, *The Invention of Solitude*, *Ghosts*, *Black-Outs*, *The Locked Room*, *Leviathan* and *In the Country of Last Things*, evoking, whenever pertinent, the already mentioned fictional ghosts from the literary tradition, both American and universal. Anna Blume’s room in *In the Country of Last Things* is undoubtedly that which best demonstrates the semantic game of “Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room” expressed in *The Invention of Solitude* (IS 159-160)⁷. However, the room is, therefore, also a potential tomb or a thanatographical womb that may generate chaos and not the written cosmos.

In the works of Auster, the work of writing can be seen in two ways, depending on the final product it creates. The writer can be the author of a cosmogony, through an originative power that reveals itself in the solitude of the room. The construction of the written work is at the same time the methodical construction of an imaginary universe. Yet, the writer can become, in another context, the creator of a lethal vacuum, describing a chaogony, disordering the universe that he conceives, conjuring a wall of death around himself and his characters. The text is built through the harmonious alignment of words, and not the simultaneous and formless gathering of fragments randomly put together, always unable to generate a symmetric and expandable space, identifiable with the scene or with the product of writing, unlike *Bartleby*, who annihilates himself between walls and rejects writing. In the chapter “The Genesis of Nothingness in the Space of Chaos”, we will try to penetrate the dysphoric “blackspaces” of *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* (which constantly plays with the connotative notions of Black and White), *The Locked Room* and *Moon Palace*, with new intertextual missives to Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Herman Melville and

⁷ In *In the Country of Last Things* we read: “Blume. As in doom and gloom, I take it.” “That’s right. Blume as in womb and tomb...” (CLT 101).

Nathaniel Hawthorne. The writer-character in permanent specular reflection is like an inexperienced God, whose hands can originate cosmos or chaos, life or death. Hence Auster's recurrent meditation on the work and power of writing, which is simultaneously self-biographical and self-critical.

To summarize the content and sequence of the three parts of this work in a single sentence, one could come up with the following formula: "The Building (I) of Cosmos (II) and Chaos (III)" in Paul Auster's scenes of writing. But who better than Paul Auster himself to answer the pertinent question "What are the meanings of the stones, walls and rooms that appear all over your work?" The answer of the author under consideration himself constitutes, undoubtedly, the best preface:

Difficult to answer your question. Everything and nothing. The irreducible. That which resists. It's hard to say. Oddly enough, I grew up just down the road from a quarry. Perhaps that has something to do with it.... I'm talking about stones, of course. As for walls and rooms... it is enough, I believe, to start thinking about them to come up with several answers.⁸

The fact that Paul Auster is a contemporary author, open to dialogue and to sharing ideas, with a literary production still in full expansion and not yet exhausted by specialized critical analysis, presented itself as a tempting challenge and one that was immediately accepted. With regard to Auster, those universal truths, crystalized in endless bibliographies, which transform any supposedly original approach into a discouraging reformulation of previous perspectives, do not yet exist. The almost absence of specific bibliography about the subject under study is completely outweighed by the adventure of reading and re-reading for the first time from the pages of Auster-himself, the best mirror of his literary ideology and imagery. Auster's work opens up before us like a "territory ahead", an endless road that Jim Nashe invites us to explore, a drift through space and time towards the wilderness in the West, like the final journey of *Moon Palace*.

⁸ Paul Auster, personal correspondence, 28 June 1996

I

STONES AND WALLS: THE MUSIC OF WORDS

(...) and the word that would build a wall
from the innermost stone of life.
(GW 67)

Reading Paul Auster's work, from his first poems and essays to his most recent fiction, reveals the recurring presence of a metalinguistic and metafictional reflection on the work of writing, in an obsessive exploration of the scene of literary creation, centered around its protagonist, the writer-character. This designation comes from the typically Austerian theme of following the writer in his vicissitudes and movements, inside a space that is exposed to the eye of the reader. Since the work of writing is the central topic of his reflections in prose, poetry, or essay, the person who produces that writing is the main character of Auster's text. The writer-character plays the leading role in his fiction, is the subject of his essays, and expresses itself in his poetry, being a vehicle for the experiences of Auster-writer himself, who so often uses the autobiographical annotation or some type of meaningful onomastic game. But how does Paul Auster see this writer-character, his double, and through which verbal images does he transpose the genesis of the written work into that same written work? In his comparative schematization of the characteristics of modernism and postmodernism, Ihab Hassan¹ juxtaposes the postmodern process ("performance/happening") to the artistic object as "finished work" of modernism. Auster, a writer situated in the postmodern period, reflects, metafictionally and metalinguistically, upon the problem of writing as action, allowing the reader to follow that process of construction. The dynamics of the construction of a poem must be the dominant principle that decides its form, defining the poetic structure in kinetic terms². Since the process is a generative continuity, through which one perception leads directly to another, the composition constitutes an open field capable of accepting elements learned during the act of writing, without rigid presuppositions concerning the technique or subject ("The poem, then, is not a transcription of an already known world, but a process of discovery", AH 87). The reader can, in consequence, enjoy a postmodern concept of participation, in contrast with the

¹ Hassan, "Postface 1982", p. 87.

² Theoretical premise that Auster seems to share with the advocates of the so called open field composition or projective verse, described in Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse" (in *Poetry New York*, 1950), related to the poetry of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.

modernist distance, since Auster dissects the process of writing, of world creation, offering free access to the mind of the writer-character. The narrative and language get intellectualized, self-conscious. While modernism is *lisible* (“readerly”), postmodernism is *scriptible* (“writerly”), actively focused on the writing³.

To Auster, the room, archetype of the space surrounded by four walls, is the space of artistic creation par excellence, to which all literary instances converge. In the sublime confinement of the room, a written universe is created, where latent chaos is ordered through imagination, generating a cosmos in expansion, successively framed by the mind of the writer (where that infinitely dense matter is, at the beginning, concentrated - *Le monde est dans ma tête...*⁴), by the room of writing, and by the pages of the book. This framing presupposes the delimitation of a potentially infinite and chaotic space through some kind of barrier to dilution and disintegration, and to the subsequent loss of identity by cosmic assimilation. This framing is thus related to a necessary symmetrical ordering, to the harmonious building of a work that, otherwise, would be a mere shapeless heap of sterile raw material.

In literary work, those raw materials are constituted by words that represent concepts, experiences and plots that exist in the mind of the writer, and the final work, which is intended to be harmonious, is the written page, or, in a broader perspective, the book itself. In the creative universe of Paul Auster, the work of writing resembles, to a degree unseen anywhere else, the concrete work of building a physical structure, as if we were a wall or a fence in stone. This image is corroborated by the conspicuous recurrence of the wall motif throughout Auster’s work. Taking the product of that construction a bit further, we realize that a certain configuration of four walls produces a room, delimits an inhabitable space, establishing a border between the inside and the outside world. The room is another recurring motif in the works of Auster. But, in reality, Auster’s work of construction is done through his writing, his walls are made of words similar to methodically ordered stones, so that the whole doesn’t crumble

³ “Foucault instructs us, for example, to ‘develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction,’ and ‘to prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic’”. Quoted by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, USA: Basil Blackwell, 1990) p. 44.

⁴ Cf. Gérard de Cortanze, “Le monde est dans ma tête, mon corps est dans le monde”, *Magazine Littéraire* 338 (Décembre 1995), 18-25.

and reaches the aesthetics proper to a literary work. These walls of words build, in turn, as though written pages brought together, "...the room that is the book" (NYT 170). Word by word, the writer-character builds the space of the literary work, since it is word by word that he builds the book. The building of the wall is made with stones, like the building of the text is made with words that create or recreate the universe⁵. In this way, it becomes possible to establish an equivalence between the stones and those words, just as between wall and text, both of them the product of a work of building.

These words-stones are the genetic material of the world (re)built through the work of writing, between the four walls of the room. Words build the book, just like stones build walls and rooms. The product of that work is the archetypical space of literary creation, constantly revisited by Auster, built exclusively out of words and enclosing the character-author within its pages/walls. Or, in the words of Auster, from the work of writing is born the room that is the book, the sublime point of convergence of all literary instances, where the writer achieves his cosmogony.

Throughout Paul Auster's work, it is unquestionably in the construction of the poetic component that the already mentioned need for a symmetrical configuration of words is most noticeable. Indeed, his lyricism has a strong musical, melodic component, firmly rooted in the music of the words, or, in line with the imagery here explored, in the music of the stones in harmony. However, recurring reflections by the author regarding that same work of literary building show his awareness of a troubled trajectory when it comes to his poetic work. The expansion of the poetic cosmos generated in Paul Auster's imagination was not always linear, as it found several walls in its way which, instead of working as structures framing his poetic constructions, were veritable monolithic barriers that jeopardized his entire literary career. In a long

⁵ The logical-psychical parallelism between world and language is the basis of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. In *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, published in 1953, Wittgenstein compares language to an old town: "a labyrinth of paths and small plazas, of new and old houses, of houses expanded in former times, and this surrounded by a quantity of new suburbs, with rectilinear streets bordered by uniform buildings", to then pose the question: "How many houses or streets does it take for a city to become a city?" (translated from the French version: *Investigations Philosophiques*, trans. by Klossowski. Paris: Gallimard, 1961. Pp. 18-19). How many stones form the wall? How many words form language and the written work? Wittgenstein relates the building of material work, under several forms (houses, streets, buildings... walls and rooms) and made of several materials (such as stone), to the building of linguistic work, which is made of words. Curiously, his *The Blue and the Brown Books*, which call to mind Paul Auster's *The Red Notebook*, were published in 1958.

interview he gave to Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (from 1989-90 and published in *The Art of Hunger*), Paul Auster critically mentions that, initially, his poems resembled clenched fists: “they were short and dense and obscure, as compact and hermetic as Delphic oracles” (AH 285). An asymmetrical or excessively nebulous construction can generate a structure that is not only empty in terms of expression but also deadly to the transmission of literary discourse, a true wall of death for writing. The cosmogonic power of the writer must be self-conscious of its simultaneously constructive and destructive potential, and Paul Auster is an excellent example of that, as Adam Begley transcribes:

He wrote prose, not verse - he says he hasn't written a poem in 13 years. His poetry, he explains, "was always a very compact, univocal expression of feelings. Prose is vast..." He pauses, searching for the right words. "It allows me to speak out of both sides of the mouth at once." His themes were primed for elaboration⁶.

The switch from poetic construction to fictional imagination is, therefore, understandable, as Paul Auster describes in the interview he gave to Joseph Mallia: “I don't think of myself as having made a break from poetry. All my work is of a piece, and the move into prose was the last step in a slow and natural evolution” (AH 257). Auster’s poetry juxtaposes fragmentary evocations of an imaginary landscape, barren and dry, with verses of tortured self-analysis – “in the impossibility of words / in the unspoken word / that asphyxiates, / I find myself” (*Interior*, GW 31). His poetry is at its most expressive when it brings to mind the hypnotic, though restrained, rhythm of his prose, but, generally speaking, it suffers from the very austerity and dryness it tries to convey.

In *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979*, published for the first time in 1990, Auster collects some of that seminal poetry, where several of the main themes of the works in prose that will follow are already present. We shouldn’t forget that groundwork is “the work which forms the base for some kind of study or skill”⁷, and hence it can be the base for a written work. Auster divides the word to better look at its segments: *Ground Work*, or work on the ground, on the dirt where he will erect his creation, building it like a skillful stone craftsman. This is the first work (first poems

⁶ Adam Begley, "The Case of the Brooklyn Symbolist" in *The New York Times Magazine* (August 30, 1992) 41, 52-54.

⁷ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

and essays) that foreshadows his future works and respective themes, like the words and the mystery of language, the city, shadows, solitude, death, emptiness, and chance. Prominent influences in his work, like Kafka and Beckett, are unsurprisingly present. Sir Walter Raleigh, to whom Auster frequently refers to, makes his appearance in a powerful meditation about death (*The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh*, GW 164-169). And, in this poetic groundwork, we can also find the omnipresent stones in all their forms⁸, the walls, and the first appearances of the room which will, in later works, surround the writer-character.

The stones and the walls of *Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979* have a multiple, polysemous type of language, just like words, the raw material of Auster's art⁹. And there are several verbal images which transpose, in a more or less obvious way, the concept of building a written work into Auster's poetry, associating words and stones, walls and pages. In order to interpret and examine those same images, we will refer to some of his most expressive compositions.

In *Unearth*, originally published in the homonymous *Unearth* (Living Hand, 1974), which covers the poetic production from 1970 to 1972, the poem interweaves the wall and the stones with a whole semantic field related to writing and language:

Along with your ashes, the barely
written ones, obliterating
the ode, the incited roots, the alien
eye - with imbecilic hands, they dragged you
into the city, bound you in
this knot of slang, and gave you
nothing. Your ink has learned
the violence of the wall. Banished,
but always to the heart
of brothering quiet, you cant the stones
of unseen earth, and smooth your place
among the wolves. Each syllable
is the work of sabotage.

From one stone touched
to the next stone
named: earth-hood: the inaccessible
ember. You
will sleep here, a voice
moored to stone, moving through
this empty house that listens
to the fire that destroyed it. (...)

Unearth XI (GW 17)

⁸ *Difficult to answer your question. Everything and nothing. The irreducible. That which resists. It's hard to say. Oddly enough, I grew up just down the road from a quarry. Perhaps that has something to do with it... I'm talking about stones, of course.* Paul Auster, personal correspondence, 28 June 1996. Cf. "Introduction" of the present work, p. 11.

⁹ *I'm learning to listen to stones*, said Marguerite Yourcenar, in the last years of her life. Yourcenar knew the mystery of the voices of the objects and the fascination of the world's forgotten and neglected alphabets. The metaphor is not new, since already in *Tellus Stabilita*, from *Memoirs of Hadrian*, Yourcenar spoke about reconstruction as the result of a collaboration with time gone by, penetrating or modifying its spirit, and carrying it toward a longer future. *Thus beneath the stones we find the secret of the springs. Memoirs of Hadrian*, trans. Grace Flick and Marguerite Yourcenar (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1955) pp. 128-129.

Unearth I (GW 7)

When we read that “Your ink has learned the violence of the wall”, we understand that that wall has a destructive power that projects itself in writing. *Song of Degrees*, from *Wall Writing*¹⁰, seems to reveal a little of the meaning of that wall:

(...)

Minima. Memory
and mirage. In each place
you stop for air,
we will build a city
around you. Through the star -
mortared wall
that rises in our night, your soul
will not pass
again.

(GW 51)

Presented as an insurmountable barrier, the ultimate obstacle at the end of the poem, here the wall foreshadows the annihilation of writing, a violent restraint to the flow of the ink of the writer’s pen. The constructive power of writing (“we will build a city”) may be used in a negative way when, instead of generating a well-ordered universe, it generates chaos. If the room that is the book does not structure the expansion of the author’s imaginary universe in a harmonious way, it will inevitably crumble, burying him inside. The death of writing will be the extinction of the character-author, the entity that is the creator and, at the same time, the inhabitant of the cosmogonic space of the room that is the book, transformed into a terminal cell. When the night comes and the soul crosses to the other side of the wall, returning becomes impossible. And the words that could decipher this wall have not been discovered yet, for death is the most inscrutable of all mysteries¹¹. “It is a wall. And the wall is death./

¹⁰ *Wall Writing* (Berkeley: The Figures Books, 1976). Edition of four hundred and seventy four copies; period from 1971 to 1975.

¹¹ Cf. *Le Mur* by Jean-Paul Sartre (1939). A collection of five novellas written in the period between *La Nausée* and *L'Age de Raison*. The first novella is set in the Spanish civil war (which had not yet ended). A republican combatant, imprisoned by the francoists, waits his execution. He imagines himself next to the wall, the weapons pointing at him. But that is all, his imagination cannot go any further, he cannot visualize a world without him. The title of this first novella becomes an emblem for the collection, to which it confers unity: no matter how close we get to the wall, the wall is impenetrable; we always remain on the same side of that wall, without being able to jump over it, run away, or ignore it.

The wall of death has, ultimately, a lot in common with the White Whale, Moby Dick, an immense and inscrutable mystery: “All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks... If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the

Illegible...”(GW 62) – illegible because it is indecipherable, because it is related to the collapse of the written work, to the irreversible fragmentation of the writing entity. The metaphor of the wall of death is a product of the work of writing, since the figure of rhetoric exists only in the text, as language, not having, as a single entity, a concrete referent in reality. Through words, the writer simultaneously constructs the metaphor (beauty) and exorcizes its referent (good)¹², as he will later do in *The Invention of Solitude*, a long exercise consisting on a written catharsis of death. But the beauty of the metaphor is just a fraction of the sublime infinity inherent to the literary cosmogenesis. While the sentiment of beauty is centered on a limited object, the sentiment of the sublime projects us to infinitude. Here, the spirit rises above itself, senses its own limits and experiences something that transcends it: it is sublime, according to Kant, that which, by the mere fact of being conceived, indicates a faculty of the soul that surpasses any of the physical senses. While the aesthetics of beauty is defined as a theory of the object regarded as a finished configuration, the aesthetics of the sublime brings forth the idea of a transcendent and infinite object. Kant relates the sublime to the supersensory, which is only present in the human spirit and not in any other of nature’s entities.

As we have seen, the creative process of writing can confer a plurality of meanings to words and to the wall, which, in this perspective, would be its parts and its final product. If the wall is separated from the writing, which observes it as an object of reflection, in *Song of Degrees*, they are reunified in poems such as *Wall Writing* (the writings on the wall or the writings of the wall; material or subject of the writing, like graffiti), *Covenant* and *Hieroglyph*:

(...) Or a word.	(...) All night I read the braille wounds on the inner wall of your cry (...)	The language of walls. Or one last word - cut from the visible. (...)
Come from nowhere in the night of the one who does not come.	Covenant (GW 44)	Hieroglyph (GW 46)
Or the whiteness of a word, Scratched into the wall.		

white whale is that wall, shoved near to me”, says Ahab to Starbuck. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 262.

¹² “Beauty and truth. It is the old question, come back to haunt us” in *Truth, Beauty, Silence* (AH 62-74).

In the first poem, the process of writing seems to be described, with the anguish of the blank page and the triumph of the first word that in it blooms. But what matters is not just to write about the walls, but also to make a wall out of writing, an aesthetic, stable, durable construction. In *Covenant* and *Hieroglyph*, we can read “braille wounds” or listen to “the language of walls” and of words “cut” (extracted) from the visible world. Stones belong to the realm of the natural, they exist in isolation, until they are laid down by the hand of the builder-writer to form a wall, following a path similar to that of words, between the abstraction of a dictionary and the finished poem. To do that requires a *Stone Work*, title of a poem that appears in the original edition of *Wall Writing*, but not in *Ground Work*, and which refers to the work with stones and with words, to the poetic art of the poet-craftsman (“Stone work: the parts of a building, esp. those ornamented with special shapes, made of stone”¹³):

You took me
for a man who wanted to die.
Indifferent stone, defiant on the greenest anvil.
The earth was page, the most quiet
wait before the word, and it was you,
fault where the eye began
to see, it was you who were dying,
to keep me alive. Beyond the wall
you worked in stone,
and when the stones were small enough
to taunt the earth, you hid, voice in the run,
and shattered them, to make them
rally underfoot, as if they were
singing (...).

The poet touches, names, gives life to the stones through the power of the poem and of word manipulation:

From one stone touched
to the next stone
named (...)

All summer long,
by the gradient rasp-light
of our dark, dune-begetting
hands: your stones,
crumbling back to life
around you.
(...)

(...) such yield
as only light will bring, and
the very stones
undead
in the image of themselves.

¹³ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

Stones are inanimate beings that the writing brings to life, transporting them from imagination to reality, offering their presence to a world that patiently waits for the light of the word (“the most quiet / wait before the word; the whiteness of a word, / scratched / into the wall”). Or they are beings that already dimly exist in everyday life, and to which the work of writing gives a new shine, a new life (like New York, its places and characters, transported to so many of Paul Auster’s works)¹⁵. Regarding this vital and transfigurative power of writing, we can examine the words of Auster himself in *The Poetry of Exile*, an essay on the poetry of Paul Celan¹⁶ where he also makes some remarks about Van Gogh’s pictorial figurations:

Neither Van Gogh's stroke nor Celan's syntax is strictly representational, for in the eyes of each the "objective" world is interlocked with his perception of it. There is no reality that can be posited without the simultaneous effort to penetrate it, and the work of art as an ongoing process bears witness to this desire. Just as van Gogh's painted objects acquire a concreteness "as real as reality", Celan handles words as if they had the density of objects, and he endows them with a substantiality that enables them to become a part of the world, his world - and not simply its mirror (AH 88-89).

Auster is in search of a discourse that expressively conveys even a subjective state or experience, in a direct encounter with the cosmos, as if it were a life transfusion:

(...) as if, in the distance between
sundown and sunrise,
a hand
had gathered up your soul
and worked it with the stones
into the heaven

¹⁴ “Bedrock - 1.the main stretch of solid rock in the ground supporting all the soil above it. 2. the facts on which a belief or argument rests” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). Significantly included in a *Ground Work - Groundwork*.

¹⁵ With respect to objects of everyday life used in writing, see the essay "The Decisive Moment", in *The Art of Hunger*, about the work of Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976), an American poet of Jewish origins, born in Brooklyn, and whose work can be considered part of the artistic movement of the open poetry or objectivism: “Each moment, each thing, must be earned, wrested away from the confusion of inert matter by a steadiness of gaze, a purity of perception so intense that the effort, in itself, takes on the value of a religious act. The slate has been wiped clean. It is up to the poet to write his own book” (AH 36). Reznikoff reflects on every encounter between the poetic persona and the world, devoting himself to seek the linguistic strategies necessary to transform those reflections into verse. To Reznikoff, the poem is a witness of individual perceptions of the world.

¹⁶ Paul Celan (1920-1970) – born into a Jewish family, the experience of the genocide, at the same time historical and personal, marked his entire poetic work, along with the reflection on the possibilities of poetic language. Celan’s last works pay more attention to everyday reality and experience in a more radical way doubts regarding the efficiency of the poetic word. Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

of earth.

Transfusion¹⁷ (GW 77)

In *Fragments from Cold* we can also find *Disappearances* (and many are the characters which disappear in Auster's fiction). In this key-poem, we find the several images we already analyzed interweaved, in a true work of poetic elaboration:

1. Out of solitude, he begins again -
(...)

He is alive, and therefore he is nothing
but what drowns in the fathomless hole
of his eye,

and what he sees
is all that he is not: a city

of the undeciphered,
event,

and therefore a language of stones,
since he knows that for the whole of life
a stone
will give way to another stone

to make a wall

and that all these stones
will form the monstrous sum

of particulars.
(GW 61)

The work of writing is born of solitude, as will happen in *The Invention of Solitude*, a long and heartfelt chronicle of an attempt to overcome the eternal isolation of life and death, or, in *The Music of Chance*, with the construction of the wall that provides a goal to Jim Nashe's solitary wandering. Stone after stone, forming the wall, "monstrous sum of particulars"¹⁸. In a global perspective, we will be able to read here the eternal cycle of life and death, the inexorable succession of human beings over

¹⁷ Originally published in *Fragments from Cold* (Parenthèse, 1977), relating to the period from 1976 to 1977.

¹⁸ Stones stacked together acquire symbolic meaning. In the Peruvian Andes mountain range, as well as in Siberia, custom dictates that travelers must add a new stone to heaps which, with time, acquire pyramidal proportions. Every accumulation of modest objects endowed with souls reinforces the potentiality of every one of them and results in the creation of a new, extremely powerful soul. The soul of a single stone is frail. But it is added to all the other souls of countless stones, and the collective soul of the heap becomes a great numinous force. See Jean-Paul Rouf Roux, *Faune et Flore Sacrées dans les Sociétés Altaïques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

space and time; from a singular, but not reductive, perspective, we see the building of the text, fruit of the writer's work:

3. To hear the silence
that follows the word of oneself. Murmur

of the least stone

shaped in the image
of earth, and those who would speak
to be nothing

but the voice that speaks them
to the air.

And he will tell
of each thing he sees in this space,
and he will tell it to the very wall
that grows before him:
(...)

(GW 63)

4.
(...)

For the wall is a word. And there is no word
he does not count
as a stone in the wall.

Therefore, he begins again,
(...)

What he breathes, therefore,
is time, and he knows now
that if he lives

it is only in what lives

and will continue to live
without him.

(GW 64)

It seems to be a herculean task (a monstrous sum) that of enumerating everything, of verbally translating everything, of counting every word and every stone in the wall:

6. And of each thing he has seen
he will speak -

the blinding
enumeration of stones,
even to the moment of death -
(...)

(GW 66)

7.
(...) and the word that would build a wall
from the innermost stone
of life.

(...) Therefore, there are the many,
and all these many lives
shaped into the stones
of a wall,

and he who would begin to breathe
will learn there is nowhere to go
but here.

Therefore, he begins again,

as if it were the last time
he would breathe.(...)

(GW 67-68)

It is the writer that must create the parallel between stones and words, between wall and text, in an infinite task, with unlimited referential horizons, that will only be

completed upon the worker's death, as in the spiral of models of *City of the World* or in the wall itself in *The Music of Chance*. A possibly insane task that Auster revisits in prose in the hallucinatory onomastic reformulation that Peter Stillman imposes on himself in *City of Glass* ("What do you do with these things?"; 'I give them names' (...) 'I invent new words that will correspond to the things.'" NYT 78). This is an attempt to catalogue the universe, to make an inventory of its basic elements, and, on the other hand, to define the fundamental and exclusive relationship between symbol and object. By prolonging until his death the extension of his work, the builder (of writing) knows that he is erecting a wall of death for himself, forever immured inside the infinite work¹⁹. But only he has the power of reordering and reformulating the universe, and he does not hesitate to sacrifice himself for it.

In the presence of this wall one can sense all the walls of death, which, one day, will cut short every human existence, interrupting the journey of life²⁰. The wall, as every system of signification, is at the same time closed in on itself and susceptible of entering a combinatorial game. It is at the same time wall and stone, totality and part. That wall can rise around the writer-character, surrounding and isolating him from the rest of mankind, until his self-annihilation, until death. As in the more or less similar fates of the characters of *The New York Trilogy*, *The Music of Chance*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *Moon Palace*, *Smoke*, *Leviathan* and *Laurel and Hardy go to Heaven*. In fact, this unpublished piece from 1976, only privately performed, narrates the story of two men which spend their entire time on stage building a wall that ends up separating them from the audience. The wall conveys disappearance and death in the

¹⁹ Such is the case of the protagonist of Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*, a perfectionist of his art of hunger. Besides being an enthusiastic reader of Kafka (cf. "Pages for Kafka" and "Kafka's Letters" in *The Art of Hunger*), Paul Auster is frequently likened to a postmodern Kafka. See Valentine Cunningham, "Kafka rides the subway" in *The Observer* 10,357 (April 15, 1990), 60 and Adam Begley, "Kafka goes gumshoe (profile)" in *The Guardian Weekend* (October 17, 1992), 18-21.

²⁰ As in *Bartleby the Scrivener*, a narrative by Herman Melville much admired and paraphrased by Paul Auster, if not even plagiarized (see Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, "Plagiarism in Praise: Paul Auster and Melville" in *Colóquio Herman Melville*, coordinated by Teresa Ferreira de Almeida Alves and Teresa Cid (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1994), 111-122). Bartleby came closer than any other man to the wall of death, to an eternal question of humanity. His universe is Wall Street, his landscape is a wall of dead bricks. Bartleby sees the wall as being eternal, an inherent part to the structure of things, comparable to the human incapacity to cross the limits of its perception, or to death itself. His vision of reality is a disenchanted one, in a "dead-wall reverie". He is obsessed with the wall, and, when that Wall materializes in his path under the form of death, it is next to a wall, in the Tombs prison (tombs, the ultimate walled spaces), that he is found dead, with his eyes open, as if he was still thinking about it. Wall Street simply accepts the walls for what they are: structures made by man to compartmentalize. To Bartleby, however, they are abstract symbols of every obstacle to the complete fulfillment of man's place in the universe.

eyes of others. Their voices do nothing but add new stones to the wall, since words are a wall built between them and the world. The wall, a prison where one writes graffiti as if to prove one exists, encloses the Austerian hero and is where he eventually self-annihilates.

Aubade introduces for the first time the theme of exile between the four walls of a room, which will be extensively developed in Auster's fiction:

(...) I am your distress, the seam
in the wall
that opens to the wind
and its stammering, storm
in the plural - this other name
you give your world: exile
in the rooms of home. (...)

(GW 75)

The wall appears as a structure that at the same time isolates and protects from the fragmentary chaos of the postmodern exterior world, constituting the basis for the refuge-room, for its four walls. The wall creates a sort of barricade against reality, delimiting a secret space that is simultaneously a sacred space of literary genesis, where death and emptiness have been banned. Because within the space of the book the power of the writer is sacred, just as it is inside the room where he writes. But, once the work is finished, the driving force of the existence of the builder as such also ceases, since he inhabits solely the interior of the book and the scene of writing, without which the identity that comes from the work of building would be impossible. Does death determine the end of the words or is it the end of the words that determines the moment of death? In *City of Glass*, does Quinn stop writing in his red notebook because he dies or does he die because he stops writing in it ("What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" NYT 131)? At the end, when there are no more lines to write in the red notebook, when there is no space left to write a single word and say "I", the character disappears, it volatilizes, as he lives only while he writes ("And when nothing was left, there could be no more words." AH 94). When the writing stops, Quinn's identity vanishes, assimilated by the fiction, as nothing remains of him. The notebook was his language, as with Stillman, Quinn cannot exist without it. From this perspective, writing and life are inextricably linked. Auster's

poetry does not forget to intertwine the words, walls, and stones with the omnipresent mystery of life and death:

(...)
As if the first
word
comes only after the last, after a life
of waiting for the word

that was lost. To say no more
than the truth of it: men die, the world fails,
the
words

You will not blame the stones,
or look to yourself
beyond the stones, and say
you did not long for them
before your face
had turned to stone.
(...)

Viaticum²¹

have no meaning. And therefore to ask
only for words.

Stone wall. Stone heart. Flesh and blood.

As much as all this.
More.

S.A. 1911-1979 (GW 92)

To build a “stone wall” is, in the English vocabulary, “to make a long speech or question so as to slow down the business of a meeting, parliament, etc.”²². In the present context, it is also to prolong life (and work) and the concomitant postponement of death and oblivion, through skillfully employed and musically conjugated words, that is, through the work of writing. Words are flung against time, against the memory that evaporates, against the loss of identity.

At the moment of death, the heart becomes stone, it fuses with the wall (“Stone wall. Stone heart”). In Quinn’s room, after his disappearance (“Wherever he may have disappeared to...” NYT 132), only the red notebook remains, the center of the end of his life and writing. What survives of Quinn is what he wrote in its pages. What survives of the artist is his work: “(...) What he breathes, therefore, / is time, and he knows now / that if he lives / it is only in what lives / and will continue to live / without him” (GW 64).

²¹ In *Wall Writing*, 1976.

²² *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh (1975), one of the thirteen essays included in *Ground Work*, but absent from *The Art of Hunger*, forms a kind of continuum with Auster's poetry by again using the image of the wall as a metaphor for death and as the basis for the spatial structure where the character builds his perennial work while he waits for death.

The Tower is stone and the solitude of stone. It is the skull of a man around the body of a man - and its quick is thought. But no thought will ever reach the other side of the wall. And the wall will not crumble, even against the hammer of a man's eye. For the eyes are blind, and if they see, it is only because they have learned to see where no light is. There is nothing here but thought, and there is nothing. The man is a stone that breathes, and he will die. The only thing that waits for him is death (GW 164).

Solitude is invented in stone; man, himself, is also a stone, carved as a chess piece. In the stone prison, there is only place for thought and for the certainty of death. The walls may close in, suffocating and omnipresent ("For death is a very wall, and beyond this wall no one can pass." GW 165). However, even this limbo of total isolation can generate a work of art:

One thing is sure: this man will die. The Tower is impervious, and the depth of stone has no limit. But thought nevertheless determines its own boundaries, and the man who thinks can now and then surpass himself, even when there is nowhere to go. He can reduce himself to a stone, or he can write the history of the world. Where no possibility exists, everything becomes possible again (GW 164).

He can breathe, he can walk, he can speak, he can read, he can write, he can sleep. He can count the stones. He can be a stone that breathes, or he can write the history of the world²³ (GW 166).

The building of the written work appears as an alternative to annihilation, filling the last days of the individual's life with a task that not only gives a new meaning to his whole existence, but also gives him the power of reordering the very history of the world (it is the "history of the world", as it is the "City of the World", and not any other secondary history). The power of writing can possess a universal scope.

If he has been able to live, he will be able to die. And when there is nothing left, he will know how to face the wall (GW 164).

In *The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh*, we are confronted with the possibility of a dignified preparation for death, through a journey of spiritual enhancement. How can

²³ As did, in fact, Sir Walter Raleigh (or Raleigh), 1552 ? - 1618. Incarcerated for many years in the Tower of London, he wrote, among other works, *The History of the World* (1614) which, in less than a century, saw eleven editions. It is characterized by a sober and eloquent style and by the famous apostrophe to death with which it ends, magnificent examples of Elizabethan prose.

the “stone that breathes” become “able to die”, “face the wall”, “go through life with his eyes open”? Through the power of writing and of solitary meditation, which grant the writer, Narcissus of his own intellect, his megalomaniacal power. This is a superhuman power that is born of the sublime exile between four walls, presupposing the gift of immortality that the written work can confer, like a work in stone that defies time²⁴. In the magical space of the room or of the cell, everything becomes possible again. There, as Auster writes in *City of Glass*: “He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower” (NYT 130).

Nevertheless, the creation of the written universe presupposes the existence of organizing principles without which that universe would merely be formlessly expanded matter, devoid of the frame that merges the stones in the wall and juxtaposes the words in poetry. At the scene of writing, there are rules that regulate the actions of the writer-character during his construction work, as it is necessary to connect facts, to narrate, to give meaning, to find a guiding “grammar” that conveys the music of the words. Although the power of writing can have a universal scope capable of (re)ordering the world according to the visionary power of the writer, it is necessary, due to the cosmic dimension of that very scope, to escape the chaos of the “monstrous sum of particulars”, with its vocabulary made impossible by the absence of a guiding structure. Paul Auster is aware of the existence of these guiding principles, not only in his own work, but also in the work of any other writer. That literary awareness of self and others constitutes the basis for the metaliterary reflections of *The Art of Hunger*.



Paul Auster’s work has in *The Art of Hunger* its involuntary poetic art, based on the need to structure the imaginary through a reflection on writing where the hero

²⁴ Cf. Augusto Roa Bastos, *I the Supreme*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Aventura, 1986): “Forms disappear, words remain, to signify the impossible” (p. 11); “I must dictate/write; note it down somewhere. That is the only way I have of proving that I still exist” (p. 45). *I the Supreme* is a novel about power, about the writing of history and the oral tradition of the storytellers. To write is a way of proving that one is still alive, of cheating death, of postponing it.

becomes at the same time the subject and the object of the life experience. Besides addressing his own work in three interviews (*Translation, Interview with Joseph Mallia* and *Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory*), Auster analyzes in his essays and prefaces the behavior of several writer-characters between the four metaphysical walls of the space of writing (Kafka, Beckett, Mallarmé, Laura Riding, Edmond Jabès, Jacques Dupin), in a reflection that reveals his own attitudes, as he is himself a writer-character, with his delimited space and a work in progress.

In the already mentioned interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (AH 270-312), Auster says he feels that all his books are, in a way, the same book, telling the story of his obsessions, of the words, questions, and dilemmas that haunt his life:

Like it or not, all my books seem to revolve around the same set of questions, the same human dilemmas. Writing is no longer an act of free will for me, it's a matter of survival. An image surges up inside me, and after a time I begin to feel cornered by it, to feel that I have no choice but to embrace it. A book starts to take shape after a series of such encounters.

(...) Writing, in some sense, is an activity that helps me to relieve some of the pressure caused by these buried secrets. Hidden memories, traumas, childhood scars - there's no question that novels emerge from those inaccessible parts of ourselves (AH 277).

The parallel with *Book of the Dead II, interview with Edmond Jabès*²⁵ (1978; GW 190-210) becomes inevitable: *The Book of Questions* (which evokes *The Book of Memory*, second part of *The Invention of Solitude*) "is based on the idea that we all live with words that obsess us. (...) Behind these words we see our own stories of death and love" (GW 201).

When addressing the topic of obsessive words, constantly repeated throughout his work, Auster refers to something which cannot be expressed but which, at the same time, cannot be emptied of its meaning. All those words become the same word and end up questioning themselves and stepping towards the forbidden, beyond the wall. The book is something that is immense, of which we can see only fragments at a time. The whole is built out of those fragments, in the same way a book is made out of words, a wall is made out of stones, and the world is made out of human beings and their lives.

²⁵ Edmond Jabès (1912-1991) – French poet, of Jewish origins. In his work, we find two principal lines of force: his historical and cultural roots, and the attempt to move from traditional poetry to a writing "que não pertença a nenhum gênero mas que os contenha a todos". The underlying image of the original book – the Bible – is always present. To Jabès, writing is a constant search (*Le Livre des Questions*, 1963-1973). Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

The stones, seen as linguistic signs that build the wall of the text, give *From Cakes to Stones* (AH 75) its title, in a context that refers to the simplicity of language in the pages of Beckett. This essay about the problems of writing, translation, and language in general is subordinate to that title, taken from one of Beckett's plays, where the metaphor of the stones and words that must be carefully handled and carved is also used. *The Myth of Babel*, the second part of the book *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World* by Peter Stillman (whose movements in New York seem to spell out the words "Tower of Babel"), mentions *The New Babel* by the fictitious Henry Dark²⁶. The tower of Babel was punished by Jehovah with the multiplication of mutually unintelligible languages. The tower could only be built while the words had meaning, as they helped to lift the stones and cement them in place. When the words became empty of meaning, the stones also ceased to have a reason for their existence. The construction was abandoned and nothing was created, which was the goal of Jehovah's punishment. As a wall needs its stones to be adequately glued together in order to stand, the language of a text also needs words that are stably interconnected in order to transmit an intelligible message, so that a written work of art is born. In *City of Glass*, words are clearly likened to stones: "Most people don't pay attention to such things. They think of words as stones, as great unmoveable objects with no life, as monads that never change" (NYT 75). Quinn, who assumes the role of Paul Auster, counters that stones/words can change, deteriorate, or transform: "Stones can change. They can be worn away by wind or water. They can erode. They can be crushed. You can turn them into shards, or gravel, or dust." (NYT 75). But stones can become alive, and that is the task of the poet who names them, just as he does with the ordinary words of everyday life. Through the magic of writing, it is possible to endow words with the gift of life. Stillman compares words to stones, but it is possible to erect a building with both²⁷.

²⁶ The essay *New York Babel* (AH 26-34) could have been another title for *The New York Trilogy*. It also addresses the creation of a new language with a touch of madness, in the manner of Stillman.

²⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian modernist who anticipated so many of the techniques and themes of postmodern writing, authored an essay where the universe is represented as an infinite library, titled *The Library of Babel*, in *Labyrinths, Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962) pp. 51-58. Both the library and the universe are in permanent expansion, they never end, constantly self-multiplying, like the expanding imaginary cosmos itself. The title conjugates the notion of writing (Library) and the notion of construction (Tower of Babel), evoking Peter Stillman's *The Tower of Babel* in *City of Glass*. To Borges, books order the universe, built (both the

In his essay on the poetry of Jacques Dupin²⁸ (from 1971; AH 171-174), Auster states:

The poem is no longer a record of feelings, a song or a meditation. Rather, it is the field in mental space in which a struggle is permitted to unfold: between the destruction of the poem and the quest for the possible poem (...) it is a matter of destroying in order to create, and of maintaining a silent vigil within the word until the last living moment, when the word begins to crumble from the pressure that has been placed upon it. (...) For the poetic word is essentially the creative word (AH 171 and 173).

The word, however, is not, in the end, annihilated, since Dupin's work, according to Auster, eventually reaches a point past which the poem cannot be destroyed anymore, in spite of the massive load of meaning that it carries: the poem becomes a perennial entity, a monument in stone. Auster revisits the topic of violence exerted against the word, which goes through a process of manipulation similar to the chiseling of stones. To fit into the wall, the stone must be carved in conformity with the whole where it will be incorporated, thus acquiring its status as an esthetic-literary object. The creation of this object is the goal of the poet's work, the fruit of the solitary struggle of the writer-character, but this struggle is perpetuated in the interest of something that is beyond any effectual violence: the birth of the literary work ("Violence is demanded, and Dupin is equal to it. But the struggle is pursued for an end beyond violence." AH 174). We can conclude from this reading that the isolation of the writer-character within the scene of writing (inside the bedroom), exempts him from any involvement in exterior reality, demanding commitment only to himself and to his work. In fact, references in Auster's work to extratextual historical and social events are rare, and, even when mentioned, they don't play a determinant role in the

books and the universe) in words, as though they were the stones of a building. Borges creates a metaphor to explain the universe in the same way Stillman intends to restructure the universe through a new language. Another essay, *The Wall and the Books* (pp. 180-182), is centered around the story of the legendary emperor Shih Huang Ti who would have ordered the construction of the Great Wall of China and simultaneously ordered the destruction of every book previous to his reign. Borges again relates construction work to writing. The building of a wall made of stone and the destruction of books made of words. Both are immense, almost infinite tasks, a vain attempt to order the universe: "...this imminence of a revelation which does not occur is, perhaps, the aesthetic phenomenon" (p. 182).

The meaning of the construction of a whole, also linked to the myth of Babylon, also emerges in *Manhattan Transfer*, where John Dos Passos chose as the epigraph for section II *Metropolis*: "There were Babylon and Nineveh: they were built of brick."

²⁸ Jacques Dupin (1927-) – French poet influenced by the thought of Heidegger. To Dupin, the word is an excess: it does not bring satisfaction or tranquility; it falls into the abyss, dragging with it the writer, the only element of real dissidence and true depth. The poem itself spreads the threads that it weaves "para abrir o corpo a um afluxo de obscuridade" (Gravin 1963; *L'Embrasure* 1969; *Dehors* 1975; *Une Apparence de Soupirail* 1983; *Chansons Troglodytes* 1989). Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992). The present essay by Paul Auster, "Jacques Dupin", was published afterwards with some alterations to the text and under the title of "The Cruel Geography of Jacques Dupin's Poetry" in *Books Abroad* 47 (1973), 76-8.

development of the action. The building of the written work is a task that eclipses ordinary occurrences, being in itself a reason for writing. The solitude of the writer-character often makes him an entity that is oblivious of the outside world to the point of ridicule, as is the case of Marco Fogg in *Moon Palace*, lost in his own divagations in a room that is getting gradually emptier. However, that cloistered obliviousness, when its sublime potentialities are understood, endow the individual with the cosmogonic power of writing, making him a much freer character than any erratic being and naturally indifferent to the outside world, as he can enjoy, as nobody else can, his own universe, created by him.

Nevertheless, the building of the written work can, sometimes, generate structures that are expressively sterile, true barriers to the conveyance of literary discourse, that end up annihilating the expansion of the poetic cosmos generated in the mind of the writer-character. And, since he exists as such only while he writes, when his writing ceases, his identity is correspondingly nullified. As was already mentioned, Paul Auster went through a similar experience in his own trajectory, when he became aware of the excessively hermetic character of his poetic production which, instead of creating a harmonious structure, became a solid and insurmountable wall, a wall of death for writing. With his natural self-awareness, Auster acknowledges this dramatic experience, even broadening it to every element of his existence: "I had run into a wall with my work. I was blocked and miserable, my marriage was falling apart, I had no money. I was finished"²⁹.

The analysis of a similar literary experience constitutes the theme of *Itinerary* (1973; AH 21-22), an essay on the work of the American poet Laura Riding³⁰, whose poems, at a certain point, also became static walls, when they should have been a gateway, an act of movement. The poem should be the power of crossing through walls, of fighting against death and isolation, of universalizing a message. And yet, it can itself become a wall of death. That wall can become established at some point along the path of a poet like Laura Riding, blocking her passage and the process of literary creation, when

²⁹ Begley, "The Case of the Brooklyn Symbolist", p. 53.

³⁰ Laura Riding (1901-1991) – American poet, born in New York. Her work is notable for its elegance of verse and form and for its tendency to combine lyrical simplicity with complex intellectual meditations. *Collected Poems* (1938) definitively marked the end of her career as a poet. The motives for her renunciation of poetry, centered on the conviction that it is not the adequate path to truth, are discussed in the prefaces to *Selected Poems* (1973) and *The Poems of Laura Riding* (1980). Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

the capacities for poetic expression become exhausted (or insufficient). To find a new beginning is to find the gateway beyond the wall, to the new universe born of the cosmogonic power of writing:

For if words will not give way, they will become a wall.

The poem. And nevertheless: the poem. It is the power to burrow through walls. And nevertheless: it is what can become a wall. To be what it must, what it is capable of being - a going toward, a moving toward the Other (...).

That Laura Riding herself came to a wall that could not be breached is not so much a sign of failure as a recognition of the necessity to move on. Nothing less than this barrier, this silence, could have revealed to us the seriousness of the journey. And if she herself now looks upon her poetic work as having reached the end of poetic possibilities, it is in this end that we must look for a new beginning, and through her wall that we must pass (AH 21-22).

Auster also dedicates to Laura Riding the essay *Truth, Beauty, Silence* (1975; AH 62-74), whose expressive title seems to place silence as the only possible epilogue for a singular journey through the universally sought-after concepts of truth and beauty. About Laura Riding's renunciation of poetry, Auster writes, perhaps autobiographically:

She did not renounce poetry because of any objective inadequacy in poetry itself - for it is no more or less adequate than any other human activity - but because poetry as she conceived of it was no longer capable of saying what she wanted to say. She now feels that she had "reached poetry's limit" [the wall]. But what really happened, it would seem, is that she had reached her own limit in poetry (AH 69).

A similar situation occurs in *Moon Palace*, articulated by Marco Fogg, also containing the idea of eloquent order, essential to the building of the written work: "I was piling too many words on top of each other, and rather than reveal the thing before us, they were in fact obscuring it, burying it under an avalanche of subtleties and geometric abstractions" (MP 123). The written work must be built with the care and technique of a wall, or it will crumble. However, the uniform space of a perfect work of art is not only the setting for an entire imaginary universe, but also for the existence of the individual who has voluntarily locked himself within the four walls of the scene of writing. In the work of Paul Auster, the writer-character, as the builder of that structure, justifies analyses of self and others such as the ones that make up the essays included in *Ground Work* and in *The Art of Hunger*. Nevertheless, that peculiar character, craftsman of stone and word, can also come to life in prose fiction, as is the case with Jim Nashe, the main character of *The Music of Chance*. Auster and Nashe have in common the same self-awareness of the condition of writer-character /builder,

making *The Music of Chance* a fictionalized poetics, a continuation of *The Art of Hunger* in the sphere of the imaginary.



In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster reveals the peculiar and accidental circumstances that marked the birth of *The Music of Chance*: “The very day I finished writing *The Music of Chance* - which is a book about walls and slavery and freedom - the Berlin Wall came down. There’s no conclusion to be drawn from this, but every time I think of it, I start to shake” (AH 276). In fact, *The Music of Chance* combines the themes of slavery (confinement, restriction of movement) and freedom (openness, movement) with the recurring theme of the walls, structures that delimit spaces of seclusion or of wandering. Nashe is enclosed (imprisoned) in the open space of the meadow, solely to build the work in stone, the wall. However, Nashe ends up annulling the paradoxical confinement of the open space (prison) and the apparent scarcity of meaning of the wall by attributing to them a meaning that guides his existential drift, in a growing work of both concrete and metaphysical building, as if Nashe himself was gradually turning into a writer-character, as he is also a craftsman of stone, word, and thought. The search of truth can be the search of a visual presence. Nashe is looking for a meaning for his solitary life, for his wandering journey, and he finds it in the wall. So, he does not escape or stop on the agreed date. A wall exists, it is visible work, made of tangible actions and materials (stones). In the visual presence of the rows of stone in the meadow, he finds a truth, a music (a harmony, a structured sequence) in his fortuitous wandering. Also in *Ghosts*, the search of truth is measured in terms of visual presence. Blue is hired by White to follow a man named Black and to keep him under surveillance for as long as necessary. The truth, for Blue, is always restricted to what he can see: “Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world” (NYT 146). Black exists because he sees him, and, having become his double, Blue exists only while he sees himself in Black’s image. If he can’t see him, he is not sure of his own existence. In *City of Glass*, Quinn also needs to observe concrete facts: Stillman’s book, Stillman himself in his wanderings through the city, or the door of the building, twenty four hours a day. If he can’t observe them, the case may disappear, evaporate.

While he has the persons, objects and places that are part of the case before his eyes, the case exists, and so does he (Quinn), who has bet, and lost, his life on it. To observe someone can be the same as making that person feel alive, even if it's all mere detective work. As with Maria Turner in *Leviathan*:

For several days, this man took pictures of her as she went about her rounds, recording her movements in a small notebook (...) It was a completely artificial exercise, and yet Maria found it thrilling that anyone should take such an active interest in her. Microscopic actions became fraught with new meaning, the driest routines were charged with uncommon emotion. After several hours, she grew so attached to the detective that she almost forgot she was paying him (L 63).

The materialization of a wall in the middle of Jim Nashe's road to liberation is initially a metaphor: the wall is the interruption of his wandering journey, a barrier to the continuation of his path, due to the lack of money. Then, that wall becomes forced labor, still an insurmountable barrier. But it will be that wall that Jim Nashe will use to frame his disjointed existence, in a voluntary cessation of the uncontrolled expansion of a fragmented individual.

When Jim crosses the wall, on the day of his liberation, when he leaves behind the structural lines of a life that has become inexorably interwoven with his work, he is already in the sphere of the illegible, on the other side of death, as in *Song of Degrees*. The more than ten thousand stones of the Irish castle, building blocks of the wall, possess an identity, as if they were living beings or could bring with them to America, to the new world whose past is so recent, a bit of the history of Ireland in the XV century. The wall is a postmodern entity because it is a pastiche of its origins, a fetishization of history. But, from the stones of that Irish castle, destroyed by Oliver Cromwell, a simple wall will be created, to embellish the meadow that is owned by Stone and Flower, two overnight millionaires of the American lottery, and to satisfy their vanity. Flower is, apparently, the leader of this enigmatic pair that at the same time hosts and imprisons Nashe and Pozzi. But Stone reveals himself to be a lot more sinister in the sadistic details of the megalomaniac *City of the World*, as if the hardness of the stone had extended into his heart ("...the act of touching a real stone had called forth a memory of the man who bore that name". MC 107), culminating in the solution of enslavement, which was his idea.

An allegoric and symbolic structure begins to emerge between the *City of the World* and the construction of the wall. The task becomes the exercise of a corrective moral

power. To build the physical wall reconstructs, in a way, the model of the *City*, where traces of a perverse sense of humor are present, as in the case of the prisoner about to be shot against a wall near his “cheery” companions, an ominous presage of the fate of the protagonists. The ideologies theorized and conceptualized in the model are put into practice in the meadow:

To my mind, there's nothing more mysterious or beautiful than a wall. I can already see it: standing out there in the meadow, rising up like some enormous barrier against time. It will be a memorial to itself, gentleman, a symphony of resurrected stones, and every day it will sing a dirge for the past we carry within us."

"A Wailing Wall," Nashe said.

"Yes," Flower said, "a Wailing Wall. A Wall of Ten Thousand Stones (MC 86).

The wall of Stone and Flower is a monumental celebration of the eternal present moment and of the wealth provided by a stroke of luck. A monument to uselessness, the monolithic structure will be a self-sufficient barrier against time, preventing luck and material ostentation from leaving and preventing death and loss from getting near. In a way, like the writing that A. erects against the fading of his father's memory in *The Invention of Solitude*, already heralded in the poetic obituary of S.A. 1911-1979. To write is a way of fighting for survival, turning one's back to the wall of death, like Salman Rushdie: "But I wonder how many of us could do what he has done with our backs against that same wall. Salman Rushdie is fighting for his life" (*A Prayer for Salman Rushdie* in *The Red Notebook*, p.158). The symphony, the work of art, can lead to the resurrection of the stones (as in *Unearth XI*, *Meridian*, *Bedrock* and *Transfusion*), in the same way that the writer breathes new life into words that are dead in everyday life. But this is a sinister monument, a symphony that hums funeral anthems to the past that each one of us carries within, at the same time a barricade and a tomb for time. This apparent caprice is everything Nashe and Pozzi see in front of them; however, it also constitutes the work they have to do. The wall that grows before them represents the impossibility of escaping what is evident, like an unavoidable wall of death, the fate of both protagonists ("Through the star - / mortared wall / that rises in our night, your soul / will not pass / again". GW 51).

The wall has its double in the imposing fence that completely surrounds Stone and Flower's property, raising the troubling question: "The barrier had been erected to keep things out, but now that it was there, what was to prevent it from keeping things in as well? All sorts of threatening possibilities were buried in that question" (MC

126). When Nashe attempts to escape, after finding Pozzi beaten up in the meadow and engaging in violent confrontation with Murks and Floyd, it is this second wall (the fence) that thwarts the escape from its double, a mysterious alliance of apparently inanimate stone structures. The unconscious perception of this mystery and the clear sensation of solitude and confinement remind Nashe of Couperin's musical piece *The Mysterious Barricades*, already referred to at the beginning of the book, at the painful moment of selling the piano and dismembering the house ("As far as he was concerned, the barricades stood for the wall he was building in the meadow, but that was quite another thing from knowing what they meant." MC 181). It becomes impossible for him to play this short piece without thinking about the wall, the construction of which the music evokes through the syncopated progression of the melody, with successive pauses and restarts which make it progress towards an epilogue that never happens. Nashe's story too never reaches a definitive resolution by escaping the wall, like the plot of *The Music of Chance* doesn't have a concrete ending, but instead a markedly open and ambiguous one.

The stones are fascinating, both for Nashe and for Pozzi. They possess an unsettling quietness, they embody eternity, indifferent to our ephemeral human lives. They are the perfect building material for a wall against time, as stones are synonymous with great robustness and durability. A construction in stone will be eternal and noble, like statues and cathedrals, it will be a construction that defies death³¹. Since pre-history that stones are used in monuments inspired by the undecipherable mysteries of the universe (megaliths), by divinities (temples), by the great historical figures and moments. In the first civilizations, people wrote in stone and the writings were sacred, as in Old Egypt. Before that, in the Age of Stone, the most basic and raw of materials, paintings were made in the stone walls of caves, in a magical ritual, to bring about success in hunting.

In *Leviathan*, the explosion of several replicas of the Statue of Liberty provokes a great commotion, mainly because, as Peter Aaron says, it is the destruction of a national symbol which, unlike the flag, unites a people around a single image of national pride. The monument in stone is an eternal symbol, immune to any conflict,

³¹ Because *The Walls Do Not Fall*, as reads the title of Hilda Doolittle's (1886-1961) 1944 work, a kind of poetic diary of her travel to Egypt, where she extensively merges her imagination with the myths and narratives from ancient Egypt.

transcending it, embodying, since the beginning, the American dream, greeting all those who arrive to the promised land. But the writer has the power not only to build but also to destroy universes and their symbols. Hence, Sachs destroys the construction in stone, petrified in the ideals that it represents, to restart history, to interrupt eternity.

Separated from the structure that gives them a meaning, the stones confront Nashe and Pozzi, because the absence of context frees their evocative power. To observe them from a distance was different, but near the stones it becomes impossible not to explore them with the fingers, timidly caressing the granite blocks, almost expecting a reaction from them. Their imposing immobility is almost frightening, as is the sensation of being in the presence of something much more ancient than any castle, as the stones are silent witnesses of an age of mysteries that no man can know or remember.

The slow triumph of stones over man, then, becomes plausible: Pozzi is the first to be punished by the sacrilege of trying to escape them. In an ironic enigma, inspired by the myth of Sisyphus, identical stones seem to get heavier and heavier: "Every time they worked on the wall, Nashe and Pozzi came up against the same bewitching conundrum: all the stones were identical, and yet each stone was heavier than the one before it" (MC 129). Nashe is temporarily spared thanks to his growing sense of identification with the wall and the stones, captive of their sortilege, without, however, escaping his final fate. In the night of the escape and presumable death of Jack Pozzi, the stones seem spectrally alive, as if they were watching those who attempt to escape, acting as fatally deceiving guides in the path that leads to darkness, the symbol of death:

They walked across the meadow carrying flashlights, moving along the length of the unfinished wall as a way to guide them in the darkness. When they came to the end and saw the immense piles of stones standing at the edge of the woods, they played their beams along the surfaces for a moment as they passed by. It produced a ghostly effect of weird shapes and darting shadows, and Nashe could not help thinking that the stones were alive, that the night had turned them into a colony of sleeping animals (MC 169).

The stones resemble sleeping demonic animals, like pagan divinities reborn from immemorial times, and the mentally retarded Floyd Junior plays around them, tormenting Jim with his stare, his endless nursery rhyme and his grotesque black and white skeleton costume. Like a small demon of the stones, he leads Jim to a murderous

frenzy ("That was when the horror began". MC 184) in which he imagines crushing the child against those same rocks, loaded with passive oppression, and to the subsequent fever that defeated him. It was Floyd Junior who waved at Jim and Pozzi in the night of the escape, exposing them and indirectly but effectively causing the death of the latter, and perfectly fulfilling the role of guardian of the wall, despite being (or because he is) an abnormal, paranormal, child, as bestial as the rocks in the metaphor.

However, the fact that he works with the stones, that he uses them to build a wall, forces Nashe to sacrifice his strange singularity to the demands of a structure, even if this structure seems to be a purely abstract one. If the stones rebel, refusing to leave the ground, it is necessary to fight them in order to place them, to lay the groundwork of preparation for the definitive construction. In a bio-bibliographical transposition, *Ground Work* too was the poetic preparation for the work in prose that Auster currently builds. In Nashe's view, the wall is a part of him, which will remain for the future, because it was born of his work. After a failed marriage, growing apart from his daughter, the fortune spent, and the wandering around in his car, he found a home in the meadow, a son in Pozzi, and a task to dedicate himself to. Hence the importance of the thousandth stone: "In spite of everything, Nashe could not help feeling a sense of accomplishment. They had made a mark somehow, they had done something that would remain after they were gone, and no matter where they happened to be, a part of this wall would always belong to them" (MC 147). To achieve the apparently pointless record of forty seven stones aligned in a single day, Nashe and Pozzi do not hesitate in working as if they were trying to prove something, keeping up with the self-imposed rhythm and handling the stones with an almost disdainful assurance, with the sole objective of demonstrating that they had not been defeated, that they had succeeded in ordering that enormous jumble. And even Murks, whose name appropriately evokes the impassiveness and inscrutability that he and the wall share in common, understands the importance of that material, lasting, and palpable work, as he explains in his peculiar vocabulary:

It's really not such bad work," Murks continued. "At least it's all there in front of you. You put down a stone, and something happens. You put down another stone, and something more happens. There's no big mystery to it. You can see the wall going up, and after a while it starts to give you a good feeling. It's not like mowing the grass or chopping wood. That's

work, too, but it don't ever amount to much. When you work on a wall like this, you've always got something to show for it (MC 148).

Nashe's sense of pride when the construction starts to take its definitive shape, fulfilling its role as a delimiting structure, of border with the unknown, is undeniable. Nashe feels the power of the work that came out of his hands, even though he is not yet able to verbalize it:

(...) the fact that he could no longer see past it, that it blocked his view to the other side, made him feel as though something important had begun to happen. All of a sudden, the stones were turning into a wall, and in spite of the pain it had cost him, he could not help admiring it. Whenever he stopped and looked at it now, he felt awed by what he had done (MC 202).

Nashe succeeded in ordering the stones into a structure that frames his own existence. He is imprisoned by the wall, but it was he himself who built that wall, the walls that define the limits of his space of confinement are of his own doing, a demonstration of strength and defiance to the authority imposed by Stone and Flower. Being a fictional representation of the writer-character, Nashe symbolizes, through his work, the building of the room that is the book, by the hands of the protagonist who locks himself in it to exert his creative energy. So too is the writer-character restricted by the space of the room and of the book, both built by him. Nashe made the wall his universe, partaking in the cosmogonic experience of the writer. The wall is the symbol of victory over the initial chaos of the stones. However, in an ironic reading, Nashe is, at the same time, inadvertently building a wall of death that blocks view to the other side, which supports a twofold reading of the words "something important had begun to happen". Once the construction is finished, the existence of its builder as such ceases. And Nashe's existence is not an exception, since it is inextricably connected to the erection of the wall, the central event of *The Music of Chance*.

Like Camus's Sisyphus, another dedicated stone mover and a symbol of the absurdity of the human condition (man, crushed by his fate, consciously accepts the challenge and devotes himself to his daily task), Nashe feels almost happy when the odds are against his success. Nashe's original comment was that Flower and Stone wanted to build a "wailing wall". But for Nashe, it becomes at the same time a wall of healing and salvation ("mending wall"³²) and a wall that keeps him captive ("retaining wall"),

³² Cf. the poem *Mending Wall* by Robert Frost: (...) *And on a day we meet to walk the line / And set the wall between us once again. / We keep the wall between us as we go. (...) Before I built a wall I'd ask to know /*

bringing to mind the work of building in *Disappearances*, with its ambiguous metaphors: “(...) since he knows that for the whole of life / a stone / will give way to another stone / to make a wall / and that all these stones / will form the monstrous sum / of particulars” (GW 61). Nashe “grows” while working to pay an ill-considered gambling debt, contracted by influence of the young and too self-confident Jack Pozzi. As the building of the wall becomes more and more a sort of personal statement for Nashe, it really seems to be the center and the whole of his life, in that it is at the same time a continuously growing recompense and a source of coherence. The wall and the slow, burdened movements associated to the daily construction work give rise to the feeling that all time prior to the wall should not be considered, or should be rebuilt in terms of its indefinite space: “(...) and he knows now / that if he lives / it is only in what lives / and will continue to live / without him” (GW 64). A life’s work is its legacy to the world that everyone can admire, whether that legacy is a wall, a book (as in *The Invention of Solitude*, *Leviathan*, *The New York Trilogy*), a letter (*In the Country of Last Things*), an obituary (*Moon Palace*), a symphony (like the one by S. in *The Invention of Solitude*), a son (a very important word in the work of Paul Auster), the levitation of Walt in *Mr. Vertigo*, or the photographs of Auggie Wren in *Smoke*. The daily ritual of Auggie, much more, as he points out, than a mere hobby, is the anchor of his existence, a lonely drift that he translates (like Nashe) into a concrete task: to take a daily photograph of the corner of Third Street and Seventh Avenue, in Brooklyn. Auggie Wren’s corner, where a whole miniature cosmos parades, efficiently illustrates the character’s obsession with the building of what he considers to be his life’s work, aside from once again confirming the postmodern obsession with exhaustive cataloging. “O pós-modernista assimila e absorve o mundo que percebe, sem saber ou sem querer saber como estruturar esse mundo para que ele possa fazer sentido.”³³ Auster’s characters observe and describe without explaining, they read without deciphering. In *City of Glass*, Quinn buys a red notebook in the vain hope that, if he takes notes of everything, maybe he will stabilize his situation. Hence

What I was walling in or walling out, / And to whom I was like to give offence. / Something there is that doesn't love a wall, / That wants it down (...). Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923) pp. 65-67.

³³ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 76.

the importance of the reports, registers and annotations in the works of Auster, from the meticulous to the truly obsessive³⁴.

Nashe too writes a comprehensive account, in the form of a diary of the building of the wall, where he records with pleasure the number of stones added, day after day, as if those stones represented his most intimate thoughts or were the noteworthy incidents of his daily life, the things usually present in a diary. In this way, the character-builder becomes denotatively a writer-character, by establishing a connection between the work of writing and the work of building in stone. Jim Nashe's writing is solely about the erection of the structure in stone, having the wall as its central subject. He aligns words in the same way that, during daytime, he aligns the stones in the wall, and those words talk about the stones and the wall. In the imaginary world of *The Music of Chance*, Nashe represents the metalinguistic and metafictional preoccupation that is present throughout the work of Paul Auster, another writer-character in constant self-analysis³⁵.

However, Nashe has interiorized his sense of identification with the work to an extreme, omitting the possibility of surviving as an autonomous character and not exclusively as a *homo-faber*. The stones became the core of his thoughts, his thoughts became stones, since Nashe lives through the wall. A diary is usually a place to record experiences and feelings, but Nashe has assimilated the wall to such a degree that in his diary there is only place for it. If the construction grants self-knowledge, in a parallel between matter and intellect, the stones aligned in the wall are thoughts organized in the mind:

At first, he imagined it was a purely statistical pleasure, but after a while he sensed that it was fulfilling some inner need, some compulsion to keep track of himself and not lose sight of where he was. By early December, he began to think of it as a journal, a logbook in which the numbers stood for his most intimate thoughts (MC 203).

³⁴ "Manifestação artística do pós-modernismo: a vanguarda está esgotada, atola-se na repetição e substitui a invenção pela exasperação pura e simples". Gilles Lipovetsky, *A Era do Vazio: Ensaio sobre o Individualismo Contemporâneo*, trans. by Miguel Serras Pereira and Ana Luísa Faria (Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 1989) p. 111.

³⁵ Regarding the originality of Auster's metafictional strategies with respect to his predecessors, see Dennis Barone, "Introduction: Auster and the Postmodern Novel" in *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, ed. Dennis Barone (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) pp. 1-26. "He does use the metafictional devices of his predecessors (...), but he does not use them to frustrate or disrupt the reading process. Whereas earlier metafiction problematized narrative with lists or collages of diverse elements, Auster's methods are less disjunctive but no less surprising. In *The Music of Chance*, for example, the constant repetition of the number seven (Nashe and Pozzi stay in a room on the seventh floor of a hotel, Flower and Stone won their money seven years ago, Flower's museum and Stone's City of the World are behind the seventh door) points to the work's fictionality and undermines its feigned verisimilitude (p. 7).

When the wall is finished, the reason for the diary's existence will equally come to an end and there will be nothing left in his life to record, as if that life had necessarily to cease. This and other presages, clearly patent throughout the book in the form of Jim's growing sense of identification with the wall, will be fulfilled in the last moments of *The Music of Chance*.

Nashe observes and questions the stones he works with, before putting them in place. While building the work he simultaneously questions it, in a process of deconstruction parallel to that of the construction, like a narrative that questions itself, in a metafictional and metalinguistic perspective. The saga of Jim Nashe in the meadow is essentially a fictionalization of the process of self-consciously building a text, of which the work of Paul Auster is a perfect example, both his essays and his fictions. The external shape must be in line with the intrinsic ideological meaning, the material presence of the word must form a coherent whole with its meaning: that is the goal of poetic construction³⁶. The result of that tangible building is a text with its particular rhetoric, but which can be compared to any other text of any other genre. Like the "text" of a wall, written in stone (*Wall Writing*), the construction of which we follow in *The Music of Chance*. Nashe is, then, the portrait of the artist as a builder.

The end of the wall, the point zero, marks the end of Jim Nashe's real existence. After the work is finished, after life has ended, only nothingness is left, emptiness, the great ghost of Auster: "He was back to zero again, and now those things were gone. For even the smallest zero was a great hole of nothingness, a circle large enough to contain the world" (MC 155). Since the wall is at the core of this story, and just like a Scheherazade at the end of its last story, when the last stone is put in place, the story will have to end, and the wall of work turns into a wall of death in the middle of Nashe's tortuous existential path (as had happened with Pozzi). Several causes trigger his murder-suicide, including vengeance for the beating of Pozzi and for the abuses he himself suffered. There is also the possibility that Nashe is terrified by the unexpected opening up of options, that he is still subjugated by the rigid routine of the wall (again, like Camus's Sisyphus), beyond which the future is a shapeless and

³⁶ As formulated by M.M. Bakhtin e P.N. Medvedev in "Material and device as components of the poetic construction: The proper formulation of the problem of the poetic construction" in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle (Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 118-28.

undecipherable presence that he cannot contemplate any longer. This notion of an enigmatic presence, with illegible implications and impossible to contemplate, already evokes the already mentioned wall of death, an insurmountable barrier, delimiting an unknown territory from which there is no possible return. Nashe realizes what, to him, his legacy to the world has become, and, since it was by his own hands that that wall of death was built, it will be by his own hands that death will come about.

After his liberation, driving his old car in the last moments of the narrative, Nashe recalls the days before the beginning of the real story of his life, the story of the building of the wall, the wall that will forever be a part of him. His last thoughts go to music (...of chance, that enables death at that moment), to the car (that transported him in his drift towards the wall and towards death), and to the beauty of the stones, of the wall, and of the meadow, covered in snow. The three central themes of *The Music of Chance* finally meet in the last moments of Nashe's life and work.

The meadow would look beautiful under the snow, he thought, and he hoped it would go on falling through the night so he could wake up to see it that way in the morning. He imagined the immensity of the white field, and the snow continuing to fall until even the mountains of stones were covered, until everything disappeared under an avalanche of whiteness (MC 215).

An immense empty space now opens up in Jim Nashe's horizon, like an immense page in blank. As in Kafka, it is the building of the work that matters, the work should never be concluded, it should always fall short of perfection, for the sake of the survival of the literary entity, if not for anything else, since once the story is finished the writer-character ceases to exist³⁷. When the construction of the wall and the story

³⁷ Franz Kafka was obsessed with the meticulous and endless construction of the written work. His manuscripts show that he was a fervent worker, "scribbling" (as he called his writing) calmly and steadily across the page, revising little, but stopping when authenticity no longer seemed to exist, laying down parallel or even contradictory tracks in search of his "prey", and content to leave his works in an "open" state, like that of his Great Wall – their segments uncertainly linked, strange spaces left in blank, the ultimate goal left unachieved, as if too blindingly grand. The German titles of *The Burrow* and of *The Great Wall of China* (at times as impenetrable in its meaning as a real wall) contain the word *Bau* (m. construction; edifice). See Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, foreword by John Updike; ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). *The Great Wall of China* (like *The Wall and the Books* by Borges) is, undoubtedly, Kafka's short story which most addresses the motif of the infinite, interminable work, the obsession with building. It evokes *The Music of Chance* and Nashe's fate not only in its title (*Wall*) but also in its intrinsic meaning. It's about the pleasure of building, not of finishing, even if, for that purpose, the life of an entire people is put on the line, in an eternal childish hope. Individuals completely identify with the work, like Nashe: "...men who with the first stone they sank in the ground felt themselves a part of the wall" (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, p. 237). There is also an explicit comparison (p. 238) between the Great Wall and the Tower of Babel. There is mention of a wise old man (cf. Stillman) who had written a book about that identification, establishing the great wall as the foundation for a new Tower of Babel. The most valued wisdom would from then on be that which was most directly related to the construction of the wall (architecture and the art of working in stone). Books would now be about the wall; the wall would

of *The Music of Chance* come to an end, the reader is left with the task of filling that empty space and that open ending with his imagination.

Through the reference to *The Music of Chance* we were able to see, in this chapter, how Auster's fiction can constitute a romanticized poetics, where a character like Jim Nashe shares the writer's self-consciousness as an artisan of stones and words, in his quest to structure his own universe.

Nashe encloses himself in the space of the meadow so that he can build his work in stone there, the same way the writer-character locks himself in the closed space of the room in order to set his cosmogonic imagination free and to build his written work there. But, if up until now we limited ourselves to the placement of stones with a view to building walls, which could eventually work as the delimiting structures of an existential path (the walls of death) or as the structures that organize the expansion of an imaginary cosmos (the walls of writing), we shall now enter the enclosed space of the room that is the book. It is in this sublime confinement that the written cosmogenesis takes place, in Paul Auster's fiction. The empty background of the room of writing is occupied by a whole apparent universe through the filling of the blank page with the words that build the literary work. The aestheticized reflection about the blank space of the room and of the page generates the text of *White Spaces*, the starting point of Auster's fictional creations, after defeating the wall that his poetry had come up against.

become the books reason for being. Writing and building merge together. At the end, we find *The News of the Building of the Wall: a Fragment* announcing a spiral of concentric walls to be infinitely built, like the models of the *City of the World*.

II
THE ROOM THAT IS THE BOOK: THE WRITTEN
COSMOGENESIS.

The world is in my head.
My body is in the world.¹

Paul Auster writes novels about solitary characters that try to find meaning in circumstantial events, and he himself writes under circumstances that seem curiously relevant: his office, a small studio apartment, is white, empty, and stained by the polluted air of Brooklyn. The writer sits under two naked light bulbs and the blinds are always shut; when they open, there is but a brick wall on the other side of the courtyard². But Auster avoids such distractions, since his sense of identification with the scribe Bartleby doesn't go that far. The door is closed, but that solitude grants the writer absolute freedom: there, he can incarnate any character and go any place his thoughts may lead him to, inside *une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement spirituelle (...) Sur les murs nulle abomination artistique. Relativement au rêve pur, à l'impression non analysée, l'art défini, l'art positif est un blasphème. Ici, tout a la suffisante claret et la délicieuse obscurité de l'harmonie*³. In this sublime confinement, the genesis of the written cosmos takes place, when the writer begins a transcendental path of silent comprehension⁴.

The infinitely dense of possibilities space of the room is the setting for the written cosmogony, an exercise in ordering and narrating one or more alternative universes, where each word corresponds to an atom that finds its place in the page that is being built. The metafictional reflection about space and the ontological charge of the verbal art reflect an increasingly acute self-consciousness in the work of writing, through which the writer-character conveys an entire world created in his imagination ("The world is in my head"). Once he is locked in his own mind, the writer-character can exert his cosmogonic power, transforming the space in blank between four walls into a universe, just like he can self-annihilate in sterile isolation and implosion. This confinement can be sublime or disaggregating, constructive or destructive. The closed space that is the scene of writing can be a womb or a tomb, because the mystery of

¹ Text appearing in Jon Kessler's sculpture "Word Box" photographed for *Why Write?*. Paul Auster, "Word Box" in *Why Write?* (Providence: Burning Deck, 1996) pp. 39-50.

² Cf. Begley, "The Case of the Brooklyn Symbolist", p. 41.

³ Charles Baudelaire, "La Chambre Double" in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968) p. 149.

⁴ "O pós-modernismo tem tendência a afirmar o equilíbrio, a escala humana, o regresso a si próprio. (...) Signos menos visíveis testemunham já uma transformação notável do valor-gozo (...) mulheres e homens redescobrem a virtude do silêncio e da solidão, da paz interior e da ascese". Lipovetsky, *A Era do Vazio*, p. 109.

creation and the mystery of death are closely related. In this second chapter we will examine only the positive aspect of the space in blank of the room (and of the page), which can contain within itself an entire world.

Auster's obsession with space is already present in his first prose works, in his references to Sir Walter Raleigh or to the polar explorer Peter Freuchen⁵, continuing in his more recent fiction. His characters vacillate between the extremes of claustrophobic confinement and directionless wandering, but, and as if trying to corroborate Pascal's thoughts – "all the unhappiness of man stems from one thing only, that he is incapable of staying quietly in his room" (IS 83)–it is the characters most apparently confined to a delimited space, like the writer-character, that turn out to be the most free. Conversely, when the characters seem free to wander about is when they become lost and confused. Jim Nashe, for instance, wanders for a whole year through America, and yet he is but a prisoner of what he believes to be his desire for freedom. But freedom is unattainable until the moment Nashe stops and becomes responsible for something and for someone else. According to Auster himself, "my work has come out of a position of intense personal despair, a very deep nihilism and hopelessness about the world, the fact of our own transience and mortality, the inadequacy of language, the isolation of one person from another"⁶. This disenchantment with the world and with human relationships is compensated by the happiness that the solitary cosmogony of a perfect imaginary world can offer. In that sublime confinement, a densely metaphysical space is created where everything becomes possible, as there exists, in latent form, a whole universe created and ordered by the mind of the writer-character. Therefore, the visual image of the room works as an emblem for the abstract notion of the mental space of literary creation. Auster's writing constantly reinvents the solitude of those spaces, in a recurrent exploration of the scene of writing. *City of Glass*, for instance, follows the drift of a writer-character through the literary space, illustrated in the urban space that he crosses but does not inhabit.

⁵ Peter Freuchen, for example, is successively mentioned by the subject of *White Spaces*, by A. in *The Invention of Solitude*, and by Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*.

⁶ Mark Irwin, "Memory's Escape: Inventing The Music of Chance - A Conversation with Paul Auster" in *Denver Quarterly* 28:3 (Winter 1994), 118.

In *A prayer for Salman Rushdie*, an essay first published in 1993 in *The New York Times* and anthologized in *The Red Notebook and Other Writings*, Auster addresses the condition of the author and the job of writing, seen as a mission involving a great deal of sacrifice, where isolation and the room are key words:

We belong to the same club: a secret fraternity of solitaires, shut-ins, and cranks, men and women who spend the better part of our time locked up in little rooms struggling to put words on a page. It is a strange way to live one's life, and only a person who had no choice in the matter would choose it as a calling. It is too arduous, too underpaid, too full of disappointments to be fit for anyone else (RN 157).

In a fictional parallel, in *Mr. Vertigo*, when Aesop decides to write the story of his life, the young black author brings about the admiration and astonishment of all the other characters for the writer and his work, in his arduous task, in complete solitude, locked for hours in his room. Every character understands and respects the cosmogonic power of the improvised writer, most particularly Walt, who describes with sincere fascination the universal and timeless scene of solitary writing:

He must have toiled eight or ten hours a day on his opus, and I can remember peeking through the door as he sat there hunched over his desk, marvelling at how a person could sit still for so long, engaged in no other activity than guiding the nib of a pen across a leaf of white foolscap. It was my first experience with the making of books (...) Now that I'm writing a book of my own, not a day goes by when I don't think about Aesop up there in his room. That was sixty-five springs ago, and I can still see him sitting at his desk, scribbling away at his youthful memoirs as the light poured through the window, catching the dust particles that danced around him (MV 89).

The first test in Walt's long calvary, the first of the rites of initiation he will have to endure to achieve the magical gift of levitation, is to be buried alive in the middle of a field for twenty four hours. In this living burial, Walt returns to Mother Earth's womb, evoking the phonetic and semantic play of *womb* and *tomb*, the first and the last stages of human existence, present in *The Invention of Solitude*. It is the most closed of all interior spaces but it is also the first and supreme test for Walt. In the room, in solitude, Walt starts exploring his gift of levitating, his art of flying, his secret power. "I kept to myself as much as possible during those weeks, hiding out in my room as I explored the mysteries and terrors of my new gift" (MV 66).

In the work of writing, the room is also the space of the daily struggle with words and of the conflicting, distant, sometimes practically impossible relationship they have with the world, while the writer-character suffers with the awareness of the difficulty of representing the world through words. The archetypical image of the room, where positive and negative qualities coexist in equal terms (cosmos and chaos), explicitly

represents the dualities of its single inhabitant, the only true protagonist for Auster: the writer. The spatial imagery describes, defines and reflects the consciousness of the individual and his writing, in a projection of the human psyche. In fact, the interior landscape of intimate spatiality unifies the several facets of the consciousness of the writer-character, in a parallel between space and life, expressing an order, an image of the mental structure. Unity is the natural state of the cosmic harmony, so the written cosmogony, unified and structured, frames the imaginary expansion of the delimited space of the page. When he has doubts about his situation in the cosmos, man creates or recreates his own cosmogony.

In order to enjoy his cosmogonic experience and his writing without being disturbed, the writer-character needs to be isolated, to make sure that the spaces of others do not invade his own personal space, which results in an unmistakable sense of self-satisfaction, patently visible in *White Spaces*. However, means of getting information or knowledge are necessary for that written cosmogenesis, and they are represented by the natural openings of the room, such as doors and windows, instruments of selective communication between the interior and the exterior. The doors and windows are at the same time an instrument of protection for the inhabitant and of exclusion and barrier to outsiders. It is through the windows that the writer-character looks outside and sees the world. Getting away from the window, he sits, and, completely removed from the world, he imagines what to write next.

Thus, the windows are to the room what the eyes are to the mind of the individual⁷. The eyes are, in the classic metaphor, windows to the soul, but, following this equation, the mind corresponds to the room. The work of writing takes place inside the room as much as inside the mind, both of them closed spaces, of writing and of reflection, respectively, with a single and solitary inhabitant. The book then blends with the room, since they are both framed by the mind of the writer⁸. The door is a

⁷ In "Answer to a Question from New York Magazine" (*Why Write?*, p. 9), the question that can be inferred is: what ideas do you associate with the words "New York"? To Auster, it is a childhood story, spent at the window of his grandparent's apartment, in the corner of Central Park South and Columbus Circle, New York. The window is, to Auster-child too, the first frontier with the world (New York), with conscious knowledge.

⁸ Once again evoking Franz Kafka, we find in this author the recurring image of the room as a space of protection from the hostile exterior. In it, the oppressed character also experiences a sense of power and comfort derived from confinement, where his mind goes through a sort of hibernation period, progressively detaching itself from the body, as in *The Metamorphosis*. In a similar way, at the end of *City of Glass*, Quinn's mind gets detached little by little from his body, in the small interior room of Stillman's house. In

symbol that illustrates well the dichotomy between sacred and profane spaces, transcended by the entrance in the enclosed area of the room. This room has transformative properties that lead its inhabitant to knowledge and to a rite of passage, as the writer-character possesses a biography in space, expanding inside that seclusion that feeds him metaphysically. The room eventually becomes a temple, a well defined space with spiritual implications, delimited at the same time by a wall and by the words of an enchantment. The room is a sacred space amidst the profane and chaotic space of the labyrinthine postmodern city, where the “art in a closed field” is generated⁹.

White Spaces, a poem in prose organized in sequences of narrative fragments anthologized in *Ground Work* and taken from the homonymous collection *White Spaces* (Station Hill, 1980; literary production from 1978 and 1979), marks a unique moment of artistic liberation in a delimited, white and impenetrable space (room), which can be filled with all possible meanings and stories. Even in institutionalized poetic forms there are spaces in blank between verses, transcendental spaces of silent comprehension, as if encouraging the reader to fill them with his imagination. In a white space, every color of the spectrum is fused together, and it is therefore a multiple space, of simultaneous existences. A white space contains in itself everything that the text can mean (“Where no possibility exists, everything becomes possible again”, as we can read in *The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh*, GW 164), both in terms of the creative potentialities of writing and the innumerable possible interpretations that the reader may subject it to. In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster explicitly refers to the ontological charge inherent to the writing of *White Spaces*:

It was a liberation for me, a tremendous letting go, and I look back on it now as the bridge between writing poetry and writing prose. That was the piece that convinced me I still had

Wedding Preparations in the Country, Raban, locked in his room, expresses his certainty “that I don't even need to go to the country myself, it isn't necessary. I'll send my clothed body. If it staggers out of the door of my room, the staggering will indicate not fear but its nothingness” (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, p. 55). The window is the only means of communication with the outside world for Gregor in *The Metamorphosis*, besides the doors, which are always closed. Gregor blends with the room. His sister Grete feels the need to open the windows, to not be confined to that reality which, in spite of everything, she cannot accept. She goes into the room, but always under the compulsion of keeping contact with the normalcy of the exterior. Finally, in *The Street Window* (p. 384) and in *Absent-minded Window-gazing* (p. 387), Kafka turns the windows into privileged means of communication between the solitary interior of meditation and the exterior, with its human harmony. But the exterior reality in these texts by Kafka is “the human harmony” (p. 384), and not, as in Auster, a chaotic postmodern city.

⁹ Cf. Hugh Kenner, “Art in a Closed Field”, *Learners and Discerners: A Newer Criticism*, ed. Robert Scholes (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1964) pp. 109-33.

it in me to be a writer. But everything was going to be different now. A whole new period of my life was about to begin (AH 287).

During the already mentioned period of great emotional and financial instability, Auster had come to a deep personal and artistic impasse: “There were moments when I thought I was finished, when I thought I would never write another word” (AH 294). Having reached rock bottom, like so many of his characters, Auster was ready for a new beginning, which, as he himself states, started when he was watching a dance rehearsal: “Something happened, and a whole world of possibilities suddenly opened up to me. I think it was the absolute fluidity of what I was seeing, the continual motion of the dancers as they moved around the floor. It filled me with immense happiness” (AH 294). In the next day, he started to write *White Spaces*, which the author describes as his attempt to translate into words the experience of the dancers. It was an indescribable artistic liberation, a breakthrough in his literary production, the definitive bridge between his poetry and his prose. In that white space, occurred the artistic metamorphosis of Paul Auster.

From that moment on, the central project of Auster’s prose takes shape: the investigation of the scene of writing, the ontology of the literary text. It is an immense project, a detective-like task that will possibly occupy him for the rest of his career. An ontology is a description of a universe, not of the universe, containing a multiple descriptive potential. To create an ontology, from this perspective, is not necessarily to seek a basis for our universe; other universes can be described in the same way, including the heterocosmos of fiction. This heterocosmos presupposes the existence of one or more universes within the space of the room and of the book. One of the oldest classic ontological themes in poetics is the “otherness” of the fictional world, its separation from the real world of experience. This was already common place in Renaissance poetics when Sir Philip Sidney reiterated it in his *Defense or Apologie*, published in 1595:

(...) doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.¹⁰

¹⁰ Philip Sidney, *Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney* IV, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 8.

Sidney addresses the theme of the fictional world as an heterocosmos, a separate universe, which persists in the twentieth century with the concept of fictionality. It is the old analogy between author and God, seeing the freedom and power of the former in its demiurgic and almost divine role. Not satisfied with invisibly exercising his freedom to create worlds, the artist now makes this freedom visible, inserting himself in the space of his work. He depicts himself in the act of building his fictional world, or of destroying it, which is also his prerogative. There is only one catch: the artist, portrayed in the act of creation or destruction, inevitably becomes himself a fiction. The real artist always occupies an ontological level superior to that of his fictional projected self, inhabitant of a peripheral private reality. Auster's character-writer moves within this heterotypical space, an impossible space that, in reality, is not located anywhere but in the written text itself. The parallel universes are (re)created in the room and in the book, both of them a product of the construction of the written work. Once again, postmodernism focuses on the process of writing as action (process, performance, happening, terms which are already present in Ihab Hassan's above mentioned classification¹¹), allowing the reader to participate in that very process and in the mind and solitude of the character-writer, in accordance with the postmodern concept of participation and in contrast with the modernist distance (distance vs. participation). Evoking the aesthetics of the open poetry of George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff, Auster emphasizes writing as a present and apparent process, often focusing on the concrete moment of the narration ("I remember a day very like today". IS 22). By becoming conscious of the narrative and of the language (scriptible, writerly), the reader participates in the parallel universe of the writing, and not in the external socio-economic reality, which postmodernism avoids¹². To Hassan, the postmodern exhaustion, silence, and absence contrast with modernism's mastery,

¹¹ Hassan, "Postface 1982", p. 87.

¹² "Many contemporary American novels are conventionally labelled 'metafictional' or 'self-referential'. By way of summary, a metafictional novel or self-referential text refers openly to its own devices and strategies, turns on itself to debate its fictional nature, to exhibit its 'made-upness.' The writer's problems in constructing the novel are prominently displayed, the reader kept constantly aware of the fabricated nature of the enterprise, the authorial voice abruptly disrupting the spectacle, dispelling the illusion, intruding like an uninvited guest into the body of the text. (...) the imaginative collaboration of implied reader and the fiction-making process, a shift away from the author-text axis, with its hierarchy of active author and passive reader, to writing and reading as undifferentiated, symbiotic activities". Peter Currie, "The Eccentric Self: Anti-Characterization and the Problem of the Subject in American Postmodernist Fiction", *Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Malcom Bradbury and Sigmund Ro (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), pp. 56-57.

logos, and presence. Because the character-writer is absent from the everyday outside world, exercising a silent cosmogony between the walls of his room. Inside that room, his power is infinite, outside of it he becomes frail and diluted in the crowd, like Quinn, A., Anna Blume or Marco Fogg. In the magical space of the room, of which *White Spaces* is the most faithful representation, the fragments of the individual coalesce, and he achieves unity by reconstituting the world in signs of his own authorship (as Peter Stillman tried to do), in a language that corresponds to the innermost meaning of things, in line with the statement of Plato's Cratylus.

Auster translated Mallarmé, and through him he discovered the notion of the ancestral book that encompasses an entire world, an idea that is at the basis of the exploration of the scene of writing. But even more directly associated with Auster's recurring themes is Edmond Jabès, whose seven volumes of meditative and oracular poetic prose *The Book of Questions* (*Le Livre des Questions*) had a profound influence in Auster's poetic narratives. Auster expounds the relation between Jabès and Mallarmé in an article originally written in 1976 for *The New York Review of Books* where he connects the Jewish elements in *The Book of Questions* to central aspects of Mallarmé's writing: "The Book is his central image - but it is not only the Book of the Jews (the spirals of commentary around commentary in the Midrash), but an allusion to Mallarmé's ideal Book as well (the Book that contains the world, endlessly folding in upon itself)" (AH 105-106). "Mallarmé wanted to put all knowledge into a book. He wanted to make a great book, the book of books" (AH 156) says Jabès himself in an interview conducted by Paul Auster, and evoking the cosmic library of Jorge Luis Borges. There is also a desire for truth and totality in Jabès's work. He is searching for a unicity based on fragments, maintaining the perception of the totality of the book at every moment of its writing, so that the whole exerts an overwhelming pressure that determines the composition of the book, word by word, stone by stone. His highly elaborate conception of the book as the central poetic principle of writing opens up the space of that same writing to the reader.

In *White Spaces*, Auster registers a primary discovery of his simultaneously phenomenological, mystical, and social investigation: the process of writing takes place in a room. He begins to investigate step by step the virgin space of the room in the following way:

I remain in the room in which I am writing this. I put one foot in front of the other. I put one word in front of the other, and for each step I take I add another word, as if for each word to be spoken there were another space to be crossed, a distance to be filled by my body as it moves through this space. It is a journey through space, even if I get nowhere, even if I end up in the same place I started. It is a journey through space, as if into many cities and out of them, as if across deserts, as if to the edge of some imaginary ocean, where each thought drowns in the relentless waves of the real (GW 85).¹³

Auster repeatedly insists on the physical character of the work of writing (as if it were a groundwork or a wall that is being built), graphically conveying this characteristic through the juxtaposition of three distinct spaces: the space where the writing is built; the space where writing has its origin, within the writer; and the space of the page, which is occupied by words. That is to say, the three rooms of writing: the room where the writer locks himself to build his opus, the room that is the creative mind, and “the room that is the book” (*Ghosts*, NYT 170). In *White Spaces*, as later in *Ghosts*, Auster represents the work of writing through the equation between the room and the book: “I remain in the room in which I am writing this”, he says, as though he was occupying the white spaces of the page, of the mind, and of the room. Whichever direction he takes, in this symbolic architecture, the writer has the sensation of being physically confined: when he writes, he enters the closed space of the book; when he interrupts his writing, he paces back and forth in the narrow, confined space of the room¹⁴. This claustrophobic situation is indicative of a certain solipsism in Auster’s writing, a tendency that is reflected in the markedly autobiographical character of his work, as if the poetic persona too was cut off from the exterior. However, the outside world eventually ends up penetrating the self-inscribed mental sphere of Auster’s characters, imposing real consequences to their thoughts and conjectures, and consequently

¹³ After reading this excerpt, the parallel with Samuel Beckett becomes inevitable. His characters literally exhaust, in a systematic way, every possibility of action in a closed field, as in the following passage, taken from *Watt* (1953): “Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed...” etc, etc, through long lines of text. In the dramatic works of Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Arthur Adamov, the external world is frequently characterized as threatening and unknown, and the sceneries and situations convey a sense of incoherent discomfort. Beckett’s plays take place in settings that are strange and alien, as if transformed by some surrealistic holocaust and evocative of the devastated city of *In the Country of Last Things*. These playwrights “of the absurd” see themselves as solitary and marginalized rebels, isolated in their private worlds, exercising their very own art in a closed field.

¹⁴ See *Voyage Autour de ma Chambre* of Xavier de Maistre, 1795. This parody of Lawrence Sterne (*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* from 1768, a semi-autobiographical fantasy) plunges the reader into the atmosphere of the XVIII century and of the great discoveries. But this “journey” is a completely spiritual one, as is its parodic duplication, since the author, with elegant humor, invites the reader to wander about without leaving that room, where he is locked. The book’s success led to a continuation, *Expédition Nocturne Autour de ma Chambre*, less accomplished.

admitting the possibility of interpenetration between the mental and the social worlds. In *The Locked Room*, the ephemeral stability of the narrator is broken by the appearance of Fanshawe's letter, coming from the outside world, in his room of writing. In *Moon Palace*, the economic reality forces Fogg out of his white room and into the hostile streets of New York. And in *The Country of Last Things*, it is Anna Blume's foray into the chaotic exterior that ends in idyll and with the miracle of life and of writing, generated in the room of the library. That violent penetration of the exterior into the white space is connoted with a violation of the purity, symbolized by the white colour, of that fertile womb, generator of an imaginary cosmos, aborting the gestation process of writing and thinking.

The problematic of the coexistence of spaces and spatial symbols in literature was addressed by Douwe Fokkema in his study of literary conventions in Gide, Larbaud, Thomas Mann, Ter Braak and Du Perron¹⁵. Gide proposes that “a viagem deve substituir a imobilidade e uma janela aberta é considerada superior a um quarto fechado”¹⁶. No, would Auster reply, as long as you can travel inside that closed room, as in *White Spaces*¹⁷. We can use the metaphor of the concentric circles to identify the hierarchy of Auster's semantic universe. The center of his semantic universe is the notion of consciousness (perception, reflection, thought). This concept depends on the existence of a thinking subject, the writer, who reflects in a state of maximum consciousness. “O segundo círculo formaria o campo semântico de despreendimento (separação, afastamento)”¹⁸. It can take the form of the wall of the room, the wall that frames, in deep solitude, the individual as a character or as the self-portrayed writer himself. “O terceiro círculo concêntrico seria o campo semântico de observação”¹⁹. Auster's character observes and takes note of everything, despite his voluntary seclusion. He does that through the obsessive observation of an object, through stalking, through the exhaustive recording of movements. Or through the evocative power of imagination, endlessly travelling between the four walls, inside the *White Spaces* where everything can coexist.

¹⁵ Fokkema, *História Literária*, pp. 35-57.

¹⁶ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 37.

¹⁷ About the supremacy of the eyes of the mind, see *Les Fenêtres* of Charles Baudelaire: *Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée*. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968) p. 174.

¹⁸ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 55.

¹⁹ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 55.

But the infinitely plural coexistence of every atom of an imaginary universe is hard to express, to systematize through words: “It comes down to this: that everything should count, that everything should be a part of it, even the things I do not or cannot understand” (GW 87). The goal is not that the text effectively describes the world that it is trying to verbalize, or that the explanations it gives are more than an approximation to the truth. This implies, as far as textual organization is concerned, preference for the continuous flow of the current of consciousness, which does not aspire to a conclusive result, and even less to universal validity. The tendency towards epistemological doubt has implications in the plot. The author is apparently indifferent to the status of his text, caring little about how and where it begins, how it progresses, how and where it ends. In postmodernism, the technique of the multiple ending is amply explored. The open ending is parodied in *Ghosts*, with its final moment when a door to get out of the story is opened, without any additional explanations. What prevails is the importance of the word that invents, that gives shape to the world, and is its only justification. Hence the compulsive need to talk and write, even though this is nothing but the recycling of crystalized meanings, for the postmodernist prefers words to silence. Writing and thinking fill every possible emptiness of the white (blank) space of the room and of the page:

And therefore this desire, this overwhelming need, to take these papers and scatter them across the room. (...) To remain in the realm of the naked eye, as happy as I am at this moment. (...) Never to be anywhere but here. And the immense journey through space that continues. Everywhere, as if each place were here (GW 88).

The voice that describes everything in words can continue indefinitely between the four walls, a space outside of time and its limitations, even much after the events have occurred. The writer-character roams aimlessly inside the room, as if he was travelling through space, through roads, deserts, and cities, ending near an ocean (as the itineraries of *Moon Palace* and *The City of Chance*). Even the narration of nothingness or of events that never happened is an artistically noble task, just like the work of Paul Auster himself is divided between the narrative of imaginary events and deeply inconclusive narratives where nothing actually happens. The postmodern code is based on a preference for non-selection, on the rejection of discriminating hierarchies, and on the refusal to distinguish between fact and fiction, past and present, relevant and irrelevant. Like Paul Auster’s openly pluralistic fiction, “the ‘postmodern’

American novel has a (...) equivocal status (...), the specific characteristics of particular works subsumed under that indiscriminating heading”²⁰ (that is, the general concept of “postmodernism”). In postmodern texts, we notice the absence of a well-defined plot and the opposite preference for arbitrary storylines, aside from the stylistic device of continuous enumeration and reworking. All these devices convey, both at the level of the sentence and of the text, the ephemeral character of reality, as they are based on an intellectual experimentation that diverges from any final conclusion. Concerning the relationship between text and code, the postmodernist convention makes use of the metalinguistic commentary, that is, it discusses the codes used in the text itself.

Literarily and biographically, *White Spaces* describes isolation in the delimited space of the room, propitious to introspection and reflection about the outside world, along with an exercise in writing that is self-conscious and precedes a true spiritual revelation. Auster knows that he is a practitioner of an art of solitude, “a way of coming to grips with one's life in the darkest, most secret corner of the self” (AH 247).

White Spaces proclaims the power of that exile, experienced in the first person:

I walk within these four walls, and for as long as I am here I can go anywhere I like. I can go from one end of the room to the other and touch any of the four walls, or even all the walls, one after the other, exactly as I like. (...) The light, streaming through the windows, never casts the same shadow twice, and at any given moment I feel myself on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth. These are moments of great happiness for me (GW 85).

In reality, the discovery made was that of formal liberation, the definitive passage from poetry to prose. However, the moment of the conception of *White Spaces*, written in a single night, coincided, by another theatrical intervention of chance, with his father's death. Yet, this traumatic and unexpected event had the upside of providing Auster, for the first time, with some financial comfort, which allowed him to consider, without material obstacles, the decisive option of pursuing a career as a writer. Chance also determined that his father's death would be the motor of *The Invention of Solitude*, his first large work in prose, after the revelation of *White Spaces*.



²⁰ Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 53.

The Invention of Solitude is at the same time a poetic form of art inspired in the actual experience of the individual (a fictionalized sequence of *The Art of Hunger*) and the seminal work of Paul Auster's prose. It can be considered a novel-manifesto in two parts (*Portrait of an Invisible Man* and *The Book of Memory*) that is a reference for every subsequent book. *The Invention of Solitude* is not just an autobiographical confession but rather a powerful meditation on questions that are common to all of mankind, with particular incidence on the analytical exploration of the scene of writing, using the writer-character and his experiences as a guinea-pig in this process of exploration of self and of others.

The *Invention of Solitude* is autobiographical, of course, but I don't feel that I was telling the story of my life so much as using myself to explore certain questions that are common to us all: how we think, how we remember, how we carry our pasts around with us at every moment. I was looking at myself in the same way a scientist studies a laboratory animal (AH 292).

Subjectivity is revealed to be essential to achieve that knowledge, to visualize the projection of the individual and from there derive objective and true conclusions. And autobiographical marks are present in most of the plots of Auster's fiction. They can be summarized as follows: a young protagonist departs in search of someone (frequently a father), facing great difficulties. There seems to be a goal but the protagonist never fully achieves it; if he finds someone in his existential wanderings, that someone is, in reality, himself, at the end of the tunnel or of the labyrinth. The narration of the quest, which is made in a simple and translucent prose, invariably reflects the very process of writing. Sometimes, the characters feel that they are being controlled by a higher entity, that their experiences reflect the movement of thoughts in the mind of an author. Auster puts writing at the center of life and life at the center of writing. Confronted with the situation of "a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book" (NYT 169), Auster turns it into an extremely rich field for meditation, where deep intellectual, historical and personal topics are present and heard. Inside the room of the book, Auster dissects with skillful expertise the dilemmas of the writer, dilemmas that never go away. When Blue "asks how to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (NYT 169-170), the answer would simply be to leave that room and that book. However, this is not allowed to the writer-character.

The stones, the walls and the poetic art, juxtaposed in the poems of *Ground Work*, are now replaced, in the prose of *The Invention of Solitude*, by the room, the space of artistic creation, containing an entire universe, a miniature cosmogony, encompassing everything that is vast, distant, and unknown. As if the stones and the walls had built it so that the poetic art could generate the book there, always in solitude, since the room represents the very essence of solitude: “The world ends at that barricaded door. For the room is not a representation of solitude, it is the substance of solitude itself” (IS 143). And solitude is the substance of that book, including its title, its main character, and the biographical circumstances of its writing. But this solitude is an invention of the individual, not the product of a universal metaphysics, it is created through meditation, writing, and the construction of the room and of the book, transformed into a place for insatiable search. “A man sits alone in a room and writes. Whether the book speaks of loneliness or companionship, it is necessarily a product of solitude” (IS 136).

To Paul Auster, the term “solitude” is exceptionally complex and not just a synonym for physical isolation, charged with negative connotations²¹. “Solitude became a passageway into the self, an instrument of discovery” (NYT 277-278), as we read in *The Locked Room* apropos of the literary path of Fanshawe (so similar to that of Paul Auster that it even begins by a poetic *Ground Work*), in which the notion/state of solitude appears not just as the motor of the book but also as a demarcation of the artistic maturity of the protagonist. Solitude tolerates creation: the writer-character within the room, that emblematic figure to whom the room can become the experience of everything (or of nothing), believes in what Keats called “the truth of imagination”. All writing possesses elements of this solitude, but few American writers believed as much in the potential of that “truth” as Auster does. Auster sees solitude as a simple fact that is inherent to the human condition, that makes itself felt even in the middle of a crowd, derived from the certainty that true experiences come from within. Introspective contemplation provides more than self-knowledge: within himself, in

²¹ While the English word “loneliness” conveys a sense of abandonment (“I don’t want to be alone, I resent the burden of solitude, I want to be with others”), emphasizing emotion, feeling, the term “solitude” is semantically neutral. It is simply the description of a state: to be alone. Cf. (...) *l'absolu d'un Je suis qui veut s'affirmer sans les autres. C'est là ce qu'on appelle généralement solitude (au niveau du monde)*. (...) *Écrire, c'est se livrer à la fascination de l'absence de temps. Nous approchons sans doute ici de l'essence de la solitude. L'absence de temps n'est pas un mode purement négatif*. Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace Littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) pp. 342 e 22.

solitude, the writer-character discovers the whole world, in a writing that is at the same time solitary and solidary. *L'oeuvre est solitaire: cela ne signifie pas qu'elle reste incommunicable, que le lecteur lui manque. Mais qui la lit entre dans cette affirmation de la solitude de l'oeuvre, comme celui qui l'écrit appartient au risque de cette solitude*²². A book of universal scope, like *The Invention of Solitude*, is born of solitude, of meditation within the room: “(...) in the solitude of his room, the world has been rushing in on him at a dizzying speed, as if it were all suddenly converging in him and happening to him at once” (IS 162). In this way, a new meaning, already visible in the title, is conferred to the concept of solitude. Solitude can be seen as a space for creation, for cosmic and individual discoveries, for global knowledge, materializing as the omnipresent space of the room.

Edmond Jabès also situates the space of poetry within the room, which possesses a life of its own and which he tries to defend from outside incursions. In his investigation of the scene of writing, Auster takes Jabès's challenge very seriously, entering the room of the book and carefully listening to the whiteness and the silence of the room and of the page. *The Invention of Solitude* contains a text of Jabèsian inspiration, *The Book of Memory*, where Auster explores the space of writing (both book and room), creating a fiction of the book, in a process that the reader is allowed to witness. Blue's already mentioned question in *Ghosts* also animates *The Book of Memory*, which thematizes the room and the book in several ways: A. describes in obsessive detail the room where he lives and writes, besides several other important rooms from his past. He depicts memories in architectural terms, as rooms where contiguous impressions are stored. Auster invokes translation as an image of what occurs when someone enters the room of the book: “Every book is an image of solitude (...) A. sits down in his own room to translate another man's book, and it is as though he were entering that man's solitude and making it his own” (IS 136). The intruder invades the solitude of the space of writing, without ever knowing whether he will get out of that violated solitude with a sense of consolidation or feeling weakened. To Blue, that penetration in someone else's solitude resulted in a terrifying *mise en abyme*. The writer resembles a ghost inside the room that is the book, an image that is visible in *The Book of Memory*, which achieves a complete fusion

²² Blanchot, *L'Espace Littéraire*, p. 11.

between the life and the writings of A. The only way to get out of the room is, then, to write the book, to create a parallel universe of words, where the character-writer can move as he pleases, without actually leaving the space delimited by his mind, by the page, and by the walls, as in the infinite journeys within the *White Spaces*: “As he writes, he feels that he is moving inward (through himself) and at the same time moving outward (towards the world)” (IS 139).

But the solitude of those who voluntarily or involuntarily lock themselves in the room may in effect imply the impossibility of communicating with others. As in the case of the wall of isolation that the father of the author (the invisible man whose portrait gives the first part of the novel its title, having also inspired S.A. 1911-1979 in *Ground Work*) has created around himself, distancing him from others in all his human relations, and particularly in his relationship with his son. Through this book, Auster tries to also penetrate in that closed space of isolation, bringing to life, through writing, the man who had just died. Once again, Auster wants to resurrect the stone through the work of writing, or, at least, to avoid that it fades away, that it merges with the wall of death, accomplishing the life transfusion that had begun in his poetic works: “I thought: my father is gone. If I do not act quickly, his entire life will vanish along with him” (IS 6). Taken by surprise by the death of his father, and compelled by the need to write about him, Auster writes *Portrait of an Invisible Man*. This attempt by a son to save his father is reiteratively illustrated throughout the text through the fascination with the story of Pinocchio and Gepetto²³. A., as a writer-character, is trying to do the same for his father’s memory, since, due to his characteristic isolation, he could do nothing for him when he was alive. At the same time, he does everything he can to build the best possible relationship with his own son, from whom external reality is conspiring to separate him. “Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room. Breath and death” (IS 159-160): in this phonetic-semantic wordplay, the room is counterpoised to the tomb, as an attempt to postpone it, or even to annihilate it. The tomb is the end of the journey initiated in the maternal womb, but the room can become another generative womb, creator of perennial writings, in a new cycle of life

²³ “Sam Auster is the first missing person to appear in Paul Auster's writing, and he is certainly one of the most memorable of these disappeared ones”, writes Charles Baxter in his essay, significantly titled “The Bureau of Missing Persons: Notes on Paul Auster's Fiction”, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14:1 (Spring 1994), 40-43.

and death. The room of the book is the place where death can be transformed into life (that is the revelation of *White Spaces*), because the written universe is not governed by the chaotic and disintegrative principles of the outside world:

Like everyone else, he craves a meaning. Like everyone else, his life is so fragmented that each time he sees a connection between two fragments he is tempted to look for a meaning in that connection. The connection exists. But to give it a meaning, to look beyond the bare fact of its existence, would be to build an imaginary world inside the real world (IS 147).

Auster uses the room as a womb to give life to the book, since, even though the room can be a claustrophobic place to the body, it is infinitely fecund to the mind. A. sees an enormous potential in language, imagining it to be the core of being, the genetic material of the world (re)created between the four walls of the room, since language is, in a conception inspired by Heidegger, “o modo como nós existimos no mundo” (IS 161). The room of the book is an alchemical place where Auster hopes to transform death into words of life through the regeneration of the father by the son.

In *The Invention of Solitude*, we find the theme of isolation addressed from two perspectives. In *Portrait of an Invisible Man* we see the solitude of the father character in the third person, the oblivious solitude of someone who lives his monotonous day-to-day life alienated from others, not because of some sort of ideological option, but rather by an inborn feeling of indifference and neutrality: “Solitary. But not in the sense of being alone. (...) Solitary in the sense of retreat. In the sense of not having to see himself, or not having to see himself being seen by anyone else” (IS 16-17). Isolation is presented in objective terms, in the description of the very character, projecting itself also in the innumerable rooms of the disproportionately big house where the father lives alone, from his divorce until his death, only staying overnight in that succession of uninhabited locked rooms, in absolute neglect. The house had become a metaphor for the father’s life, the rigorously faithful representation of his inside world. Death is reflected in the progressive emptying of the rooms, which parallels the fading away of the father’s memory, which A. tries to oppose by writing. Since the father is the dominating character, the overwhelming space of that excessively vast house is the center of *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, while A., being the son and the dominated character, is limited to occupying exiguous and frequently miserable rooms, the central spaces in *The Book of Memory*.

The house is the reflection of the most significant events in the Auster family, and, after the family breaks apart, of the existential path of the father character. The question of sharing the house brings about the memory of the divorce of the Austers, and the divorce of A. himself is perceived in connection with the need to move to the room in Varick Street and with the visits to the house of his ex-wife and son. But this is a recurrent perspective not just in the writing of this particular work (by A.) but also in the writing of the work in general (by Auster). Time seems to stand still in his father's house, while he manically tries to make sure that nothing ever changes, even in the most minute details (like keeping the windows always closed), but that vain attempt is refuted by an obvious process of inexorable degradation. That is why A. is so taken by surprise by his father's death, repeating that he seemed to him to be invulnerable.

In *The Book of Memory*, the perspective is changed: Auster (A.) looks at his own relationship with his son in the first person, examining his existential path and the self-imposed isolation of the writer who is trying to find himself. Curiously, his son also feels the need to lock himself in a room in order “to think”. A. reinvents solitude through the recurring metaphor of Jonah's confinement in the belly of the whale, of Pinocchio and Gepetto trapped inside the shark, and through the obsession with the claustrophobically delimited space of the room. He meticulously describes the several and always exiguous rooms he inhabited during his troubled journey, or the way several creative artists approached that same theme. To Auster-son, solitude is conscious, rational, analyzed, even dissected in its implications. The room, as a space soaked in solitude within its four walls, is animated, populated by thoughts:

Each time he goes out, he takes his thoughts with him, and during his absence the room gradually empties of his efforts to inhabit it. When he returns, he has to begin the process all over again, and that takes work, real spiritual work (IS 77).

It is an interiorized space, of intellectual labor, and not, as it was for his father, a mere place for physical repose. In the small room at number 6 Varick Street, A. writes *The Book of Memory* (“Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits”. IS 88). Auster deciphers his memory, which inhabits the most interior and closed of spaces, the room of the mind. In the room, he writes the book of the memory that is stored in that same room, both of them filled with words and solitude: “This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull” (NYT

293), using the transcendental discovery of the narrator of *The Locked Room*²⁴. The revelations made possible by the solitude of that room give the writer-character the ability to understand everything at once, and, as soon as he starts to write about that very solitude, to be something more than simply himself:

If there is any reason for him to be in this room now, it is because there is something inside him hungering to see it all at once, to savor the chaos of it in all its raw and urgent simultaneity. (...) The pen will never be able to move fast enough to write down every word discovered in the space of memory (IS 139).

The most complete perception of the endless possibilities of a limited space is achieved in the description of the room of the eccentric composer S. at Place Pinel in Paris. There, S. lived as a castaway in the heart of town, dedicated to the composition of his *magnum opus*, a piece for three orchestras and four choirs that would take twelve days to perform. The generative space of the room is identified with the creative qualities of the composer's mind. Several are the comforting visits that A. pays to that room, as S. reminds him of the real father he never had. Years later, A. is afraid of returning to that place, as he fears that this second father may also have died and he has to empty another room in his memory. In this brief story of S.'s room are again contained the great themes of Paul Auster's work: the exploration of the scene of artistic creation, the father-son relationship, the fear of the emptiness of death, and the cosmogonic power, all inside a simple room:

(...) to feel the room expand, and to watch your mind explore the excessive, unfathomable reaches of that space. For there was an entire universe in that room, a miniature cosmology that contained all that is most vast, most distant, most unknowable. It was a shrine, hardly bigger than a body, in praise of all that exists beyond the body: the representation of one man's inner world (...) The room he lived in was a dream space, and its walls were like the skin of some second body around him (...) This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of the imagination (IS 89).

Going through rooms distant from his memory, Auster explores the solitude of several artists. He visits the room of Anne Frank, where her diary was written, and evokes Holderlin, at the end of his life, imprisoned by his own insanity in his room at the tower of Tübingen, built by the architect Zimmer (room). Auster directly identifies

²⁴ In *The Locked Room*, that same narrator finds, in the country house that Fanshawe had inhabited in times past, a short poem, coming from the past and written on the wall (cf. *Wall Writing*), after wandering lengthily through the several rooms. "On the second day, examining the rooms on the upper floor" (NYT 291), as if he was examining the rooms of memory, of the mind, of that house which also embodies a stage of Fanshawe's existence.

Anne Frank's room with the room of the book, where she discovered and wrote her identity, since every experience of solitude and self-discovery after the holocaust is inescapably haunted by the absolute isolation of Anne Frank. In her diary and in her room, the young writer tried to order the chaos of the world that surrounded her, so that she could physically and mentally survive. Auster, a Jewish writer, heir of an ontology that was molded by history in its solipsistic solitude, is also trying to reorder the chaotic post-holocaust and post-modern universe through writing, like the Jewish protagonist of the apocalyptic *In the Country of Last Things*. He then moves on to painting, to Vermeer's women, placidly solitary in their rooms, to the painting *The Bedroom* by Van Gogh, described in a letter from the painter to his brother. Auster compares that room to a prison, to a locked room ("The bed blocks one door, a chair blocks the other door, the shutters are closed: you can't get in, and once you are in, you can't get out". IS 143). In the same way, he recalls a visit to Emily Dickinson's room, at her house in Amherst, Massachusetts, where:

(...) the world was already there, in that room (...) Perhaps more than any other concrete place in American literature, it symbolizes a native tradition, epitomized by Emily, of an assiduous study of the inner life (IS 123).

The Invention of Solitude can be considered a celebration of the room and of the closed space, where the spirit projects itself within the walls, transforming it into a mental uterus, the site of a second birth. In this captivity, the subject (Auster, H"lderlin, Anne Frank, Collodi, Van Gogh, Vermeer, Dickinson) generates, firstly, himself. He passes from mere biological existence to spiritual life. His confinement transforms him into a voluntary pariah, a castaway in the middle of the city, hidden in a secret space of the urban habitat. The subject has to disappear so that he can live again; self-erasure can be redeeming, so Auster's protagonists go to the limits of starvation and physical deprivation. Self-destructive passion that comes close to total annihilation (very similar to the one analyzed by Auster in his essay on Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*) transforms the confinement in the room into a kind of secular, godless asceticism. The room is a prison that opens the gates of creative and spiritual freedom, the subject is a closed room that the writer-character has to explore in order to find a redeeming exit.

The voyage of the mind is an actual voyage, even if the writer-character never leaves the delimited space of the room, the scene of the real human drama, the place where

the subject simultaneously loses himself and finds himself again, where he is fragmented and reunited. The room frames the thoughts of A., like the page frames the writing that conveys those same thoughts. *The Invention of Solitude* ends with a scene of writing in the room, having only the blank sheet of paper, the pen, and the table as props. After the actor-creator travels his entire universe, walking between the table, the bed, and the chair, the words come up, in an autobiographical context very similar to that of *White Spaces*: solitude creates the magical words of the book, and writing reinvents solitude.



*The New York Trilogy*²⁵ appeared as a follow up to *The Invention of Solitude*, as we can read in Paul Auster's interview with Joseph Mallia: "I believe the world is filled with strange events. Reality is a great deal more mysterious than we ever give it credit for. In that sense, the Trilogy grows directly out of *The Invention of Solitude*" (AH 260). Auster frequently uses a conventional genre, like the police novel, to metaphysical and epistemological ends. He generally starts in the real, outside world (rough, concrete, dangerous), and slowly leads us to another place, an interior, dream-like *moon palace*. On the same occasion, Auster stated that *The New York Trilogy* focuses on the problem of identity, blurring the borders between madness and creativity and between reality and imagination. In *Ghosts*, according to the author, the spirit of Thoreau is prevalent, and the confinement within the walls of New York is very similar to the solitude of the forest in *Walden* (1854). In both cases, perfect isolation is achieved, out of which comes a transcendent capacity to observe and to reflect in the spaces delimited by walls or by the forest²⁶:

The idea of living a solitary life, of living with a kind of monastic intensity - and all the dangers that entails. Walden Pond in the heart of the city. In his American Notebook, Hawthorne wrote an extraordinary and luminous sentence about Thoreau that has never left me. "I think he means to live like an Indian among us." That sums up the project better than

²⁵ Originally published in the United States as *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room* (1986) by Sun & Moon Press, Los Angeles.

²⁶ Cf. Chapter 5 of *Walden, Solitude*: "I have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself (...) I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. (...) I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection (...) Why should I feel lonely? (...) What do we want most to dwell near to? (...) but to the perennial source of our life (...)". Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. Joseph Wood Krutch (New York: Bantam Books, 1962) pp. 200-8.

anything else I've read. The determination to reject everyday American life, to go against the grain, to discover a more solid foundation for oneself (AH 263).

The eventual fragmentation of the fictional universe created by the writer-character is counterbalanced by the framing on the page, through the writing that builds a legible cosmos out of the imaginary chaos. That framing also includes the search for an objective space where the individual can stop his own fragmentation. Nathaniel Hawthorne, a tutelary figure mentioned in *Ghosts* and clearly prominent in *The Locked Room*, locked himself for twelve years in a room so that he could begin his written work²⁷. Herman Melville, another of Auster's favorite authors, searched for his own identity in sea adventures. By transferring those adventures into writing, he secured his place in literature. It's the classic search for an identity and for a place in the world, only possible, in postmodernity, through protective, but also creative, seclusion within the room, amidst the city's wilderness²⁸. In *The New York Trilogy*, the external labyrinth is the city of New York itself, an iconic city for postmodernism, as it is where the question of the identity of the individual, which gets diluted in the crowd of the metropolis²⁹, is most acutely felt. New York has the utopian image of a space that is inexhaustible, that invites exploration, since there is a correspondence between the vastness of the natural space and the wild space of the forest of skyscrapers, like utopia and dystopia. In the essay *The Decisive Moment*, in *The Art of Hunger*, Auster analyzes the poetry of Charles Reznikoff, whom he classifies as "a poet of the eye (...) For it is he who must learn to speak from his eye and cure himself of seeing with his mouth" (AH 35). Like Auster's, Reznikoff's work is deeply rooted

²⁷ In fact, *The Locked Room* explicitly evokes Nathaniel Hawthorne's first novel, edited in 1828, and whose publication was interrupted in the following year. *Fanshawe*, as it is pertinently titled, far from being considered a masterpiece, contributes, however, to the study of the author's literary trajectory. Hawthorne would have paid one hundred dollars to editors Marsh & Capen from Boston for the anonymous publication of a thousand copies in October 1828. Cf. Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991).

²⁸ "In democratic countries', Tocqueville presciently noted, 'each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object, namely, himself.' (...) This near pathological individualism, romantic solipsism and debilitating concern with 'finding yourself' finds expression in the frantic search for instant salvation in a waste of novel therapies. (...) The interminable quest for the chimera of an inviolable identity follows inevitably from the belief that one can never be happy, authentic, genuine, sincere or 'free' until one has finally discovered, through the perilous voyage of self-exploration (an infinite regress to an ever-receding origin), that El Dorado of pure presence and unmediated plenitude of being: The Real Me". Currie, "The Eccentric Self", pp. 58-9.

²⁹ On the isolation and alienation of the individual locked in his room amidst the metropolis, see *Manhattan Transfer* (II. *Metropolis*) by John Dos Passos: "He walked home fast, ran up the stairs, and locked the room door behind him. The room was quiet and empty". John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925) p. 14.

in New York City, where the poet wanders about through writing³⁰. But Auster knows that the omniscient identification with the metropolis is born from invisible observation, from blending with the city's stones and walls:

If the poet's primary obligation is to see, there is a similar though less obvious injunction upon the poet - the duty of not being seen. The Reznikoff equation, which weds seeing to invisibility, cannot be made except by renunciation. In order to see, the poet must make himself invisible. He must disappear, efface himself in anonymity (AH 38).

If: "Lives make no sense, I argued" (NYT 250); "The point being that, in the end, each life is irreducible to anything other than itself. Which is as much as to say: lives make no sense" (NYT 253); "In the end, each life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose" (NYT 217), a possible solution is to get locked in a room and, within it, create a personal and imaginary meaning for everything, that is, to rewrite the universe. According to Paul Auster's own words: "stories are crucial. It's through stories that we struggle to make sense of the world. This is what keeps me going - the justification for spending my life locked up in a little room, putting words on paper"³¹. Auster's characters use very particular routine processes to structure existential chaos, and all of them have to do with writing

(like the detailed records, reports and catalogs of Stillman, Blue, Quinn, Jim Nashe, Maria Turner). As an alternative to the ineffectual system imposed by external reality, those characters-writers-recorders show an elitist and classical need for order, associated with an anarchistic impulse to destroy pre-existing systems, in a reactionary vision of ideal order. Language can rearrange the world because it is intimately connected with it ("The sign cannot be separated from the social situation without relinquishing its nature as sign. Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation"³²); the concept of a unified and closed text changes to that of a plural and open text, to use Roland Barthes's distinction³³. The urgency to methodically fill the room and the

³⁰ In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster transcribes a pertinent fragment of Reznikoff's poetry: "I like the sound of the street - / but I, apart and alone, / beside an open window / and behind a closed door. / I am alone - / and glad to be alone; / I do not like people who walk about / so late; who walk slowly after midnight / through the leaves fallen on the sidewalks. / I do not like / my own face / in the little mirrors of the slot-machines / before the closed stores" (AH 38-39).

³¹ Irwin, "Memory's Escape", p. 119.

³² M.M. Bakhtin (V.N. Voloshinov), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka e I.R. Titunik (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973) p. 95.

³³ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) p. 158.

blank page has to do with the great ghost of Auster, the fear of emptiness, symbolized by death. That's the reason for the open endings in his stories, as death remains a mystery without solution. The idea that "lives make no sense" explains the absence of a definite meaning to *The New York Trilogy*, and its inconclusive and frustrating endings. Due to that inability of attributing meaning to human existence, the endings of Paul Auster's narratives establish a compromise between individual and surrounding reality.

In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster travels by writing, presenting extreme situations, focusing on solitary characters without restraints and with a great need to communicate, beyond the physical barriers that are the walls of the rooms where they isolate themselves. The written journey is equivalent to a motion of the mind, and to walk becomes the factual representation of the cognitive process. In *White Spaces*, Auster conceptualizes movement not as a simple function of the body but rather as an extension of the mind. Inside a simple room, the writer-character can experience the infinite possibilities of a limited space, because words shape and expand both mental and material spaces. In Auster's fiction, the spaces of the city, of the mind of the author, and of textuality implode into a space of verbal representation, in an area that is clearly demarcated by physical and metaphysical walls. This "area" presents similarities with Brian McHale's theory that postmodern fiction builds spaces that allow for experimentation, opening new ontological existences in a territory situated between two worlds, the "zone"³⁴. This originates the need to create the written work in order to survive and to confer meaning to existence and to the world, as things only exist as long as we see them and (de)scribe them. From this perspective, the empirical subject, with his series of subjective states, makes up the whole of reality, and other subjects, which supposedly exist, do not have an independent existence any more than a character in a dream does. This is simply a picture of the process of written cosmogenesis, whose entities, being apparently real, are nothing but mere products of the writer-character's imagination, without which that universe would never have existed. But the solipsism of the writer-character presupposes total isolation, as he has created a world of words that cannot exist independently from his thoughts. The room symbolizes that world, made by writing and for writing.

³⁴ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 43-58.

Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there.
Another ghost.
Exactly (NYT 175).

In *Ghosts*, appropriately called the *Inward Gaze of a Private Eye* by Stephen Schiff³⁵, Blue and Black are face to face in their rooms, space for reflection, solitude, and knowledge. Blue is confined, as is Quinn, and he too observes another while, in reality, he is observing himself, in a mediated process of self-discovery. Initially, Blue sees his solitude with some optimism, as it has allowed him to become his own master, like Quinn and Marco Fogg when they set themselves free of everything in the middle of the city. But Blue ignores that he is also falling into a dark cave (room), where his identity will be questioned, transformed, and, ultimately, in risk of disappearing. "All of a sudden, his calm turns to anguish, and he feels as though he is falling into some dark, cave-like place, with no hope of finding a way out" (NYT 145). By observing Black (darkness, absence of color and light), he also enters the dark cave that is the unknown that is inside every human being and himself.

In his first incursion to the interior of Black's room, Blue realizes he is entering something more than a simple and trivial accommodation. When he goes inside, "the door will open, and after that Black will be inside of him forever" (NYT 183). To enter Black's room will be like entering the mystery, and to explore it will be like entering the mind of Black himself, the last place to explore, in this endless exchange of glances. "The door opens, and suddenly there is no more distance, the thing and the thought of the thing are one and the same" (NYT 184). Blue enters the room of Black, who seems to await him, and steals his writings, which are but the useless reports of Blue himself. "To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it" (NYT 190). As in *City of Glass*, the police novel converts into a narrative of self-discovery. Blue has entered the space of the room and of the mind that that room gives a material form to, he is inside the sacred space of the man he has been observing for more than a year, and, because of that, there is a certain feeling of disappointment with the mute austerity of the room.

³⁵ Stephen Schiff, "Inward Gaze of a Private Eye" in *The New York Times Book Review* 92 (January 4, 1987), 14.

There are no images that evoke Black's affections, since there are no connections with the outside world. "It's no man's land, the place you come to at the end of the world" (NYT 185): here, only the characters move about, in an empty no man's land, between fantasy and reality, as a page that is still in blank. At the end of the world, everything is put into question and everything will have to be rebuilt, in a new cosmogony by the hand of the writer. This is a *White Space*, antithetically inhabited by Black, where perfect order and the endless book reign supreme. The room is just the space of writing, it exists so that the book can be created or infinitely reread within it:

It looks like a big book, Blue continues.

Yes, says Black. I've been working on it for many years.

Are you almost finished ?

I'm getting there, Black says thoughtfully. But sometimes it's hard to know where you are. I think I'm almost done, and then I realize I've left out something important, and so I have to go back to the beginning again. But yes, I do dream of finishing it one day. One day soon, perhaps.

I hope I get a chance to read it, says Blue.

Anything is possible, says Black. But first of all, I've got to finish it. There are days when I don't even know if I'll live that long (NYT 185).

The void witnessed on this first visit only adds to the mystery and to the recently discovered torment of Blue's self-questioning. The room is just the scene of the drama, not an explanation of its protagonists. To enter or to leave it is like entering or leaving the story that took over the lives of Blue and Black. "What if he stood up, went out the door, and walked away from the whole business?" (NYT 186), ponders Blue in what can be understood as curious metafictional allusion by the character. Impossible, because to leave the room, to get away from the story, is the same as leaving the life that is conferred by the book to fictional instances. Fate must be fulfilled: Blue will only leave the room in the last lines of the story, after he kills Black and deciphers the mystery of the book, written and lived by both of them.

But the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment, and that will not come until Blue leaves the room. Such is the way of the world: not one moment more, not one moment less. When Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door, that will be the end of it (NYT 195).

"The end of it"... of Blue, of Black, of the mystery, and of *Ghosts*. On the other hand, to enter Black's room alone, without using a disguise and with direct access to the written work, is a way to acquire the key to the enigma that became the center of the lives of both of them. However, the key reveals itself even more enigmatic than the mystery, because chance ("the light falls by chance on a pile of papers stacked neatly

at the edge of Black's desk", NYT 188) determined that Blue should pick up the pile of papers that contains his own reports. Chance and text are interlinked in the best postmodern fashion, bringing to mind the origin of the text of *City of Glass*, which, according to Paul Auster, was caused by chance, by a mistaken phone call. A mysterious interlocutor also takes Quinn for a certain Paul Auster, the owner of a detective agency. In reality, the novelist Paul Auster is the "agency" where all the complex characters in *The New York Trilogy* derive from. In the same way *The Red Notebook* is a written record of chance happenings that took place in the author's life, Blue's reports were a written record of all the (chance) occurrences in Black's life. Not being an intellectual, and even less a reader, Blue metamorphosed into a writer, that is, into someone who lives inside a book³⁶. He becomes a virtual prisoner in his own room and he understands the writer's terror:

(...) seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. (...) There is no story, no plot, no action - nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room? (NYT 169-170)

It is the primal condition of the imprisoned writer, looking at the blank page without the structures of the story, of the plot, or of the action to support him. Blue is lost in the book and in the room. Blue's suspicions that his life had been captured in a book are confirmed during his two visits to Black's room. But it was he himself who created the room that imprisoned him, since Blue and Black were writing the same work. When Blue understands that Black is his double, he also realizes that Black's room is another scenery of writing. By being confronted with Black's writing, Blue recovers his own writing and understands what he has become. Because to enter the room is the same as to enter the soul of the person who inhabits it or who writes in it. Once again, "to enter Black (...) was the equivalent of entering himself". Through writing, Blue confers meaning to Black's existence, in his total isolation, structuring it and avoiding its fragmentation. And he similarly structures his own existence, since, in this mirror-like universe of doubles, we can't know for sure who is the satellite of

³⁶ Cf. the words of Paul Auster himself in "Why Write?", an essay in the homonymous *Why Write?*: "If nothing else, the years have taught me this: if there's a pencil in your pocket, there's a good chance that one day you'll feel tempted to start using it. As I like to tell my children, that's how I became a writer" (p. 25). Or, according to Maurice Blanchot: *Écrire, c'est entrer dans l'affirmation de la solitude où menace la fascination. C'est se livrer au risque de l'absence de temps, où règne le recommencement éternel*. Blanchot, *L'Éspace Littéraire*, p. 27.

whom. In a wider context, some cultures and civilizations, with their respective universes, also find the basis for their cosmognosis in writings, through books such as the Bible, the Koran or the Talmud. As an author of ordering, cosmogonic writing, Blue acquires power over Black and over his own destiny. In fact, Blue physically dominates Black, puts a more than probable violent end to his existence, and decides the end of the story by leaving the room of the book for good. Through the character, Auster paints the portrait of a kind of writer about which Blue knows nothing about: the postmodern writer³⁷. “There is no story, no plot, no action - nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book” (NYT 169); here is the solipsistic solitude of the writer, in a society that is fragmented in isolated individuals. By leaving the room, Blue also leaves the book and all the cosmogonic power that the work of writing had conferred him.

Ghosts had its origin in *Black-Outs*, an almost completely unknown unpublished play in one act from 1976³⁸. In this play, the scenery is similarly closed and limited to an out-of-use office, filled with papers and archives, with a single glass panel door and two windows, bringing to mind Beckett’s dramaturgy. There inhabit characters almost homonymous to those of *Ghosts*, in a very similar context: Green is a submissive and silent writer of words dictated by Black, who defines himself as being merely “a mão que escreve as palavras”, just ears, no mouth, evoking Bartleby. The character of Blue, long awaited, finally enters the scene, penetrating the closed (and black) space of Black by the door, after having seen Green through the window. These are the only ways of communication with the exterior, as no one gets out of this room, in a complete self-imposed solitude. Blue too had, in the past, obsessively observed a man who, like him, lived in complete solitude. At the window, he observed his object and wrote about it, in what turned out to be a subtle way of annihilating it. In fact, by transforming the subject into words, Blue took away his ability to exist independently from those words and from the writing controlled by him. He transformed him into a

³⁷ “There is perhaps a further homologous correspondence between the problem of personal identity (character, the subject) within the postmodern text and critical uncertainty as to the generic identity or status of the postmodern text itself: the rejection of a single, consistent style or genre related to the liquidation of illusory self-identity”. Currie, “The Eccentric Self”, p. 66.

³⁸ Published for the first time by Gérard de Cortanze in the dossier dedicated to Paul Auster, in *Magazine Littéraire* 338 (December 1995), 50-8. The quotes used here are translations from the French version of *Magazine Littéraire*. *Blackouts* is mentioned in *The Locked Room* as being the title of one of Fanshawe’s successful works.

character dependent upon an author, in the same way Blue himself depends on Auster in the context of *Black-Outs*. Blue exerted the author's maximum authority, transformed into a despotic solipsist: "Não. Tudo desapareceu. Nós fizemo-lo em palavras, é tudo". That is the plot of *Black-Outs*: Blue relates how he recorded in writing everything the "homem observado" did, and Green records in writing everything Blue says.

As in *Ghosts*, Blue describes the room of the "homem observado" in terms of complete austerity and isolation from the exterior, focused solely on the writing of the work to which, according to him, he dedicated his whole life. Inside the room, there is only the work of writing, in a metaphor for the writer and his mind, where the words and the book dominate everything. This endless and circular story, with an opening ending consisting of a dialogue that restarts, is closed in a room, with characters that never leave, nor contact the exterior. They will forever remain trapped in there, as the story as no end and always concludes with the preparation for a new and endless dialogue, as if they were walking in circles within the room, in an infinite and impossible to fill *White Space*. The rectangular space of the room (scenery) squares within itself the infinite circle of the story³⁹.

In similar fashion, the closed and well delimited space of *The Brooklyn Cigar Company* in *Smoke and Blue in the Face* is the central stage for both stories, in the written version as in the cinematographic version. The characters are introduced as they enter this stage, an interior space decorated and characterized with extreme care, as highlighted by Paul Auster and Wayne Wang. In *Smoke*, Paul Benjamin's apartment, the exiguous center of a life of work and solitude, is completely austere, devoted exclusively to writing, and indicates a mere survival at a personal level. If Benjamin's biography brings to mind that of Quinn in *City of Glass* (writer going through a crisis, dead family), his room also evokes those of Quinn, Blue, A., Samuel Farr, Marco Fogg, Ben Sachs's cell, Jim Nashe's trailer. And, once more, *Bartleby's*

³⁹ Cf. (...) que l'oeuvre soit infinie (...) l'artiste, n'étant pas capable d'y mettre fin, est cependant capable d'en faire le lieu fermé d'un travail sans fin dont l'inachèvement développe la maîtrise de l'esprit, exprime cette maîtrise, l'exprime en la développant sous forme de pouvoir. (...) L'infini de l'oeuvre, dans une telle vue, n'est que l'infini de l'esprit. (...) L'oeuvre est le cercle pur où, tandis qu'il l'écrit, l'auteur s'expose dangereusement à la pression qui exige qu'il écrive, mais aussi s'en protège. De là - pour une part du moins - la joie prodigieuse, immense, qui est celle d'une délivrance, comme le dit Goethe, d'un tête-à-tête avec la toute-puissance solitaire de la fascination, en face de laquelle on est demeuré debout, sans la trahir et sans la fuir, mais sans renoncer non plus à sa propre maîtrise. Blanchot, *L'Espace Littéraire*, pp. 10 e 53.

office and room, with its window facing a brick wall, the small niche to sleep, and the tiny kitchen: “The workroom is a bare and simple place. Desk, chair, and a small wooden bookcase with manuscripts and papers shoved onto its shelves. The window faces a brick wall” (S 28). Everywhere, vestiges of an extreme solitude and exclusive dedication to writing. That solitude is broken when Paul Benjamin lets in that closed space of isolation another character, Rashid, who reawakens him to life⁴⁰.

The magic of the interior space reappears in *Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story*, a peculiar Christmas story inserted in *Smoke* and published for the first time in the Christmas of 1990 in *The New York Times*. The central scenery is the interior of an old black lady’s apartment in Boerum Hill’s chaotic projects, a place that’s uninviting but which has a dose of Christmas magic capable of awakening a sense of human solidarity apparently missing in New York City, so often another *Country of Last Things*. That Christmas magic is broken when Auggie leaves the small apartment, closing the door on the story and losing track of the old lady forever.

The Locked Room, third narrative of the trilogy, offers us a deceptively childish parallel of the room, solitary closed space of meditation with universal reach, represented by the box where Fanshawe used to close himself when he was a child, so as to exert what the narrator saw as a magical power: “It was his secret place, he told me, and when he sat inside and closed it up around him, he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good” (NYT 220). This definition of the magic box would be entirely adequate to characterize the sublime confinement within the room that is the book, and almost transcribes the ideas in evidence in *White Spaces*: “I walk within these four walls, and for as long as I am here I can go anywhere I like. (...) I feel myself on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth. These are moments of great happiness for me” (GW 85).

Fanshawe achieves unique thoughts and abilities in the most secluded and secret spaces, which, in reality, are located within his mind, which fills them, attributing to them a cosmogonic meaning (“This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull”. NYT 293). That space of impenetrable secrets is a kind of “room of one’s

⁴⁰ With *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*, Paul Auster had the opportunity to leave the room, and yet to continue writing: “It was a great experience, it got me out of my room”. Kenneth Chanko, “Smoke Gets in Their Eyes” in *Entertainment Weekly* 281/282 (June 30/July 7, 1995), 14-15.

own”, to adapt Virginia Woolf’s expression. In the interior room, the process of literary creation, which is even more interior, as it is a psychological process, takes place. However, the ultimate truth is beyond the narrator’s reach, and, because of that, it is also unattainable to the reader. While Fanshawe never invites his friend inside the box, Aesop shares with Walt his imaginary world of words, disclosing horizons which will, much later, allow Walt to write the story of his life. It seems to be easier to share the words that are already written than the magical space of creation, exclusive property of the artist writer. We never have access to the content of Fanshawe’s travels and meditations within the box, or to the content of the book where for six months he annotated the motivations that led him to cloistering himself. That red notebook is given to the narrator, immediately read, forgotten, and destroyed, without offering any teachings or disclosures, in the last instants of *The Locked Room*. In fact, even though Fanshawe refuses to leave the closed room, he leaves his red notebook, which he affirms will clarify his plans, to the narrator. Declaring he has ingested poison, he does not fear any intervention from the outside world anymore. However, there is nothing revealing in the content of the book that would extend its referential field to the two preceding stories in Auster’s trilogy. As the narrator acknowledges, the book remains one last monument to Fanshawe’s unintelligibility: “Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible” (NYT 314). Hesitating at each step, at every word he encounters, the narrator destroys the book, page by page, as he reads it, and reaches the end of *The Locked Room* at the same time as the reader and with an identical degree of knowledge.

That is also the case with Fanshawe’s posthumous best-sellers, *Neverland*, *Miracles*, and *Blackouts*, edited by the narrator but whose content we ignore, just as we ignore the content of Ben Sachs’s *Leviathan* in the homonymous *Leviathan*, or of Samuel Farr’s infinite book in *In the Country of Last Things*, works of supposedly universal and transcendental scope, true revelations, in the sacred sense of the term. We also do not know the context of the book where Quinn annotates his last thoughts of super-human scope, or of the work to which Black devoted his entire life. Even the poetic persona of *White Spaces* is just “on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth”, which will remain undiscovered, or which, at least, he does share with the

reader. Because the imaginary universe can be ordered by the writer-character, but not explained in its essential mysteries, those of creation and death:

(...) Nothing interested me so much as what was happening to Fanshawe inside the box, and I would spend those minutes desperately trying to imagine the adventures he was having. But I never learned what they were, since it was also against the rules for Fanshawe to talk about them after he climbed out.

Something similar was happening now in that open grave in the snow. Fanshawe was alone down there, thinking his thoughts, living through those moments by himself, and though I was present, the event was sealed off from me, as though I was not really there at all (NYT 220-221).

These are works which describe universes untouched by the conditions of narratability, trapped by an inenarrable closure. Auster uses the mystery novel to explore linguistic and philosophical absences, deliberately avoiding solutions, since he understands that, as an author-detective, he cannot find the single clue, the simple answer. He writes a novel about higher metaphysical quests. These references are meta-textual commentaries on an unknown original text, and they point to the world-creating and world-destroying power of language ("American postmodernism may be seen to endorse a rhetorical view of life which begins with the primacy of language"⁴¹) and to the relationship between fictional being and illusorily real being. A cycle of fictional creation, destruction, and recreation is evident in the cosmogonic process of the writer of fiction, underlining his freedom to project a world ("Shall I project a world?", cries Pynchon's hero in *The Crying of Lot 49*⁴²). In this process, we get a glimpse of some of the characteristics of the ontological structure of fictional works and of their worlds that postmodernism displays. The postmodernist simultaneously confirms and subverts the power of literary representation, since it is necessary to recognize the existence of a system in order to then reject and deconstruct it. Like Auster does with Northern-American literary tradition (from names like Melville and Hawthorne to the tradition of the dark mystery novel *à la* Philip Marlowe), which he needs as the entity underlying its own parody⁴³. The postmodern equivocality emerges

⁴¹ Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 64.

⁴² Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Bantan Books, 1966) pp. 59 e 63.

⁴³ An emblematic example of this subversion is the moment when the narrator of *The Locked Room* "baptizes" the girl in the Parisian bar as Fayaway, and himself as Herman Melville, evoking the author of *Moby-Dick*, a book that Sophie had given him.

in Auster in his anti-mystery and anti-epistemological novel, leading him again to the ontological categories of writing⁴⁴.

The reference to the red notebook of *The Locked Room*, successor of the red notebook of *City of Glass*, immediately evokes the homonymous work from 1993, *The Red Notebook: True Stories, Prefaces and Interviews*⁴⁵. In his second true story, Auster describes a one year period he spent in south France, in 1973, staying at an isolated country house, a place favorable to the work of a young writer. Solitude always appears linked to the work of writing, and the house in stone, a closed space delimited by thick walls, works as the motor of the story. In that old labyrinthine space, the character has a troubled existence (in itself a labyrinth), calling to mind the house of A.'s father in *The Invention of Solitude*, or the house-school of the childhood of Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*, a character chosen by Quinn as a literary pseudonym.

On the one hand, the place was beautiful: a large, eighteenth-century stone house bordered by vineyards on one side and a national forest on the other. The nearest village was two kilometers away (...) It was an ideal spot for two young writers to spend a year, and L. and I both worked hard there, accomplishing more in that house than either one of us would have thought possible.

On the other hand, we lived on the brink of permanent catastrophe... (RN 4).

As in *William Wilson*, the mansion, despite being a labyrinth, is a source of pleasure to him: "But the house! - how quaint an old building was this! - to me how veritably a palace of enchantment"⁴⁶. The interior space, filled by specular multiplication of the rooms, is inhabited by shadows and by the ghost of the other, of the double. Once again, the question of identity is inseparable from the importance of the space. Poe's mansion is a physical labyrinth with an interior counterpart at a mental level, which provides the story's tragic density, helped by its claustrophobic aspect, with its

⁴⁴ The fragmentation of the equivocal postmodern identity applies not only to the problematic of the subject but also to that of the literary genre itself: "The plausible coherence, pre-existent unity and propriety of the firm and fixed identity has also been called into question. (...) a recognition of subjectivity as the trace of plural and intersecting discourses, of non-unified, contradictory ideologies". Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 64.

⁴⁵ See *Le Cahier Rouge* by Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), French writer and politician of Swiss origin, and one of the creators of liberal ideology. *Le Cahier Rouge* is about the wanderings and experiences of his adventurous youth, through the cities of Europe, discovering the world, gambling, and women. Focalized on a narrator-self, it transcribes personal experiences, enriched and objectified through reflection. The manifest conflict between self and society is already the promise of an unstable future for the author. In its homonymous work, Auster also mentions his own bumpy passage through Europe, during a period of drift in his youth, and reflects on several important episodes of his existence. Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

⁴⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe: Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews*, edited with an introduction by David Galloway (London: Penguin Books, 1968) p. 161.

specular multiplication of the character, paralleling the mansion's rooms. It should be highlighted that, during a part of his stay in France, Fanshawe had inhabited a particularly solid and isolated building (in a fictional transposition of the autobiographical episode in *The Red Notebook*), but one which allowed him a unique work of observation, reflection, and writing, in a clear image of the subject himself (the self as a house), unwaveringly isolated from everybody else. The closed room where the narrator finally finds Fanshawe also has a physical situation (in Boston. See AH 276) and an intellectual situation (the mind of the narrator, where Fanshawe had always been) at the same time. The room is at the same time actual space and space made of thought and for thought⁴⁷.

Even though dominated by the inhibiting ghost of Fanshawe, the narrator, being himself a writer (in a secondary role, evidently), is also aware of the cosmogonic power of writing and of imagination. However, since he is a character in self-fragmentation, that awareness only appears as a recollection from a distant past, or in moments of hallucination. Evoking the time when he was a census worker in Harlem, the narrator recalls the difficulties he faced to open doors, to get people to reveal their domestic interiors. He then became an inventor of infinite identities, locked in the solitude of his room, taking great pleasure out of that, and even a certain sense of social duty, in one of Auster's very rare references to external social and political context. The narrator elaborated a written cosmogony within the room: "It gave me pleasure to pluck names out of thin air, to invent lives that had never existed, that never would exist" (NYT 250), this is the work of writing, of the novelist. But this cosmogony, that the narrator assumes to be imaginary, penetrates the "reality" of the story imagined by Paul Auster (who had already been a character in *City of Glass*, although the author asserts he's not an autobiographical subject), in a *myse en abyme* about the work and the creative power of writing. Auster justifies that infiltration on

⁴⁷ On the other hand, the room which Poe describes in his essay "The Philosophy of Furniture" can be considered the "anti-room" of Auster and his characters, as though in a postmodern deconstruction of the American canon pioneered by Poe. "A mild, or what artists term a cool light, with its consequent warm shadows, will do wonders for even an ill-furnished apartment. (...) Even now, there is present to our mind's eye a small and not ostentatious chamber with whose decorations no fault can be found". *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Stuart and Susan Levine (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976) pp. 14-18. The Apollonian sobriety of the room of Poe, who seems to have inaugurated the literary motif of the closed room in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), does not reach the austerity of Auster's room. Poe seems to describe his own room as a space of superior refinement, while Auster's is instead a space of superior writing and meditation.

the machine of the book, in *City of Glass*, as a desire to climb over the walls that isolate fiction from reality. Later, in the period of delirious decadence in Paris, the narrator characterizes himself as a sublime alchemist who can change the world at will, just because he had attributed an imaginary identity to a stranger: “I was the sublime alchemist who could change the world at will. This man was Fanshawe because I said he was Fanshawe, and that was all there was to it. Nothing could stop me anymore” (NYT 296). Nonetheless, this new image of the divine power of the writer ends violently for the “sublime creator”, with a good dose of irony.

The closed rooms where Fanshawe locks himself in (both in his mind and in external reality) possess points of observation of the surrounding universe, without which the reflection and written production would be merely abstract. The narrator mentions that Fanshawe’s capacity for observation has reached impressive levels of clarity and aptitude, being capable of seeing and writing almost simultaneously: “By now, Fanshawe’s eye has become incredibly sharp, and one senses a new availability of words inside him, as though the distance between seeing and writing had been narrowed, the two acts now almost identical, part of a single, unbroken gesture” (NYT 277). As we mentioned before, the eyes convey images to the mind (in *Moon Palace* we read: “‘Dammit, boy,’ he would say, ‘use the eyes in your head!...’” MP 120) in the same way that windows carry images to the inhabitant of the room, with a consequent work of writing. The book is written within the room of the mind, and the windows that are eyes and words are interposed between the room and the world. As we read in *Ghosts*, relating to Blue and his reports: “Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world” (NYT 146). Here we find, in a metaphor, the relation between sign and referent, between word and world, being the latter filtrated by the mind of the writer and by words, that is, denaturalized, as in Plato’s *Cratylus*⁴⁸. The power of literary representation reflects the cosmogonic power of the writer, who, in postmodernism, simultaneously writes and subverts narrative conventions, abolishing preexisting and independent meta-narratives, as Jean-François Lyotard asserts⁴⁹, challenging the realist notion of representation that

⁴⁸ To Cratylus’s assertion that language corresponds to the deep meaning of things, Socrates objects that words express the image, and not the reality of the world.

⁴⁹ Lyotard, *A Condição Pós-Moderna*.

presumes the transparency of the medium, and thus generating an alternative written universe.



Leviathan (1992) works almost as a rewriting of *The Locked Room* in its revisitation of, among others, the theme of solitude, the exploration of closed spaces and their recurrent symbology, and, in particular, in the eternal self-reflexive analysis of the scene of writing. Here, we find a marked metafictional awareness *ab initio* in the long contextualization that the narrator, Peter Aaron (P.A. / Paul Auster), gives us about the circumstances of the compulsive writing of that urgent narrative. When Aaron reads the news that an unidentified man exploded in a road in North Wisconsin, in an allegory of the fragmentation of the postmodern subject, he immediately knows it is Benjamin Sachs, his best friend and a promising novelist. From that moment on, Aaron takes on the task of solving the mystery surrounding Sachs's life and death, starting a journey that is at the same time one of self-discovery.

The house in Vermont where Peter Aaron writes the story of *Leviathan* has solitude as its main appeal. The room in the small, deteriorated annex is the ideal place to write for the ascetic writer, calling to mind *The Invention of Solitude*, favored by both Sachs and Peter, his double. That room is dominated by written and spoken words which get trapped between its walls, floating in the air or captured in writing:

It's as if his words were still hanging in the air around me (...) nothing that he said should escape this room. (...) Until the moment comes for me to show what I've written here, I can comfort myself with the thought that I won't be breaking my word (L 9).

The writing and the room are always linked together. Some of the dialogues and encounters crucial to the development of the action also take place there: the first and last scenes of the book (two interviews with FBI agents, between which Peter relates the entire story) happen at the house in Vermont, and address not only the mystery of Sachs but also the mystery of writing, in which agent Harris takes a keen interest. In the last moments of the novel, Peter takes Harris to the studio where he will set free the words of the story that was narrated and written in that place.

Symptomatically, Sachs's first book was written in the solitude of a prison cell, a peculiar "locked room":

The book itself doesn't mean much, But I suppose I'm still attached to the place where it was born.'

'And what place was that?'

'Prison. I started writing the book in prison.'

'You mean an actual prison? With locked cells and bars? (L 19-20).

The prison cell, like a monastic cell, is a prefiguration of the writer's isolation and asceticism at its most extreme, solitary as a monk in his mission of awakening others to reality through writing. The displacement of the protagonist from the center to the margins of society seems inherent to that mission. Emerson's epigraph "Every actual State is corrupt" should be kept in mind during the reading of *Leviathan*. There are no quotes taken from Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* in Auster's homonymous novel. However, the conflict between individual interests and the common good frames the actions of the characters. For Hobbes, it is the selfish needs that govern human behavior, and not common goals. Sachs was imprisoned (condemned to institutional and punitive isolation) for refusing to participate in the moral corruption of that same society, symbolized by the Vietnam War. But from isolation imposed by oneself or by others, the written work is born, as the power of the mind is unbreakable⁵⁰. A., Quinn, Blue, Black, Sam, Rushdie, and writers in general, in the way Auster sees them in *The Red Notebook*, also write in isolation, separated from the outside world by physical or metaphysical walls. When devoted to the written cosmogony, solitude offers incomparable freedom, allowing the subject to fill the empty space with entities from his imagination: "You'd be surprised how much freedom that gives you" (L 21). Aaron, the eternal double of Sachs, also finds in the autobiographical recurrence of the minuscule apartment on Varick Street his austere cell where the work of writing is the only activity possible. This new space will be equally filled by meditation and words, as in the episode of A. and S. in *The Invention of Solitude*:

It was basic, nonsense survival, but the truth is that I was happy in that room. As Sachs put it the first time he came to visit me, it was a sanctuary of inwardness, a room in which the only possible activity was thought. (...) But I started working on my novel again in that room, and little by little my luck changed (L 56-57).

⁵⁰ Cf. the poem of Richard Lovelace written in *London Gatehouse Prison*, in 1640: "Stone walls doe not a prison make, / Nor Iron bars a Cage; / Mindes innocent and quiet take / That for an Hermitage; / If I have freedom in my Love, / And in my soule am free; / Angels alone that sore above, / Injoy such Liberty".

The biography and characterization of the several characters of *Leviathan* are illustrated through the description of the spaces they inhabit. Rooms, houses, places where life and artistic creation occur, and their respective changes in the stories of Peter and Delia Aaron, Ben and Fanny Sachs, Maria Turner and Lillian Stern, are given great importance, forming a veritable biography in space. On the other hand, the characters's existential crises are always associated with a change in living place. As had already happened in *The Invention of Solitude* with A. (Peter Aaron/Paul Auster/A.), the troubled move of Aaron and Delia to the decrepit country house in Dutchess County illustrates well their economical and personal vicissitudes, with a marriage in its terminal stage. When Delia and David move to an apartment in Cobble Hill, in Brooklyn, there is an immediate rapprochement between father and son and an unsuccessful attempt of reconciliation of the couple. The apartment in Carroll Gardens, successor to the one on Varick Street, allows Peter to enjoy more time in the company of his son. Similarly, in *The Locked Room*, the progress of the emotional and economic success of the couple formed by Sophie and the narrator is reflected by the communion of interior spaces and by the successive moves from apartment to apartment. The later deterioration of that relationship finds its echo in the hotel rooms and brothel rooms that the solitary narrator frequents in Paris. The first characterization of the eccentric Maria Turner includes a reference to her attic studio on Duane Street. Ben and Fanny Sachs's happiness is reflected by the power of attraction of the house in Brooklyn. Peter's brief stays in the peace of this domestic interior accentuate, in a very negative way, the family war (described through the use of war vocabulary and metaphors) that awaits him outside, at his own house. The contrast between the interior comfort, within walls, and the discomfort of the outside world is equally visible in *City of Glass*, in the visit to the Austers's house, and in *The Country of Last Things*, in the room of Anna and Sam in the library, or Boris Stepanovitch's small apartment. When Ben Sachs is transformed into Phantom of Liberty, his ceaseless and solitary pilgrimage through America is reflected by the whirlwind of successive hotel rooms and rented apartments, refuges, though not homes, where he patiently prepares his work of liberation, to which we will sacrifice his life.

The interior space, the room, the house, are the space of confidentiality. It is there Peter writes the confession that gives substance to *Leviathan*. That is how the book starts and also how it ends, by passing the secret to Harris. The secretive last revelations of Ben to Maria concerning the identity and fate of the Phantom of Liberty occur in interior spaces. After staying with Maria Turner, Sachs moves to Lillian Stern's house, with its closed and enigmatic space, and both cases result in more or less required or consummated romantic relationships. After the incident of the fall, during the celebrations of the Statue of Liberty, Sachs only tells Aaron his version of the events in the privacy of his house. This becomes even more significant if we recall that the main consequence of that fall was Sachs's total and inexplicable silence for several days. The fall illustrates well the abrupt transition from a comfortable interior, in the seductive company of Maria, to the hostile exterior, a sea of darkness and death ("...and an instant later he was falling head-first into the night". L 111). The interior space is represented as a sanctuary, evoking the maternal womb, not only in its capacity to generate writing, but also in the affectionate protection it provides. Similarly, in *The Music of Chance*, Jim Nashe's car is a sanctuary, a refuge for wandering thoughts, like a room in motion: "The car became a sanctum of invulnerability, a refuge in which nothing could hurt him anymore" (MC 12). In a similar drift to that of the Phantom of Liberty, during his wandering about America, Nashe stays in innumerable hotel rooms and eventually spends some time with Fiona Wells. But these are ephemeral situations, devoid of meaning, and which do nothing but accentuate his solitude. On the other hand, the proof of confidence in Pozzi and in his poker happens in the room Nashe shares with him at the Plaza Hotel, where he decides his fate by planning to go with him. That is also where he acquires a fatherly affection for Pozzi, when he tells him his story of abandonment. In *Mr. Vertigo*, it is in the successive hotel rooms shared by Walt and Master Yehudi, during their troubled tour across America, that they cement their partnership. These rooms also illustrate, by their increasing quality, *Walt the Wonder Boy's* ascension to fame. Much later, Walt will also share a room with Mrs. Witherspoon, occupying the place that was once Master Yehudi's and paying off an old debt of gratitude and friendship. The enigmatic Mother Sue is described by Walt as being "a wall", with connotations of silence and mystery, like a wall of death, of the unknown. Mother Sue is a depository

of an ancient wisdom that Walt, a spokesperson for American common sense, cannot understand. But it will be during his illness, in the room, that Walt will observe the maternal love of the old Native-American and the power of her peculiar chants and prayers to the Great Spirit of the Oglala.

Time flows in the room, where the space and the time of literary creation are located. Sachs recovers the power of writing by moving, like a hermit, to the house in Vermont:

...it was a bit like being in prison again. There weren't any extraneous preoccupations to bog him down. Life had been reduced to its bare-bones essentials, and he no longer had to question how he spent his time. Every day was more or less a repetition of the day before. Today resembled yesterday, tomorrow would resemble today, and what happened next week would blur into what had happened this week. There was comfort for him in that (L 140).

Writing is born of solitude, by populating it with imaginary characters and worlds. That creative solitude may be found in the cell of a prison or in the life of a hermit in the woods, as in Thoreau's *Walden*: "'It's odd', he continued, 'but the two times I've sat down and written a novel, I've been cut off from the rest of the world. First in jail when I was a kid, and now up here in Vermont, living like a hermit in the woods'" (L 141). Sachs wrote his first book and writes his masterpiece (*Leviathan*) in the cell of a prison or of a monastic austerity. By leaving those cells, he gets lost in the external space and the written cosmogenesis is interrupted. After jail, only in Vermont will Sachs write with the same complete dedication, but even that state of grace is interrupted when he gets lost, both metaphorically and literally, in the perpetually hostile exterior. Because when he is closed in a room or in a cell, the writer-character has only the space that his mind creates, and that blank space is the true motor of literary creation. In the final scenes, Peter Aaron occupies his friend's space of writing, feeling the cosmogonic power of the writer and of the imaginary world created by him, which supplants reality:

There is a point at which a book begins to take over your life, when the world you have imagined becomes more important to you than the real world, and it barely crossed my mind that I was sitting in the same chair that Sachs used to sit in, that I was writing at the same table he used to write at, that I was breathing the same air he had once breathed (L 218).



In *The Country of Last Things* (1987), we find, once again, although in a strangely rare context in the work of Paul Auster, the theme of the room as a space of comfort and written genesis, besides a sort of early gloss of the sentence in *Leviathan*: “There is a point at which a book begins to take over your life”. In this dark tale about a chaotic, post-apocalyptic walled city, there is nothing that does not have a connotation of aggression, violence, and death. Solitude is in everyone, in the generalized obsession with death and in the fight for surviving at any cost. The other is always a potential enemy, conflict is permanent, and the insurmountable wall of death crosses the narrative for several times. In the devastated city of *In the Country of Last Things*, in every street, deadly toll-walls are suddenly erected. The city itself is walled, at its western limit, by the **Muralha do Violino**, and at south by the **Porta Milenar**. There is also the insane and cyclopic project of the **Muralha do Mar**, which would take at least fifty years to build. There are no confirmed reports of anyone surviving those walls of death (as with, in a certain way, the infamous Berlin Wall). The walls of this country of things that come last demarcate the frontier between life and death, block contact with the past, form barriers against life. Those who are able to get in become trapped in the city and in its horrors, entering hell⁵¹. The isolated stones are themselves fragments of that violence. As the houses are destroyed and people are living and dying in the streets, the stones get scattered throughout the city. And, inevitably, they are used to kill and do harm, as in the deaths by dilapidation of the Old Testament and in Islamic culture:

Every morning, the city sends out trucks to collect the corpses. (...) Throwing stones at death-truck workers is a common occupation among the homeless. (...) One could say that the stones represent the people's disgust with a government that does nothing for them until they are dead. But that would be going too far. The stones are an expression of unhappiness, and that is all (CLT 17).

Due to all this, the rooms and houses, spaces of refuge and solitude, are ferociously disputed. The few that remain standing in the nameless city are overcrowded, filthy, they are invaded and sacked, and their owners, legitimate or themselves looters, get thrown out, robbed, or killed. Frauds and extortions perpetrated by fake real estate

⁵¹ *All that Fall*, a 1957 piece by Samuel Beckett, constantly evokes images of an empty, sterile, and dead world. The uniqueness of the characters comes from the fact that they continue to exist, or to resist (as Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*) in an absurd world. The absurd is emphasized by the juxtaposition of their ignorant and vulgar natures in a world where death is, in fact, the most common occurrence.

agencies or fake owners multiply. The scarcity of housing also leads to the forced and quarrelsome cohabitation of several individuals under the same roof, which is, however, essential to their security and survival, as in the case of the protagonist, Anna Blume, when she shares Isabel and Ferdinand's exiguous residence. Finally, the need for a shelter, for an illusion of comfort and safety, even if only for a few days, leads to the endless lines in front of the Woburn House, to desperate attempts to get in, and to even more desperate stratagems to avoid leaving, from supplications to self-mutilation and suicide. During their short stay, the guests can enjoy what is considered a normal daily routine: a room, a shower, warm meals, clean clothes, a garden where they can go for a stroll, books to read, but transformed into invaluable treasures, worth dying for, to the almost bestial characters of the novel. At the Woburn House, there is a huge personal and financial commitment just to give the homeless ten days of comfort, in the safe normality of a house. This is certainly an illogical project, but nothing seems to make sense in this country of last things. Like the ephemeral happiness Anna experiences in the library, the guests at Woburn House are also returned to the streets after ten days, often by force. There is extreme violence in this apparent but always illusory solidarity and happiness. The individual dramas of Anna and Samuel Farr and the collective dramas of the Woburn House parallel the universal drama of the disintegrating city.

In the Country of Last Things seems to be truly agoraphobic. When chased by the crowd, Anna Blume finds refuge in the interior of the semi-destroyed national library, bringing to mind the medieval right of sanctuary within sacred spaces impermeable to any external and profane authority, masterfully fictionalized in Umberto Eco's novel *Il Nome della Rosa* (1980), whose initial title was *La Libreria*. A reliquary of books coming from every horizon, the library of *Il Nome della Rosa* is almost like one big book where all knowledge from all known parts of the world is kept. Once again recalling Borges, we return to the theme of the universe as a global and infinite library. Paul Auster, who worked for a year at the library of Columbia as a student, reintroduces the reality of this space of maturation and knowledge in his fiction. In *In the Country of Last Things*, as in *Il Nome della Rosa*, it is the unstable center of a world submerged in horror and emptiness, the refuge of a heteroclite population that includes not only researchers and writers escaping the Purification Movement but also

the last community of surviving Jews. The library, the collection of all books, works, by synecdoche, as an image of the present book, providing the key to its comprehension⁵².

Safety and comfort, always very relative concepts, are only possible indoors. And the library, like the room, is a very special interior space, surrounded by literal and figurative chaos: an interior dedicated exclusively to books, the only possible safe haven in this disaggregated society's collective drift. To enter the books, the universe of fiction, seems to be the ultimate solution for survival when reality becomes unbearable. And, in another mirror-like fictionalized reflection, at the heart of the library is the most interior of all spaces, where someone still persists in creating a book. As if Sam's room was a representation of the creative mind (cf. "This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull". NYT 293), surrounded and protected by the library, by the walls that frame the scene of writing. Sam's room is a depository of the cosmogonic and world-ordering power of writing, devoted to the building of a life's work, with universal referential horizons: "The story is so big (...) it's impossible for any one person to tell it" (CLT 102). Sam is about to immolate himself to the book, but, at the same time, it is the creation of the book that keeps him alive: "I can't stop. The book is the only thing that keeps me going. It prevents me from thinking about myself and getting sucked up into my own life. If I ever stopped working on it, I'd be lost. I don't think I'd make it through another day" (CLT 104)⁵³. Here, Auster presents the room as a life-saving cell, besides continuing to be a space of artistic creation. Since the characters have long lost the ability to dream and to create, they survive each day at a time, desensitized by suffering and starvation. Art is a luxury from times of prosperity, and Sam seems to be punished for having devoted himself to the useless metaphysics of writing and of introspective solitude. Book and room eventually disappear in the same demoniacal and purifying fire.

⁵² About the library as a character and an image of the fictional universe, see: Gérard de Cortanze, "De la bibliothèque comme personnage de roman" and Alexandre Laumonier, "La bibliothèque post-moderne d' Umberto Eco", dossier "L' Univers des bibliothèques: D' Alexandrie à Internet", *Magazine Littéraire* 349 (Dezembro 1996), 52-61.

⁵³ *Bien des ouvrages nous touchent parce qu'on y voit encore l'empreinte de l'auteur qui s'en est éloigné trop hâtivement, dans l'impatience d'en finir, dans la crainte, s'il n'en finissait pas, de ne pouvoir revenir à l'air du jour. Dans ces oeuvres, trop grandes, plus grandes que celui qui les porte, toujours se laisse pressentir le moment suprême, le point presque central où l'on sait que si l'auteur s'y maintient, il mourra à la tâche.* Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire*, p. 56.

Penetrating the library, Anna enters a magical space, as though a tale of wonders, where she finds what can no longer be found outside, in the city: peace and safety, the friendly and attentive voice of the rabbi, Samuel Farr's love, a new shelter, a son, a book to write, a goal in life, a work to build ("I lived in the library with Sam, and for the next six months that small room was the center of my world". CLT 107). Later, it will be in the room at Woburn House, during her long and comforting conversations with Victoria Woburn, that her homosexual relationship will begin, in a feminine parallel of her passion for Sam. But if Woburn House is the point of convergence of all tragedies, the room at the library is one of the few spaces spared from the generalized chaos. It is also a space of miracles, since it is where Anna and Sam's son is conceived, in a city where children hadn't been born for a long time. In the miraculous room of the romance, a human being is conceived, as the book is generated in the room of the writer-character. Anna Blume is, thus far, the only female protagonist in Auster's fiction. Consequently, she surpasses her male counterparts in her maternal capacity to generate human life in addition to the capacity to generate writing, as if her body was a living and moving image of the room. Or as if the latter was a static and walled image of a mother's womb. Anna populates both of them with life – the son corresponding to the book and vice-versa – but both gestations are cut short. When Anna imprudently leaves the room, the magic is broken, and the external terror penetrates the apparently immune, internal "White Space": the two lovers get lost, they return to a life of incertitude and solitude, the child dies before he is born, and a fire consumes the library, the room, and the book. Exterior reality swallows the impossible dreams generated in that oneiric island amidst the country of last things. When reading *In the Country of Last Things*, we realize that the last possible way to explore the world is to look at it as a labyrinth, a confusing and cryptic text. To decode that puzzle, to transform solitude into liberation, and to find a way amidst the chaos is the responsibility of the writer, who appears in the form of a metaphor in the *Country of Last Things*, a veritable chronicle of a "world at the end of the world"⁵⁴. The city is a labyrinth where one travels without a destination, and the labyrinth is the great central theme of postmodernism, the new space of the novel, as the travel without a destination is the new type of travel. The postmodern travel novel is the

⁵⁴ Cf. Luis Sepúlveda, *Mundo do Fim do Mundo* (Porto: Edições Asa, 1995).

narrative of a quest governed by chance, as in *The Music of Chance*, *Moon Palace*, or *Mr. Vertigo*. Anna Blume travels to a labyrinthine city where she wanders without a destination, in a succession of encounters and happenings generated by chance. After suffering repeated disappointments with different forms of affection and the book she was writing with Sam comes to an abrupt end, she turns to the solitary writing of the letter (source of the text of *In the Country of Last Things*) in her struggle against destruction. She is reborn thanks to writing, and the text itself mimics the work of reconstitution of the individual: the initial fragmentation gives place, little by little, to a more structured and more chronologically ordered narrative, reflecting the way Anna devoted herself to writing her letter, restructuring the surrounding chaos and reaffirming her identity. Anna writes what she was never able to say, but her writing, instead of bringing the expected comfort, does nothing but reopen real and symbolic wounds, since, although Anna has escaped the fate Dujardin had in store for her, she left the adventure diminished, fragmented, and sterile. Like Sam's, Anna's project is never finished: writing never exhausts its expressive possibilities, it never encompasses the complete reality of the different experiences, because the universe is infinite and the "sum of particulars" is monstrous (as in *Disappearances 1*), hence the constant and enigmatic open endings in Paul Auster's fiction:

I sometimes wonder how much I have left out, how much has been lost to me and will never be found again, but those are questions that cannot be answered. (...) Now the entire notebook has almost been filled, and I have barely even skimmed the surface. (...) I've been trying to fit everything in, trying to get to the end before it's too late, but I see now how badly I've deceived myself. Words do not allow such things. The closer you come to the end, the more there is to say. The end is only imaginary, a destination you invent to keep yourself going, but a point comes when you realize you will never get there. You might have to stop, but that is only because you have run out of time. You stop, but that does not mean you have come to the end (CLT 182-183).

"This is Anna Blume, your old friend from another world. Once we get where we are going, I will try to write to you again, I promise" (CLT 188), we read, in the last moment, when the letter and the book come to a close. Once the writer-character crosses the gates of the city and leaves the walled space, the narrative can no longer continue. The city itself is in the end revealed to be the most insurmountably closed of all the spaces of writing in *In the Country of Last Things*.

To tell stories, Paul Auster's art and occupation, is a form of exercising the divine power to give life, an exclusive attribute of God and of the sacred space of the maternal

womb, which Anna Blume possesses: “A voice that speaks, a woman's voice that speaks, a voice that speaks stories of life and death, has the power to give life” (IS 153). Auster gives his characters a single task: to cross a space that is simply the space of solitude. Life appears then as an enigma to solve, the enigma of the chaos in *In the Country of Last Things*, of the wall in construction in *The Music of Chance*, of seeing in *The New York Trilogy*, of walking over water in *Mr. Vertigo*. Auster's characters, extreme ascetics, walk inside their own minds, despite also moving in the closed space of the room and on the blank space of the page. Auster's writer-character, after having infused routine actions with the rarest emotion, becomes a stranger in his own eyes, almost an imaginary creature. It is not the actions that count but the way they are thought, lived, and written, in an individual journey that leads to a clairvoyance of cosmogonic implications.

We can conclude by elaborating on a quote from Gaston Bachelard: *La casa alberga al ensueño, la casa protege al soñador, la casa nos permite soñar en paz*⁵⁵. Substituting the house by the room, we find here the purest characterization of Paul Auster's literary space, to use the notion developed by Maurice Blanchot. The room is the universe of the writer-character, a true cosmos, built and inhabited by the solitary protagonist. The mind of that character is in turn inhabited by a cosmic immensity which can be ordered and conveyed through the work of writing. This cosmic immensity is associated with an expansion of being that everyday life represses and externally instituted prudence hinders, but which is revealed and exercised in solitude. In the solitude of the room, the writer-character is in a different space, dreaming the universe within an immense world. The cosmogenesis is the dynamic result of the structured dream of the protagonist (“The world is in my head”), framed by the white space of the room and of the page, in the form of written work with its entire poetic and fictional universe. Auster uses writing to reflect specularly about that same writing and its creation, as if he is putting a mirror in front of the page as he fills it with words.

Throughout Paul Auster's work, his different writer-characters reveal predominantly one of the aspects of their individuality. In this chapter, we paid special attention to

⁵⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poética del Espacio*, trans. by Ernestina de Champourcin (Madrid: Breviarios del Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994) p. 36.

those which most resemble Auster himself, that is, to those which have more characteristics of a writer than characteristics of a character in the hands of that same writer. We have addressed confinement as a sublime and constructive phenomenon, like a womb where the sacred mystery of life manifests itself. But Paul Auster also offers us a disaggregating and destructive confinement, where the closed space is comparable to a tomb, part of death's domains. When the character forgets the possibility of using his creative potential (the cosmogonic writing), he lets himself be controlled by events manipulated by someone else, and no work results from his isolation, chaos overcomes the cosmos, and the individual is fragmented to the point of total annihilating disaggregation. Next, we will explore the dysphoric antithesis of those *Black Spaces*.

III
THE GENESIS OF NOTHINGNESS IN THE SPACE OF
CHAOS

During the exploration of the setting of the written genesis, we concluded that, between the four walls of the room that is the book, creative capacity exists in total freedom, in a pure wild state that may lead to the construction of a cosmos or of chaos. The room is the place where the unstable, creative, and sometimes dangerous encounter between life and writing takes place, and its positive connotations of protection can be contrasted with the negative connotations of confinement, the downside to the psychic nourishment that solitude provides. “Freedom, confinement, those are the two sides of a single thought, and the one couldn't exist without the other”¹. With these words, Paul Auster acknowledges the ambivalence of the context of writing, a space where apparently contradictory states exist simultaneously. If freedom of imagination builds the book, confinement can transform the room into a chaotic space when the writer-character submerges into a solipsistic excess, sterile in terms of the construction of an orderly universe, forgetting about the cosmogonic power of solitude. If solitude does not result in writing, the room that is the book cannot exist, bringing about the end of the existence of the writer-character that inhabits it, thwarting the preservation of life itself in that space. There is nothing left but to leave and get diluted in the hostile exterior, in the city that has evolved from an original and mythical benevolence to a contemporary and realistic malevolence, or to give up the identity conferred by the status of character when the book ends. In both cases, to leave the room and the book is synonymous with non-existence, with deletion of identity and consequent death as an individual being. Without a connection to the surrounding structure that can be compared to the totality of the self, the individual feels alienated from the great realities of being. Presence becomes absence, a characteristic of postmodern fiction that Ihab Hassan contrasts with the modernist presence². Or, according to Peter Currie: “It becomes a matter of equal importance to recognize the vital process and experience of negation in postmodernism as an essential opposing force to the abstract pseudo-affirmation, the yea-saying of

¹ Irwin, "Memory's Escape", p. 113.

² Hassan, "Postface 1982", pp. 81-92.

commodity culture as a whole”³. When the walls around the writer-character are seen as a demarcation of the supreme confinement of death, and not of the absolute freedom of the space of literary creation, the man locked inside it is in a tomb and not in a room: “It is as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole” (IS 77).

The space of chaos is created in fiction but it does not create fiction, in the specular reading that we have been following, based on the exploration of the scene of writing by the writer himself. That non-cosmogonic black space destroys the character that inhabits it, marking the end of the story⁴. *The New York Trilogy* is a succession of spaces where nothing happens and everything gets fragmented. Nothingness surrounds the characters and annuls them, writing becomes anti-writing, consuming itself and dying, as nothing can be itself and its own antagonistic double at the same time. The expansion of the imaginary cosmos cannot be confined to the closed space of the room and begins to implode, a return trip to the obscure place where it had its origin, in the mind of the writer-character who thus sees his cosmogony thwarted. Infinitely closed around itself, the potential white space of the page becomes a black space from which no message emanates. However, and so that the written work survives until the moment of its reading, so that an effective dissolution of the character is produced, Paul Auster creates strategies to guarantee the verisimilitude of the narrative of nothingness, of fragmentation, of the dominion of chaos. Instead of giving us direct access to white space of the room and of the book, filled by the alternative cosmos, we witness the inverse process through annotations and reports collected afterwards (*City of Glass* and *Ghosts*), through the more or less lucid and credible testimony of close witnesses (*The Locked Room* and *Leviathan*), or, the best example, through the disheartened and inconclusive autobiography of the experiencing subject himself (*Moon Palace*), because, let us not forget: “Impossible, I realize, to enter another's solitude” (IS 19).

³ Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 69.

⁴ Cf. the commentary of the anonymous narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), a novel about the disappearance of the individual and the collapse of the moral perspective: “(...) the mind that has conceived a plan for living must never lose sight of the chaos against which the pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge”. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 468.

“The room. Brief mention of the room and/or the dangers lurking inside it. As in the image: H”lderlin in his room” (IS 98). The room is thus, and demonstrably, a space of potential danger and insanity, as in the case of H”lderlin, mentioned in *The Invention of Solitude*, who lived submerged in schizophrenia for thirty six years in the room that Zimmer built for him. Similarly, in *Moon Palace*, Zimmer embodies the room where he takes in the half-crazy and dying Marco Fogg. Both characters, with their singular onomastic, are rooms that have built other rooms, showing a capacity for self-duplication beyond the reach of a disaggregating character, which cannot even preserve his own identity anymore, and who has nothing left but to withdraw to that final space (“These four walls hold only the signs of his own disquiet”, IS 78).

The written work of art is created in the room, through a sort of white magic, in contrast with the black magic of the black room, a paroxysm of seclusion where, in *City of Glass*, young Peter Stillman had to discover the words of a new language, after the most immense of solitudes had been invented for him: “In the dark I speak God's language and no one can hear me” (NYT 21). If no one can hear him, the words will not survive their speaker, they will die with him, never leaving the black space of the unknown mind and of the insurmountably sealed room. The narrative function loses its key elements, its heroes, its vicissitudes, trajectories, and goals. It gets dispersed in clouds of linguistic elements, plunging into global deconstruction, into chaogony. At a literary level, the plot of the narrative is dismantled, the classic delimitations of the several narrative fields go through a work of problematization, canons disappear, miscegenations at the borders between genres are produced. In this dissemination of language games, it is the individual himself that seems to get dissolved.

The three narratives that make up *The New York Trilogy* – *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room* – repeat essentially the same story. All of them use and deconstruct the conventional elements of the police novel, resulting in a recurrent investigation of the nature, function, and meaning of language, but also of solitude, seclusion, and the problematic of identity. The labyrinth of *The New York Trilogy* is populated by mysterious observers, alternative authors, mirrors looking at mirrors, and characters that have more or less disappeared, structured by the observation and search for lost and rediscovered entities. This universe of chaos and non-solutions leads Auster’s detectives through paths that are very different from those initially established.

City of Glass, the story that inaugurates *The New York Trilogy*, fictionalizes the degeneration of language, the changes of identity, the struggle to preserve human characteristics in a great metropolis, when the city itself is immersed in its disaggregating mechanical routine which completely erases any individual. Although this trilogy has as its title, external setting, and common thread the metropolis of New York City, it is the scenes in interiors that trigger the action and that make it progress. *City of Glass* begins at the apartment owned by Quinn, a writer going through a literary and existential crisis under the sign of death, who has already experienced several ways of life and identities. Quinn is a drifter in the labyrinth of the city, a man who, through motion, creates his own emptiness, an aimless utopian. He lives the postmodern condition described by Lyotard: (...) *la dissolution du lien social et le passage des collectivités sociales à l'état d'une masse d'atomes individuels lancés dans un absurde mouvement brownien (...) un monde dans lequel les événements vécus se sont rendus indépendants de l'homme*⁵.

After the first phone call, Quinn wonders about what would Max Work do, since the writer cannot resist the temptation of leaving reality to enjoy a few moments in the space of fiction. Once he accepts the case, the spatial focus switches to Peter and Virginia Stillman's apartment, in an initial structure similar to that of *Ghosts*. The immediate narrative of Peter Stillman's childhood, violently trapped in the "dark place" in search of the signs of a new divine language, establishes a dysphoric parallel with the rooms where the artist locks himself to discover the poetic word in solitude. But Stillman's isolation is inherent to the creation of a whole new language and not just to its recreation with aesthetic goals in mind. The narrative of Peter, captive of darkness in the name of a threatening pseudo-god, occupies nine pages of uninterrupted direct speech, and, at the end, Quinn realizes that a whole day went by and they are now sitting in the dark. Quinn recalls several examples of children who grew up in complete solitude and silence, and the influence of that solitude in the language they acquired, tragically illustrating the enigmatic relationship between silence and words. Ironically, when Stillman-father is arrested, he too is incarcerated in a punitive dark place, according to the son's narrative. That dark place is like a tomb for the living, for involuntary inhabitants of a space to which they were led by

⁵ Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979) p. 31.

others. Stillman-father buried his own live son there, establishing a dysphoric dichotomy with Quinn's dead son in his coffin ("He thought of the little coffin that held his son's body and how he had seen it on the day of the funeral being lowered into the ground. That was isolation, he said to himself. That was silence. It did not help, perhaps, that his son's name had also been Peter". NYT 35), or, intertextually, with the son of Mallarmé in *Mallarmé's Son* and in *A Tomb for Anatole*⁶.

In the interior of the house of the writer "Paul Auster", Quinn finds an attentive interlocutor, hospitality, and an image of the family he lost, while the streets are the setting of the darkest moments of his existential path. New York symbolizes the nothingness that Quinn has built around himself and which he will never be able to escape. The postmodern agoraphobia tends to see the urban process as inescapable and chaotic, where anarchy and constant change assume a preponderant role, in such inconclusive situations as the urban narratives of *The New York Trilogy*. When he leaves the Austers's apartment, Quinn realizes the extent of his own loss and solitude: "Quinn was nowhere now" (NYT 104), even though he is in his domestic space, of potential happiness. Quinn would like to occupy Auster's space, which frames a perfect universe, in a cruel intervention by the pseudo-author, displaying his happiness in front of a character whose affective void was caused by him, in a caprice of his omnipotent writing. In the meta-space between Auster and Auster (author and writer-character), Auster (which one of them?) stages a complex game involving his own name and status, at the same time associating and dissociating himself from a writer-character who can either be a secondary character or the main figure, the first author. Realizing that he is no more than a mere object by and in the hands of the writer, Quinn, who is so accustomed to use literary pseudonyms, decides to take control over his identity, in a puerile but not inconsequential attempt to take revenge.

Quinn contemplates the walls of his own room, whose color reflects the passage of time:

He sat down in his living room and looked at the walls. They had once been white, he remembered, but now they had turned a curious shade of yellow. Perhaps one day they would drift further into dinginess, lapsing into grey, or even brown, like some piece of ageing fruit. A white wall becomes a yellow wall becomes a grey wall, he said to himself. The paint becomes exhausted, the city encroaches with its soot, the plaster crumbles within. Changes, then more changes still (NYT 104).

⁶ Stephane Mallarmé, *A Tomb for Anatole*, trans. by Paul Auster (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983).

White can become gradually closer to black, until they become indistinguishable, as in the growing identification of Black with White in *Ghosts*. The city covers the walls with its soot, as it will cover Quinn's face and clothes with the indelible marks of the days spent at the alley, in progressive degradation, illustrating the intangibility of the eternal. Also in the story of Peter Freuchen, in *The Invention of Solitude*, the protagonist covers with his breath the walls of the igloo he built as a shelter, hastening his own death. At the alley, Quinn hides for an indefinite period of time, sometimes protected by the walls of a garbage bin, fused into the city: "It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city" (NYT 116). This confinement within the walls of New York can constitute an urban, postmodern revisitation of the theme of isolation in the forest of Thoreau's *Walden*, obsessively reread in *Ghosts*. However, it is even more evident the similitude with the hypnotic contemplation of the wall by Bartleby, with whom Quinn shares common traits⁷. Quinn's path and space retract like Bartleby's, from the island of Manhattan to the small windowless room, before they themselves withdraw from the world and from the text. The scrivener's anti-writing corresponds to Quinn's inability to solve the Stillman case. Like the Scrivener, Quinn also reduces his needs for sleep and food to a minimum, and spends his last time alone, in a room, mysteriously fed, and devoted to strange thought and writing exercises. Both write naked or semi-naked (according to the standards in Melville's time), in a prelude to the final identification of Quinn with Peter Stillman-child, as if he were at the same time the new subject and object of the project that Stillman-father had abandoned. "(...) language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language" (NYT 43): Peter's captivity is carried out in the name of this need to invent a new language, pure, divine,

⁷ Bartleby is completely isolated from others by the walls and curtains that surround him, internal walls of a social nature which separate different professional hierarchies, culminating in the pure emptiness of a plain brick wall, the only landscape he can see from his window. Bartleby is who is nearest to the wall in the universe of the office. That is his great distinguishing mark, he is the one who most clearly perceives the walls that delimit and isolate us. The very building where he works and lives is walled by other, taller, buildings, like Quinn's alley. Bartleby refuses to be a copyist of the reality established by the society "of the wall" (of Wall Street), but he does not create an alternative writing, he does not become the fictional image of the recalcitrant writer, perhaps because he has in the past worked at the Dead Letter Office, a space of death for writing. Bartleby's solitude is not constructive, his rebellion is but silence and negation, without acquiring cosmogonic power. He merely contemplates the wall, prisoner of his own consciousness, becoming the static occupant of an empty room. The wall (of Wall Street and of The Tombs) encloses him, as impenetrable as death. But what ends up killing the scrivener are not the walls in themselves but the fact that he confused the walls made by man with the wall of human mortality.

and untouched by communication vices. Peter was imprisoned by walls made of inexistent words. However, Stillman draws here a plausible parallel between the sign-referent inadequacy of language and the fragmentation of the postmodern universe:

For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos (NYT 77).

The trilogy seems to contain the plan for a writing that is illegible, chaotic. Everything is built so as to give the illusion of a future resolution that is always dispersed. Everywhere, we see the predominance of the degradation of objects, of the order that crumbles, a generalized **setback** against which coincidences, the system of true and false identifications, doubles, symmetries, the games of mirrors, and the textual structure are put in place, in an attempt to oppose it.

At the alley, Quinn discovers the true nature of solitude, when he realizes that he is irreparably compromising his identity, reflected by the exacerbated degradation of this new living space: “(...) he began to understand the true nature of solitude. He had nothing to fall back on anymore but himself. And of all things he discovered during the days he was there, this was the one he did not doubt: that he was falling” (NYT 117). The surveillance of the Stillmans’s building was so exclusive, so claustrophobic, that Quinn not only didn’t realize his own deterioration but also ignored, after two months had passed, the news of the suicide of Stillman-father, ending up losing all contact with the case and with the story that he was the protagonist of. Unconsciously, Quinn starts moving in the direction of another story, that of the search for the lost paradise, with its universal language. In this context, the reductive immersion in the alley and in the garbage can mean the need to die in order to be reborn purified and to access that adamitic innocence.

When he returns home, Quinn realizes that he will not be able to reassume his abandoned existence. The last memories of his past happiness had remained in the lost interior: the desk where he used to write and the drawings made by his son, a thin reflection of the domestic space of the Austers. In *The Music of Chance*, the beginning of Nashe’s wandering journey, which will lead him to death, also happens with the dismemberment of the house, the unifying center of the individual. Escaping a new drift, Quinn locks himself in the smallest, darkest and most inaccessible room in the house of the Stillmans, which reduces itself to a series of empty and immaculately

white rooms, refusing those which open to the exterior (“We stepped in cautiously and discovered a series of bare, empty rooms. In a small room at the back, impeccably clean as all the other rooms were, the red notebook was lying on the floor”. NYT 132). There, in the space where everything started, where his final journey was triggered, Quinn reaches a truly omniscient capacity for reflection and evocation, even remembering the moment of his own birth, as if he had penetrated his own self (which he does not recognize anymore), his own dispersed identity. Quinn becomes a kind of spectator of his own existence, registering what he sees, aware that he has reached the bottom of the abyss and that the spiral is about to invert. The space-time circle begins to close: solitude, darkness, and words are again reunited in the room. Free from his clothing, Quinn assumes the posture of a child about to emerge from the womb. In reality, Quinn inhabits himself, in the most obscure corner of his brain, **where time gets relativized**, represented by the dark and ignored room where one day it can become reduced to brief instants of light, until the final darkness:

(...) he was inside now, and no matter what room he chose to camp in, the sky would remain hidden, inaccessible even at the farthest limit of sight (...) He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again (NYT 127 e 131).

The true labyrinth resides in Quinn’s interior, in the rooms of his mind, where he walks in an infinite drift, without being able to build a definitive text about the universal reality. Quinn does not achieve a cosmic solution. Fragmented and chaotic, the world remains, at the end of his quest, exactly as it was in the beginning. Quinn’s contact with pure adamitic language was partial, momentary, and inconclusive, his own fate, like that of so many other of Auster’s characters, remains a mystery, and the reader is abandoned in the middle of a narrative declaration of renunciation about the omitted, the imprecise, and the undecipherable.

The beginning of *Ghosts* shows traces that are recurrent in the context of the opening of *City of Glass*. After the sentimental disappointment with the ex-future Mrs. Blue, detective Blue returns home to assess the situation. Looking at the wall and at the image of Gold, Blue recalls his tragic case, eternally unsolved, and begins to define a plan, conscious that the time to turn the page had arrived, just like Quinn, after having seen the marks of the passage of time. In both stories, meditation about the interior space (the room and the walls that set its limits) comes after a moment of great

dramatic intensity (becoming aware of the lost happiness and acquired solitude), preceding an extreme, borderline mad, decision, the beginning of the process that will lead to the annihilation of the protagonist.

By accepting White's proposal (like Quinn with respect to Stillman), Blue becomes a prisoner of the case and of the room:

And yet White is the one who set the case in motion - thrusting Blue into an empty room, as it were, and then turning off the light and locking the door. Ever since, Blue has been groping about in the darkness, feeling blindly for the light switch, a prisoner of the case itself (NYT 169).

Blue is doubly confined by the hand of White, whose intervention is revealed to be as dark as the name of the character to be observed, and with whom he will eventually feel identified. *Moby-Dick*, the White Whale, and the black-white wall of *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, are intertextual evidence that light and darkness can blend, as well as their connotations of good and evil. In the same space, cosmos and chaos can coexist, just like White and Black reside in the same character. In this way, Blue's room can also be a white space and a black space at the same time. Black, White's counter-color, is in reality its equivalent in terms of absolute value, as both are at the ends of the color range – negation or synthesis of colors. Blue fills empty reports: no matter how much he blackens the white page with words, he inscribes nothing in it but absence. Blue states from the beginning that words are transparent (invisible) to him; thus, re-reading his notes, he is surprised to discover that they have made the facts disappear instead of engraving them tangibly in the world. When white or black proliferate, the lasting impression is that of a constant erasure of the entities in narration.

Blue cannot separate the room where he was locked from the case itself, since, in reality, one is dependent upon the other and the offer of the room as an observation post was one of the few points that White made clear from the beginning. Forays to the outside are not significant, and Blue seems to eventually become only interested in the buildings, caressing their stone fronts. His case is to be in a room observing a man that is in another room and observing himself at the same time. But it is also a step towards self-erasure, towards the growing awareness that he is only living a half-life, through mere words, of someone else's life. Blue feels like a character in a book without action:

But if the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action - nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book (NYT 169).

Here, we find a clear metalanguage, a penetration of the character into reality in terms of both the construction and the reception of the story, besides Blue's desire to free himself of his increasingly conscious status of dramatic persona. Black is presented as the presumable author of the book, bringing self-irony to Paul Auster's occupation, with a proleptic reference to his status of true motor of the case: "As for Black, the so-called writer of this book, Blue can no longer trust what he sees. It is possible that there really is such a man - who does nothing, who merely sits in his room and writes?" (NYT 169).

Blue knows that he is becoming a ghost by way of the room and of writing. The conjugation of these two motifs explains the reference to Hawthorne, who, according to his biography, spent twelve years locked in a room in order to write. But Black's observations also reveal a preoccupation with the solipsistic existence of the writer, similar to Blue's:

Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there.
Another ghost.
Exactly (NYT 175).

The synopsis of *Wakefield* constitutes a new intertextual prolepsis of the central motifs of the next short-story, *The Locked Room*, besides illustrating some of the moments in *Ghosts* and *City of Glass*. Wakefield retires to a room, initially as a joke, where he ends up forgetting his identity and disappearing from the world, leaving his own wife a widow and becoming a living ghost. Wakefield consciously observes his own death (like Blue), having the room as observation post and base for the process of self-erasure. Entering his old house, twenty years later, Wakefield reassumes his lost identity. If Auster's postmodern re-writing refuses its protagonists such a conclusion, Nathaniel Hawthorne achieves an enigmatic final identification between the closed space of the house and the closed space of the tomb, whose door Wakefield is about to cross, creating a doubt about the story's eventual happy-end that is very

postmodern: “Stay, Wakefield! Would you go to the sole home that is left you? Then step into your grave! The door opens”.⁸

As we have seen, the space of creation of a work of art can be simultaneously the space of the self-destruction of its author. Black dies at the hands of Blue, but he had planned everything except the escape of the latter (“You’ve written your suicide note, and that’s the end of it. Exactly”. NYT 194). Perhaps it is for that reason that Black states that he wishes to finish the book of a lifetime (the book of life) soon. Blue will appear in the room to bring death to Black, in a contraposition of the moment when Anna Blume miraculously appears at Sam Farr’s door to save the author and his work. The circle closes over Blue and Black when it becomes clear that the journey of looking and of writing about that looking never left the space of the two rooms. A closed labyrinth-like circuit took shape, without an apparent logical reason, destroying the canonical detective story and its narrative instances, with an addressed-addressee (White), a subject (Blue), and an object (Black), like in *City of Glass* the “whodunit” gave place to the “who-am-I?”. In reality, there was no external manipulation, White was nothing but a ghost. The character finds the true author, Black, who lived through Blue, through his eyes, his routine path, his weekly writing. Blue had always shown confidence in the words he used in his reports, those great windows placed between him and the world, until he starts to question the process: “It’s as though his words, instead of drawing out the facts and making them sit palpably in the world, have induced them to disappear” (NYT 147). Blue’s reports did not express reality but only what he thought was reality, illustrating the postmodern doubt about the supposedly unequivocal relation between reality and the signs that translate it, product of a post-Eden language, the great riddle of *City of Glass*.

Black is an existential parasite, a vampire of Blue’s vital energy. Without knowing it, Blue also inhabits Black’s room, with his observation and as the reason for being of the object of that observation (“You were the whole world to me, Blue...” NYT 194). The lethal power of the room does not spare even its ghost inhabitant. The process of the fragmentation of Blue unfolds over four simultaneous spaces, facing each other in the urban scenery: the room and the mind of Black, and the room and the mind of Blue himself. Thus, by entering Black’s room, Blue entered himself and another at

⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 298.

the same time. He put together in the same space too many co-present entities, conjuring an imploding blackout. The existence of the double reinforces the story's structural unity, through the psychological identification with the adversary, but it also fragments the individual in more than one entity, eliminating the canonical notion of an indisputable individual identity. Looking at White as also a double of Black, he would be his visible and luminous face, hiding the character's dark and secret side.

In the several days that Blue spends locked in the room, after the shock in Black's room, he strolls meditatively between the four walls, lengthily analyzing the several images that adorn them, as in a gallery of all the ghosts that accompanied him through the story. And, for that reason, the ex-future Mrs. Blue, a living and non-ghost entity, which was, nonetheless, rejected in favor of the mystery of *Ghosts*, is just "a certain blank spot on the wall" (NYT 190), since this is a story by, about, and for ghosts. As Blue gets again close to the window, to the outside world, the drama quickly approaches its final scene. The starting signal is given by Black, by the mere fact that he is no longer inside the room, but outside the building. The window demarcates the space between dream and reality, that separates the fictional from the real world, as is clear in Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fenêtres*. In the last moment, when Blue gets out of the room, he also gets out of the story, prompting the epilogue: "For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing" (NYT 196). The riddle has not been solved, Blue simply abandons the room and the book, without us finding out anything about his fate or about Black's work and motivations, since the postmodern novel problematizes riddles without trying to solve them. The final dialogue is a dark duplication of the initial dialogue with White, this time marking the closure of the case, in the room of Black and of all the presences.

The interior space is thus the decisive space for the progression of the action⁹. Even if that interior is, as in *Leviathan*, a wood so dense that it becomes closed, anticipating

⁹ The action in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is equally, and in its entirety, set in the room of Gregor and adjacent rooms of the Samsas's house. Only at the end the surviving characters go to the exterior, on a jaunt to forget the whole story and to start a new life. A new and hopeful vision of the future appears only when they leave the oppressive atmosphere of the house. The fate of Gregor, the "monster", was confinement and death in the prison-cage of the room, tacitly ignored by his family. The identification between Gregor and the room is so strong that the emptying of the latter of its furniture is equivalent to the

the night and bringing about another turning point in Ben Sachs's troubled existence. Maria Turner's project, *Thursdays with Ben*, is born of his visit to her apartment. It is inside the house that the relationship that will directly or indirectly lead to the birth of the Phantom of Liberty, to all the events in the book, and to Sachs' death has its start. To find Fanny with another man in the room, invading an intimate space, justifies the disappearance of the protagonist. The dialogue at Maria's house, the next step in the desperate search for a welcoming interior, triggers a deadly effect when the identity of Joe Dimaggio and Lilian Stern is revealed to her. The room is presented as a womb that can generate countless forms of life and death. Alternative existential paths that are infinitely multiple are born of that seminal confined space.

Like the preceding narratives of *The New York Trilogy*, *The Locked Room* is centered, as its title indicates, around a succession of closed spaces, of interior settings. The first step into the story is taken when the narrator enters Fanshawe's apartment, an austere space, dominated by the work of writing: "It was a small railroad flat with four rooms, sparsely furnished, with one room set aside for books and a work table" (NYT 201). Curiously, Fanshawe is portrayed as the narrator's alter-ego, inhabiting the interior of his mind, already in the first few lines of the story. The written exploration of that closed room motivates the present work:

It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am. (...) He was the one who was with me, the one who shared my thoughts, the one I saw whenever I looked up from myself (NYT 199).

The link between Auster and Hawthorne materializes in this story: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* (1828) has as its homonymous hero an intellectual who withdraws from the world and immerses himself in solitude. The fact that Auster baptizes his heroine with the name of Sophie, like Hawthorne's wife, plays a

emptying of the former of his last human characteristics. Gregor himself realizes that by wanting an empty room he has yielded to his most primitive instincts ("Nothing should be taken out of his room; everything must stay as it was; he could not dispense with the good influence of the furniture". Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, pp. 116-7). The compartmentalization of the participants in closed and sealed spaces, with doors that are always well locked and prevent communication between irredeemably isolated universes, is clearly visible. In Kafka's claustrophobic world, the outside seems to communicate more tranquility, harmony, and light than the inside. Because Kafka, unlike Auster, fears solitude and does not associate the confinement in the room with artistic creation, but only with disintegration and death. Auster always offers a possibility of redemption, he is a postmodernist, but not a nihilist like Kafka. The name of Kafka conveys the most universal anguish of the modern world: a dead-end situation, an oppressive atmosphere, a labyrinth-like space.

preponderant role in Fanshawe's self-destructive fascination by the author, whose tendency towards isolation, both in his private life and in the themes he used in his writing, is well known. Hawthorne clearly looked at his hero as a noble and unpolluted aspect of himself, like this narrator, frequently confused with his childhood friend. But the initial biography of this Fanshawe was completely taken from Paul Auster's own biography. Therefore, both the narrator and the object of his quest represent the author, that is to say, we are looking at the writer's search for his own identity. The narrator doesn't even have a name, he is just the man that tells the story of the locked room, existing solely as a narrative entity. Like his eccentric predecessors of *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, Fanshawe developed his attraction for secret closed spaces (the tomb and the box are prominent motifs in the biographical details that the narrator discovers) until it becomes an implacable and ritualized privacy, so severe that it is undistinguishable from death. We can again quote from *Wakefield* to illustrate the consequences of this dominant characteristic in the works of Auster and of Hawthorne:

Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe.¹⁰

Stillman, Black, and Fanshawe are, all three of them, Wakefields that left their daily routine to pursue insane visions, and it is ironic to note that the characters that go look for them (Quinn, Blue, the narrator) are themselves dispossessed of their identities during their search.

While the narrator's mind is dominated by the omnipresent Fanshawe, Sophie's is gradually emptied of his presence. Sophie sees her missing husband as a temporary gift, irretrievably lost, and now substituted by her son who is about to be born. Sophie apprehends that transition in physical, spatial terms, as if she herself were a space (room) that is emptied to be refilled with a new content (inhabitant). The narrator plays semantically with the word "room" and with Sophie's notion of pregnancy: "(...) as though there was no more room inside her for Fanshawe. These were the words she used to describe the feeling - no more room inside her" (NYT 203), evoking the verbal

¹⁰ Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches*, p. 298.

sequence “Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room” from *The Invention of Solitude* (159-160), about the universal mysteries of life and death.

The suitcases that the narrator carries out of Fanshawe’s house, with the written work inside, weigh as much as a man, according to the comparison explicit in the text, since the work represents the man himself. Even here, Fanshawe is locked inside a closed minimal space (the suitcases), as if the narrator were carrying him out of Sophie’s space, who has no more room for him inside her, and to his own space, which Fanshawe will now inhabit. The narrator mentions the courage he had to gather in order to open those suitcases, as he will have to do, much later, to open the boxes with Fanshawe’s belongings, in the house he will share with Sophie. To open those spaces is the same as freeing their occupier, to let him freely haunt the lives of those who surround him, like the ghosts in the preceding story.

When the narrator enters alone in the room of Fanshawe’s childhood, that experience reveals itself to be equally painful. The rooms are the most intimate spaces, where the memory of those who inhabited them lingers. If Fanshawe is locked in the room that is the mind of the narrator, the latter too will access Fanshawe’s mind and room, exploring the interior of the man who already knows and inhabits his own interior, in a scene similar to the one in *Ghosts* where Blue penetrates Black’s space: “I settled down behind the desk. It was a terrible thing to be sitting in that room, and I didn’t know how long I would be able to take it. (...) I had stepped into the museum of my own past, and what I found there nearly crushed me” (NYT 257). The emotional reaction of the narrator is violent, provoked by the memories (photographs and letters) revealed in the specific atmosphere of the room. If we look at the house as a metaphor for who inhabits it, that room at the top floor becomes the space where thought, recollections, the subconscious where every secret is hidden, reside.

In the day before the narrator’s break up with Sophie and the self-destructive expedition to Paris, the last space where Fanshawe still inhabits is opened: after the suitcases, the office, and the room of his childhood, the closet with his belongings is unveiled, once again releasing the ghost. The characters discuss the presence that haunts their lives, as if the boxes and the closet contained the man: “Now, as Sophie opened the door of the closet and looked inside, her mood suddenly changed. ‘Enough of this,’ she said, squatting down in the closet. (...) ‘Enough of Fanshawe and his

boxes” (NYT 284). Sophie had opened the doors of memory, one of the locked rooms where the spirit of Fanshawe resides. Inadvertently, she also mentions “his boxes”, evoking the magic box of his childhood and his powers, already by then super-human. “Enough of this” and “All of it”: we do not know whether Sophie is talking about the spaces and objects or Fanshawe, in a deliberate metonymy of container and content. Already in Paris, in the only postcard that the narrator writes to Sophie, we read: “At the very least, remember to clean out the closet before I return” (NYT 289), underlining the need to exorcise the ghost of memory, since it is inside the most interior and unventilated space of the mind (the closet) that the fears of the subconscious hide.

Very similarly, in *Leviathan*, Ben Sachs devotes himself to meticulously cleaning the several rooms of Lillian Stern’s house, as if he was trying to solve every compartment of Lillian’s troubled existence, as full of secrets as a closed room. The process of Sachs’s adoption by Lillian and her daughter Maria is illustrated by the progressive discovery of the several rooms in the house, until he conquers Lillian’s. Finally, Sachs finds the courage to enter the room of the man he had killed, and whose absence he is trying to fill:

‘I finally found the courage to go into his room,’ Sachs said. ‘That’s what started it, I think, that was the first step toward some kind of legitimate action. Until then, I hadn’t even opened the door. Too scared, I suppose, too afraid of what I might find if I started looking. (...) I found a copy of his dissertation. That was the key. If I hadn’t found that, I don’t think any of the other things would have happened (L 223).

As in *The New York Trilogy*, by entering the room Sachs enters the mind of the character and simultaneously discovers what his next mission is. The dissertation is the key, since *Leviathan* is centered around the consciousness of the simultaneity of life and of writing. At the threshold of his new existence, at the decisive moment, Ben feels he is about to begin “a long voyage into the darkness of his soul (L 198), like someone who’s just run into a brick wall” (L 227). A true wall of death, since Sachs decides to kill his previous identity and initiate a new journey that will only end with the accident on a road in Wisconsin.

Remembering his adolescence spent in the company of Fanshawe, the narrator realizes that the dramas lived by Fanshawe were always more painful, because they were more internal: “By the time he was thirteen or fourteen, Fanshawe became a kind of internal exile, going through the notions of dutiful behaviour, but cut off from his

surroundings, contemptuous of the life he was forced to live” (NYT 216). The ending of *The Locked Room* sees the terminal confinement of the protagonist in a space of literal and figurative seclusion, paralleling the nature of his dramas. The possession of the interior of the narrator fragments his apparently unified and coherent world. However, that occupation is doubly destructive, since both Fanshawe and the narrator begin a path of disintegration, to which only the latter will survive. Fanshawe’s actions (like giving his birthday present to Dennis) had revealed new worlds and attitudes to a fascinated narrator-child, in a representation of the process of maturation and exploration of reality through self-discovery. The narrator could have found those possibilities inside himself, without the intervention of Fanshawe, but, if Fanshawe is presented as the central element in this process, that is because he has always inhabited the intimate interior of the narrator, dominating him.

In his biographical digression, the narrator mentions that the final strengthening of the relationship between the young Fanshawe and his dying father occurred in the privileged space of the room. Only in that space of intimacy, also connoted with death, which is awaited within its walls, do father and son recognize each other in their forgotten affective ties. At the moment of his father’s death, Fanshawe is lying on a freshly dug tomb, experiencing the sensation of maximum isolation, looking at the sky, at the antipodes of the life-generating womb, the other universal closed space. The tomb is as remote as the box inside which Fanshawe used to enclose himself in his childhood, to gain access to unique experiences and travels, which he shared with no one. The same happens here, when accessing the experience of death completely alone, oblivious of the presence of the narrator. Fanshawe simultaneously fulfills the zen ideal of pure detachment, of perfect indifference, and the American dream of absolute individualism, asserting, sheltered from the world, his identity. In spite of being a writer, Fanshawe does not seek to publish, his writing remains personal, an expression of his individualism, invulnerable to social pressures, more authentic than those that seek superficial success. In contrast, the narrator, by abandoning his literary dreams to write articles, follows a path opposite to that of Fanshawe, establishing the compromises that the latter always refused.

The narrator possesses a space devoted to solitary writing, which he supposes not to share with anyone, but which, in reality, is equally haunted by Fanshawe, an invisible

but omnipresent presence both in the biography that he is going to write and in the letter sent to that address, in a clear invasion of what the narrator thought was an intimate space, safe from any ghost: “The fact that I did not once stop thinking about Fanshawe, that he was inside me day and night for all those months, was unknown to me at the time” (NYT 242). In Paris, the narrator finds out that Fanshawe had worked as a ghost writer for the wife of a Russian filmmaker, but, in reality, the whole trilogy is one vast system of ghost writing. Stillman invents the ghost Henry Dark to articulate his ideas about the rediscovered paradise. Blue, in turn, makes reports for White where he transforms Black’s life into writing, but, since White and Black are the same person, the recipient reads his own life described by another. In *The Locked Room*, there is a rumor that the anonymous narrator is the true author of *Neverland* and that the name Fanshawe is just an artifice. And here is also included Quinn’s red notebook, a text abandoned by a man that has disappeared and on which, according to the narrator, a big part of the story of *City of Glass* is based. As if in unaware gestation, Fanshawe is inside every space inhabited by the narrator because he is inside himself, preventing him from achieving a capacity for visionary isolation similar to that of the box, of the tomb, or of the room. Incapable of prospering within the limits of the existence he inherited, the narrator stagnates, as if his talent was now the exclusive property of Fanshawe, although his marriage and financial security seemed to give him the freedom to explore his own literary projects. Once again in the trilogy, a character becomes conscious of being as though trapped in a book written by someone else. The threat of psychological disintegration by subjection to Fanshawe is greater than the threat verbalized by Fanshawe himself that he would kill the narrator in case he tried to find his location.

“The letter was opaque, a block of darkness that thwarted every attempt to get inside it” (NYT 238): Fanshawe’s letter announces an impenetrable darkness that gradually takes over the narrator’s entire existence.

Only darkness has the power to make a man open his heart to the world, and darkness is what surrounds me whenever I think of what happened (...) My only hope is that there is an end to what I am about to say, that somewhere I will find a break in the darkness (NYT 235).

The narrator longs for a way out of the darkness, out of the dark room where he is locked, antithetical to the creative liberation of the White Spaces, since the spaces of

the narrator (room, mind, and book) have become spaces of chaos. When the narrator physically penetrates Fanshawe's mother, he feels like he is also penetrating his own darkness, without, however, deciphering it. In a way, he is inside Fanshawe, through the person who generated him, inside the man who is, in turn, inside him. A spiral of violated ("I was fucking out of hatred", NYT 266), chaotic spaces, annihilators of both the invader and the invaded, is drawn.

After having access to the secret that Fanshawe still lives, the narrator himself becomes a conscious locked room: "I locked up the secret inside me and learned to hold my tongue" (NYT 239). The permanently postponed biography and its protagonist become inhibiting presences. In the room of the mind, they undermine his relationship with Sophie, with the world around him, and with himself. In the room of writing, they make his work impossible: "my new workroom (...) seemed too cramped" (NYT 244), a similar feeling to the one experienced by Sophie when she stated that there was no more room inside her for Fanshawe. "I was truly lost, floundering desperately inside myself" (NYT 244), observes the narrator, as if he was immersed in Peter Stillman's dark room. As in the entire trilogy, the closed room that is inside each one of us is always the hardest to explore. By trying to write Fanshawe's biography, the narrator is not creating a cosmogony, as had happened with the census in Harlem when he had found the doors of reality closed, but a chaology. Fanshawe had had his tomb in his youth, which had brought him, and just him, closer to the indecipherable mystery of death. The narrator will now have another tomb, which does not lead him to any revelation: "I was digging a grave, after all, and there were times when I began to wonder if I was not digging my own" (NYT 250). The pages of the book had built a wall of death, transforming it into a tomb, the most lonely and enveloping of spaces, the ultimate room.

For several pages, the narrator summarizes a series of stories that Fanshawe is fond of, where confinement in small spaces (cave, room, igloo) is a constant, always connoted with death, veritable tombs for the living, like the locked room of Fanshawe himself. These deadly, falsely protective walls can be built with words, like the ones spoken by Mrs. Fanshawe, which float in the air around the narrator, forming a protective chamber that is a trap, and which will haunt his life for a long time:

Her voice was hypnotic. As long as she went on speaking, I felt that nothing could touch me anymore. There was a sense of being immune, of being protected by the words that

came from her mouth (...) I was floating inside that voice, I was surrounded by it, buoyed up by its persistence, going with the flow of syllables, the rise and fall, the waves (NYT 264).

In Paris, the narrator tries to fill the rooms that are still empty in the edifice of his memory in order to finish the cursed construction of the written work. But the awareness of his growing inner darkness becomes acute, as does that of the self-incarceration he had reached. The process of duplication reaches its plenitude at this point. Simultaneously, and without the narrator knowing it at that moment, Fanshawe too is enclosed in darkness, under the recurring name of Henry Dark, waiting only for his own and self-imposed end. Alone in the hotel room, the narrator experiences the Kafkaian final metamorphosis.

Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there since the beginning. From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been - but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude - living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull (NYT 292-293).

At this crucial moment, the narrator accesses the central motif (and title) of the story that encloses him as a character, enters the last closed room, and finds himself in Fanshawe. Like Blue, when he entered the room of his double, Black, an image of the interior chaos and of the unknown inner-self, and found his own writings. If to write is a way of attaining identity, the presence of the double is an image of the unknown self of the individual. The pilgrimage through the rooms of memory is always tortured by the strangers that occupy them, intruders that speak for him. On the next page, Paul Auster interferes in the narrative to offer the key to that duplication and circularity, by asserting, himself, that *The Locked Room*, *City of Glass*, and *Ghosts* are all the same story at different and increasing levels of understanding of the theme at hand. The recurring setting of the postmodern metropolis, inherited from Kafka, Beckett, Borges, and Jabès, is as labyrinthine as the human mind, reflecting a psychological complexity that has its roots in Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Dickinson. Finally, the narrator heads for Fanshawe's microcosmic locked room. But will this be an actual encounter at a house in Boston¹¹ or just a final duel inside his mind? Is the

¹¹ The room and the house of the final scene of *The Locked Room* exist in real life. Paul Auster incidentally found out about the sordid story of the house in a visit to Boston, where he heard an account of the dramatic events that took place in its rooms (see *The Art of Hunger*, p. 276).

narrator next to a door behind which Fanshawe is hidden or is he in the interior of his own subconscious? The quest of *The Locked Room* is but the description of a spiraling movement with its center on the narrator, which penetrates a labyrinth-like abandoned mansion (evoking *William Wilson*, another story haunted by the idea of the double) opening door after door, in an imagistic representation of a movement of self-discovery. When Fanshawe's room, the fulcrum of a suffering consciousness, is reached, and despite the door that separates them, the proximity between the two interlocutors is so pronounced that it seems to the narrator that Fanshawe's words are coming from within his own head, growing evidence that that is where Fanshawe in fact resides.

The destructive seclusion of Fanshawe, also experienced by his double, constitutes an antithesis to the solitude of cosmogonic writing. Narrating the process of his own erasure, already manifest during his travels in the Greek freighter, Fanshawe reveals never to have left the closed space of the ship, "living like a dead man" (NYT 310). Through the door, he describes how he would lock himself in his cabin, at the bottom of the ship, the darkest and most inaccessible space, a veritable fluctuating tomb, an antiphoric response to the visionary challenge from youth. Fanshawe has been living for two years in his house in Boston, the final stage of his journey, in complete isolation, under the name Henry Dark, the sinister character from Peter Stillman's book, since darkness has already taken over him. Fanshawe recognizes that the house is too big for a single person and that he has never even tried to explore the upper floors, in a parallel with the human mind, which Fanshawe and the narrator explore together (as one), and of which only a small parcel can be known or used. Fanshawe would have known about its most obscure rooms, and, because of that, he decided not to go any further. The narrator traveled with him, and, after living on the edge of the final darkness, decided to abandon that exploration and to kill Fanshawe, definitively locking him in a room forever closed.

In spite of his insistency, the final door remains closed¹², under a death threat, evidencing the impossibility to reach the absolute truth, about ourselves and about the

¹² A very similar scene occurs in Herman Melville's *Jimmy Rose*, a character that is already present in *Ghosts*, in the hobo disguise chosen by Blue. In Melville's work, Jimmy Rose refuses to open the door of the old house where he locked himself in an eccentric and desperate exile, going as far as to make death threats to a friend who goes looking for him after learning the secret of his whereabouts. Like in the final scenes of *The Locked Room*, the narrator friend, who centers his entire discourse on the protagonist, must

universe that surrounds us, since there will always be one last closed room in our subconscious. We cannot open the door that isolates it from the world, or let that last bastion of the unknown penetrate into a book written in a room with windows to the exterior. The book that is written in those magical or sinister interior rooms never reaches the eyes of the public. What did Fanshawe do or write during his long seclusion? What did Black write? What did Quinn write in the red notebook, with the pen he bought from a deaf mute, an inhabitant from the world of silence? What did Sam write in *In the Country of Last Things*? In contrast with Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, or even Phillip Marlowe, Auster's detectives never reach a solution. The drift of the mind, in a constant state of meditation, motivates the narrative, codified in the drift of the signs, producing other signs in its movement towards an established goal. When that goal remains unattained (or unattainable), we are left with the inconclusive endings of *The New York Trilogy* and of *Moon Palace*.



In the elliptic synopsis of the first paragraphs of *Moon Palace*¹³ (1989), three key elements of Marco Fogg's troubled biography immediately stand out: the room at 112th West Street, the 1492 books in whose company he lived, and the boxes sent by Victor, mobile spaces that stored those same books and contained the memory of the character, like Fanshawe's box, since the books were his most precious possession, slowly accumulated over a period of thirty years, the only inheritance left to Marco, after the estrangement and death of such a striking personality as Victor's. The beginning of the story of Marco blends with the story of that empty room, populated by nothing but the written word. Every stage of his subsequent biography is accompanied by moves into new and more or less chaotic living spaces.

In *The Invention of Solitude*, the dramatic story of A.'s grandparents, and of how Anna Auster killed her husband, is also seen preferably through the constant house moves

decipher the unaltered rooms of an old mansion, the former property of the missing Rose. His spirit haunts the rooms of the mansion, prompting the narrative of the story. Once again, Auster reveals himself to be a "plagiarist in praise", an expression of Melville curiously conspicuous in the text of *Jimmy Rose*. See Herman Melville, *Selected Tales and Poems*, edited with an introduction by Richard Chase (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) pp. 132-143 and Sousa Santos, "Plagiarism in Praise".

¹³ A merely nominal restaurant-space, devoid of description or significant meaning to the progress of the action.

and, consequently, the absence of lasting reference points, which marked and irreparably isolated the Auster family. The murder happens at the house and a succession of cells and courtrooms immediately follows, in a claustrophobic saga, like the very family from which the father is never able to escape. The family is a true cell (jail), and not a cell (body), a group closed in on itself, walled, as a defense against the creditors and every danger immanent to the condition of poor Jewish immigrants. That prison cell is tyrannically dominated by the matriarch Anna Auster, who imposes her authority on all of her children up until death.

During Marco Fogg's infancy, he and Victor create imaginary worlds which compensate for the cruelty and loneliness of the surrounding reality (the mother's death, the illegitimacy, the unknown father, the school classmates). Together, they build perfect universes, described in detail, with a prominent place within the closed space they both share, in a perfect image of the work of cosmogonic writing of the writer that is isolated in his room. Marco and Victor are two creators of alternative universes in perfect interior harmony:

Within a month of my arrival, we had developed a game of inventing countries together, imaginary worlds that overtuned the laws of nature. Some of the better ones took weeks to perfect, and the maps I drew of them hung in a place of honor above the kitchen table. The land of Sporadic Light, for example, and the Kingdom of One-Eyed Men. Given the difficulties the real world had created for both of us, it probably made sense that we should want to leave it as often as possible (MP 6).

To Victor and Marco, real life and writing are the same: every human being can, during the course of his entire existential path, also write the book of his own life: "Every man is the author of his own life," he said. "The book you are writing is not yet finished. Therefore, it's a manuscript. What could be more appropriate than that?" (MP 7), are Victor's words, when Fogg discovers, delighted, that his initials can represent the word "manuscript".

The room at 112th West Street marks the beginning of Fogg's independent biography, strewn with detailed descriptions of inadequate furniture, rentals, shared rooms, and eternal financial problems. A few minutes after he gets inside, the seventy six boxes with Victor's books arrive, and become the only furniture of that empty space. Fogg creates a modular prison of sorts, a bed, a desk, out of those peculiar materials. This is a vital setting for Fogg, as evidenced in the enthusiastic declarations of affection for that small private space of reading and meditation. Books are a salient element of

originality, which, like a puzzle, can build anything at all if assembled in the right way, representing the construction of the written work through the correct placing and ordering of stone-words. The diversified reading allows Fogg to travel to any space and field of knowledge between those four walls, revisiting some of the passages in *White Spaces*.

But emptiness will begin to progressively take control of Fogg's life after Victor's death. Instead of filling the blank space of the room, Fogg will allow that white absence to fill him, in a solitary and cloistered inactivity, intertextually indebted to the static nihilism of some of the characters of Kafka¹⁴ and Beckett and to the theater of the absurd¹⁵. "I decided that the thing I should do was nothing: my action would consist of a militant refusal to take an action at all. This was nihilism raised to the level of an aesthetic proposition. I would turn my life into a work of art" (MP 20-21): this seems to be a peculiar way of writing the book of life, with artistic aspirations, more by omission than by effective construction. Fogg starts to move into another world, discarding his belongings and concocting increasingly bizarre excuses for his apparent indifference to discomfort. In reality, Fogg shows every sign of schizophrenia: his behavior becomes increasingly erratic, he loses notion of time, experiences hallucinations, and his powers of reasoning weaken considerably.

The room is an image of the protagonist of *Moon Palace* (they are both excessively filled with literary fiction and empty of reality), a mirror of his biography and mental

¹⁴ "I am more and more unable to think, to observe, to determine the truth of things, to remember, to speak, to share an experience; I am returning to stone, this is the truth. I am more and more unable even in the office. If I can't take refuge in some work, I am lost." Franz Kafka, *I Am a Memory Come Alive: Autobiographical Writings by Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1974) p. 115. The work (of writing) is the means of salvation for many of Auster's characters. Inactivity, on the other hand, is the vehicle of fragmentation, as proven by Fogg's trajectory.

¹⁵ All the playwrights of the absurd are preoccupied with the modern and global lack of communication. In Edward Albee's plays, each character exists within the borders of his own private ego. The dramatic technique he uses is to elaborate on a theme centered on communication, presenting a series of apparently disconnected discourses. The cumulative effect of these discourses is a devastating commentary about the failure to communicate (solitude) in modern society. *Endgame* (1957), by Beckett, takes place in a room isolated from all contact with the exterior. The characters are confined to that empty room, which is possibly suggestive of the interior of the human skull, the windows being the eyes that observe the world, or, according to some critics, we may be inside the maternal womb. Most of the values that western civilization represents do not seem to matter anymore in this play. Here, everything has lost its meaning, as the game reaches its end. Outside, everything is zero. The only persons left are sterile and desperate, a despair similar to that of *In the Country of Last Things*. Also in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), Krapp, an old man, performs his last soliloquy to be tape-recorded, repeating gestures and words in solitude, in an empty room. "How can one be sure, in such darkness", asks the nameless narrator of *The Unnamable*, referring to the solitude that surrounds and blinds him. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable: Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 1965) p. 292.

processes. The character blends with the room, and the room with the books that inhabit it, the only entities that differentiate it from a completely empty closed space. Fogg lives through the books, his principal possession and activity, which, nonetheless, he gradually sells, in an irreversible process of physical and mental emptying. The fragmentation of the human being is visibly effective, there is a symbiotic relation between the real and the imaginary, between the book and the world, between the individual and the room:

As I sold off the books, my apartment went through many changes. (...) My life had become a gathering zero, and it was a thing I could actually see: a palpable, burgeoning emptiness. Each time I ventured into my uncle's past, it produced a physical effect, an effect in the real world (...) The room was a machine that measured my condition: how much of me remained, how much of me was no longer there. I was both perpetrator and witness, both actor and audience in a theater of one. I could follow the progress of my own dismemberment. Piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear (MP 24).

The emptying of the room symbolizes the emptying of Fogg's life, body, and mind to the point of absolute stupor, of suicidal asceticism. If, until now, the books were Victor's incarnation, they are now Fogg's shrinking incarnation, his furniture, company, and main activity, besides his only source of income and subsistence. Indirectly, through their progressive sale, the books are the actual sustenance of Fogg, who devours them in literal and figurative sense; Fogg is the books, psychosomatically speaking. Anna Blume too burns the books of the library so she can survive the Terrible Winter, but she destroys the library to save her life, since she understood that reality must take priority over fiction.

"The world has shrunk to the size of this room for him, and for as long as it takes him to understand it, he must stay where he is" (IS 79): Fogg cut ties with humanity, in a simple negation of the external world, trying to get as close as possible to the point zero (zen) of existence¹⁶. Postmodernism is disqualified from any political involvement due to its narcissistic and ironic appropriation of existing images and stories. The deliberate rupture with history means the destruction of the relation between human society and space, along with the rupture of the relations between

¹⁶ "The deteriorative surveillances of *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*; the *Locked Room* narrator's absorption into the Fanshawe biography; the slide of the urban society in *In the Country of Last Things*; Fogg's starvations and eviction and the parallel trajectories of wandering and loss in the lineage Effing-Barber-Fogg in *Moon Palace*; the wall-building sentence in *The Music of Chance*; Sachs's abandonment of wife, lovers, and carrer in his drive toward literal fragmentation in *Leviathan* - all are variants of getting back to zero.[v. formatação original dos títulos]" Eric Wirth, "A Look Back from the Horizon", *Beyond the Red Notebook*, p. 174.

public and private spaces, motivated by pure indifference towards anything that is external to the room, to the book, to fiction¹⁷.

Literary creation is clearly demarcated from the delirium caused by Fogg's deprivations, since it implies a work of building and not a passive cataloging of feverish and obscure thoughts, wild associations, and awoken dreams, such as the ones experienced by the protagonist during that period. The writer's isolation between the four walls of the room must be a source of work and construction, not sterile oneiric reveries. That solitary productivity differentiates the writer and confers him the power to fill the white spaces of the room instead of expanding them like Fogg. In a similar way, Franz Kafka's *The Hunger Artist* also took his passive isolation too far, to the point of actual physical deletion, being forgotten by everyone and quickly replaced. Quinn, on the other hand, combines his solitary disaggregation with a unique visionary ability and sublime thoughts annotated in the unreachable book, since solitude can be (re)invented in several ways. When, after the period of delirium caused by starvation, Fogg grasps the reality of his situation, he starts to attribute a deathly connotation to that white space that surrounds him, both in the physical and in the existential plane, in a phonic evocation of the white whale: "(...) back in the world of fragments, back in the world of hunger and bare white walls" (MP 33). This is, in reality, a black space, the antithesis of the seminal text of Auster's prose, the stage for the fragmentation of the individual.

The moments unfurled one after the other, and at each moment the future stood before me as a blank, a white page of uncertainty. If life was a story, as Uncle Victor had often told me, and each man was the author of his own story, then I was making it up as I went along. I was working without a plot, writing each sentence as it came to me and refusing to think about the next. All well and good, perhaps, but the question was no longer whether I could write the story off the top of my head. I had already done that. The question was what I was supposed to do when the pen ran out of ink (MP 41-42).

Fogg's existence is reduced to the depopulated room and its walls are the pages of the book of life where, very much like Quinn, he mentally inscribes the events that transform him into nothing, in a nihilistic reformulation of Victor's teachings. The door and the windows, out of which the *Moon Palace* can be seen, are the means of communication with the exterior that Fogg rejects, in the process of his solipsistic

¹⁷ "O momento pós-moderno é muito mais do que uma moda, revela o processo da indiferença pura na medida em que todos, todos os comportamentos, podem coabitar sem se excluírem, tudo pode ser escolhido conforme o gosto, tanto o mais operatório como o mais esotérico...". Lipovetsky, *A Era do Vazio*, p. 39.

implosion, a white, non-violent suicide by isolation and inanition. Inadvertently, Simon Fernandez, the building superintendent in charge of the task of throwing Fogg out, synthesizes that identity between the room and the life of its only inhabitant, both in a terminal situation: ““You've got some place here, my friend. If you don't mind me saying so, it reminds me of a coffin. One of those pine boxes they bury bums in”” (MP 45). The walls of the room enclose its solitary inhabitant like a sarcophagus. “This is what I deserve, I said to myself. I've made my nothing, and now I've got to live in it” (MP 54): inside the room, Fogg has created a dark cosmogony, consciously building chaos and destroying the cosmos that that space once was.

Moon Palace is a story of wanderings driven by chance, alternating interior and exterior spaces. Leaving the room, Fogg continues the process of his dissolution outside, in the city of New York, a new stage in the process, and a new setting. But the exterior can be even more hostile and empty than the nothingness of the room. Fogg paradoxically finds an external space closed to the turbulence of the city: the Central Park, where he becomes a kind of postmodern Robinson Crusoe. This intermediary space contrasts with the restlessly uniform behavior of the urban crowd, where collective hostility, the fragmentation of the individual, and robotic massification reside. The Central Park is a vestige of nature, an outdoor open space, but closed to the horror of the streets of New York, attentively observed by Fogg in his wanderings. There, calm and generosity exist, and time and individuality can be enjoyed, no matter how eccentric that individuality may be, in an imperfect urban Garden of Eden. However, Fogg will use this new space only to fill it with an even larger amount of nothingness and self-destruction (“...Zimmer and Kitty kept asking me how I had managed to do nothing for so many days”. MP 62). Besides the humiliating activities of mendicancy, Fogg spends his time in hallucinated internal colloquiums, or in repetitive games of cataloging, already patent in *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *Leviathan*, in contrast with the characters of *The Invention of Solitude* and *The Music of Chance*, which try to fill their empty spaces with writing or with the construction of work, even if that work is just a wall without an apparent purpose. Fogg eventually withdraws to a natural cave in Central Park, a closed space of death, the apparent antithesis of the maternal womb, a closed space of life. The cave becomes an image of final solitude, a recurrence of the motif already announced in the room-

coffin, where Fogg had enclosed himself before he voluntarily buried himself in the cave-tomb. But the miracle occurs and Fogg is saved *in extremis*, unlike Quinn, being reborn to life: he is pulled out of the cave by his friends, as though in a birth, thus leaving that paradoxical womb of death, that metamorphic cocoon which would have annihilated him if he had insisted on staying there. The cave is comparable to the dark and secret depths of the mind, with a limited view of the exterior, a possible stage for a somber state of isolation. But it can also be the place for a resurrection, since the journey to the subterranean world is one of the archetypical imageries for the experience that precedes the birth of a new man. Relating both symbolisms, the imagery of the cave represents a descent to the unconscious that involves the death of the ego. Fogg, however, will only switch from a state of hibernation to one of apparent life.

In Fogg's peculiar biography, a transitional period of recuperation in the company of Zimmer ensues, along with his discovery of Kitty Wu's love, with a curious annotation about the difficulties lovers face when there is no room available. However, his stay at Zimmer's house is short-lived and a new period follows, related to the move to a new interior space of work and residence. By leaving the room, Fogg also leaves Zimmer, who he will not see again until thirteen years later. Fogg's new room, at the house of a monomaniac who calls himself Thomas Effing, is as austere as a monk's cell. Once again, although without the extreme eccentricities of the previous room, books are the only decorative element. In this frugal setting, the re-aggregation of the protagonist will occur, through the construction of a written work, the *Obituary in the Present Tense* of Effing, like the homonymous poem in *Ground Work* (GW 90)¹⁸. Fogg will fill the room with words, avoiding that it transforms again into a lethal white space, simultaneously exorcising death and the future fading of Effing's memory, through the elaboration of the extremely detailed obituary, a task in all aspects similar to that which triggered the writing of *The Invention of Solitude*. In both cases, words are a force in opposition to the emptiness of death. Effing, like

¹⁸ *Obituary in the Present Tense* (GW 90) possesses, besides its title, two passages which can point to the text of Moon Palace. "Egg white, the white / of his eye" brings to mind the episode of desperation brought about by the broken egg oozing on the floor at one of those moments of penury in the room of 112th West Street. But it is, without doubt, the verses "He memorizes / none of it. Nor does he write / anything down. He abstains / from the heart / of living things. He waits (...)" that best illustrate the nebulous trance experienced by Marco Fogg in his last days in the shelter of the room and during his drift through Central Park.

Victor, wants to be the author of his own biography, so he forges an identity and an obituary, while his crippled body points in another direction. He persistently demands descriptive precision, which raises in Fogg linguistic and philosophical doubts: there are no two identical objects, nor is any object identical to itself. Language deceives, in the same way it hounded Stillman, Quinn, or Blue in *The New York Trilogy*.

The motif of the cave will reoccur in the narrative in the story of the youth of Effing/Barber, Fogg's grandfather, a wild version, amidst the American wilderness, of the domesticated cave in the middle of Central Park in New York, the capital of the postmodern civilization. To gain access to the cave of renewal, Effing too had to go through a painful experience connoted with death. After being forced to bury his friend and travel companion Byrne with his own hands, Effing lets himself go insane, closed in himself and in the wild solitude of the lost canyon. Reaching the cave, Effing takes possession of the murdered hermit's identity and again embodies an identity which was by then nothing but a ghost, a shadow within those walls, revealing reminiscences of Plato's myth. For Effing, that was when the happiest period of his life, of inner peace and esthetic productivity, started. The cave was located in a sort of natural oasis, a small Eden in the West, like the Central Park is located amidst the eastern urban jungle, spaces that are simultaneously open and closed, which grandfather and grandson **complete** with diverse activities. Effing fills solitude with the construction of works of painting and writing, which reorder his universe and existential chaos. Solitary writing is thus intimately connected to the esthetically ordered transcription of the world, in a process almost as visual as painting itself:

In one notebook he recorded his thoughts and observations, attempting to do in words what he had previously been doing in images (...) then he had found that writing could serve as an adequate substitute for making pictures. (...) He had descended so deeply into his solitude by then that he no longer needed any distractions. He found it almost unimaginable, but little by little the world had become enough for him (MP 171-172).

Yet, the power of solitude is dangerous and must be managed in a very cautious way, under the danger of becoming aggressively hermitic, by avoiding, often violently, contact with others, besides the always present danger of self-destruction by excessive seclusion, as in the case of Fogg. After a certain moment, the cave where Effing had created a perfect cosmos becomes the equivalent of an impregnable fortress, which must be defended at any price, even if that means killing or forever maintaining the

lie of a stolen identity, with all its subsequent anguish. Absolute solitude is always risky, since it is artificial, contrary to man's natural gregarious instinct. Without advocating for the ideologically motivated artist, Auster seems to point out the unsustainable artificiality of those who completely isolate themselves from surrounding reality, who close every door and every window to the world:

He had worked steadily for the past seven months at being alone, struggling to build his solitude into something substantial, an absolute stronghold to delimit the boundaries of his life, but now that someone had been with him in the cave, he understood how artificial his situation was (MP 176).

Effing then decides to leave the cave, that mental refuge and tomb of the past, closing another chapter of the book of life, which will continue to be written by Fogg, the unknown grandson. Listening to Effing's narrative, Fogg feels prophetically identified with his solitude, with the cave where he himself had lived: "I had my own memories of living in a cave, after all, and when he described the loneliness he had felt then, it struck me that he was somehow describing the same things I had felt" (MP 183). Both had visited the most remote of spaces, since they had confused the room and the cave with their entire being, identifying themselves with the walls that surrounded them until exhaustion, until physical and mental annihilation. Both grandfather and grandson had closed themselves within themselves, in a claustrophobic solipsism which Fogg begins to realize after several days locked in a room without windows, smothered by Effing's haunting voice narrating its story of solitude: "As the days went by, the atmosphere in the house became more and more claustrophobic. (...) I began to live inside that voice as though it were a room, a windowless room that grew smaller and smaller with each passing day" (MP 183-184). Fogg lives inside the room and the words that float within it, building the book.

Finally, and as a result of the episode of the distribution of money in the streets of New York, Fogg comes to fully understand Effing's generous madness, as if he had finally entered a forgotten room of his own mind, with a secret passage in space-time to Effing's mind: "It was as though I had crossed some mysterious boundary deep within myself, crawling through a trapdoor that led to the innermost chambers of Effing's heart" (MP 213). Fogg entered his grandfather's cave, the cave of his mind, the same which, in times past, had materialized in the middle of the wild

West. The cave(s) where Effing, the artist of the image and of the word, created a universe, an identity, an art, where he was mad and from where he was reborn. The closed space, the mind, and the genesis of art are always interlinked in Paul Auster's writing.

In the room of the dying Effing, the final conciliation between grandfather and grandson (who are unaware of their family tie) will occur, in an atmosphere of friendship encouraged by the intimate space, anticipating the other scene of final conciliation, this time between a father and a son who recognize each other as such (Barber-Fogg), in the hospital room of the dying Solomon. Fogg fills time with words, with infinite stories, true or imaginary, and even with inventories of the objects in the room, in a last attempt to order the world around him, so as to soften Effing's last moments. Fogg feels that he has carried out an arduous task in that room, a work of words, of writing in the air, in the solitude of a space shared with a living-dead. But that virtual writing has, once again, the power to postpone the ghost of death and forgetfulness.

With Effing dead, and thanks to a new intervention of chance, Fogg will get to know his father, Solomon Barber, the solitary balloon-boy, locked within his deformed body. The body can be a dungeon, a ghostly cave enclosing the unknown truth of the soul ("His body was a dungeon, and he had been condemned to serve out the rest of his days in it..." MP 240), and solitude can be lived inside the space of the books, as though they were rooms where Barber locks himself to get away from others and from himself. Out of the chaotic solitude of his existence, Barber emerges as a character immune to ridicule, with a new entity (like Effing, the father he never got to know), in an inner world created by him, fruit of his isolation: "By plunging into the chaos that inhabited him, he had become Solomon Barber at last, a personage, a someone, a self-created world unto himself" (MP 242).

The tradition of more or less hallucinated and connoted with death isolation runs deep in Fogg's family. Barber's mother too, the abandoned wife of Julian Barber, the first Effing, died insane after a life of voluntary incarceration in a room. The story of Barber's infancy blends with that of the house where his mother filled the emptiness of the room and of life with the most fantastic narratives, dictated by her madness. For Barber and for his descendants, the concept of home is a purely

imaginary one, the house is simply the destructive shell of a desperate childhood. In the company of Fogg, Barber plans to seek Effing's cave, the enigmatic cave lost in the middle of the desert, closing in space the circle of time and generations. Fogg then summarizes the above mentioned spiritual dimension of the cave, so clearly symbolic that it casts doubt about its actual existence: "Even if there wasn't an actual cave, there was the experience of a cave. It all depends on how literally you want to take him" (MP 276). Very similarly, to read *The Locked Room* leads to a persistent doubt about Fanshawe's actual existence outside the narrator's mind. However, the project comes to an end when Barber, at the moment of the revelation of his paternity to Fogg, falls to his death in the open tomb, enclosing himself alive in the ultimate walled space and establishing a partial parallel with *The Locked Room*, where Fanshawe is inside an open tomb at the moment of his father's death. In *Moon Palace* it is the latter who falls into the tomb at the moment of his birth as a father. Fogg's identification as a son is so briefly inconsequent as the life of his own son. Since none of Fogg's actions leads to the construction of a finished system (from the *Obituary*, which was refused by every editor, to the drift across America, cut short by the theft of the car), the life he had planned together with Kitty Wu inevitably ends in an interrupted gestation.

At the ironic Eden Rock Hotel, Fogg experiences a rapid passage through hell, where he masterfully conjugates isolation with self- and hetero-destruction by vandalizing the room, since "If accommodations are provided in hell, I said to myself, this is what they would look like" (MP 302). Marco Fogg understands that, by using his will and determination, he is able to transform the existential fragments into an orderly system, a cosmogony. However, he remains immersed in a militant refusal to act in the face of chaos. At the end of the novel, Marco reaches the western extremity of the American continent and contemplates the emptiness that stretches without obstacles to the coast of China. He only wishes to keep looking at the world, even if the effort required by that looking makes him vulnerable and ignored as an individual, in a pure and neutral perception that Auster associates with Charles Reznikoff's poetry.

For the Austerian character struck by the discovery that the universe can become dominated by chaos and dissolution, the main question is how to react. Only when

imagination fights the chaos with new ideas and new cosmoi can the determinism of the everyday world be altered. Auster's writing shows us that nothing can stop the fragmentation of reality, but, thanks to the richness of imagination, new worlds can be born. In the 1974 essay *The Art of Hunger* (AH 9-25), Auster recognizes himself in a quote by Samuel Beckett:

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else... To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now (AH 19).

To Auster, as to Beckett, art must integrate chaos. And that is what the characters in Auster's fiction do, recognizing without hesitation the presence of chaos in their paths, from Anna Blume, who is never conquered by it, to Quinn and Marco Fogg, who irreparably submerge themselves in it. It is, then, necessary to admit the existence of chaos, to extract from it that which can survive to it, and, ultimately, to use imagination to build a new cosmogony. It is necessary to understand the functioning of the universe before combating it with the power of creativity: that is the task of the writer-character.

CONCLUSION

In the previously mentioned essay *The Art of Hunger*, Auster quotes Samuel Beckett, and, in doing so, defines his own ideological and literary orientation, reflecting a profound critical acuity and sense of artistic mission: “To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now” (AH 19). Throughout his work, Auster shows a rare talent for observing the human diversity, besides taking clear pleasure in the deconstruction and reformulation of language, as though immersed in the exploration of Beckett’s chaos. All his writing seems fascinated by the abstraction from reality and from experienced moments. But if Auster’s linguistic virtuosity may have its roots in French formalism, with which he had extensive contact, the underlying matter remains classically American, from the search for liberty at the expense of homogeneous normality, to the quixotic tests his characters impose on themselves, during the course of a trajectory that is bumpy but carefully engraved in space-time. Auster’s work presents sophisticated surfaces with a subliminal mythology, aside from a special predilection for tracing the sinuous and unpredictable paths of chance, as through there was a musical harmony in the chaotic tension of individual existence. In the journeys of his characters, Auster tries to apprehend how lonely or how multiple can the human mind be.

In Auster, the penchant for intertextuality and the theme of writing are not merely a fictional strategy. The relation between life and text is not a simple rhetorical metaphor. Life (which often is a recollection of other lives, as in *The Invention of Solitude*) is a text that must be written with the greatest urgency, while the wall of death does not surround the writer-character (the dominant variable), even if, fatally and finally, that text turns out to be the memory of other texts. In the solitude of life, close to the edge of annihilation, some words are aligned on the page, and written sentences start a dialogue with the pages of those who occupy or haunt other scenes of writing: “He finds a fresh sheet of paper. He lays it out on the table before him and writes these words with his pen. It was. It will never be again. Remember” (IS 172). In *In the Country of Last Things*, for instance, Auster achieved, with a cruel factuality that is evocative of Jonathan Swift, to build a world of demolished objects that we are immediately and painfully forced to recognize as our own world. The ancestors of such tales of an intolerable present, made viable through the dislocation to another context, make up a vast list that includes Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley’s

Brave New World and Beckett's *Endgame*. Auster shows that writing is a form of selftranslation: he reflects metaphorically about his fictional doubles and ghosts, making that translation one of the central motifs of the book.

In the interior of the room of the book, Auster masterfully stages the writer's central dilemmas, dilemmas that are eternal and universal. To Blue's question "How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (NYT 169-170), the only decisive answer would be to leave the room that is the book. But to the writer, infinitely vulnerable to accusations of not meeting the ideological requirements enunciated in the writing, to leave the room is impossible: that would mean to stop writing. The imagery of the room is vital to Auster: even though every individual is seen as an isolated entity, a network of connections and correspondences that needs to be unveiled subsists. To fulfill this goal, it is necessary to plunge into the core of individual solitude and to order the chaos of chances and incoherent objects, keeping what makes sense and maintains a link with the surrounding world. Naturally, the possibility of absolute confinement, of refusing to look at the outside world remains, but by choosing that attitude the writer-character is suffocating the part of himself that is the most alive. If the imagination generates fragmentation, the written work will never be able to codify the order of the new imaginary cosmos, establishing the connection between the room and the world.

In the course of his literary journey, Auster, based in New York, explores mysterious and unexpected areas such as solitude, doubles, the limits of language, the father's absence, death by progressive detachment from every desire and need, the role of the past, infinite enumeration, and chance. His way of addressing these complex obsessions is framed by a preference for the postmodern procedural game, not meaning by that that his work is limited to the current categorizations. His prose systematically tends toward austere simplicity, but it is not restricted to the characteristics of minimalism. Similarly, Auster always escaped the simplification of the term "postmodern", since his exploration of the ambiguity of perception and identity bears the imprint of global modernity. Auster cultivates his art also as a means to find new meanings in experiences; Auster's writing is at the same time epistemology and ontology.

In the last paragraph of *City of Glass*, the narrator notes: “As for Auster, I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout” (NYT 132). The narrator is himself a critic, reminding us that this real-fictional character-writer, the apparent architect of the novel, has allowed his other characters to disappear without explanation, irreversibly fragmented his point of view, did not provide a solution to the intrigue, let his excessive determination result in indetermination, and allowed the narrative codes to converge in an irreparable undecipherability. We thus observe how the Austerian postmodern novel parodies other genres, exposing the conventions in their forms and language. In Auster’s metafiction, we find a fundamental refusal of the notion of univocal classification, since metafiction is a process in constant motion, fiction in a state of metamorphosis. It could be the case that Auster’s apparently obsessive orientation towards epistemology would reduce the novel to an academic endeavor. However, literature possesses an intrinsic value that goes beyond the codification of dominant ideologies. Literature is esthetically justified, and the fusion of theory and representation reveals and exercises the capacities and limitations of both aspects. Auster never manipulates his characters, because he knows he too is prey to the inner need to write, assigning to literature the role that Montaigne used to assign to philosophy: to learn to live.

The fictional plot may be the story of the quest for a vision, as in *City of Glass*, *Leviathan*, or *In the Country of Last Things*, perhaps reflecting Auster’s posture with respect to the nature of the postmodern condition. The reworking of the detective story as a search for the ultimate language shows that what is most appropriate to the postmodern world is not the final and specular textualization of reality but the text about the text. Stories about stories and books of questions instead of answers are the forms in which the difficult reality of our times is better embodied. *The New York Trilogy* participates in the deconstruction of the mythological tower of the ancestral city and of its language, describing the Babel-like fragmentation of the contemporary metropolis, in parallel with the postmodern crisis of linguistic representation. Its ideological structure of wandering and detachment with regard to preexisting canons puts the postmodern subject under the obligation of questioning the basic foundations of every mythical archetype. Auster’s novels evoke traditional logocentric ghosts (presence, reality, truth), which reflect the principle of inseparability between word

and meaning, only to dissolve that identity through a textual orientation that emphasizes fictionality and consequently reinforces the illusory effects of signification. Auster alters the mechanisms, thwarting the reader's expectations regarding the epilogue and textual transparency that a mimetic pact would imply. The resulting empty space imbues the text with the freedom of a plurality of meanings, which disperses all certainties and carries with it a cosmogonic/chaogonic power. Under the appearance of narrative fluency, Auster's writing hides the subversion of the basic premises of realist literature and of referential signs, in a fictionalized self-reflexive poetics about the structuring of an imaginary universe.

Auster's protagonists are self-exiled (locked in a room, in a book, or in themselves), vagabonds, and explorers of a country, of a closed space, or of a page, who conquer unknown regions through their writing. The character's attempt to name objects and to decipher signs is also the job of the ontological traveler, as adventures only exist in the language that narrativizes them. Since language is unstable and its meanings are imprecise, no space can be completely occupied by its discoverer. The uncertainty of language also negates the self-discovering traveler access to the absolute origin, the ultimate identity of the individual, the final locked room. The semantic journey never reaches its destination, since it consists in an endless spiral of arrivals and departures, of travels in space and time. The multitude of orientations results in an infinite referential framework which continually alters the spatial meaning for the traveler of the imaginary universe. In Auster's writing, objects and the language of the mental processes that conceptualize those same objects are often indistinguishable:

(...) the beating
drum of words
within, so many words

lost in the wide world
within me, and thereby to have known
that in spite of myself

I am here.

As if this were the world.

(...) For the crumbling of the earth
underfoot

is a music in itself, and to walk among these
stones
is to hear nothing
but ourselves.

(...)
then count out my life
in these stones: forget
I was ever here. The world
that walks inside me

is a world beyond reach.

In Memory of Myself (GW 97)

Quarry (GW 80)

From the space dominated by stones, we hear the voice of the writer-character, as though they had taken upon themselves the task of narrating his solitary and silent journey. The stones, the wall, and the room (the words, the page, and the book) ontologically structure the imaginary cosmos generated by Paul Auster's mind, like a real world born of a magma of words contained in another, interior, world.

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INDEX:

ABBREVIATIONS USED

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I – STONES AND WALLS: THE MUSIC OF WORDS

CHAPTER II – THE ROOM THAT IS THE BOOK: THE WRITTEN

COSMOGENESIS

CHAPTER III – THE GENESIS OF NOTHINGNESS IN THE SPACE OF CHAOS

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Bibliography

Secondary Bibliography

Clara Sarmento

**THE WORDS, THE PAGE, AND THE BOOK:
SYMBOLIC INCIDENCES IN THE LITERARY
CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORKS OF PAUL AUSTER**

**ABBREVIATIONS FOR SOME OF THE WORKS OF PAUL AUSTER
USED IN THIS WORK¹²⁷:**

AH - *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews*. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1992.

CLT - *In the Country of Last Things*. London: Faber and Faber, 1989 [1987].

GW - *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970 - 1979*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991 [1990].

IS - *The Invention of Solitude*. London: Penguin, 1988 [1982].

L - *Leviathan*. London: Faber and Faber, 1993 [1992].

MC - *The Music of Chance*. London: Penguin, 1991 [1990].

MP - *Moon Palace*. London: Penguin, 1989.

MV - *Mr. Vertigo*. London: Penguin, 1994.

NYT - *The New York Trilogy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992 [1987].

RN - *The Red Notebook and Other Writings*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995 [1993].

S - *Smoke and Blue in the Face*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

¹²⁷ Works not listed here will be included in the final bibliography

INTRODUCTION

“The Words, the Page, and the Book: Symbolic Incidences in the Work of Paul Auster” is an essay on the intertextual reading of the extensive literary production of a writer that makes contemporary life in the turn-of-the-century urban universe the main vehicle for his originality. Auster was born in 1947, in Newark, New Jersey, studied in Columbia University, and, after working for a year in an oil tanker, lived in France for four years before returning to New York in 1974. The aesthetic and fictional world of Paul Auster is austere¹, composed of reconfigured intrigues and complex motifs drawn from the history of American literature and from his own past as a writer. It is thus hard to distinguish the varied intertextual plots that characterize his literary journey, which we will try to summarize, not according to its rigid chronological order, but rather to the way his different works illustrate the main themes and inflections guiding that unconventional journey. Auster started his career writing poems and essays for *The New York Review* and for *Harper's Saturday Review*. In 1987, he obtained critical acclaim for the collection of narratives (*City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*) in *The New York Trilogy*, having then opted for the novel. *The New York Trilogy* is a postmodern deconstruction of fictional genres, particularly the mystery novel, forming a sequence of simultaneous explorations of multiple questions, from the plot, centered around an oppressive urban context, to the nature of language and the unavoidably intertwined roles of writer, character, and reader. *The New York Trilogy* narrates its tales with considerable dramatic suspense, but breaks the rules of traditional structure to transform fiction into a true research field, simultaneously immersed in contemporary urban social reality and in research on language, writing and literary history. *City of Glass*, for instance, uses the detective story in order to explore themes of identity and the relationship between words and meaning. Instead of being solved, the mysteries investigated eventually turn out to be even more complex. Each story in the trilogy adds a new thread to what has already been written and reveals the growing diversification and epistemological confidence of a writer that investigates, among other things, his own identity, and at the same time (de)scribes the quest for nature and for the origins of the literary genre he uses.

¹ See, for instance: Robert Creeley, "Austerities" in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14:1 (Spring 1994), 35-39; Brian Case, "Austere Auster" in *Time Out* 902 (December 2, 1987), 42; Cheri Fein, "Austerity" in *Details* (April 1989), 127-128; Joan Frank, "The Art of Austerity" in *San Francisco Review of Books* 17:3 (Winter 1992), 20-22.

Auster's stories always have hidden literary roots, in which the writer seems to display a canonical desire for building an explicatory tradition. In the trilogy, the fictional ghosts include names like Melville, Thoreau, Poe, Whitman or Hawthorne.

Auster's books are postmodern in that they are fictions clearly and reflexively about fiction. However, to read Paul Auster's fiction as a mere illustration of a certain definition of postmodernism would be severely reductionist. Postmodernism is a global movement visible in almost every cultural manifestation, from Quentin Tarantino's movies to architecture, from the writings of William Burroughs and John Fowles to painting, from philosophy to television. In literature, postmodernism has its roots in the rejection of traditional mimetic fiction and of the values of institutionalized modernism. On the contrary, it favors a sense of artifice, suspicion towards absolute truth, and highlights the fictionality of fiction. Postmodernism's self-ironic attitude appears to be a return to traditional values, but it is in fact a conscious questioning of ancient styles of writing. Postmodernism's deceptive lightness makes it more easily assimilated by mainstream and pop cultures, which possibly explains Paul Auster's success and the movie adaptations of his fiction. The artificial acceptance of contemporary alienation and the idolization of the art-object have already led to accusations of political irresponsibility. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard² sees the boom of information technologies and the correspondent easy access to a proliferation of diverse materials of seemingly anonymous origin as an integrant part of postmodern culture and as a contribution to the dissolution of personal identity and responsibility values. However, Lyotard considers the multiplicity of styles of postmodernism as part of a massive rejection of the representational conception of art and language. A comparative reading of the paradigmatic *New York Trilogy* with certain features of postmodernism, namely those

² Jean-François Lyotard, *A Condição Pós-Moderna*, translation by José A. Bragança de Miranda (Lisboa: Gradiva, 1989)

enumerated by Ihab Hassan³, Douwe Fokkema⁴, Brian McHale⁵ or Jean-François Lyotard, may suggest the presence of a novel representative of this movement, but Auster's work is not restricted to this field. Though Auster's writing has plenty epistemology, it also investigates a very large spectrum of ontological and intertextual topics:

Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. (...) an author may, in his or her own life time, easily write both a modernist and postmodernist work. (Contrast Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with his *Finnegans Wake*.) (...) This means that a "period," as I have already intimated, must be perceived in terms *both* of continuity *and* discontinuity, the two perspectives being complementary and partial.

(...) any definition of postmodernism calls upon a fourfold vision of complementarities, embracing continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony⁶.

Auster, a former teacher of creative writing, poet, critic, and translator, has always written near his personal experiences. Hence the presence of so many autobiographical elements in his work, the direct motive for the indiscriminate use of the expression writer-character (or character-writer) in this work. In *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), a meditation about death built around memories of his father and the author's relationship with his own son, Auster also reflects on the relationship between language and the individual, on the simultaneous need for and solipsism of naming objects. The book is an attempt to proclaim the power of memory in a world perpetually beyond our comprehension, exploring contemporary and historical philosophical questions about language, along with the awareness of the way the writer should rebuild it as an instrument of autobiographical and phenomenological expression. Auster's fictional works present a stunning degree of variety, always encompassing the most vast contexts and corresponding ideologies and aesthetics. Taking place in an urban scenery in disintegration, *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) reveals itself to be an apocalyptic novel with historical themes. *Moon Palace*

³ Such as, for instance, the concepts of *scriptible* (writerly), performance (happening), silence, exhaustion, process, participation and absence, described by Ihab Hassan in "Postface 1982: Towards a Concept of Postmodernism" in *Critical Essays on American Postmodernism*, edited by Stanley Trachtenberg (New York: G.K.Hall and Co., 1995) pp. 81-92.

⁴ Douwe W. Fokkema, *História Literária: Modernismo e Pós-Modernismo*, translation by Abel Barros Baptista (Lisboa: Vega, n.d.).

⁵ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). To McHale, the epistemological dominant is characteristic of modernism, changing to the ontological dominant in postmodernism. Cf. McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 3-11.

⁶ Hassan, "Postface 1982", pp. 84-5.

(1989) is a fascinating work of complex fantasy, a fusion of experimentalism with the American myth. *The Music of Chance* (1990; filmed in 1993 by director Philip Haas) leaves the urban scenery to wander through an endless space of chance, an *on the road* restricted by the stones of a wall of multiple connotations. *Leviathan* (1992), another experimental work about the simultaneity of life and writing, was followed by *Mr. Vertigo* (1994), a history of America metaphorized in the journey of a young man who learns to fly. *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* (1995) originated the homonymous motion pictures directed by Wayne Wang. In his fiction, Paul Auster combines magical realism with the contemporary world, never allowing the reader to forget that his main theme is the process of writing itself. Among his works there are also translations from French and several volumes of poetry, besides *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979* (1990) and *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews* (1992), compilations of poems and essays dealing with many of the subjects covered in his fiction. Paul Auster deciphers the world as a confusing textual labyrinth, fully aware that to rebuild memories, to beat solitude, to find order in chance, and to discover the living image of objects is the true act of investigation by which the writer is responsible, that is, to discern the order of the universe amidst chaos.

After reading Paul Auster's literary oeuvre, two motifs stand out: existential loss and drift, and the isolation of the character devoted to the task of writing, as if he were confined to the book that controls his existence. When the author's works are taken as a whole, this second motif is clearly prevalent, situating in the space of the character's solitude the motive for his own drift, as if the wandering could also take place within the four walls of a room, as it is narrated within the space of the page and of the book. In this gallery of solitary characters devoted to the task of writing and meditating, some started to stand out as capable of ordering, through that work, an apparently disjointed existential trajectory. Among these, the narrator of *White Spaces*, A., and Samuel Farr-Anna Blume are worthy of special attention. Characters like Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe, Ben Sachs, or Paul Benjamin seem to hesitate between the construction of a universe and self-destruction, as though incapable of fully realizing the infinitely creative power of writing. And what to say of Jim Nashe, a non-writing but constructive entity, who claims, however, to be capable of reading the

meaning of his nomadic existence in the stones of a wall, as if these were the words of a text he himself had written? Despite being one of the few protagonists in Auster's fiction who is not directly involved in writing as a profession (and mission), Jim Nashe seems to be the one closest to the poetic persona of *Ground Work* and of the essays of *The Art of Hunger*. Indeed, in both his poems and essays, Auster seems to look at writing as a concrete physical endeavor of actual building, as if the words to be aligned in the text-poem were stones to be laid in order to build a wall or some other stone structure.

Resulting from this reflection, the present work examines symbolic meanings in the work of Paul Auster, where stones-words are the genetic substance of a world (re)built through the work of writing, between the four walls of a room. Words build the book in the same way stones build a wall, and that wall defines a closed space-time which nonetheless allows for unlimited mental expansion, like a room or a book. Paul Auster's work is revealed as an aesthetical-literary meta-reflection about the work of writing: the writer exists solely as an entity that produces writing; writing (and its product, the book) occurs entirely within the room; the room is the exclusive space of the writer entity, in a circular succession of endless identities. How Paul Auster sees himself as a writer, how he looks at the writing he produces, and how he transposes that attitude into literary discourse is what we shall subsequently try to explore.

In the first chapter ("Walls and Stones: the Music of Words") we shall look at the above mentioned image of writing as a precise work of construction, starting from the raw materials which are words and from the unequivocal correspondence between the written-aligned object and the external referent, concentrating particularly on *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979*, *The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews*, *Laurel and Hardy go to Heaven*, and *The Music of Chance*. The search for truth may be the search for a visual presence, and the infinite task of the supreme artist would be to designate every object in the universe, rebuilding it through those reinvented words, like Peter Stillman, an insane and ironic *alter-ego* of the author, who seeks the creation not just of a new world but also of a new language to translate it.

It is within the closed space of the scene of writing (though generically called "room", it may also, throughout the fiction, take the shape of a house, a studio, an apartment,

or a jail cell) that there seems to be more freedom, as the protagonists get the possibility of enjoying an entire universe built by their work. Since the room is a space that can be filled (“White Space”), it is a haven of infinite possibilities; there, a protective alternative universe is created where everything is ordered by imagination. The pages that the character-writer builds turn into the walls of the room, secluding him, so that the written genesis can mature and freely expand. The room is like a womb that conceives and gives birth to the written work after a long gestation in solitary confinement. This symbolic figuration is explored in the chapter “The Room that is a Book: the Written Cosmogony”, through the analysis of the settings where writing happens mentioned, among others, in *The Red Notebook: True Stories, Prefaces and Interviews*, *Smoke*, *Mr. Vertigo*, *White Spaces*, *The Invention of Solitude*, *Ghosts*, *Black-Outs*, *The Locked Room*, *Leviathan* and *In the Country of Last Things*, evoking, whenever pertinent, the already mentioned fictional ghosts from the literary traditions of America and of the world. Anna Blume’s room in *In the Country of Last Things* is undoubtedly that which best demonstrates the semantic game of “Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room” expressed in *The Invention of Solitude* (IS 159-160)⁷. However, the room is, therefore, also a potential tomb or a thanatographical womb that may generate chaos instead of the written cosmos.

In Auster’s oeuvre, the work of writing can be seen in two ways, depending on its final product. The writer can be the author of a cosmogony, through an originative power that reveals itself in the solitude of the room. The construction of the written work is at the same time the methodical construction of an imaginary universe. Yet, the writer can become, in another context, the creator of a lethal vacuum, describing a chaogony, disordering the universe he himself conceives, conjuring a wall of death around himself and his characters. The text is built through the harmonious alignment of words, and not the simultaneous and formless gathering of fragments randomly put together, always unable to generate a symmetrical and expandable space, identifiable with the scene or with the product of writing, unlike Bartleby, who annihilates himself between walls and rejects writing. In the chapter “The Genesis of Nothingness in the Space of Chaos”, we will try to penetrate the dysphoric “blackspaces” of *City of Glass*,

⁷ In *In the Country of Last Things* we read: “Blume. As in doom and gloom, I take it.” “That’s right. Blume as in womb and tomb...” (CLT 101).

Ghosts (which constantly plays with the connotative notions of Black and White), *The Locked Room* and *Moon Palace*, with new intertextual missives to Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The writer-character in permanent specular reflection is like an inexperienced God, whose hands can originate cosmos or chaos, life or death. Hence Auster's recurrent meditation on the work and power of writing, which is simultaneously self-biographical and self-critical.

To summarize the content and sequence of the three parts of this work in a single sentence, one could come up with the following formula: "The Building (I) of Cosmos (II) and Chaos (III)" in Paul Auster's scenes of writing. But who better than Paul Auster himself to answer the pertinent question "What are the meanings of the stones, walls and rooms that appear all over your work?" The author's answer certainly becomes the best preface:

Difficult to answer your question. Everything and nothing. The irreducible. That which resists. It's hard to say. Oddly enough, I grew up just down the road from a quarry. Perhaps that has something to do with it.... I'm talking about stones, of course. As for walls and rooms... it is enough, I believe, to start thinking about them to come up with several answers.⁸

The fact that Paul Auster is a contemporary author, open to dialogue and to sharing ideas, with a literary production still in full expansion and not yet exhausted by specialized critical analysis, presented itself as a tempting challenge and one that was immediately accepted. Auster has not yet given rise to those universal truths, crystallized in endless bibliographies, which transform any supposedly original approach into a discouraging reformulation of previous perspectives. The almost absence of specific bibliography about the subject under study is completely outweighed by the adventure of reading and re-reading for the first time from the pages of Auster-himself, the best mirror of his literary ideology and imagery. Auster's work opens up before us like a "territory ahead", an endless road that Jim Nashe invites us to explore, a drift through space and time towards the wilderness in the West, like the final journey of *Moon Palace*.

⁸ Paul Auster, personal correspondence, 28 June 1996

I

STONES AND WALLS: THE MUSIC OF WORDS

(...) and the word that would build a wall
from the innermost stone of life.
(GW 67)

Reading Paul Auster's work, from his first poems and essays to his most recent fiction, reveals the recurring presence of a metalinguistic and metafictional reflection on the work of writing, in an obsessive exploration of the scene of literary creation, centered around its protagonist, the writer-character. This designation comes from the typically Austerian theme of following the writer in his vicissitudes and movements, within a space exposed to the reader's eye. Since the work of writing is the central topic of his reflections in prose, poetry, or essay, the person who produces that writing is the main character of Auster's text. The writer-character plays the leading role in his fiction, is the subject of his essays, and expresses himself in his poetry, as a vehicle for the experiences of Auster-writer himself, who so often uses the autobiographical annotation or some type of meaningful onomastic game. But how does Paul Auster see this writer-character, his double, and what verbal images does he use in order to transpose the genesis of the written work into that same written work?

In his comparative schematization of the characteristics of modernism and postmodernism, Ihab Hassan¹ juxtaposes the postmodern process ("performance/happening") to the artistic object as the "finished work" of modernism. Auster, a writer of the postmodern period, reflects, metafictionally and metalinguistically, upon the problem of writing as action, allowing the reader to follow that process of construction. The dynamics of the construction of a poem must be the dominant principle that decides its form, defining the poetic structure in kinetic terms². Since the process is a generative continuity, in which one perception leads directly to another, the composition constitutes an open field capable of incorporating elements learned during the act of writing, without rigid presuppositions concerning the technique or subject ("The poem, then, is not a transcription of an already known world, but a process of discovery", AH 87). The reader can, in consequence, enjoy a postmodern concept of participation, in contrast with the modernist distance, since

¹ Hassan, "Postface 1982", p. 87.

² Theoretical premise that Auster seems to share with the advocates of the so called "open field composition" or "projective verse", described in Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse" (in *Poetry New York*, 1950), related to the poetry of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.

Auster dissects the process of writing, of world creation, offering free access to the mind of the writer-character. The narrative and the language become intellectualized, self-conscious. While modernism is *lisible* (“readerly”), postmodernism is *scriptible* (“writerly”), actively focused on the writing³.

To Auster, the room, archetype of the space surrounded by four walls, is the space of artistic creation *par excellence*, to which all literary instances converge. In the sublime confinement of the room, a written universe is created, where latent chaos is ordered through imagination, generating an expanding cosmos, successively framed by the mind of the writer (where that infinitely dense matter is, at the beginning, concentrated - *Le monde est dans ma tête...*⁴), by the room of writing, and by the pages of the book. This framing presupposes the delimitation of a potentially infinite and chaotic space through some kind of barrier to dissolution and disintegration, and to the subsequent loss of identity by cosmic assimilation. This framing is thus related to a necessary symmetrical ordering, to the harmonious building of a work that would otherwise be a mere shapeless heap of sterile raw material.

In literary work, those raw materials are made up of words representing concepts, experiences, and plots that exist in the mind of the writer, and the final work, which is intended to be harmonious, is the written page, or, in a broader perspective, the book itself. In Paul Auster's creative universe, the work of writing resembles, to an unparalleled degree, the actual building of a physical structure, as if we were talking about a stone wall or fence. This image is corroborated by the conspicuous recurrence of the wall motif throughout Auster's work. Taking the product of that construction a bit further, we realize that a certain configuration of four walls produces a room, comprising an inhabitable space and defining a boundary between the inside and the outside worlds. The room is another recurring motif in Auster's oeuvre. Auster's work of construction, however, is actually done through his writing. His walls are made of words resembling methodically ordered stones, so that the whole doesn't crumble and

³ “Foucault instructs us, for example, to ‘develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction,’ and ‘to prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic’”. Quoted by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, USA: Basil Blackwell, 1990) p. 44.

⁴ Cf. Gérard de Cortanze, “Le monde est dans ma tête, mon corps est dans le monde”, *Magazine Littéraire* 338 (Décembre 1995), 18-25.

reaches the aesthetics appropriate for a literary work. These walls of words build, in turn, as though written pages put together, "...the room that is the book" (NYT 170). Word by word, the writer-character builds the space of the literary work, since it is word by word that he builds the book. The wall is made up of stones, just as the text is made up of words that create or recreate the universe⁵. In this way, it becomes possible to draw an equivalence between the stones and those words, just as between wall and text, both of them the result of a work of building.

These words-stones are the genetic material of the world (re)built through the work of writing, between the four walls of the room. Words build the book, just like stones build walls and rooms. The product of that work is the archetypal space of literary creation, constantly revisited by Auster, built exclusively out of words and enclosing the character-author within its pages/walls. Or, in Auster's own words, from the work of writing is born the room that is the book, the sublime point of convergence of all literary instances, where the writer achieves his cosmogony.

Throughout Paul Auster's work, it is unquestionably in the construction of the poetic component that the already mentioned need for a symmetrical configuration of words is most noticeable. Indeed, his lyricism has a strong musical, melodic component, firmly rooted in the music of the words, or, to be in consonance with the imagery here explored, in the music of the stones in harmony. However, recurring reflections by the author regarding that same work of literary building show his awareness of a troubled trajectory when it comes to his poetic work. The expansion of the poetic cosmos generated in Paul Auster's imagination was not always linear, as it found several walls in its way which, instead of working as structures framing his poetic constructions, were true monolithic barriers that jeopardized his entire literary career. In a long interview he gave to Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (from 1989-90

⁵ The logical-psychical parallelism between world and language is the basis of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. In *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, published in 1953, Wittgenstein compares language to an old town: "a labyrinth of paths and small plazas, of new and old houses, of houses expanded in former times, and this surrounded by a quantity of new suburbs, with rectilinear streets bordered by uniform buildings", to then pose the question: "How many houses or streets does it take for a city to become a city?" (translated from the French version: *Investigations Philosophiques*, trans. by Klossowski. Paris: Gallimard, 1961. Pp. 18-19). How many stones form the wall? How many words form language and the written work? Wittgenstein relates the building of material work, under several forms (houses, streets, buildings... walls and rooms) and made of several materials (such as stone), to the building of linguistic work, which is made of words. Curiously, his *The Blue and the Brown Books*, which call to mind Paul Auster's *The Red Notebook*, were published in 1958.

and published in *The Art of Hunger*), Paul Auster critically mentions that, initially, his poems resembled clenched fists: “they were short and dense and obscure, as compact and hermetic as Delphic oracles” (AH 285). An asymmetrical or excessively nebulous construction can generate a structure that is not only empty in terms of expression but also fatal to the transmission of literary discourse, a true wall of death for writing. The cosmogonic power of the writer must be self-aware of its simultaneously constructive and destructive potential, and Paul Auster is an excellent example of that, as Adam Begley transcribes:

He wrote prose, not verse - he says he hasn't written a poem in 13 years. His poetry, he explains, "was always a very compact, univocal expression of feelings. Prose is vast..." He pauses, searching for the right words. "It allows me to speak out of both sides of the mouth at once." His themes were primed for elaboration⁶.

The switch from poetic construction to fictional imagination is, therefore, understandable, as Paul Auster describes in the interview he gave to Joseph Mallia: “I don't think of myself as having made a break from poetry. All my work is of a piece, and the move into prose was the last step in a slow and natural evolution” (AH 257). Auster's poetry juxtaposes fragmentary evocations of an imaginary landscape, barren and dry, with verses of tortured self-analysis – “in the impossibility of words / in the unspoken word / that asphyxiates, / I find myself” (*Interior*, GW 31). His poetry is at its most expressive when it brings to mind the hypnotic, though restrained, rhythm of his prose, but, generally speaking, it suffers from the very austerity and dryness it tries to convey.

In *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979*, published for the first time in 1990, Auster collected some of that seminal poetry, which already contained several of the main themes of the works in prose to follow. We shouldn't forget that groundwork is “the work which forms the base for some kind of study or skill”⁷, and hence it can be the base for a written work. Auster breaks apart the word to better look at its segments: *Ground Work*, or work on the ground, on the dirt where he will erect his creation, building it like a skillful stonemason. This is the first work (first poems and essays) that foreshadows his future works and respective themes, like the words

⁶ Adam Begley, "The Case of the Brooklyn Symbolist" in *The New York Times Magazine* (August 30, 1992) 41, 52-54.

⁷ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

and the mystery of language, the city, shadows, solitude, death, emptiness, and chance. Prominent influences in his work, like Kafka and Beckett, are unsurprisingly present. Sir Walter Raleigh, to whom Auster frequently refers to, makes his appearance in a powerful meditation about death (*The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh*, GW 164-169). And, in this poetic groundwork, we can also find the omnipresent stones in all their forms⁸, the walls, and the first appearances of the room which will, in later works, surround the writer-character.

The stones and the walls of *Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979* have a multiple, polysemous type of language, just like words, the raw material of Auster's art⁹. And there are several verbal images which transpose, in a more or less obvious way, the concept of building a written work into Auster's poetry, associating words and stones, walls and pages. In order to interpret and examine those same images, we will refer to some of his most expressive compositions.

In *Unearth*, originally published in the homonymous *Unearth* (Living Hand, 1974), which covers the poetic production from 1970 to 1972, the poem interweaves the wall and the stones with a whole semantic field related to writing and language:

Along with your ashes, the barely
written ones, obliterating
the ode, the incited roots, the alien
eye - with imbecilic hands, they dragged you
into the city, bound you in
this knot of slang, and gave you
nothing. Your ink has learned
the violence of the wall. Banished,
but always to the heart
of brothering quiet, you cant the stones
of unseen earth, and smooth your place
among the wolves. Each syllable
is the work of sabotage.

Unearth I (GW 7)

From one stone touched
to the next stone
named: earth-hood: the inaccessible
ember. You
will sleep here, a voice
moored to stone, moving through
this empty house that listens
to the fire that destroyed it. (...)

Unearth XI (GW 17)

⁸ *Difficult to answer your question. Everything and nothing. The irreducible. That which resists. It's hard to say. Oddly enough, I grew up just down the road from a quarry. Perhaps that has something to do with it... I'm talking about stones, of course.* Paul Auster, personal correspondence, 28 June 1996. Cf. "Introduction" of the present work, p. 11.

⁹ *I'm learning to listen to stones*, said Marguerite Yourcenar in the last years of her life. Yourcenar knew the mystery of the voices of the objects and the fascination of the world's forgotten and neglected alphabets. The metaphor is not new, since already in *Tellus Stabilita*, from *Memoirs of Hadrian*, Yourcenar spoke about reconstruction as the result of a collaboration *with time gone by, penetrating or modifying its spirit, and carrying it toward a longer future. Thus beneath the stones we find the secret of the springs.* *Memoirs of Hadrian*, trans. Grace Flick and Marguerite Yourcenar (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1955) pp. 128-129.

When we read that “Your ink has learned the violence of the wall”, we understand that that wall has a destructive power that projects itself in writing. *Song of Degrees*, from *Wall Writing*¹⁰, seems to partially reveal the meaning of that wall:

(...)
Minima. Memory
and mirage. In each place
you stop for air,
we will build a city
around you. Through the star -
mortared wall
that rises in our night, your soul
will not pass
again.
(GW 51)

Presented as an insurmountable barrier, the ultimate obstacle at the end of the poem, here the wall foreshadows the annihilation of writing, a violent restraint to the flow of the ink from the writer’s pen. The constructive power of writing (“we will build a city”) may be used in a negative way when, instead of generating a well-ordered universe, it generates chaos. If the room that is the book does not structure the expansion of the author’s imaginary universe in a harmonious way, it will inevitably crumble, burying him inside. The death of writing will be the extinction of the writer-character, the entity that is the creator and, at the same time, the inhabitant of the cosmogonic space of the room that is the book, transformed into a terminal cell. When the night comes and the soul crosses to the other side of the wall, returning becomes impossible. And the words that could decipher this wall have not been discovered yet, for death is the most inscrutable of all mysteries¹¹. “It is a wall. And the wall is death./

¹⁰ *Wall Writing* (Berkeley: The Figures Books, 1976). Edition of four hundred and seventy four copies; period from 1971 to 1975.

¹¹ Cf. *Le Mur* by Jean-Paul Sartre (1939). A collection of five novellas written in the period between *La Nausée* and *L'Age de Raison*. The first novella is set in the Spanish civil war (which had not yet ended). A republican combatant, imprisoned by the francoists, waits his execution. He imagines himself next to the wall, the weapons pointed at him. But that is all, his imagination cannot go any further, he cannot visualize a world without him. The title of this first novella becomes an emblem for the collection, to which it confers unity: no matter how close we get to the wall, the wall is impenetrable; we always remain on the same side of that wall, without being able to jump over it, run away, or ignore it.

The wall of death has, ultimately, a lot in common with the White Whale, Moby Dick, an immense and inscrutable mystery: “All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks... If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me”, says Ahab to Starbuck. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 262.

Illegible...”(GW 62) – illegible because it is indecipherable, because it is related to the collapse of the written work, to the irreversible fragmentation of the writing entity. The metaphor of the wall of death is a product of the work of writing, since the figure of rhetoric exists only in the text, as language, not having, as a single entity, a concrete referent in reality. Through words, the writer simultaneously constructs the metaphor (beauty) and exorcizes its referent (good)¹², as he will later do in *The Invention of Solitude*, a long exercise consisting of a written catharsis of death. But the beauty of the metaphor is just a fraction of the sublime infinity inherent to the literary cosmogenesis. While the sentiment of beauty is focused on a limited object, the sentiment of the sublime projects us to infinitude. Here, the spirit rises above itself, senses its own limits and experiences something that transcends it: the sublime, according to Kant, is that which, by the mere fact of being conceived, points to a faculty of the soul surpassing all physical senses. While the aesthetics of beauty is defined as a theory of the object regarded as a finished configuration, the aesthetics of the sublime brings forth the idea of a transcendent and infinite object. Kant relates the sublime to the supersensory, which is only present in the human spirit and not in any of nature’s entities.

As already pointed out, the creative process of writing can confer a plurality of meanings to words and to the wall, which, in this perspective, would be its parts and its final product. If the wall is separated from the writing, which observes it as an object of reflection, in *Song of Degrees*, they are reunified in poems such as *Wall Writing* (the writings on the wall or the writings of the wall; material or subject of the writing, like graffiti), *Covenant* and *Hieroglyph*:

(...)
Or a word.

Come from nowhere
in the night
of the one who does not come.

Or the whiteness of a word,
Scratched
into the wall.

Wall Writing (GW 43)

(...)
All night
I read the braille wounds
on the inner wall
of your cry (...)

Covenant (GW 44)

The language of walls.
Or one last word -
cut
from the visible. (...)

Hieroglyph (GW 46)

¹² “Beauty and truth. It is the old question, come back to haunt us” in *Truth, Beauty, Silence* (AH 62-74).

The first poem seems to describe the process of writing, with the anguish of the blank page and the triumph of the first word that blooms in it. But what matters is not just to write about the walls, but also to make a wall out of writing, an aesthetic, stable, durable construction. In *Covenant* and *Hieroglyph*, we can read “braille wounds” or listen to “the language of walls” and of words “cut” (extracted) from the visible world. Stones belong to the realm of the natural, they exist in isolation, until they are laid down by the builder-writer’s hand to give shape to a wall, describing a trajectory similar to that of words, between the abstraction of a dictionary and the finished poem. Doing that requires a *Stone Work*, the title of a poem which appears in the original edition of *Wall Writing*, but not in *Ground Work*, and which refers to the work with stones and with words, to the poetic art of the poet-craftsman (“Stone work: the parts of a building, esp. those ornamented with special shapes, made of stone”¹³):

You took me
for a man who wanted to die.
Indifferent stone, defiant on the greenest anvil.
The earth was page, the most quiet
wait before the word, and it was you,
fault where the eye began
to see, it was you who were dying,
to keep me alive. Beyond the wall
you worked in stone,
and when the stones were small enough
to taunt the earth, you hid, voice in the run,
and shattered them, to make them
rally underfoot, as if they were
singing (...).

The poet touches, names, gives life to the stones through the power of the poem and of word manipulation:

From one stone touched
to the next stone
named (...)

All summer long,
by the gradient rasp-light
of our dark, dune-begetting
hands: your stones,
crumbling back to life
around you.
(...)

(...) such yield
as only light will bring, and
the very stones
undead
in the image of themselves.

Unearth XI (GW 17)

Meridian (GW 35)

¹³ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

Stones are inanimate beings that the writing brings to life, transporting them from imagination to reality, offering their presence to a world that patiently waits for the light of the word (“the most quiet / wait before the word; the whiteness of a word, / scratched / into the wall”). Or they are beings that already dimly exist in everyday life, and to which the work of writing gives a new glow, a new life (like New York, its places and characters, transported to so many of Paul Auster’s works)¹⁵. Regarding this vital and transfigurative power of writing, we can examine the words of Auster himself in *The Poetry of Exile*, an essay on the poetry of Paul Celan¹⁶ in which he also made some remarks about Van Gogh’s pictorial figurations:

Neither Van Gogh's stroke nor Celan's syntax is strictly representational, for in the eyes of each the "objective" world is interlocked with his perception of it. There is no reality that can be posited without the simultaneous effort to penetrate it, and the work of art as an ongoing process bears witness to this desire. Just as van Gogh's painted objects acquire a concreteness "as real as reality", Celan handles words as if they had the density of objects, and he endows them with a substantiality that enables them to become a part of the world, his world - and not simply its mirror (AH 88-89).

Auster is searching for a discourse that expressively conveys even a subjective state or experience, in a direct encounter with the cosmos, as if it were a life transfusion:

(...) as if, in the distance between
sundown and sunrise,
a hand
had gathered up your soul
and worked it with the stones
into the heaven

¹⁴ “Bedrock - 1.the main stretch of solid rock in the ground supporting all the soil above it. 2. the facts on which a belief or argument rests” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). Significantly included in a *Ground Work - Groundwork*.

¹⁵ With respect to objects of everyday life used in writing, see the essay "The Decisive Moment", in *The Art of Hunger*, about the work of Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976), an American poet of Jewish origins, born in Brooklyn, and whose work may be considered part of the artistic movement of the open poetry or objectivism: “Each moment, each thing, must be earned, wrested away from the confusion of inert matter by a steadiness of gaze, a purity of perception so intense that the effort, in itself, takes on the value of a religious act. The slate has been wiped clean. It is up to the poet to write his own book” (AH 36). Reznikoff reflects on every encounter between the poetic persona and the world, devoting himself to seek the linguistic strategies necessary to transform those reflections into verse. To Reznikoff, the poem is a witness of individual perceptions of the world.

¹⁶ Paul Celan (1920-1970) – born into a Jewish family, the experience of the genocide, at the same time historical and personal, marked his entire poetic work, along with the reflection on the possibilities of poetic language. Celan’s last works pay more attention to everyday reality and experience more radical doubts regarding the efficiency of the poetic word. Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

of earth.

Transfusion¹⁷ (GW 77)

In *Fragments from Cold* we can also find *Disappearances* (and many are the characters that disappear in Auster's fiction). In this key-poem, we find the several images we have already analyzed interweaved, in a true work of poetic elaboration:

1. Out of solitude, he begins again -
(...)

He is alive, and therefore he is nothing
but what drowns in the fathomless hole
of his eye,

and what he sees
is all that he is not: a city

of the undeciphered,
event,

and therefore a language of stones,
since he knows that for the whole of life
a stone
will give way to another stone

to make a wall

and that all these stones
will form the monstrous sum

of particulars.
(GW 61)

The work of writing is born of solitude, as will happen in *The Invention of Solitude*, a long and heartfelt chronicle of an attempt to overcome the eternal isolation of life and death, or, in *The Music of Chance*, with the construction of the wall that provides a goal to Jim Nashe's solitary wandering. Stone after stone, forming the wall, "monstrous sum of particulars"¹⁸. From a global perspective, we will be able to read here the eternal cycle of life and death, the inexorable succession of human beings

¹⁷ Originally published in *Fragments from Cold* (Parenthèse, 1977), relating to the period from 1976 to 1977.

¹⁸ Stones stacked together acquire symbolic meaning. In the Peruvian Andes mountain range, as well as in Siberia, custom dictates that travelers must add a new stone to heaps which, with time, acquire pyramidal proportions. Every accumulation of modest objects endowed with souls reinforces the potentiality of every one of them and results in the creation of a new, extremely powerful soul. The soul of a single stone is frail. But it is added to all the other souls of countless stones, and the collective soul of the heap becomes a great numinous force. See Jean-Paul Rouf Roux, *Faune et Flore Sacrées dans les Sociétés Altaïques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

over space and time; from a singular, though not reductive, perspective, we see the building of the text, as the result of the writer's work:

3. To hear the silence
that follows the word of oneself. Murmur
of the least stone

shaped in the image
of earth, and those who would speak
to be nothing

but the voice that speaks them
to the air.

And he will tell
of each thing he sees in this space,
and he will tell it to the very wall
that grows before him:
(...)

(GW 63)

4.
(...)
For the wall is a word. And there is no word
he does not count
as a stone in the wall.

Therefore, he begins again,
(...)

What he breathes, therefore,
is time, and he knows now
that if he lives

it is only in what lives

and will continue to live
without him.

(GW 64)

It seems to be a herculean task (a monstrous sum) that of enumerating everything, of verbally translating everything, of counting every word and every stone in the wall:

6. And of each thing he has seen
he will speak -

the blinding
enumeration of stones,
even to the moment of death -
(...)

(GW 66)

7.
(...) and the word that would build a wall
from the innermost stone
of life.

(...) Therefore, there are the many,
and all these many lives
shaped into the stones
of a wall,

and he who would begin to breathe
will learn there is nowhere to go
but here.

Therefore, he begins again,

as if it were the last time
he would breathe.(...)

(GW 67-68)

It is the writer who must create the parallel between stones and words, between wall and text, in an endless task, with unlimited referential horizons, that will only be

completed upon the worker's death, as in the spiral of models of *City of the World* or in the wall itself in *The Music of Chance*. A possibly insane task that Auster revisits in prose in the hallucinatory onomastic reformulation that Peter Stillman imposes on himself in *City of Glass* ("What do you do with these things?"; 'I give them names' (...) 'I invent new words that will correspond to the things.'" NYT 78). This is an attempt to catalogue the universe, to make an inventory of its basic elements, and, on the other hand, to define the fundamental and exclusive relationship between symbol and object. By prolonging the extension of his work until his death, the builder (of writing) knows that he is erecting a wall of death for himself, forever immured inside the infinite work¹⁹. But only he has the power of reordering and reformulating the universe, and he does not hesitate to sacrifice himself for it.

In the presence of this wall one can sense the presence of all the walls of death, which, one day, will cut short every human existence, interrupting the journey of life²⁰. The wall, like every system of signification, is at the same time closed in on itself and susceptible of entering a combinatorial game. It is at the same time wall and stone, totality and part. That wall can rise around the writer-character, surrounding and isolating him from the rest of mankind, until his self-annihilation, until death. That is more or less the fate of the characters of *The New York Trilogy*, *The Music of Chance*, *In the Country of Last Things*, *Moon Palace*, *Smoke*, *Leviathan* and *Laurel and Hardy go to Heaven*. In fact, this unpublished piece from 1976, only privately performed, narrates the story of two men who spend their entire time on stage building a wall that ends up separating them from the audience. The wall conveys disappearance and death

¹⁹ Such is the case of the protagonist of Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*, a perfectionist of his art of hunger. Besides being an enthusiastic reader of Kafka (cf. "Pages for Kafka" and "Kafka's Letters" in *The Art of Hunger*), Paul Auster is frequently likened to a postmodern Kafka. See Valentine Cunningham, "Kafka rides the subway" in *The Observer* 10,357 (April 15, 1990), 60 and Adam Begley, "Kafka goes gumshoe (profile)" in *The Guardian Weekend* (October 17, 1992), 18-21.

²⁰ As in *Bartleby the Scrivener*, a narrative by Herman Melville much admired and paraphrased by Paul Auster, if not even plagiarized (see Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, "Plagiarism in Praise: Paul Auster and Melville" in *Colóquio Herman Melville*, coordinated by Teresa Ferreira de Almeida Alves and Teresa Cid (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1994), 111-122). Bartleby came closer than any other man to the wall of death, to an eternal question of mankind. His universe is Wall Street, his landscape is a wall of dead bricks. Bartleby sees the wall as eternal, an inherent part to the structure of things, comparable to the incapacity to cross the limits of human perception, or to death itself. His vision of reality is a disenchanted one, in a "dead-wall reverie". He is obsessed with the wall, and, when that Wall materializes in his path under the form of death, it is next to a wall, in the Tombs prison (tombs, the ultimate walled spaces), that he is found dead, with his eyes open, as if he was still thinking about it. Wall Street simply accepts the walls for what they are: structures made by man to compartmentalize. To Bartleby, however, they are abstract symbols of every obstacle to the complete fulfillment of man's place in the universe.

in the eyes of others. Their voices do nothing but add new stones to the wall, since words are a wall built between them and the world. The wall, a prison where one writes graffiti as if to prove one exists, encloses the Austerian hero and is where he eventually self-annihilates.

Aubade introduces for the first time the theme of exile between the four walls of a room, which will be extensively developed in Auster's fiction:

(...) I am your distress, the seam
in the wall
that opens to the wind
and its stammering, storm
in the plural - this other name
you give your world: exile
in the rooms of home. (...)

(GW 75)

The wall appears as a structure that both isolates and protects from the fragmentary chaos of the postmodern exterior world, constituting the basis for the refuge-room, for its four walls. The wall creates a sort of barricade against reality, demarcating a secret space that is also a sacred space of literary genesis, where death and emptiness have been banned. Because within the space of the book the power of the writer is sacred, just as it is inside the room where he writes. But, once the work is finished, the driving force of the existence of the builder as such also ceases, since he inhabits solely the interior of the book and the scene of writing, without which the identity that comes from the work of building would be impossible. Does death determine the end of the words or is it the end of the words that determines the moment of death? In *City of Glass*, does Quinn stop writing in his red notebook because he dies or does he die because he stops writing in it ("What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" NYT 131)? At the end, when there are no more lines to write in the red notebook, when there is no space left to write a single word and say "I", the character disappears, he dematerializes, as he lives only while he writes ("And when nothing was left, there could be no more words." AH 94). When the writing stops, Quinn's identity vanishes, assimilated by the fiction, as nothing remains of him. The notebook was his language, and, as with Stillman, Quinn cannot exist without it. From this perspective, writing and life are inextricably intertwined. Auster's poetry does not

neglect the importance of linking the words, walls, and stones with the omnipresent mystery of life and death:

(...)
As if the first
word
comes only after the last, after a life
of waiting for the word

that was lost. To say no more
than the truth of it: men die, the world fails,
the
words

You will not blame the stones,
or look to yourself
beyond the stones, and say
you did not long for them
before your face
had turned to stone.
(...)

Viaticum²¹

have no meaning. And therefore to ask
only for words.

Stone wall. Stone heart. Flesh and blood.

As much as all this.
More.

S.A. 1911-1979 (GW 92)

To build a “stone wall” is, in the English vocabulary, “to make a long speech or question so as to slow down the business of a meeting, parliament, etc”²². In the present context, it is also the extension of life (and work) and the concomitant postponement of death and oblivion, through skillfully employed and musically conjugated words, that is, through the work of writing. Words are flung against time, against the memory that evaporates, against the loss of identity.

At the moment of death, the heart turns into stone, it fuses with the wall (“Stone wall. Stone heart”). In Quinn’s room, after his disappearance (“Wherever he may have disappeared to...” NYT 132), only the red notebook remains, the center of the end of his life and writing. What survives of Quinn is what he wrote in its pages. What survives of the artist is his work: “(...) What he breathes, therefore, / is time, and he knows now / that if he lives / it is only in what lives / and will continue to live / without him” (GW 64).

²¹ In *Wall Writing*, 1976.

²² *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh (1975), one of the thirteen essays included in *Ground Work*, though not in *The Art of Hunger*, forms a kind of continuum with Auster's poetry by again using the image of the wall as a metaphor for death and as the basis for the spatial structure where the character builds his perennial work while he waits for death.

The Tower is stone and the solitude of stone. It is the skull of a man around the body of a man - and its quick is thought. But no thought will ever reach the other side of the wall. And the wall will not crumble, even against the hammer of a man's eye. For the eyes are blind, and if they see, it is only because they have learned to see where no light is. There is nothing here but thought, and there is nothing. The man is a stone that breathes, and he will die. The only thing that waits for him is death (GW 164).

Solitude is invented in stone; man, himself, is also a stone, carved as a chess piece. In the stone prison, there is only place for thought and for the certainty of death. The walls may close in, suffocating and omnipresent ("For death is a very wall, and beyond this wall no one can pass." GW 165). However, even this limbo of total isolation can generate a work of art:

One thing is sure: this man will die. The Tower is impervious, and the depth of stone has no limit. But thought nevertheless determines its own boundaries, and the man who thinks can now and then surpass himself, even when there is nowhere to go. He can reduce himself to a stone, or he can write the history of the world. Where no possibility exists, everything becomes possible again (GW 164).

He can breathe, he can walk, he can speak, he can read, he can write, he can sleep. He can count the stones. He can be a stone that breathes, or he can write the history of the world²³ (GW 166).

The building of the written work appears as an alternative to annihilation, filling the last days of the subject's life with a task that not only gives new meaning to his whole existence, but also gives him the power of reordering the very history of the world (it is the "history of the world", as it is the "City of the World", and not any other secondary history). The power of writing can possess a universal scope.

If he has been able to live, he will be able to die. And when there is nothing left, he will know how to face the wall (GW 164).

In *The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh*, we are confronted with the possibility of a dignified preparation for death, through a journey of spiritual enhancement. How can

²³ As did, in fact, Sir Walter Raleigh (or Raleigh), 1552 ? - 1618. Incarcerated for many years in the Tower of London, he wrote, among other works, *The History of the World* (1614), which saw eleven editions in less than a century. It is characterized by a sober and eloquent style and by the famous apostrophe to death with which it ends, a magnificent example of Elizabethan prose.

the “stone that breathes” become “able to die”, “face the wall”, “go through life with his eyes open”? Through the power of writing and of solitary meditation, which grant the writer, a Narcissus of his own intellect, his megalomaniacal power. This is a superhuman power born of the sublime exile between four walls, presupposing the gift of immortality that the written work can confer, like a work in stone that defies time²⁴. In the magical space of the room or of the cell, everything becomes possible again. There, as Auster writes in *City of Glass*: “He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower” (NYT 130).

Nevertheless, the creation of the written universe presupposes the existence of organizing principles without which that universe would merely be formlessly expanding matter, with no frame to assemble the stones into the wall or juxtapose the words in poetry. At the scene of writing, the actions of the writer-character during his construction work must follow certain rules, as it is necessary to connect facts, to narrate, to give meaning, to find a guiding “grammar” that conveys the music of the words. Although the power of writing can have a universal scope capable of (re)ordering the world according to the visionary power of the writer, it is necessary, due to the cosmic dimension of that very scope, to escape the chaos of the “monstrous sum of particulars”, with its vocabulary made impossible by the absence of a guiding structure. Paul Auster is aware of the existence of these guiding principles, not only in his own work, but also in the work of any other writer. That literary awareness of himself and of others is at the core of the metaliterary reflections found in *The Art of Hunger*.



Paul Auster’s work has in *The Art of Hunger* its involuntary poetic art, based on the need to structure the imagination through a reflection on writing in which the hero

²⁴ Cf. Augusto Roa Bastos, *I the Supreme*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Aventura, 1986): “Forms disappear, words remain, to signify the impossible” (p. 11); “I must dictate/write; note it down somewhere. That is the only way I have of proving that I still exist” (p. 45). *I the Supreme* is a novel about power, about the writing of history and the oral tradition of the storytellers. To write is a way of proving that one is still alive, of cheating death, of postponing it.

becomes both the subject and the object of the life experience. In addition to addressing his own work in three interviews (*Translation, Interview with Joseph Mallia* and *Interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory*), Auster's essays and prefaces analyze the behavior of several writer-characters between the four metaphysical walls of the space of writing (Kafka, Beckett, Mallarmé, Laura Riding, Edmond Jabès, Jacques Dupin), in a reflection that reveals his own attitudes, as he is himself a writer-character, with a delimited space and a work in progress.

In the already mentioned interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (AH 270-312), Auster suggests that all his books are, in a way, the same book, telling the story of his obsessions, of the words, questions, and dilemmas that haunt his life:

Like it or not, all my books seem to revolve around the same set of questions, the same human dilemmas. Writing is no longer an act of free will for me, it's a matter of survival. An image surges up inside me, and after a time I begin to feel cornered by it, to feel that I have no choice but to embrace it. A book starts to take shape after a series of such encounters.

(...) Writing, in some sense, is an activity that helps me to relieve some of the pressure caused by these buried secrets. Hidden memories, traumas, childhood scars - there's no question that novels emerge from those inaccessible parts of ourselves (AH 277).

The parallel with *Book of the Dead II, interview with Edmond Jabès*²⁵ (1978; GW 190-210) becomes inevitable: *The Book of Questions* (which evokes *The Book of Memory*, the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*) "is based on the idea that we all live with words that obsess us. (...) Behind these words we see our own stories of death and love" (GW 201).

Addressing the topic of obsessive words, constantly repeated throughout his work, Auster refers to something which cannot be expressed but which, at the same time, cannot be emptied of its meaning. All those words become the same word and end up questioning themselves and stepping towards the forbidden, beyond the wall. The book is something that is immense, of which we can see only fragments at a time. The whole is built out of those fragments, in the same way a book is made out of words, a wall is made out of stones, and the world is made out of human beings and their lives.

²⁵ Edmond Jabès (1912-1991) – French poet, of Jewish origins. In his work, we find two principal lines of force: his historical and cultural roots, and the attempt to move from traditional poetry to a writing "**que não pertença a nenhum gênero mas que os contenha a todos**". The underlying image of the original book – the Bible – is always present. To Jabès, writing is a constant search (*Le Livre des Questions*, 1963-1973). Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

The stones, seen as linguistic signs that build the wall of the text, give *From Cakes to Stones* (AH 75) its title, in a context that refers to the simplicity of language in Beckett's pages. This essay about the problems of writing, translation, and language in general takes its title from one of Beckett's plays, which also uses the metaphor of the stones and words that must be carefully handled and carved. *The Myth of Babel*, the second part of the book *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World* by Peter Stillman (whose movements in New York seem to spell out the words "Tower of Babel"), mentions *The New Babel* by the fictitious Henry Dark²⁶. The tower of Babel was punished by Jehovah with the multiplication of mutually unintelligible languages. The tower could only be built while the words had meaning, as they helped to lift the stones and cement them together. When the words became empty of meaning, the stones also ceased to have a reason for their existence. The construction was abandoned and nothing was created, which was the goal of Jehovah's punishment. As a wall needs its stones to be adequately cemented together in order to stand, the language of a text also needs words that are stably interconnected in order to transmit an intelligible message, so that a written work of art is born. In *City of Glass*, words are clearly likened to stones: "Most people don't pay attention to such things. They think of words as stones, as great unmoveable objects with no life, as monads that never change" (NYT 75). Quinn, who assumes the role of Paul Auster, replies that stones/words can change, deteriorate, or transform: "Stones can change. They can be worn away by wind or water. They can erode. They can be crushed. You can turn them into shards, or gravel, or dust." (NYT 75). But stones can become alive, and that is the task of the poet who names them, just as he does with the ordinary words of everyday life. Through the magic of writing, it is possible to endow words with the gift of life. Stillman compares words to stones, but it is possible to erect a building with both²⁷.

²⁶ The essay *New York Babel* (AH 26-34) could have been another title for *The New York Trilogy*. It also addresses the creation of a new language with a touch of madness, in the manner of Stillman.

²⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinean modernist who anticipated so many of the techniques and themes of postmodern writing, authored an essay where the universe is represented as an infinite library, titled *The Library of Babel*, in *Labyrinths, Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962) pp. 51-58. Both the library and the universe are in permanent expansion, they never end, constantly self-multiplying, like the expanding imaginary cosmos itself. The title conjugates the notion of writing (Library) and the notion of construction (Tower of Babel), evoking Peter Stillman's *The Tower of Babel* in *City of Glass*. To Borges, books order the universe, built (both the books and the universe) in words, as though they were the stones of a building. Borges creates a metaphor

In his essay on the poetry of Jacques Dupin²⁸ (from 1971; AH 171-174), Auster states:

The poem is no longer a record of feelings, a song or a meditation. Rather, it is the field in mental space in which a struggle is permitted to unfold: between the destruction of the poem and the quest for the possible poem (...) it is a matter of destroying in order to create, and of maintaining a silent vigil within the word until the last living moment, when the word begins to crumble from the pressure that has been placed upon it. (...) For the poetic word is essentially the creative word (AH 171 and 173).

The word, however, is not, in the end, annihilated, since Dupin's work, according to Auster, eventually reaches a point past which the poem cannot be destroyed anymore, in spite of the massive load of meaning it carries: the poem becomes a perennial entity, a monument in stone. Auster revisits the topic of violence exerted against the word, which goes through a process of manipulation similar to the chiseling of stones. To fit into the wall, the stone must be carved in conformity with the totality where it will be incorporated, thus acquiring its status as an aesthetic-literary object. The creation of this object is the goal of the poet's work, the fruit of the solitary struggle of the writer-character, but this struggle is pursued in the interest of something beyond any effectual violence: the birth of the literary work ("Violence is demanded, and Dupin is equal to it. But the struggle is pursued for an end beyond violence." AH 174). We can conclude from this reading that the isolation of the writer-character within the scene of writing (inside the room), exempts him from any involvement in exterior reality, demanding commitment only to himself and to his work. In fact, references in Auster's work to extratextual historical and social events are rare, and, even when mentioned, they don't play any crucial role in the development of the action. The building of the written work is a task which eclipses ordinary occurrences, and a reason in itself for

to explain the universe in the same way Stillman intends to restructure the universe through a new language. Another essay, *The Wall and the Books* (pp. 180-182), is centered around the story of the legendary emperor Shih Huang Ti who would have ordered the construction of the Great Wall of China and simultaneously ordered the destruction of every book previous to his reign. Borges again relates construction work to writing. The building of a wall made of stone and the destruction of books made of words. Both are immense, almost infinite tasks, a vain attempt to order the universe: "...this imminence of a revelation which does not occur is, perhaps, the aesthetic phenomenon" (p. 182).

The meaning of the construction of a whole, also linked to the myth of Babylon, also emerges in *Manhattan Transfer*, where John Dos Passos chose as the epigraph for section II *Metropolis*: "There were Babylon and Nineveh: they were built of brick."

²⁸ Jacques Dupin (1927-) – French poet influenced by the thought of Heidegger. To Dupin, the word is an excess: it does not bring satisfaction or tranquility; it falls into the abyss, dragging with it the writer, the only element of real dissidence and true depth. The poem itself spreads the threads that it weaves "para abrir o corpo a um afluxo de obscuridade" (Gravin 1963; *L'Embrasure* 1969; *Dehors* 1975; *Une Apparence de Soupirail* 1983; *Chansons Troglodytes* 1989). Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992). The present essay by Paul Auster, "Jacques Dupin", was published afterwards with some alterations to the text and under the title of "The Cruel Geography of Jacques Dupin's Poetry" in *Books Abroad* 47 (1973), 76-8.

writing. The solitude of the writer-character often makes him an entity oblivious of the outside world to the point of ridicule, as is the case of Marco Fogg in *Moon Palace*, lost in his own divagations in a room that is getting gradually emptier. However, that cloistered obliviousness, when its sublime potentialities are understood, endows the subject with the cosmogonic power of writing, making him a much freer character than any erratic being and naturally indifferent to the outside world, as he can enjoy, as nobody else can, his own universe, created by him.

Nevertheless, the building of the written work can, sometimes, generate structures that are expressively sterile, true barriers to the conveyance of literary discourse, that end up annihilating the expansion of the poetic cosmos generated in the mind of the writer-character. And, since he exists as such only while he writes, when his writing ceases, his identity is correspondingly nullified. As was already mentioned, Paul Auster went through a similar experience in his own trajectory, when he became aware of the excessively hermetic nature of his poetic production which, instead of creating a harmonious structure, became a solid and insurmountable wall, a wall of death for writing. With his usual self-awareness, Auster acknowledges this dramatic experience, even broadening it to every element of his existence: "I had run into a wall with my work. I was blocked and miserable, my marriage was falling apart, I had no money. I was finished"²⁹.

The analysis of a similar literary experience constitutes the theme of *Itinerary* (1973; AH 21-22), an essay on the work of the American poet Laura Riding³⁰, whose poems, at a certain point, also became static walls, when they should have been a gateway, an act of movement. The poem should be the power of crossing through walls, of fighting against death and isolation, of universalizing a message. And yet, it can itself become a wall of death. That wall can become established at some point along the path of a poet such as Laura Riding, blocking her passage and the process of literary creation, when the capacities for poetic expression become exhausted (or insufficient). To find

²⁹ Begley, "The Case of the Brooklyn Symbolist", p. 53.

³⁰ Laura Riding (1901-1991) – American poet, born in New York. Her work is notable for its elegance of verse and form and for its tendency to combine lyrical simplicity with complex intellectual meditations. *Collected Poems* (1938) definitively marked the end of her career as a poet. The motives for her renunciation of poetry, centered on the conviction that it is not the adequate path to truth, are discussed in the prefaces to *Selected Poems* (1973) and *The Poems of Laura Riding* (1980). Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

a new beginning is to find the gateway beyond the wall, towards the new universe born of the cosmogonic power of writing:

For if words will not give way, they will become a wall.

The poem. And nevertheless: the poem. It is the power to burrow through walls. And nevertheless: it is what can become a wall. To be what it must, what it is capable of being - a going toward, a moving toward the Other (...).

That Laura Riding herself came to a wall that could not be breached is not so much a sign of failure as a recognition of the necessity to move on. Nothing less than this barrier, this silence, could have revealed to us the seriousness of the journey. And if she herself now looks upon her poetic work as having reached the end of poetic possibilities, it is in this end that we must look for a new beginning, and through her wall that we must pass (AH 21-22).

Auster also dedicates to Laura Riding the essay *Truth, Beauty, Silence* (1975; AH 62-74), whose expressive title seems to place silence as the only possible epilogue for a singular journey through the universally sought-after concepts of truth and beauty. About Laura Riding's renunciation of poetry, Auster writes, perhaps autobiographically:

She did not renounce poetry because of any objective inadequacy in poetry itself - for it is no more or less adequate than any other human activity - but because poetry as she conceived of it was no longer capable of saying what she wanted to say. She now feels that she had "reached poetry's limit" [the wall]. But what really happened, it would seem, is that she had reached her own limit in poetry (AH 69).

A similar situation occurs in *Moon Palace*, as articulated by Marco Fogg, also containing the idea of eloquent order, essential to the building of the written work: "I was piling too many words on top of each other, and rather than reveal the thing before us, they were in fact obscuring it, burying it under an avalanche of subtleties and geometric abstractions" (MP 123). The written work must be built with the care and technique of a wall, or it will crumble. However, the uniform space of a perfect work of art is not only the setting for an entire imaginary universe, but also for the existence of the individual who has voluntarily locked himself up within the four walls of the scene of writing. In the work of Paul Auster, the writer-character, as the builder of that structure, justifies analyses of self and others such as the ones that make up the essays included in *Ground Work* and in *The Art of Hunger*. Nevertheless, that peculiar character, craftsman of stone and word, can also come to life in prose fiction, as is the case with Jim Nashe, the main character of *The Music of Chance*. Auster and Nashe share the same self-awareness of the condition of writer-character /builder, making

The Music of Chance a fictionalized poetics, a continuation of *The Art of Hunger* in the sphere of the imaginary.



In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster reveals the peculiar and accidental circumstances that marked the birth of *The Music of Chance*: “The very day I finished writing *The Music of Chance* - which is a book about walls and slavery and freedom - the Berlin Wall came down. There’s no conclusion to be drawn from this, but every time I think of it, I start to shake” (AH 276). In fact, *The Music of Chance* combines the themes of slavery (confinement, restriction of movement) and freedom (openness, movement) with the recurring theme of the walls, structures that delimit spaces of seclusion or of wandering. Nashe is secluded (imprisoned) within the open space of the meadow, solely to build the work in stone, the wall. However, Nashe ends up annulling the paradoxical confinement of the open space (prison) and the apparent scarcity of meaning of the wall by attributing a meaning to them that guides his existential drift, in a growing work of both concrete and metaphysical building, as if Nashe himself was gradually turning into a writer-character, as he is also a craftsman of stone, word, and thought.

The search of truth can be the search of a visual presence. Nashe is looking for a meaning for his solitary life, for his wandering journey, and he finds it in the wall. So, he does not escape or stop on the agreed date. A wall exists, it is a visible piece of work, made of tangible actions and materials (stones). In the visual presence of the rows of stone in the meadow, he finds truth and music (a harmony, a structured sequence) in his fortuitous wandering. Also in *Ghosts*, the search of truth is measured in terms of visual presence. Blue is hired by White to follow a man named Black and to keep him under surveillance for as long as necessary. The truth, for Blue, is always restricted to what he can see: “Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world” (NYT 146). Black exists because he sees him, and, having become his double, Blue exists only while he sees himself in Black’s image. If he can’t see him, he is not sure of his own existence. In *City of Glass*, Quinn also needs to observe concrete facts: Stillman’s book, Stillman himself in his wanderings

through the city, or the door of the building, twenty-four hours a day. If he can't observe them, the case may disappear, evaporate.

While he has the persons, objects and places that are part of the case before his eyes, the case exists, and so does he (Quinn), who has bet, and lost, his life on it. Watching someone can be the same as making them feel alive, even if it's all mere detective work. As with Maria Turner in *Leviathan*:

For several days, this man took pictures of her as she went about her rounds, recording her movements in a small notebook (...) It was a completely artificial exercise, and yet Maria found it thrilling that anyone should take such an active interest in her. Microscopic actions became fraught with new meaning, the driest routines were charged with uncommon emotion. After several hours, she grew so attached to the detective that she almost forgot she was paying him (L 63).

The materialization of a wall in the middle of Jim Nashe's road to liberation is initially a metaphor: the wall is the interruption of his wandering journey, a barrier to the continuation of his path, due to the lack of money. Then, that wall becomes forced labor, still an insurmountable barrier. But it will be that wall that Jim Nashe will use to frame his disjointed existence, in a voluntary cessation of the uncontrolled expansion of a fragmented individual.

When Jim crosses the wall, on the day of his liberation, when he leaves behind the structural lines of a life that has become inexorably interwoven with his work, he is already in the sphere of the illegible, on the other side of death, as in *Song of Degrees*. The more than ten thousand stones of the Irish castle, building blocks of the wall, possess an identity, as if they were living beings or could bring a part of the history of Ireland in the XV century with them to America, to the new world of such recent past. The wall is a postmodern entity because it is a pastiche of its origins, a fetishization of history. But, from the stones of that Irish castle, destroyed by Oliver Cromwell, a simple wall will be erected, to embellish the meadow owned by Stone and Flower, two overnight millionaires of the American lottery, and to satisfy their vanity. Flower is, apparently, the leader of this enigmatic pair both hosting Nashe and Pozzi and holding them prisoners. But Stone turns out to be a lot more sinister in the sadistic details of the megalomaniacal *City of the World*, as if the harshness of the stone had extended into his heart ("...the act of touching a real stone had called forth a memory of the man who bore that name". MC 107), culminating in the solution of enslavement, which was his idea.

An allegoric and symbolic structure begins to emerge between the *City of the World* and the construction of the wall. The task becomes the exercise of a corrective moral power. The construction of the physical wall replicates, in a way, the model of the *City*, where traces of a perverse sense of humor are present, as in the case of the prisoner about to be shot against a wall near his “cheerful” companions, an ominous presage of the protagonists’ fates. The ideologies theorized and conceptualized in the model are carried out in the meadow:

To my mind, there’s nothing more mysterious or beautiful than a wall. I can already see it: standing out there in the meadow, rising up like some enormous barrier against time. It will be a memorial to itself, gentleman, a symphony of resurrected stones, and every day it will sing a dirge for the past we carry within us.”

“A Wailing Wall,” Nashe said.

“Yes,” Flower said, “a Wailing Wall. A Wall of Ten Thousand Stones (MC 86).”

The wall of Stone and Flower is a monumental celebration of the eternal present moment and of the wealth provided by a stroke of luck. A monument to uselessness, the monolithic structure will be a self-sufficient barrier against time, preventing luck and material ostentation from leaving and preventing death and loss from getting near. In a way, like the writing that A. erects against the fading of his father’s memory in *The Invention of Solitude*, already heralded in the poetic obituary of S.A. 1911-1979. Writing is a way of fighting for survival, turning one’s back to the wall of death, like Salman Rushdie: “But I wonder how many of us could do what he has done with our backs against that same wall. Salman Rushdie is fighting for his life” (*A Prayer for Salman Rushdie* in *The Red Notebook*, p.158). The symphony, the work of art, can lead to the resurrection of the stones (as in *Unearth XI*, *Meridian*, *Bedrock* and *Transfusion*), in the same way that the writer breathes new life into words that are dead in everyday life. But this is a sinister monument, a symphony that hums funeral anthems to the past that each one of us carries within, both a barricade against and a tomb for time. This apparent caprice is everything Nashe and Pozzi see in front of them; however, it also represents the work they have to do. The wall rising before them stands for the impossibility of escaping what is evident, like an unavoidable wall of death, the fate of both protagonists (“Through the star - / mortared wall / that rises in our night, your soul / will not pass / again”. GW 51).

The wall has its double in the imposing fence that completely surrounds Stone and Flower’s property, raising the troubling question: “The barrier had been erected to

keep things out, but now that it was there, what was to prevent it from keeping things in as well? All sorts of threatening possibilities were buried in that question” (MC 126). When Nashe attempts to escape, after finding Pozzi beaten up in the meadow and engaging in violent confrontation with Murks and Floyd, it is this second wall (the fence) that thwarts the escape from its double, in a mysterious alliance of apparently inanimate stone structures. The unconscious perception of this mystery and the clear sensation of solitude and confinement remind Nashe of Couperin’s musical piece *The Mysterious Barricades*, already referred to at the beginning of the book, at the painful moment of selling the piano and dismantling the house (“As far as he was concerned, the barricades stood for the wall he was building in the meadow, but that was quite another thing from knowing what they meant.” MC 181). It becomes impossible for him to play this short piece without thinking about the wall, the construction of which the music evokes through the syncopated progression of the melody, with successive pauses and restarts that make it progress towards an epilogue that never happens. Nashe’s story too never reaches a definitive resolution by escaping the wall, just as the plot of *The Music of Chance* does not have a concrete, but instead a markedly open and ambiguous ending.

The stones are fascinating, both for Nashe and for Pozzi. They possess an unsettling quietness, they embody eternity, indifferent to our ephemeral human lives. They are the perfect building material for a wall against time, as stones are synonymous with great robustness and durability. A construction in stone will be eternal and noble, like statues and cathedrals, it will be a death-defying construction³¹. Since pre-history stones have been used in monuments inspired by the undecipherable mysteries of the universe (megaliths), by divinities (temples), by the great historical figures and events. In ancient civilizations, people wrote in stone and the writings were sacred, as in Old Egypt. Before that, in the Age of Stone, the most basic and raw of materials, paintings were made on the stone walls of caves, in a magical ritual, to bring about success in hunting.

In *Leviathan*, the explosion of several replicas of the Statue of Liberty provokes a great commotion, mainly because, as Peter Aaron says, it is the destruction of a

³¹ Because *The Walls Do Not Fall*, as reads the title of Hilda Doolittle’s (1886-1961) 1944 work, a kind of poetic diary of her travel to Egypt, where she extensively merges her imagination with the myths and narratives from ancient Egypt.

national symbol which, unlike the flag, unites a people around a single image of national pride. The monument in stone is an eternal symbol, immune to any conflict, transcending it, embodying, since the beginning, the American dream, greeting all those who arrive to the promised land. But the writer has the power not only to build but also to destroy universes and their symbols. Hence, Sachs destroys the stone construction, petrified in the ideals that it represents, to restart history, to interrupt eternity.

Separated from the structure that gives them a meaning, the stones confront Nashe and Pozzi, because the absence of context sets free their evocative power. To observe them from a distance was different, but when closer it becomes impossible not to explore the stones with the fingers, timidly caressing the granite blocks, almost expecting a reaction from them. Their imposing immobility is almost frightening, as is the sensation of being in the presence of something much more ancient than any castle, as the stones are silent witnesses to an age of mysteries that no man can know or remember.

The slow triumph of stones over man, then, becomes plausible: Pozzi is the first to be punished by the sacrilege of trying to escape them. In an ironic enigma, inspired by the myth of Sisyphus, identical stones seem to get heavier and heavier: "Every time they worked on the wall, Nashe and Pozzi came up against the same bewitching conundrum: all the stones were identical, and yet each stone was heavier than the one before it" (MC 129). Nashe is temporarily spared thanks to his growing sense of identification with the wall and the stones, a captive of their sortilege, without, however, escaping his final fate. In the night of Jack Pozzi's escape and presumable death, the stones seem spectrally alive, as if they were watching those who attempt to escape, acting as fatally deceiving guides in the path to darkness, the symbol of death:

They walked across the meadow carrying flashlights, moving along the length of the unfinished wall as a way to guide them in the darkness. When they came to the end and saw the immense piles of stones standing at the edge of the woods, they played their beams along the surfaces for a moment as they passed by. It produced a ghostly effect of weird shapes and darting shadows, and Nashe could not help thinking that the stones were alive, that the night had turned them into a colony of sleeping animals (MC 169).

The stones resemble sleeping demonic animals, like pagan divinities reborn from immemorial times, and the mentally retarded Floyd Junior plays around them, tormenting Jim with his stare, his endless nursery rhyme and his grotesque black and

white skeleton costume. Like a small demon of the stones, he leads Jim to a murderous frenzy ("That was when the horror began". MC 184) in which he imagines crushing the child against those very rocks, loaded with passive oppression, and to the subsequent fever that defeats him. It is Floyd Junior who waves at Jim and Pozzi in the night of the escape, exposing them and indirectly but effectively causing the death of the latter, and perfectly fulfilling the role of guardian of the wall, despite being (or because he is) an abnormal, paranormal, child, as bestial as the rocks in the metaphor. However, the fact that he works with the stones, that he uses them to build a wall, forces Nashe to sacrifice his strange singularity to the demands of a structure, even if this structure seems to be a purely abstract one. If the stones rebel, refusing to leave the ground, it is necessary to fight them in order to place them, to lay the groundwork of preparation for the definitive construction. In a bio-bibliographical transposition, *Ground Work* too was the poetic preparation for the work in prose that Auster currently builds. In Nashe's view, the wall is a part of him, which will remain standing in the future, because it was born of his work. After a failed marriage, growing apart from his daughter, his fortune spent, and the wandering around in his car, he found a home in the meadow, a son in Pozzi, and a task to devote himself to. Hence the importance of the thousandth stone: "In spite of everything, Nashe could not help feeling a sense of accomplishment. They had made a mark somehow, they had done something that would remain after they were gone, and no matter where they happened to be, a part of this wall would always belong to them" (MC 147). In order to achieve the apparently pointless record of forty seven stones aligned in a single day, Nashe and Pozzi do not hesitate in working as if they were trying to prove something, keeping up with the self-imposed rhythm and handling the stones with an almost disdainful assurance, with the sole purpose of showing that they had not been defeated, that they had succeeded in ordering that enormous jumble. And even Murks, whose name appropriately evokes the impassiveness and inscrutability that he and the wall share, understands the importance of that material, lasting, and palpable work, as he explains in his peculiar vocabulary:

It's really not such bad work," Murks continued. "At least it's all there in front of you. You put down a stone, and something happens. You put down another stone, and something more happens. There's no big mistery to it. You can see the wall going up, and afer a while it starts to give you a good feeling. It's not like mowing the grass or chopping wood. That's

work, too, but it don't ever amount to much. When you work on a wall like this, you've always got something to show for it (MC 148).

Nashe feels undeniable pride when the construction starts to take its definitive shape, fulfilling its role as a demarcating structure, of border with the unknown. Nashe feels the power of the work that came out of his hands, even though he is not yet able to verbalize it:

(...) the fact that he could no longer see past it, that it blocked his view to the other side, made him feel as though something important had begun to happen. All of a sudden, the stones were turning into a wall, and in spite of the pain it had cost him, he could not help admiring it. Whenever he stopped and looked at it now, he felt awed by what he had done (MC 202).

Nashe succeeds in ordering the stones into a structure that frames his own existence. He is imprisoned by the wall, but he has built that wall himself, the walls that define the limits of his space of confinement are of his own doing, a demonstration of strength and defiance to the authority imposed by Stone and Flower. Being a fictional representation of the writer-character, Nashe and his work stand for the building of the room that is the book, by the hands of the protagonist who locks himself in it to exert his creative energy. So too is the writer-character restricted by the space of the room and of the book, both built by him. Nashe made the wall his universe, partaking in the cosmogonic experience of the writer. The wall is the symbol of victory over the initial chaos of the stones. However, in an ironic reading, Nashe is, at the same time, inadvertently building a wall of death that blocks the other side from view, which supports a twofold reading of the words "something important had begun to happen". Once the construction is finished, the existence of its builder as such ceases. And Nashe's existence is not an exception, since it is inextricably connected to the erection of the wall, the central event of *The Music of Chance*.

Like Camus' Sisyphus, another dedicated stone mover and a symbol of the absurdity of the human condition (man, crushed by his fate, consciously accepts the challenge and devotes himself to his daily task), Nashe feels almost happy when the odds are against his success. Nashe's original comment was that Flower and Stone wanted to build a "wailing wall". But for Nashe, it becomes a wall of healing and salvation ("mending wall"³²) as well as a wall that keeps him captive ("retaining wall"),

³² Cf. the poem *Mending Wall* by Robert Frost: (...) *And on a day we meet to walk the line / And set the wall between us once again. / We keep the wall between us as we go. (...) Before I built a wall I'd ask to know /*

bringing to mind the work of building in *Disappearances*, with its ambiguous metaphors: "(...) since he knows that for the whole of life / a stone / will give way to another stone / to make a wall / and that all these stones / will form the monstrous sum / of particulars" (GW 61). Nashe "grows" while working to pay an ill-considered gambling debt, contracted due to the influence of the young and too self-confident Jack Pozzi.

As the building of the wall becomes more and more a sort of personal statement for Nashe, it really seems to be the center and the whole of his life, in that it is at the same time a continuously growing reward and a source of coherence. The wall and the slow, burdened movements associated to the daily construction work give rise to the feeling that all time prior to the wall should not be considered, or should be rebuilt in terms of its indefinite space: "(...) and he knows now / that if he lives / it is only in what lives / and will continue to live / without him" (GW 64). A life's work is its legacy to the world that everyone can admire, whether that legacy is a wall, a book (as in *The Invention of Solitude*, *Leviathan*, *The New York Trilogy*), a letter (*In the Country of Last Things*), an obituary (*Moon Palace*), a symphony (like the one by S. in *The Invention of Solitude*), a son (a very important word in the work of Paul Auster), the levitation of Walt in *Mr. Vertigo*, or the photographs of Auggie Wren in *Smoke*. Auggie's daily ritual, much more, as he points out, than a mere hobby, is the anchor of his existence, a lonely drift that he translates (like Nashe) into a concrete task: to take a daily photograph of the corner of Third Street and Seventh Avenue, in Brooklyn. Auggie Wren's corner, where an entire miniature cosmos goes by, efficiently illustrates the character's obsession with the building of what he considers to be his life's work, aside from once again confirming the postmodern obsession with thorough cataloging. "O pós-modernista assimila e absorve o mundo que percebe, sem saber ou sem querer saber como estruturar esse mundo para que ele possa fazer sentido."³³ Auster's characters observe and describe without explaining, they read without deciphering. In *City of Glass*, Quinn buys a red notebook in the vain hope that, if he takes everything down, that might bring stability to his situation. Hence the

What I was walling in or walling out, / And to whom I was like to give offence. / Something there is that doesn't love a wall, / That wants it down (...). Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923) pp. 65-67.

³³ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 76.

importance of the reports, registers and annotations in Auster's work, from the meticulous to the truly obsessive³⁴.

Nashe too writes a comprehensive account, in the form of a diary, of the building of the wall, where he records with pleasure the number of stones added, day after day, as if those stones represented his most intimate thoughts or were the noteworthy incidents of his daily life, the things usually contained in a diary. In this way, the builder-character becomes denotatively a writer-character, by establishing a connection between the work of writing and the work of building in stone. Jim Nashe's writing is solely about the erection of the stone structure, with the wall as its central subject. He aligns words in the same way that, during daytime, he aligns the stones in the wall, and those words talk about the stones and the wall. In the imaginary world of *The Music of Chance*, Nashe represents the metalinguistic and metafictional concern present throughout the work of Paul Auster, another writer-character in constant self-analysis³⁵.

However, Nashe's sense of identification with his work has sunk in so deeply that he no longer contemplates the possibility of surviving as an autonomous character and not exclusively as a *homo-faber*. The stones have become the core of his thoughts, his thoughts have become stones, as Nashe lives through the wall. A diary is usually a place to record experiences and feelings, but Nashe has assimilated the wall to such an extent that nothing else is recorded in his diary. If the construction grants self-knowledge, in a parallel between matter and intellect, the stones aligned in the wall are thoughts organized in the mind:

At first, he imagined it was a purely statistical pleasure, but after a while he sensed that it was fulfilling some inner need, some compulsion to keep track of himself and not lose sight of where he was. By early December, he began to think of it as a journal, a logbook in which the numbers stood for his most intimate thoughts (MC 203).

³⁴ "Manifestação artística do pós-modernismo: a vanguarda está esgotada, atola-se na repetição e substitui a invenção pela exasperação pura e simples". Gilles Lipovetsky, *A Era do Vazio: Ensaio sobre o Individualismo Contemporâneo*, trans. by Miguel Serras Pereira and Ana Luísa Faria (Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 1989) p. 111.

³⁵ Regarding the originality of Auster's metafictional strategies with respect to his predecessors, see Dennis Barone, "Introduction: Auster and the Postmodern Novel" in *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*, ed. Dennis Barone (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) pp. 1-26. "He does use the metafictional devices of his predecessors (...), but he does not use them to frustrate or disrupt the reading process. Whereas earlier metafiction problematized narrative with lists or collages of diverse elements, Auster's methods are less disjunctive but no less surprising. In *The Music of Chance*, for example, the constant repetition of the number seven (Nashe and Pozzi stay in a room on the seventh floor of a hotel, Flower and Stone won their money seven years ago, Flower's museum and Stone's City of the World are behind the seventh door) points to the work's fictionality and undermines its feigned verisimilitude" (p. 7).

When the wall is finished, the reason for the diary's existence will also come to an end, and there will be nothing left in his life to record, as if that life had necessarily to cease. This and other presages, clearly patent throughout the book in the form of Jim's growing sense of identification with the wall, will be fulfilled in the last moments of *The Music of Chance*.

Nashe observes and questions the stones he works with, before putting them in place. While building the work, he simultaneously questions it, in a process of deconstruction parallel to that of the construction, like a narrative that questions itself, from a metafictional and metalinguistic perspective. The saga of Jim Nashe in the meadow is essentially a fictionalization of the process of self-consciously building a text, of which Paul Auster's essays and fictions are perfect examples. The outer shape must be in line with the intrinsic ideological meaning, the material presence of the word must form a coherent whole with its meaning: that is the goal of poetic construction³⁶. The result of that tangible building is a text which has its particular rhetoric, but which can be compared to any other text of any other genre. Like the "text" of a wall, written in stone (*Wall Writing*), the construction of which we follow in *The Music of Chance*. Nashe is, then, the portrait of the artist as a builder.

The end of the wall, the point zero, marks the end of Jim Nashe's real existence. After the work is finished, after life has ended, only nothingness is left, emptiness, the great ghost of Auster: "He was back to zero again, and now those things were gone. For even the smallest zero was a great hole of nothingness, a circle large enough to contain the world" (MC 155). Since the wall is at the core of this story, and just like a Scheherazade at the end of her last story, when the last stone is put in place, the story will have to end, and the wall of work will turn into a wall of death in the middle of Nashe's tortuous existential path (as had happened to Pozzi). Several causes trigger his murder-suicide, including vengeance for the beating of Pozzi and for the abuses he himself had suffered. There is also the possibility that Nashe is terrified by the unexpected opening up of options, that he is still subjugated by the rigid routine of the wall (again, like Camus' Sisyphus), beyond which the future is a shapeless and

³⁶ As formulated by M.M. Bakhtin e P.N. Medvedev in "Material and device as components of the poetic construction: The proper formulation of the problem of the poetic construction" in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle (Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 118-28.

undecipherable presence that he can no longer contemplate. This notion of an enigmatic presence, with illegible implications and impossible to contemplate, already evokes the already mentioned wall of death, an insurmountable barrier, defining an unknown territory from where there is no possible return. Nashe realizes what, to him, his legacy to the world has become, and, since it was by his own hands that that wall of death was built, it will be by his own hands that death will come about.

After his liberation, by the end of the narrative, Nashe drives his old car and recalls the days before the beginning of the real story of his life, the story of the building of the wall, the wall that will forever be a part of him. His last thoughts go to music (...of chance, that enables death at that moment), to the car (that transported him in his drift towards the wall and towards death), and to the beauty of the stones, of the wall, and of the meadow, covered in snow. The three central themes of *The Music of Chance* finally meet in the last moments of Nashe's life and work.

The meadow would look beautiful under the snow, he thought, and he hoped it would go on falling through the night so he could wake up to see it that way in the morning. He imagined the immensity of the white field, and the snow continuing to fall until even the mountains of stones were covered, until everything disappeared under an avalanche of whiteness (MC 215).

An immense empty space now opens up in Jim Nashe's horizon, like a huge blank page. As in Kafka, it is the building of the work that matters, the work should never be concluded, it should always fall short of perfection, for the sake of the survival of the literary entity, if not for anything else, since once the story is finished the writer-character ceases to exist³⁷. When the construction of the wall and the story of *The*

³⁷ Franz Kafka was obsessed with the meticulous and endless construction of the written work. His manuscripts show that he was a fervent worker, "scribbling" (as he called his writing) calmly and steadily across the page, revising little, but stopping when authenticity no longer seemed to exist, laying down parallel or even contradictory tracks in search of his "prey", and content to leave his works in an "open" state, like that of his Great Wall – their segments uncertainly linked, strange spaces left in blank, the ultimate goal left unachieved, as if too blindingly grand. The German titles of *The Burrow* and of *The Great Wall of China* (at times as impenetrable in its meaning as a real wall) contain the word *Bau* (m. construction; edifice). See Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, foreword by John Updike; ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). *The Great Wall of China* (like *The Wall and the Books* by Borges) is, undoubtedly, Kafka's short story which most addresses the motif of the infinite, interminable work, the obsession with building. It evokes *The Music of Chance* and Nashe's fate not only in its title (*Wall*) but also in its intrinsic meaning. It's about the pleasure of building, not of finishing, even if, for that purpose, the life of an entire people is put at stake, in an eternal childish hope. Individuals completely identify with the work, like Nashe: "...men who with the first stone they sank in the ground felt themselves a part of the wall" (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, p. 237). There is also an explicit comparison (p. 238) between the Great Wall and the Tower of Babel. There is mention of a wise old man (cf. Stillman) who had written a book about that identification, establishing the great wall as the foundation for a new Tower of Babel. The most valued wisdom would from then on be that which was most directly related to the construction of the wall (architecture and the art of working in stone). Books would now be about the wall; the wall would become

Music of Chance come to an end, the reader is left with the task of filling that empty space and that open ending with his own imagination.

Through the reference to *The Music of Chance* we have been able, in this chapter, to see how Auster's fiction may be read as a romanticized poetics, where a character such as Jim Nashe shares the writer's self-consciousness as an artisan of stones and words, in his quest to structure his own universe.

Nashe encloses himself in the space of the meadow so that he can build his work in stone there, just as the writer-character locks himself up in the closed space of the room in order to set his cosmogonic imagination free and build his written work there. But, if up until now we limited ourselves to the placement of stones with a view to building walls, which could eventually work as the structures outlining an existential path (the walls of death) or as the structures organizing the expansion of an imaginary cosmos (the walls of writing), we shall now enter the enclosed space of the room that is the book. It is in this sublime confinement that the written cosmogenesis takes place in Paul Auster's fiction. The empty background of the room of writing is occupied by an entire apparent universe through the words filling the blank page and thus building the literary work. The aestheticized reflection about the blank space of the room and of the page generates the text of *White Spaces*, the starting point of Auster's fictional creation after defeating the wall that his poetry had come up against.

the books reason for being. Writing and building merge together. At the end, we find *The News of the Building of the Wall: a Fragment* announcing a spiral of concentric walls to be infinitely built, like the models of the *City of the World*.

II
THE ROOM THAT IS THE BOOK: THE WRITTEN
COSMOGENESIS.

The world is in my head.
My body is in the world.¹

Paul Auster writes novels about solitary characters who try to find meaning in circumstantial events, and he himself writes under circumstances that seem curiously significant: his office is a white, empty, fog-stained small studio apartment in Brooklyn. The writer sits under two naked light bulbs and the blinds are always shut; when they open, only a brick wall on the other side of a courtyard can be seen². But Auster avoids such distractions, since his sense of identification with the scribe Bartleby doesn't go that far. The door is closed, but that solitude grants the writer absolute freedom: there, he can incarnate any character and go anywhere his thoughts may lead him, inside *une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement spirituelle (...) Sur les murs nulle abomination artistique. Relativement au rêve pur, à l'impression non analysée, l'art défini, l'art positif est un blasphème. Ici, tout a la suffisante claret et la délicieuse obscurité de l'harmonie*³. In this sublime confinement, the genesis of the written cosmos takes place, when the writer begins a transcendental path of silent understanding⁴.

The infinitely dense in possibilities space of the room is the setting for the written cosmogony, an exercise in ordering and narrating one or more alternative universes, where each word corresponds to an atom that finds its place in the page that is being built. The metafictional reflection about space and the ontological charge of his verbal art reflect an increasingly acute self-awareness in the work of writing, through which the writer-character conveys an entire world created in his imagination ("The world is in my head"). Once locked in his own mind, the writer-character can exert his cosmogonic power, transforming the blank space between four walls into a universe, just as he can self-annihilate in sterile isolation and implosion. This confinement can be sublime or disintegrating, constructive or destructive. The closed space of the scene of writing can be a womb or a tomb, because the mystery of creation and the mystery

¹ Text appearing in Jon Kessler's sculpture "Word Box" photographed for *Why Write?*. Paul Auster, "Word Box" in *Why Write?* (Providence: Burning Deck, 1996) pp. 39-50.

² Cf. Begley, "The Case of the Brooklyn Symbolist", p. 41.

³ Charles Baudelaire, "La Chambre Double" in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968) p. 149.

⁴ "O pós-modernismo tem tendência a afirmar o equilíbrio, a escala humana, o regresso a si próprio. (...) Signos menos visíveis testemunham já uma transformação notável do valor-gozo (...) mulheres e homens redescobrem a virtude do silêncio e da solidão, da paz interior e da ascese". Lipovetsky, *A Era do Vazio*, p. 109.

of death are closely related. In this second chapter we will examine only the positive aspect of the blank space of the room (and of the page), which can contain an entire world within itself.

Auster's obsession with space is already present from his first prose, in his references to Sir Walter Raleigh or to the polar explorer Peter Freuchen⁵, continuing in his more recent fiction. His characters vacillate between the extremes of claustrophobic confinement and directionless wandering, but, and as if trying to corroborate Pascal's thoughts – "all the unhappiness of man stems from one thing only, that he is incapable of staying quietly in his room" (IS 83) – it is the characters most apparently confined to a delimited space, like the writer-character, who turn out to be the most free. Conversely, when the characters seem free to wander about is when they become lost and confused. Jim Nashe, for instance, wanders through America for a whole year, and yet he is but a prisoner of what he believes to be his desire for freedom. But freedom is unattainable until the moment Nashe stops and becomes responsible for something and for someone else. According to Auster himself, "my work has come out of a position of intense personal despair, a very deep nihilism and hopelessness about the world, the fact of our own transience and mortality, the inadequacy of language, the isolation of one person from another"⁶. This disenchantment with the world and with human relationships is made up for by the happiness that the solitary cosmogony of a perfect imaginary world can offer. In that sublime confinement, a densely metaphysical space is created where everything becomes possible, as there exists, in latent form, a whole universe created and ordered by the mind of the writer-character. Therefore, the visual image of the room stands for the abstract notion of the mental space of literary creation. Auster's writing constantly reinvents the solitude of those spaces, in a recurrent exploration of the scene of writing. *City of Glass*, for instance, follows the drift of a writer-character through the literary space, illustrated in the urban space that he crosses but does not inhabit.

In *A Prayer for Salman Rushdie*, an essay first published in 1993 in *The New York Times* and anthologized in *The Red Notebook and Other Writings*, Auster addresses

⁵ Peter Freuchen, for example, is successively mentioned by the subject of *White Spaces*, by A. in *The Invention of Solitude*, and by Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*.

⁶ Mark Irwin, "Memory's Escape: Inventing The Music of Chance - A Conversation with Paul Auster" in *Denver Quarterly* 28:3 (Winter 1994), 118.

the condition of the author and the job of writing, seen as a mission involving a great deal of sacrifice, where isolation and the room are key words:

We belong to the same club: a secret fraternity of solitaires, shut-ins, and cranks, men and women who spend the better part of our time locked up in little rooms struggling to put words on a page. It is a strange way to live one's life, and only a person who had no choice in the matter would choose it as a calling. It is too arduous, too underpaid, too full of disappointments to be fit for anyone else (RN 157).

In a fictional parallel, in *Mr. Vertigo*, when Aesop decides to write the story of his life, the young black author brings about the admiration and astonishment of all the other characters for the writer and his work, in his arduous task, in complete solitude, locked in his room for hours. Every character understands and respects the cosmogonic power of the improvised writer, most particularly Walt, who describes the universal and timeless scene of solitary writing with sincere fascination:

He must have toiled eight or ten hours a day on his opus, and I can remember peeking through the door as he sat there hunched over his desk, marvelling at how a person could sit still for so long, engaged in no other activity than guiding the nib of a pen across a leaf of white foolscap. It was my first experience with the making of books (...) Now that I'm writing a book of my own, not a day goes by when I don't think about Aesop up there in his room. That was sixty-five springs ago, and I can still see him sitting at his desk, scribbling away at his youthful memoirs as the light poured through the window, catching the dust particles that danced around him (MV 89).

The first test in Walt's long ordeal, the first of the rites of initiation he will have to endure to achieve the magical gift of levitation, is to be buried alive in the middle of a field for twenty four hours. In this living burial, Walt returns to Mother Earth's womb, evoking the phonetic and semantic play of *womb* and *tomb*, the first and the last stages of human existence, present in *The Invention of Solitude*. It is the most closed of all interior spaces but it is also the first and supreme test for Walt. In the room, in solitude, Walt starts exploring his gift of levitating, his art of flying, his secret power. "I kept to myself as much as possible during those weeks, hiding out in my room as I explored the mysteries and terrors of my new gift" (MV 66).

In the work of writing, the room is also the space of the daily struggle with words and of the conflicting, distant, sometimes almost impossible relationship they have with the world, while the writer-character suffers due to his awareness of the difficulty of representing the world through words. The archetypical image of the room, where positive and negative qualities coexist on equal terms (cosmos and chaos), explicitly represents the dualities of its single inhabitant, the only true protagonist for Auster: the writer. The spatial imagery describes, defines, and reflects the consciousness of

the subject and his writing, in a projection of the human psyche. In fact, the interior landscape of intimate spatiality unifies the several facets of the consciousness of the writer-character, in a parallel between space and life, expressing an order, an image of the mental structure. Unity is the natural state of the cosmic harmony, so the written cosmogony, unified and ordered, frames the imaginary expansion of the delimited space of the page. When he has doubts about his situation in the cosmos, man creates or recreates his own cosmogony.

In order to enjoy his cosmogonic experience and his writing undisturbed, the writer-character needs to be isolated, to make sure that the spaces of others do not invade his own personal space, which results in an unmistakable sense of self-satisfaction, patently visible in *White Spaces*. However, means of getting information or knowledge are necessary for that written cosmogenesis, and they are represented by the natural openings of the room, such as doors and windows, instruments of selective communication between the inside and the outside. The doors and windows are both an instrument of protection for the inhabitant and of exclusion and barrier against outsiders. It is through the windows that the writer-character looks outside and sees the world. Getting away from the window, he sits, and, completely removed from the world, imagines what to write next.

Thus, the windows are to the room what the eyes are to the mind of the subject⁷. The eyes are, in the classic metaphor, windows to the soul, but, following this equation, the mind corresponds to the room. The work of writing takes place inside the room as much as inside the mind, both of them closed spaces, of writing and of reflection, respectively, with a single and solitary inhabitant. The book then blends with the room, since they are both shaped by the mind of the writer⁸. The door is a symbol that

⁷ In "Answer to a Question from New York Magazine" (*Why Write?*, p. 9), the question that can be inferred is: what ideas do you associate with the words "New York"? To Auster, it is a childhood story, spent at the window of his grandparent's apartment, in the corner of Central Park South and Columbus Circle, New York. The window is, to Auster-child too, the first frontier with the world (New York), with conscious knowledge.

⁸ Once again evoking Franz Kafka, we find in this author the recurring image of the room as a space of protection from the hostile exterior. In it, the oppressed character also experiences a sense of power and comfort derived from confinement, where his mind goes through a sort of hibernation period, progressively detaching itself from the body, as in *The Metamorphosis*. In a similar way, at the end of *City of Glass*, Quinn's mind gets gradually detached from his body, in the small interior room of Stillman's house. In *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, Raban, locked in his room, expresses his certainty "that I don't even need to go to the country myself, it isn't necessary. I'll send my clothed body. If it staggers out of the door of my room, the staggering will indicate not fear but its nothingness" (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, p. 55). The window is the only means of communication with the outside world for Gregor in *The Metamorphosis*,

illustrates well the dichotomy between sacred and profane spaces, transcended by the entrance in the enclosed area of the room. This room has transformative properties that lead its inhabitant to knowledge and to a rite of passage, as the writer-character possesses a biography in space, expanding inside that seclusion that feeds him metaphysically. The room eventually becomes a temple, a well defined space with spiritual implications, demarcated both by a wall and by the words of an enchantment. The room is a sacred space amidst the profane and chaotic space of the labyrinthine postmodern city, where the “art in a closed field” is generated⁹.

White Spaces, a poem in prose organized in sequences of narrative fragments anthologized in *Ground Work* and taken from the homonymous collection *White Spaces* (Station Hill, 1980; literary production from 1978 and 1979), marks a unique moment of artistic liberation in a delimited, white, impenetrable space (room), which can be filled with all possible meanings and stories. Even in canonical poetic forms there are blank spaces between verses, transcendental spaces of silent understanding, as if encouraging the reader to fill them with his or her imagination. In a white space, all colors of the spectrum blend together, and it is therefore a multiple space, of simultaneous existences. A white space contains in itself everything that the text can mean (“Where no possibility exists, everything becomes possible again”, as we can read in *The Death of Sir Walter Raleigh*, GW 164), both in terms of the creative potentialities of writing and the numberless possible interpretations that the reader may subject it to. In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster explicitly refers to the ontological charge inherent to the writing of *White Spaces*:

It was a liberation for me, a tremendous letting go, and I look back on it now as the bridge between writing poetry and writing prose. That was the piece that convinced me I still had it in me to be a writer. But everything was going to be different now. A whole new period of my life was about to begin (AH 287).

During the already mentioned period of great emotional and financial instability, Auster had come to a deep personal and artistic impasse: “There were moments when

besides the doors, which are always closed. Gregor blends with the room. His sister Grete feels the need to open the windows, to not be confined to that reality which, in spite of everything, she cannot accept. She goes into the room, but always under the compulsion of keeping contact with the normalcy of the exterior. Finally, in *The Street Window* (p. 384) and in *Absent-minded Window-gazing* (p. 387), Kafka turns the windows into privileged means of communication between the solitary interior of meditation and the exterior, with its human harmony. But the exterior reality in these texts by Kafka is “the human harmony” (p. 384), and not, as in Auster, a chaotic postmodern city.

⁹ Cf. Hugh Kenner, “Art in a Closed Field”, *Learners and Discerners: A Newer Criticism*, ed. Robert Scholes (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1964) pp. 109-33.

I thought I was finished, when I thought I would never write another word” (AH 294). Having reached rock bottom, like so many of his characters, Auster was ready for a new beginning, which, as he himself states, started when he was watching a dance rehearsal: “Something happened, and a whole world of possibilities suddenly opened up to me. I think it was the absolute fluidity of what I was seeing, the continual motion of the dancers as they moved around the floor. It filled me with immense happiness” (AH 294). The next day, he started to write *White Spaces*, which the author describes as his attempt to translate the experience of the dancers into words. It was an indescribable artistic liberation, a breakthrough in his literary production, the definitive bridge between his poetry and his prose. In that white space, the artistic metamorphosis of Paul Auster took place.

From that moment on, the central project of Auster’s prose takes shape: the investigation of the scene of writing, the ontology of the literary text. It is an immense project, a detective-like task that will possibly occupy him for the rest of his career. An ontology is a description of a universe, not of the universe, containing multiple descriptive potential. To create an ontology, from this perspective, is not necessarily to seek a basis for our universe; other universes can be described in the same way, including the heterocosmos of fiction. This heterocosmos presupposes the existence of one or more universes within the space of the room and of the book. One of the oldest classic ontological themes in poetics is the “otherness” of the fictional world, its separation from the real world of experience. This was already commonplace in Renaissance poetics when Sir Philip Sidney reiterated it in his *Defense or Apologie*, published in 1595:

(...) doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.¹⁰

Sidney addresses the theme of the fictional world as an heterocosmos, a separate universe, which persists in the twentieth century with the concept of fictionality. It is the old analogy between author and God, seeing the freedom and power of the former in its demiurgic and almost divine role. Not satisfied with invisibly exercising his

¹⁰ Philip Sidney, *Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney* IV, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 8.

freedom to create worlds, the artist now makes this freedom visible, inserting himself in the space of his work. He depicts himself in the act of building his fictional world, or of destroying it, which is also his prerogative. There is only one catch: the artist, portrayed in the act of creating or destroying, inevitably becomes fictional himself. The real artist always occupies an ontological level superior to that of his fictional projected self, inhabitant of a peripheral private reality. Auster's character-writer moves within this heterotypical space, an impossible space that, in reality, is not located anywhere but in the written text itself. The parallel universes are (re)created in the room and in the book, both of them a product of the construction of the written work. Once again, postmodernism focuses on the process of writing as action (process, performance, happening, terms which are already present in Ihab Hassan's above mentioned classification¹¹), allowing the reader to participate in that very process and in the mind and solitude of the character-writer, in accordance with the postmodern concept of participation and in contrast with the modernist distance (distance vs. participation). Evoking the aesthetics of the open poetry of George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff, Auster emphasizes writing as a present and apparent process, often focusing on the concrete moment of the narration ("I remember a day very like today". IS 22). By becoming conscious of the narrative and of the language (scriptible, writerly), the reader participates in the parallel universe of the writing, and not in the external socio-economic reality, which postmodernism avoids¹². To Hassan, the postmodern exhaustion, silence, and absence contrast with modernism's mastery, logos, and presence. Because the character-writer is absent from the everyday outside world, exercising a silent cosmogony between the walls of his room. Inside that room, his power is infinite, outside of it he becomes frail and diluted in the crowd, like Quinn, A., Anna Blume or Marco Fogg. In the magical space of the room, of which

¹¹ Hassan, "Postface 1982", p. 87.

¹² "Many contemporary American novels are conventionally labelled 'metafictional' or 'self-referential'. By way of summary, a metafictional novel or self-referential text refers openly to its own devices and strategies, turns on itself to debate its fictional nature, to exhibit its 'made-upness.' The writer's problems in constructing the novel are prominently displayed, the reader kept constantly aware of the fabricated nature of the enterprise, the authorial voice abruptly disrupting the spectacle, dispelling the illusion, intruding like an uninvited guest into the body of the text. (...) the imaginative collaboration of implied reader and the fiction-making process, a shift away from the author-text axis, with its hierarchy of active author and passive reader, to writing and reading as undifferentiated, symbiotic activities". Peter Currie, "The Eccentric Self: Anti-Characterization and the Problem of the Subject in American Postmodernist Fiction", *Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Malcom Bradbury and Sigmund Ro (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), pp. 56-57.

White Spaces is the most faithful representation, the fragments of the subject coalesce, and he achieves unity by reconstituting the world in signs of his own authorship (as Peter Stillman tried to do), in a language that corresponds to the innermost meaning of things, in line with the statement of Plato's *Cratylus*.

Auster translated Mallarmé, and through him he discovered the notion of the ancestral book that encompasses an entire world, an idea that is at the basis of the exploration of the scene of writing. But even more directly associated with Auster's recurring themes is Edmond Jabès, whose seven volumes of meditative and oracular poetic prose *The Book of Questions* (*Le Livre des Questions*) had a profound influence in Auster's poetic narratives. Auster expounds the relation between Jabès and Mallarmé in an article originally written in 1976 for *The New York Review of Books* in which he connects the Jewish elements in *The Book of Questions* to central aspects of Mallarmé's writing: "The Book is his central image - but it is not only the Book of the Jews (the spirals of commentary around commentary in the Midrash), but an allusion to Mallarmé's ideal Book as well (the Book that contains the world, endlessly folding in upon itself)" (AH 105-106). "Mallarmé wanted to put all knowledge into a book. He wanted to make a great book, the book of books" (AH 156) says Jabès himself in an interview conducted by Paul Auster, and evoking the cosmic library of Jorge Luis Borges. There is also a desire for truth and totality in Jabès' work. He is searching for a unity based on fragments, maintaining the perception of the totality of the book at every moment of its writing, so that the whole exerts an overwhelming pressure that determines the composition of the book, word by word, stone by stone. His highly elaborate conception of the book as the central poetic principle of writing opens up the space of that same writing to the reader.

In *White Spaces*, Auster records a primary discovery of his simultaneously phenomenological, mystical, and social investigation: the process of writing takes place in a room. Step by step, he begins to investigate the virgin space of the room in the following way:

I remain in the room in which I am writing this. I put one foot in front of the other. I put one word in front of the other, and for each step I take I add another word, as if for each word to be spoken there were another space to be crossed, a distance to be filled by my body as it moves through this space. It is a journey through space, even if I get nowhere, even if I end up in the same place I started. It is a journey through space, as if into many

cities and out of them, as if across deserts, as if to the edge of some imaginary ocean, where each thought drowns in the relentless waves of the real (GW 85).¹³

Auster repeatedly insists on the physical character of the work of writing (as if it were a groundwork or a wall being built), graphically conveying this through the juxtaposition of three distinct spaces: the space where the writing is built; the space where writing has its origin, within the writer; and the space of the page, which is occupied by words. That is to say, the three rooms of writing: the room where the writer locks himself to build his book, the room that is the creative mind, and “the room that is the book” (*Ghosts*, NYT 170). In *White Spaces*, as later in *Ghosts*, Auster represents the work of writing through the equation between the room and the book: “I remain in the room in which I am writing this”, he says, as though he is occupying the white spaces of the page, of the mind, and of the room. Whichever direction he takes, in this symbolic architecture, the writer has the sensation of being physically confined: when he writes, he enters the closed space of the book; when he interrupts his writing, he paces back and forth in the narrow, confined space of the room¹⁴. This claustrophobic situation is indicative of a certain solipsism in Auster’s writing, a tendency that is reflected in the markedly autobiographical nature of his work, as if the poetic persona too was cut off from the exterior. However, the outside world eventually ends up penetrating the self-inscribed mental sphere of Auster’s characters, imposing real consequences to their thoughts and conjectures, and, as a result, admitting the possibility of interpenetration between the mental and the social worlds. In *The Locked Room*, the fragile stability of the narrator is broken by the appearance of Fanshawe’s letter, coming from the outside world, in his room of writing. In *Moon*

¹³ After reading this excerpt, the parallel with Samuel Beckett becomes inevitable. His characters literally exhaust, in a systematic way, every possibility of action in a closed field, as in the following passage, taken from *Watt* (1953): “Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed...” etc, etc, through long lines of text. In the dramatic works of Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Arthur Adamov, the external world is frequently characterized as threatening and unknown, and the sceneries and situations convey a sense of incoherent discomfort. Beckett’s plays take place in settings that are strange and alien, as if transformed by some surrealistic holocaust and evocative of the devastated city of *In the Country of Last Things*. These playwrights “of the absurd” see themselves as solitary and marginalized rebels, isolated in their private worlds, exercising their very own art in a closed field.

¹⁴ See *Voyage Autour de ma Chambre* of Xavier de Maistre, 1795. This parody of Lawrence Sterne (*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* from 1768, a semi-autobiographical fantasy) plunges the reader into the atmosphere of the XVIII century and of the great discoveries. But this “journey” is a completely spiritual one, as is its parodic duplication, since the author, with elegant humor, invites the reader to wander about without leaving that room, where he is locked. The book’s success led to a continuation, *Expédition Nocturne Autour de ma Chambre*, less accomplished.

Palace, the economic reality forces Fogg out of his white room and into the hostile streets of New York. And in *In the Country of Last Things*, it is Anna Blume's foray into the chaotic exterior that ends in idyll and with the miracle of life and of writing, generated in the room of the library. That violent penetration of the exterior into the white space is connoted with a violation of the purity, symbolized by the white colour, of that fertile womb, generator of an imaginary cosmos, aborting the gestation process of writing and thinking.

The problematic of the coexistence of spaces and spatial symbols in literature was addressed by Douwe Fokkema in his study of literary conventions in Gide, Larbaud, Thomas Mann, Ter Braak and Du Perron¹⁵. Gide proposes that “a viagem deve substituir a imobilidade e uma janela aberta é considerada superior a um quarto fechado”¹⁶. Auster would certainly reply no, not as long as you can travel within that closed room, as in *White Spaces*¹⁷. We can use the metaphor of the concentric circles to identify the hierarchy of Auster's semantic universe. The center of his semantic universe is the notion of consciousness (perception, reflection, thought). This concept depends on the existence of a thinking subject, the writer, who reflects in a state of maximum consciousness. “O segundo círculo formaria o campo semântico de despreendimento (separação, afastamento)”¹⁸. It can take the form of the wall of the room, the wall that frames, in deep solitude, the subject as a character or as the self-portrayed writer himself. “O terceiro círculo concêntrico seria o campo semântico de observação”¹⁹. Auster's subject observes and takes note of everything, despite his deliberate seclusion. He does that through the obsessive observation of an object, through stalking, through the exhaustive record of movements. Or through the evocative power of imagination, endlessly travelling between the four walls, inside the *White Spaces* where everything can coexist.

But the infinitely plural coexistence of every atom in an imaginary universe is hard to express, to systematize through words: “It comes down to this: that everything should count, that everything should be a part of it, even the things I do not or cannot

¹⁵ Fokkema, *História Literária*, pp. 35-57.

¹⁶ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 37.

¹⁷ About the supremacy of the eyes of the mind, see *Les Fenêtres* of Charles Baudelaire: *Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée*. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968) p. 174.

¹⁸ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 55.

¹⁹ Fokkema, *História Literária*, p. 55.

understand” (GW 87). The goal is not for the text to effectively describe the world it is trying to verbalize, or for the explanations it gives to be more than an approximation to the truth. This implies, as far as textual organization is concerned, preference for the continuous flow of the stream of consciousness, which does not aspire to a conclusive result, and even less to universal validity. The tendency towards epistemological doubt has consequences for the plot. The author is apparently indifferent to the status of his text, caring little about how and where it begins, how it progresses, how and where it ends. In postmodernism, the multiple ending technique is thoroughly explored. The open ending is parodied in *Ghosts*, with its final moment when a door to get out of the story is opened, without any additional explanations. What prevails is the importance of the word that invents, gives shape to the world, and is its only justification. Hence the compulsive need to talk and write, even though this is but the recycling of crystallized meanings, for the postmodernist prefers words to silence. Writing and thinking fill every possible emptiness of the white (blank) space of the room and of the page:

And therefore this desire, this overwhelming need, to take these papers and scatter them across the room. (...) To remain in the realm of the naked eye, as happy as I am at this moment. (...) Never to be anywhere but here. And the immense journey through space that continues. Everywhere, as if each place were here (GW 88).

The voice that describes everything in words can continue indefinitely between the four walls, a space outside of time and its limitations, even long after the events have occurred. The writer-character roams aimlessly inside the room, as if travelling through space, through roads, deserts, and cities, ending near an ocean (as the itineraries of *Moon Palace* and *The City of Chance*). Even the narration of nothingness or of events that never happened is an artistically noble task, just as the work of Paul Auster himself is divided between the narrative of imaginary events and deeply inconclusive narratives where nothing really happens. The postmodern code is based on a preference for non-selection, on the rejection of discriminating hierarchies, and on the refusal to distinguish between fact and fiction, past and present, relevant and irrelevant. Like Paul Auster’s openly pluralistic fiction, “the 'postmodern' American novel has a (...) equivocal status (...), the specific characteristics of particular works subsumed under that indiscriminating heading”²⁰ (that is, the general concept of

²⁰ Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 53.

“postmodernism”). In postmodern texts, we notice the absence of a well-defined plot and the opposite preference for arbitrary storylines, aside from the stylistic device of continuous enumeration and reworking. All these devices convey, both at the level of the sentence and of the text, the ephemeral character of reality, as they are based on an intellectual experimentation diverging from any final conclusion. Concerning the relationship between text and code, the postmodernist convention makes use of the metalinguistic commentary, that is, it discusses the codes used in the text itself.

Literarily and biographically, *White Spaces* describes isolation in the delimited space of the room, propitious to introspection and reflection about the outside world, along with a self-conscious exercise in writing that precedes a true spiritual revelation. Auster knows that he is a practitioner of an art of solitude, “a way of coming to grips with one's life in the darkest, most secret corner of the self” (AH 247). *White Spaces* proclaims the power of that exile, experienced in the first person:

I walk within these four walls, and for as long as I am here I can go anywhere I like. I can go from one end of the room to the other and touch any of the four walls, or even all the walls, one after the other, exactly as I like. (...) The light, streaming through the windows, never casts the same shadow twice, and at any given moment I feel myself on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth. These are moments of great happiness for me (GW 85).

The discovery actually made was that of formal liberation, the definitive passage from poetry to prose. However, the moment of the conception of *White Spaces*, written in a single night, coincided, by another theatrical intervention of chance, with his father's death. Yet, this traumatic and unexpected event had the upside of providing Auster, for the first time, with some financial comfort, which allowed him to consider, without material obstacles, the decisive option of pursuing a career as a writer. Chance also determined that his father's death would be the motor of *The Invention of Solitude*, his first large work in prose, after the revelation of *White Spaces*.



The Invention of Solitude is at the same time a poetic form of art inspired in the actual experience of the subject (a fictionalized sequence of *The Art of Hunger*) and the seminal work of Paul Auster's prose. It can be considered a novel-manifesto in two parts (*Portrait of an Invisible Man* and *The Book of Memory*) that works as a reference

for every subsequent book. *The Invention of Solitude* is not just an autobiographical confession but rather a powerful meditation on questions common to all of mankind, with particular incidence on the analytical exploration of the scene of writing, using the writer-character and his experiences as a guinea-pig in this process of exploration of the self and of others.

The *Invention of Solitude* is autobiographical, of course, but I don't feel that I was telling the story of my life so much as using myself to explore certain questions that are common to us all: how we think, how we remember, how we carry our pasts around with us at every moment. I was looking at myself in the same way a scientist studies a laboratory animal (AH 292).

Subjectivity is revealed to be essential to achieve that knowledge, to visualize the projection of the individual and from there derive objective and true conclusions. And autobiographical marks are present in most of the plots of Auster's fiction. They can be summarized as follows: a young protagonist departs in search of someone (frequently a father figure), facing great difficulties. There seems to be a goal but the protagonist never fully achieves it; if in his existential wanderings he finds someone, that someone is, in fact, himself, at the end of the tunnel or of the labyrinth. The narration of the quest, which is made in a simple, translucent prose, invariably reflects the very process of writing. Sometimes, the characters feel that they are being controlled by a higher entity, that their experiences reflect the movement of thoughts in the mind of an author. Auster puts writing at the center of life and life at the center of writing. Confronted with the situation of "a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book" (NYT 169), Auster turns it into an extremely rich field for meditation, where deep intellectual, historical and personal topics are present and heard. Inside the room of the book, Auster dissects the dilemmas of the writer with skillful expertise, dilemmas that never go away. When Blue "asks how to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (NYT 169-170), the answer would simply be to leave that room and that book. The writer-character, however, is not allowed to do that.

The stones, the walls and the poetic art, juxtaposed in the poems of *Ground Work*, are now replaced, in the prose of *The Invention of Solitude*, by the room, the space of artistic creation, containing an entire universe, a miniature cosmogony, encompassing everything that is vast, distant, and unknown. As if the stones and the walls had built it so that the poetic art could generate the book there, always in solitude, since the

room represents the very essence of solitude: “The world ends at that barricaded door. For the room is not a representation of solitude, it is the substance of solitude itself” (IS 143). And solitude is the substance of that book, including its title, its main character, and the biographical circumstances of its writing. But this solitude is an invention of the subject, not the product of a universal metaphysics, it is created through meditation, writing, and the construction of the room and of the book, transformed into a place for insatiable search. “A man sits alone in a room and writes. Whether the book speaks of loneliness or companionship, it is necessarily a product of solitude” (IS 136).

To Paul Auster, the term “solitude” is exceptionally complex and not just a synonym for physical isolation, charged with negative connotations²¹. “Solitude became a passageway into the self, an instrument of discovery” (NYT 277-278), as we read in *The Locked Room* apropos of the literary path of Fanshawe (so similar to that of Paul Auster that it even begins by a poetic *Ground Work*), in which the notion/state of solitude appears not just as the motor of the book but also as a demarcation of the artistic maturity of the protagonist. Solitude allows for creation: the writer-character within the room, that emblematic figure to whom the room can become the experience of everything (or of nothing), believes in what Keats called “the truth of imagination”. All writing possesses elements of this solitude, but few American writers believed as much in the potential of that “truth” as Auster does. Auster sees solitude as a simple fact that is inherent to the human condition, making itself felt even in the middle of a crowd, derived from the certainty that true experiences come from within. Introspective contemplation provides more than self-knowledge: within himself, in solitude, the writer-character discovers the entire world, in a writing that is both solitary and solidary. *L' oeuvre est solitaire: cela ne signifie pas qu' elle reste incommunicable, que le lecteur lui manque. Mais qui la lit entre dans cette affirmation de la solitude de l' oeuvre, comme celui qui l' écrit appartient au risque de cette*

²¹ While the English word “loneliness” conveys a sense of abandonment (“I don’t want to be alone, I resent the burden of solitude, I want to be with others”), emphasizing emotion, feeling, the term “solitude” is semantically neutral. It is simply the description of a state: to be alone. Cf. (...) *l' absolu d' un Je suis qui veut s' affirmer sans les autres. C' est là ce qu' on appelle généralement solitude (au niveau du monde)*. (...) *Écrire, c'est se livrer à la fascination de l'absence de temps. Nous approchons sans doute ici de l'essence de la solitude. L'absence de temps n'est pas un mode purement négatif*. Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace Littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) pp. 342 e 22.

*solitude*²². A book of universal scope, like *The Invention of Solitude*, is born of solitude, of meditation within the room: “(...) in the solitude of his room, the world has been rushing in on him at a dizzying speed, as if it were all suddenly converging in him and happening to him at once” (IS 162). In this way, a new meaning, already visible in the title, is conferred to the concept of solitude. Solitude can be seen as a space for creation, for cosmic and individual discoveries, for global knowledge, materializing as the omnipresent space of the room.

Edmond Jabès also situates the space of poetry within the room, which possesses a life of its own and which he tries to defend from outside incursions. In his investigation of the scene of writing, Auster takes Jabès’ challenge very seriously, entering the room of the book and carefully listening to the whiteness and silence of the room and of the page. *The Invention of Solitude* contains a text of Jabèsian inspiration, *The Book of Memory*, in which Auster explores the space of writing (both book and room), creating a fiction out of the book, in a process that the reader is allowed to witness. Blue’s already mentioned question in *Ghosts* also animates *The Book of Memory*, which topicalizes the room and the book in several ways: A. describes the room where he lives and writes with obsessive detail, in addition to several other important rooms from his past. He depicts memories in architectural terms, as rooms where contiguous impressions are stored. Auster invokes translation as an image of what occurs when someone enters the room of the book: “Every book is an image of solitude (...) A. sits down in his own room to translate another man’s book, and it is as though he were entering that man’s solitude and making it his own” (IS 136). The intruder invades the solitude of the space of writing, without ever knowing whether he will get out of that violated solitude with a sense of consolidation or feeling weakened. To Blue, that penetration into someone else’s solitude resulted in a terrifying *mise en abyme*. The writer resembles a ghost inside the room that is the book, an image that is visible in *The Book of Memory*, which achieves a complete fusion between A.’s life and writings. The only way to get out of the room is, then, to write the book, to create a parallel universe of words, where the character-writer can move as he pleases, without actually leaving the space delimited by his mind, by the page, and by the walls, as in the infinite journeys within the *White Spaces*: “As he

²² Blanchot, *L’Espace Littéraire*, p. 11.

writes, he feels that he is moving inward (through himself) and at the same time moving outward (towards the world)” (IS 139).

But the solitude of those who voluntarily or involuntarily lock themselves in the room may in effect imply the impossibility of communicating with others. As in the case of the wall of isolation that the author’s father (the invisible man whose portrait gives the first part of the novel its title and inspired S.A. 1911-1979 in *Ground Work*) has created around himself, distancing him from others in all his human relations, and particularly in his relationship with his son. Through this book, Auster also tries to penetrate that closed space of isolation, bringing back to life, through writing, the man who had just died. Once again, Auster wants to resurrect the stone through the work of writing, or, at least, to prevent it from fading away and merging with the wall of death, thus accomplishing the life transfusion that had begun in his poetic works: “I thought: my father is gone. If I do not act quickly, his entire life will vanish along with him” (IS 6). Taken by surprise by the death of his father, and compelled by the need to write about him, Auster writes *Portrait of an Invisible Man*. This attempt by a son to save his father is reiteratively illustrated throughout the text through the fascination with the story of Pinocchio and Gepetto²³. A., as a writer-character, is trying to do the same for his father’s memory, since, due to his characteristic isolation, he could do nothing for him while he was alive. At the same time, he does everything he can to build the best possible relationship with his own son, from whom external reality is conspiring to separate him. “Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room. Breath and death” (IS 159-160): in this phonetic-semantic wordplay, the room is counterpoised to the tomb, as an attempt to postpone it, or even to annihilate it. The tomb is the end of the journey begun in the maternal womb, but the room can become another generative womb, creator of perennial writings, in a new cycle of life and death. The room of the book is the place where death can be transformed into life (that is the revelation of *White Spaces*), because the written universe is not governed by the chaotic and disintegrative principles of the outside world:

Like everyone else, he craves a meaning. Like everyone else, his life is so fragmented that each time he sees a connection between two fragments he is tempted to look for a meaning

²³ “Sam Auster is the first missing person to appear in Paul Auster's writing, and he is certainly one of the most memorable of these disappeared ones”, writes Charles Baxter in his essay, significantly titled “The Bureau of Missing Persons: Notes on Paul Auster's Fiction”, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14:1 (Spring 1994), 40-43.

in that connection. The connection exists. But to give it a meaning, to look beyond the bare fact of its existence, would be to build an imaginary world inside the real world (IS 147).

Auster uses the room as a womb to give life to the book, since, even though the room can be a claustrophobic place to the body, it is infinitely fecund to the mind. A. sees enormous potential in language, imagining it to be the core of being, the genetic material of the world (re)created between the four walls of the room, since language is, in a conception inspired by Heidegger, “o modo como nós existimos no mundo” (IS 161). The room of the book is an alchemical place where Auster hopes to transform death into words of life through the regeneration of the father by the son.

In *The Invention of Solitude*, we find the theme of isolation addressed from two perspectives. In *Portrait of an Invisible Man* we see the solitude of the father character in the third person, the oblivious solitude of someone who lives his monotonous day-to-day life alienated from others, not because of some sort of ideological option, but rather due to an inborn feeling of indifference and neutrality: “Solitary. But not in the sense of being alone. (...) Solitary in the sense of retreat. In the sense of not having to see himself, or not having to see himself being seen by anyone else” (IS 16-17). Isolation is presented in objective terms, in the description of the very character, projecting itself also in the endless number of rooms in the disproportionately big house where the father lived alone after his divorce until his death, only staying overnight in that succession of uninhabited locked rooms, in absolute neglect. The house had become a metaphor for the father’s life, the rigorously faithful representation of his inside world. Death is reflected in the progressive emptying of the rooms that parallels the fading away of the father’s memory, which A. tries to fight through writing. As the father is the dominating character, the overwhelming space of that excessively vast house is the center of *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, whereas A., being the son and the dominated character, is limited to occupying exiguous and frequently miserable rooms, the central spaces in *The Book of Memory*.

The house reflects the most significant events in the Auster family, and, after the family breaks apart, the existential path of the father character. The question of sharing the house brings about the memory of the divorce of the Austers, and the divorce of A. himself is perceived in connection with the need to move to the room in Varick Street and with the visits to the house of his ex-wife and son. But this is a recurrent perspective not just in the writing of this particular work (by A.) but also in the writing

of the work in general (by Auster). Time seems to stand still in his father's house, while he manically tries to make sure that nothing ever changes, even in the most minute details (like keeping the windows always closed), but that vain attempt is thwarted by an obvious process of inexorable degradation. That is why A. is so taken aback by his father's death, repeating that he seemed to him to be invulnerable.

In *The Book of Memory*, the perspective is changed: Auster (A.) looks at his own relationship with his son in the first person, examining his existential path and the self-imposed isolation of the writer who is trying to find himself. Curiously, his son also feels the need to lock himself in a room in order “to think”. A. reinvents solitude through the recurring metaphor of Jonah's confinement in the belly of the whale, of Pinocchio and Gepetto trapped inside the shark, and through the obsession over the claustrophobically delimited space of the room. He meticulously describes the many and invariably exiguous rooms he inhabited during his troubled journey, or the way several creative artists approached that same theme. To Auster-son, solitude is conscious, rational, analyzed, even dissected in its implications. The room, as a space soaked in solitude within its four walls, is animated, populated by thoughts:

Each time he goes out, he takes his thoughts with him, and during his absence the room gradually empties of his efforts to inhabit it. When he returns, he has to begin the process all over again, and that takes work, real spiritual work (IS 77).

It is an interiorized space, of intellectual labor, and not, as it was for his father, a mere place for physical repose. In the small room at number 6 Varick Street, A. writes *The Book of Memory* (“Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits”. IS 88). Auster deciphers his memory, which inhabits the most interior and closed of spaces, the room of the mind. In the room, he writes the book of the memory that is stored in that same room, both of them filled with words and solitude: “This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull” (NYT 293), using the transcendental discovery of the narrator of *The Locked Room*²⁴. The revelations made possible by the solitude of that room give the writer-character the

²⁴ In *The Locked Room*, that same narrator finds, in the country house inhabited by Fanshawe in times past, a short poem, coming from the past and written on the wall (cf. *Wall Writing*), after wandering lengthily through the several rooms. “On the second day, examining the rooms on the upper floor” (NYT 291), as if he was examining the rooms of memory, of the mind, of that house which also embodies a stage of Fanshawe's existence.

ability to understand everything at once, and, as soon as he starts to write about that very solitude, to be something more than simply himself:

If there is any reason for him to be in this room now, it is because there is something inside him hungering to see it all at once, to savor the chaos of it in all its raw and urgent simultaneity. (...) The pen will never be able to move fast enough to write down every word discovered in the space of memory (IS 139).

The most complete perception of the endless possibilities of a limited space is achieved in the description of the room of the eccentric composer S. at Place Pinel in Paris. There, S. lived as a castaway in the heart of town, devoted to the composition of his *magnum opus*, a piece for three orchestras and four choirs that would take twelve days to perform. The generative space of the room is identified with the creative qualities of the composer's mind. Several are the comforting visits that A. pays to that room, as S. reminds him of the real father he never had. Years later, A. is afraid of returning to that place, as he fears that this second father may also have died and he has to empty another room in his memory. In this brief story of S.'s room are again contained the great topics of Paul Auster's work: the exploration of the scene of artistic creation, the father-son relationship, the fear of the emptiness of death, and the cosmogonic power, all inside a simple room:

(...) to feel the room expand, and to watch your mind explore the excessive, unfathomable reaches of that space. For there was an entire universe in that room, a miniature cosmology that contained all that is most vast, most distant, most unknowable. It was a shrine, hardly bigger than a body, in praise of all that exists beyond the body: the representation of one man's inner world (...) The room he lived in was a dream space, and its walls were like the skin of some second body around him (...) This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of the imagination (IS 89).

Going through rooms distant from his memory, Auster explores the solitude of several artists. He visits Anne Frank's room, where her diary was written, and evokes Holderlin, at the end of his life, imprisoned by his own insanity in his room at the tower of Tübingen, built by the architect Zimmer (room). Auster directly identifies Anne Frank's room with the room of the book, where she discovered and wrote her identity, since every experience of solitude and self-discovery after the holocaust is inescapably haunted by the absolute isolation of Anne Frank. In her diary and in her room, the young writer tried to order the chaos of the world around her, so that she could physically and mentally survive. Auster, a Jewish writer, heir of an ontology molded by history in its solipsistic solitude, is also trying to reorder the chaotic post-holocaust and post-modern universe through writing, like the Jewish protagonist of

the apocalyptic *In the Country of Last Things*. He then moves on to painting, to Vermeer's women, placidly solitary in their rooms, to the painting *The Bedroom* by Van Gogh, described in a letter from the painter to his brother. Auster compares that room to a prison, to a locked room ("The bed blocks one door, a chair blocks the other door, the shutters are closed: you can't get in, and once you are in, you can't get out". IS 143). In the same way, he recalls a visit to Emily Dickinson's room, at her house in Amherst, Massachusetts, where:

(...) the world was already there, in that room (...) Perhaps more than any other concrete place in American literature, it symbolizes a native tradition, epitomized by Emily, of an assiduous study of the inner life (IS 123).

The Invention of Solitude can be considered a celebration of the room and of the closed space, where the spirit projects itself within the walls, transforming it into a mental uterus, the site of a second birth. In this captivity, the subject (Auster, H"lderlin, Anne Frank, Collodi, Van Gogh, Vermeer, Dickinson) generates, firstly, himself. He passes from mere biological existence to spiritual life. His confinement transforms him into a voluntary pariah, a castaway in the middle of the city, hidden in a secret space of the urban habitat. The subject has to disappear so that he can live again; self-erasure can be redeeming, so Auster's protagonists go to the limits of starvation and physical deprivation. Self-destructive passion coming close to total annihilation (very similar to the one analyzed by Auster in his essay on Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*) turns the confinement in the room into a kind of secular, godless asceticism. The room is a prison that opens the gates of creative and spiritual freedom, the subject is a closed room that the writer-character has to explore in order to find a redeeming exit.

The voyage of the mind is an actual voyage, even if the writer-character never leaves the closed space of the room, the scene of the real human drama, the place where the subject simultaneously loses himself and finds himself again, where he is fragmented and reunited. The room frames the thoughts of A., like the page frames the writing that conveys those same thoughts. *The Invention of Solitude* ends with a scene of writing in the room, having only the blank sheet of paper, the pen, and the table as props. After the actor-creator travels across his entire universe, walking between the table, the bed, and the chair, the words come up, in an autobiographical context very similar to that of *White Spaces*: solitude creates the magical words of the book, and writing reinvents solitude.



*The New York Trilogy*²⁵ appeared as a follow up to *The Invention of Solitude*, as we can read in Paul Auster's interview with Joseph Mallia: "I believe the world is filled with strange events. Reality is a great deal more mysterious than we ever give it credit for. In that sense, the Trilogy grows directly out of *The Invention of Solitude*" (AH 260). Auster frequently uses a conventional genre, like the detective novel, to metaphysical and epistemological ends. He generally starts in the real, outside world (rough, concrete, dangerous), and slowly leads us to another place, an interior, dream-like *moon palace*. In that same interview, Auster stated that *The New York Trilogy* focuses on the problem of identity, blurring the lines between madness and creativity and between reality and imagination. In *Ghosts*, according to the author, the spirit of Thoreau is prevalent, and the confinement within the walls of New York is very similar to the solitude of the forest in *Walden* (1854). In both cases, perfect isolation is achieved, out of which comes a transcendent capacity to observe and to reflect in the spaces delimited by walls or by the forest²⁶:

The idea of living a solitary life, of living with a kind of monastic intensity - and all the dangers that entails. Walden Pond in the heart of the city. In his American Notebook, Hawthorne wrote an extraordinary and luminous sentence about Thoreau that has never left me. "I think he means to live like an Indian among us." That sums up the project better than anything else I've read. The determination to reject everyday American life, to go against the grain, to discover a more solid foundation for oneself (AH 263).

The eventual fragmentation of the fictional universe created by the writer-character is counterbalanced by the framing on the page, through the writing that builds a legible cosmos out of the imaginary chaos. That framing also includes the search for an objective space where the subject can stop his own fragmentation. Nathaniel Hawthorne, a tutelary figure mentioned in *Ghosts* and clearly prominent in *The Locked Room*, locked himself for twelve years in a room so that he could begin his

²⁵ Originally published in the United States as *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room* (1986) by Sun & Moon Press, Los Angeles.

²⁶ Cf. Chapter 5 of *Walden, Solitude*: "I have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself (...) I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. (...) I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection (...) Why should I feel lonely? (...) What do we want most to dwell near to? (...) but to the perennial source of our life (...)". Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. Joseph Wood Krutch (New York: Bantam Books, 1962) pp. 200-8.

written work²⁷. Herman Melville, another of Auster's favorite authors, searched for his own identity in sea adventures. By transferring those adventures into writing, he secured his place in literature. It's the classic search for an identity and for a place in the world, only possible, in postmodernity, through protective, but also creative, seclusion within the room, amidst the city's wilderness²⁸. In *The New York Trilogy*, the external labyrinth is the city of New York itself, an iconic city for postmodernism, as it is where the question of the identity of the individual, which gets diluted in the crowd of the metropolis²⁹, is most acutely felt. New York has the utopian image of an inexhaustible space that invites exploration, since there is a correspondence between the vastness of the natural space and the wild space of the skyscraper forest, like utopia and dystopia. In the essay *The Decisive Moment*, in *The Art of Hunger*, Auster analyzes the poetry of Charles Reznikoff, whom he classifies as "a poet of the eye (...) For it is he who must learn to speak from his eye and cure himself of seeing with his mouth" (AH 35). Like Auster's, Reznikoff's work is deeply rooted in New York City, where the poet wanders about through writing³⁰. But Auster knows that the omniscient identification with the metropolis is born from invisible observation, from blending with the city's stones and walls:

If the poet's primary obligation is to see, there is a similar though less obvious injunction upon the poet - the duty of not being seen. The Reznikoff equation, which weds seeing to invisibility, cannot be made except by renunciation. In order to see, the poet must make himself invisible. He must disappear, efface himself in anonymity (AH 38).

²⁷ In fact, *The Locked Room* explicitly evokes Nathaniel Hawthorne's first novel, edited in 1828, and whose publication was interrupted in the following year. *Fanshawe*, as it is pertinently titled, far from being considered a masterpiece, contributes, however, to the study of the author's literary trajectory. Hawthorne would have paid one hundred dollars to editors Marsh & Capen from Boston for the anonymous publication of a thousand copies in October 1828. Cf. Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991).

²⁸ "In democratic countries', Tocqueville presciently noted, 'each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object, namely, himself.' (...) This near pathological individualism, romantic solipsism and debilitating concern with 'finding yourself' finds expression in the frantic search for instant salvation in a waste of novel therapies. (...) The interminable quest for the chimera of an inviolable identity follows inevitably from the belief that one can never be happy, authentic, genuine, sincere or 'free' until one has finally discovered, through the perilous voyage of self-exploration (an infinite regress to an ever-receding origin), that El Dorado of pure presence and unmediated plenitude of being: The Real Me". Currie, "The Eccentric Self", pp. 58-9.

²⁹ On the isolation and alienation of the individual locked in his room amidst the metropolis, see *Manhattan Transfer* (II. *Metropolis*) by John Dos Passos: "He walked home fast, ran up the stairs, and locked the room door behind him. The room was quiet and empty". John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925) p. 14.

³⁰ In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster transcribes a pertinent fragment of Reznikoff's poetry: "I like the sound of the street - / but I, apart and alone, / beside an open window / and behind a closed door. / I am alone - / and glad to be alone; / I do not like people who walk about / so late; who walk slowly after midnight / through the leaves fallen on the sidewalks. / I do not like / my own face / in the little mirrors of the slot-machines / before the closed stores" (AH 38-39).

If: "Lives make no sense, I argued" (NYT 250); "The point being that, in the end, each life is irreducible to anything other than itself. Which is as much as to say: lives make no sense" (NYT 253); "In the end, each life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose" (NYT 217), a possible solution is to get locked in a room and, within it, create a personal and imaginary meaning for everything, that is, to rewrite the universe. According to Paul Auster's own words: "stories are crucial. It's through stories that we struggle to make sense of the world. This is what keeps me going - the justification for spending my life locked up in a little room, putting words on paper"³¹. Auster's characters use very particular routine processes to structure existential chaos, and all of them have to do with writing

(like the detailed records, reports and catalogs of Stillman, Blue, Quinn, Jim Nashe, Maria Turner). As an alternative to the ineffectual system imposed by external reality, those characters-writers-recorders show an elitist and classical need for order, associated with an anarchistic impulse to destroy pre-existing systems, in a reactionary vision of ideal order. Language can rearrange the world because it is intimately connected with it ("The sign cannot be separated from the social situation without relinquishing its nature as sign. Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation"³²); the concept of a unified and closed text changes to that of a plural and open text, to use Roland Barthes' distinction³³. The urgency to methodically fill the room and the blank page has to do with the great ghost of Auster, the fear of emptiness, symbolized by death. That's the reason for the open endings in his stories, as death remains an unsolvable mystery. The idea that "lives make no sense" explains the absence of a definite meaning to *The New York Trilogy*, and its inconclusive and frustrating endings. Due to that inability of attributing meaning to human existence, the endings of Paul Auster's narratives establish a compromise between individual and surrounding reality.

³¹ Irwin, "Memory's Escape", p. 119.

³² M.M. Bakhtin (V.N. Voloshinov), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka e I.R. Titunik (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973) p. 95.

³³ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) p. 158.

In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster travels by writing, presenting extreme situations, focusing on solitary, unrestrained characters with a great need to communicate, beyond the physical barriers imposed by the walls of the rooms where they isolate themselves. The written journey is equivalent to a motion of the mind, and walking becomes the factual representation of the cognitive process. In *White Spaces*, Auster conceptualizes movement not as a simple function of the body but rather as an extension of the mind. Inside a simple room, the writer-character can experience the infinite possibilities of a limited space, because words shape and expand both mental and material spaces. In Auster's fiction, the spaces of the city, of the mind of the author, and of textuality implode into a space of verbal representation, in an area clearly demarcated by physical and metaphysical walls. This "area" presents similarities with Brian McHale's theory that postmodern fiction builds spaces that allow for experimentation, opening new ontological existences in a territory situated between two worlds, the "zone"³⁴. This originates the need to create the written work in order to survive and to confer meaning to existence and to the world, as things only exist as long as we see them and (de)scribe them. From this perspective, the empirical subject, with his series of subjective states, makes up the whole of reality, and other subjects, which supposedly exist, do not have an independent existence any more than a character in a dream does. This is simply a picture of the process of written cosmogenesis, in which apparently real entities are nothing but mere products of the writer-character's imagination, without which that universe would never have existed. But the solipsism of the writer-character presupposes total isolation, as he has created a world of words that cannot exist independently from his thoughts. The room symbolizes that world, made by writing and for writing.

Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there.
Another ghost.
Exactly (NYT 175).

In *Ghosts*, appropriately called the *Inward Gaze of a Private Eye* by Stephen Schiff³⁵, Blue and Black are face to face in their rooms, spaces for reflection, solitude, and knowledge. Blue is confined, as is Quinn, and he too observes another while, in

³⁴ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 43-58.

³⁵ Stephen Schiff, "Inward Gaze of a Private Eye" in *The New York Times Book Review* 92 (January 4, 1987), 14.

reality, he is observing himself, in a mediated process of self-discovery. Initially, Blue sees his solitude with some optimism, as it has allowed him to become his own master, like Quinn and Marco Fogg when they set themselves free of everything in the middle of the city. But Blue ignores that he is also falling into a dark cave (room), where his identity will be questioned, transformed, and, ultimately, in risk of disappearing. “All of a sudden, his calm turns to anguish, and he feels as though he is falling into some dark, cave-like place, with no hope of finding a way out” (NYT 145). By observing Black (darkness, absence of color and light), he also enters the dark cave that is the unknown inside every human being and himself.

In his first incursion to the interior of Black’s room, Blue realizes he is entering something more than a simple and trivial accommodation. When he goes inside, “the door will open, and after that Black will be inside of him forever” (NYT 183). To enter Black’s room will be like entering the mystery, and to explore it will be like entering the mind of Black himself, the last place to explore, in this endless exchange of glances. “The door opens, and suddenly there is no more distance, the thing and the thought of the thing are one and the same” (NYT 184). Blue goes into Black’s room, who seems to be waiting for him, and steals his writings, which are but the useless reports of Blue himself. “To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it” (NYT 190). As in *City of Glass*, the detective story turns into a narrative of self-discovery. Blue has entered the space of the room and of the mind that that room gives a material form to, he is inside the sacred space of the man he has been observing for more than a year, and, because of that, there is a certain feeling of disappointment at the mute austerity of the room. There are no images evoking Black’s affections, since there are no connections with the outside world. “It’s no man’s land, the place you come to at the end of the world” (NYT 185): here, only the characters move about, in that empty no man’s land, between fantasy and reality, as a page that is still blank. At the end of the world, everything is put into question and everything will have to be rebuilt, in a new cosmogony by the hand of the writer. This is a *White Space*, antithetically inhabited by Black, where perfect order and the endless book reign supreme. The room is just

the space of writing, it exists so that the book can be created or infinitely reread within it:

It looks like a big book, Blue continues.

Yes, says Black. I've been working on it for many years.

Are you almost finished ?

I'm getting there, Black says thoughtfully. But sometimes it's hard to know where you are.

I think I'm almost done, and then I realize I've left out something important, and so I have to go back to the beginning again. But yes, I do dream of finishing it one day. One day soon, perhaps.

I hope I get a chance to read it, says Blue.

Anything is possible, says Black. But first of all, I've got to finish it. There are days when I don't even know if I'll live that long (NYT 185).

The void witnessed on this first visit only adds to the mystery and to the recently discovered torment of Blue's self-questioning. The room is just the scene of the drama, not an explanation of its protagonists. To enter or to leave it is like entering or leaving the story that took over the lives of Blue and Black. "What if he stood up, went out the door, and walked away from the whole business?" (NYT 186), ponders Blue in what can be understood as curious metafictional allusion by the character. Impossible, because to leave the room, to get away from the story, is the same as leaving the life that is conferred by the book to fictional instances. Fate must be fulfilled: Blue will only leave the room in the last lines of the story, after he kills Black and deciphers the mystery of the book, written and lived by both of them.

But the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment, and that will not come until Blue leaves the room. Such is the way of the world: not one moment more, not one moment less. When Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door, that will be the end of it (NYT 195).

"The end of it"... of Blue, of Black, of the mystery, and of *Ghosts*. On the other hand, to enter Black's room alone, without using a disguise and with direct access to the written work, is a way to acquire the key to the enigma that became the center of both of their lives. However, the key reveals itself to be even more enigmatic than the mystery, because chance ("the light falls by chance on a pile of papers stacked neatly at the edge of Black's desk", NYT 188) has determined that Blue should pick up the pile of papers that contains his own reports. Chance and text are intertwined in the best postmodern fashion, bringing to mind the origin of the text of *City of Glass*, which, according to Paul Auster, was caused by chance, by a mistaken phone call. A mysterious interlocutor also takes Quinn for a certain Paul Auster, the owner of a detective agency. In reality, the novelist Paul Auster is the "agency" where all the

complex characters in *The New York Trilogy* derive from. In the same way *The Red Notebook* is a written record of chance happenings that took place in the author's life, Blue's reports are a written record of all the (chance) occurrences in Black's life.

Not being an intellectual, and even less a reader, Blue metamorphosed into a writer, that is, into someone who lives inside a book³⁶. He becomes a virtual prisoner in his own room and he understands the writer's terror:

(...) seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. (...) There is no story, no plot, no action - nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room? (NYT 169-170)

It is the primal condition of the imprisoned writer, looking at the blank page without the structures of the story, of the plot, or of the action to support him. Blue is lost in the book and in the room. Blue's suspicions that his life had been captured in a book are confirmed during his two visits to Black's room. But it was he himself who created the room that imprisoned him, since Blue and Black were writing the same work. When Blue understands that Black is his double, he also realizes that Black's room is another scenery of writing. By being confronted with Black's writing, Blue recovers his own writing and understands what he has become. Because to enter the room is the same as to enter the soul of the person who inhabits it or who writes in it. Once again, "to enter Black (...) was the equivalent of entering himself". Through writing, Blue confers meaning to Black's existence, in his total isolation, structuring it and avoiding its fragmentation. And he similarly structures his own existence, since, in this mirror-like universe of doubles, we cannot know for sure who is the satellite of whom. In a wider context, some cultures and civilizations, with their respective universes, also find the basis for their cosmognosis in writings, through books such as the Bible, the Koran or the Talmud. As an author of ordering, cosmogonic writing, Blue acquires power over Black and over his own destiny. In fact, Blue physically dominates Black, puts a more than probable violent end to his existence, and decides the end of the story by leaving the room of the book for good. Through the character,

³⁶ Cf. the words of Paul Auster himself in "Why Write?", an essay in the homonymous *Why Write?*: "If nothing else, the years have taught me this: if there's a pencil in your pocket, there's a good chance that one day you'll feel tempted to start using it. As I like to tell my children, that's how I became a writer" (p. 25). Or, according to Maurice Blanchot: *Écrire, c'est entrer dans l'affirmation de la solitude où menace la fascination. C'est se livrer au risque de l'absence de temps, où règne le recommencement éternel*. Blanchot, *L'Espace Littéraire*, p. 27.

Auster paints the portrait of a kind of writer about whom Blue knows nothing about: the postmodern writer³⁷. “There is no story, no plot, no action - nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book” (NYT 169); here is the solipsistic solitude of the writer, in a society that is fragmented in isolated individuals. By leaving the room, Blue also leaves the book and all the cosmogonic power that the work of writing had conferred him.

Ghosts had its origin in *Black-Outs*, an almost completely unknown unpublished play in one act from 1976³⁸. In this play, the scenery is similarly closed and limited to an out-of-use office, filled with papers and archives, with a single glass panel door and two windows, bringing to mind Beckett’s dramaturgy. The place is inhabited by characters almost homonymous to those of *Ghosts*, in a very similar context: Green is a submissive and silent writer of words dictated by Black, who defines himself as being merely “a mão que escreve as palavras”, just ears, no mouth, evoking Bartleby. The character of Blue, long awaited, finally enters the scene, penetrating the closed (and black) space of Black by the door, after having seen Green through the window. These are the only ways of communication with the exterior, as no one gets out of this room, in a complete self-imposed solitude. Blue too had, in the past, obsessively observed a man who, like him, lived in complete solitude. At the window, he observed his object and wrote about it, in what turned out to be a subtle way of annihilating it. In fact, by transforming the subject into words, Blue took away his ability to exist independently from those words and from the writing controlled by him. He transformed him into a character dependent upon an author, in the same way Blue himself depends on Auster in the context of *Black-Outs*. Blue exerted the author’s maximum authority, transformed into a despotic solipsist: “Não. Tudo desapareceu. Nós fizemo-lo em palavras, é tudo”. That is the plot of *Black-Outs*: Blue relates how he recorded in writing everything the “homem observado” did, and Green records in writing everything Blue says.

³⁷ “There is perhaps a further homologous correspondence between the problem of personal identity (character, the subject) within the postmodern text and critical uncertainty as to the generic identity or status of the postmodern text itself: the rejection of a single, consistent style or genre related to the liquidation of illusory self-identity”. Currie, “The Eccentric Self”, p. 66.

³⁸ Published for the first time by Gérard de Cortanze in the dossier dedicated to Paul Auster, in *Magazine Littéraire* 338 (December 1995), 50-8. The quotes used here are translations from the French version of *Magazine Littéraire*. *Blackouts* is mentioned in *The Locked Room* as being the title of one of Fanshawe’s successful works.

As in *Ghosts*, Blue describes the room of the “homem observado” in terms of complete austerity and isolation from the exterior, focused solely on the writing of the work to which, according to him, he has devoted his whole life. Inside the room, there is only the work of writing, in a metaphor for the writer and his mind, where the words and the book dominate everything. This endless and circular story, with an open ending consisting of a dialogue that restarts, is closed in a room, with characters that never leave or have any contact with the outside world. They will forever remain trapped in there, as the story does not end and always concludes with the preparation for a new and endless dialogue, as if they were walking in circles within the room, in an infinite and impossible to fill *White Space*. The rectangular space of the room (scenery) squares within itself the infinite circle of the story³⁹.

In a similar fashion, the closed and well delimited space of *The Brooklyn Cigar Company* in *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* is the central stage for both stories, in the written version as in the cinematographic version. The characters are introduced as they enter this stage, an interior space decorated and characterized with extreme care, as highlighted by Paul Auster and Wayne Wang. In *Smoke*, Paul Benjamin’s apartment, the exiguous center of a life of work and solitude, is completely austere, devoted exclusively to writing, and indicates mere survival at a personal level. If Benjamin’s biography brings that of Quinn in *City of Glass* to mind (writer going through a crisis, dead family), his room also evokes those of Quinn, Blue, A., Samuel Farr, Marco Fogg, Ben Sachs’ cell, Jim Nashe’s trailer. And, once more, *Bartleby*’s office and room, with its window facing a brick wall, the small niche to sleep, and the tiny kitchen: “The workroom is a bare and simple place. Desk, chair, and a small wooden bookcase with manuscripts and papers shoved onto its shelves. The window faces a brick wall” (S 28). Everywhere, vestiges of an extreme solitude and exclusive

³⁹ Cf. (...) que l' oeuvre soit infinie (...) l' artiste, n' étant pas capable d' y mettre fin, est cependant capable d' en faire le lieu fermé d' un travail sans fin dont l' inachèvement développe la maîtrise de l' esprit, exprime cette maîtrise, l' exprime en la développant sous forme de pouvoir. (...) L' infini de l' oeuvre, dans une telle vue, n' est que l' infini de l' esprit. (...) L' oeuvre est le cercle pur où, tandis qu' il l' écrit, l' auteur s' expose dangereusement à la pression qui exige qu' il écrive, mais aussi s' en protège. De là - pour une part du moins - la joie prodigieuse, immense, qui est celle d' une délivrance, comme le dit Goethe, d' un tête-à-tête avec la toute-puissance solitaire de la fascination, en face de laquelle on est demeuré debout, sans la trahir et sans la fuir, mais sans renoncer non plus à sa propre maîtrise. Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire*, pp. 10 e 53.

dedication to writing. That solitude is broken when Paul Benjamin lets in that closed space of isolation another character, Rashid, who reawakens him to life⁴⁰.

The magic of the interior space reappears in *Auggie Wren's Christmas Story*, a peculiar Christmas story inserted in *Smoke* and published for the first time in the Christmas of 1990 in *The New York Times*. The central scenery is the interior of an old black lady's apartment in Boerum Hill's chaotic projects, a place that, though uninviting, has a dose of Christmas magic capable of awakening a sense of human solidarity apparently missing in New York City, so often another *Country of Last Things*. That Christmas magic is broken when Auggie leaves the small apartment, closing the door on the story and losing track of the old lady forever.

The Locked Room, the third narrative of the trilogy, offers us a deceptively childish parallel of the room, solitary closed space of meditation with universal reach, represented by the box where Fanshawe used to close himself up when he was a child, so as to exert what the narrator saw as a magical power: "It was his secret place, he told me, and when he sat inside and closed it up around him, he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good" (NYT 220). This definition of the magic box would be entirely adequate to characterize the sublime confinement within the room that is the book, and almost transcribes the ideas evident in *White Spaces*: "I walk within these four walls, and for as long as I am here I can go anywhere I like. (...) I feel myself on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth. These are moments of great happiness for me" (GW 85).

Fanshawe achieves unique thoughts and abilities in the most secluded and secret spaces, which are in fact located within his mind, which fills them, attributing to them a cosmogonic meaning ("This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull". NYT 293). That space of impenetrable secrets is a kind of "room of one's own", to adapt Virginia Woolf's expression. In the inner room, the process of literary creation, which is even more interior, as it is a psychological process, takes place. However, the ultimate truth is beyond the narrator's reach, and, because of that, it is also unattainable to the reader. While Fanshawe never invites his friend inside the box,

⁴⁰ With *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*, Paul Auster had the opportunity to leave the room, and yet to continue writing: "It was a great experience, it got me out of my room". Kenneth Chanko, "Smoke Gets in Their Eyes" in *Entertainment Weekly* 281/282 (June 30/July 7, 1995), 14-15.

Aesop shares his imaginary world of words with Walt, disclosing horizons which will, much later, allow Walt to write the story of his life. It seems to be easier to share the words already written than the magical space of creation, exclusive property of the artist writer. We never have access to the content of Fanshawe's travels and meditations within the box, or to the content of the book where for six months he annotated the motivations that led him to cloister himself. That red notebook is given to the narrator, immediately read, forgotten, and destroyed, without offering any teachings or disclosures, in the last instants of *The Locked Room*. In fact, even though Fanshawe refuses to leave the closed room, he leaves his red notebook, which he affirms will clarify his plans, to the narrator. Declaring he has ingested poison, he does not fear any intervention from the outside world anymore. However, there is nothing revealing in the content of the book that would extend its referential field to the two preceding stories in Auster's trilogy. As the narrator acknowledges, the book remains one last monument to Fanshawe's unintelligibility: "Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible" (NYT 314). Hesitating at each step, at every word he encounters, the narrator destroys the book, page after page, as he reads it, and gets to end of *The Locked Room* at the same time as the reader and with an identical degree of knowledge.

That is also the case with Fanshawe's posthumous best-sellers, *Neverland*, *Miracles*, and *Blackouts*, edited by the narrator but the contents of which we ignore, just as we ignore the content of Ben Sachs' *Leviathan* in the homonymous *Leviathan*, or of Samuel Farr's infinite book in *In the Country of Last Things*, works of supposedly universal and transcendental scope, true revelations, in the sacred sense of the term. We also do not know the context of the book where Quinn annotates his last thoughts of super-human scope, or of the work to which Black devoted his entire life. Even the poetic persona of *White Spaces* is just "on the brink of discovering some terrible, unimagined truth", which will remain undiscovered, or which, at least, he does not share with the reader. Because the imaginary universe can be ordered by the writer-character, but not explained in its essential mysteries, those of creation and death:

(...) Nothing interested me so much as what was happening to Fanshawe inside the box, and I would spend those minutes desperately trying to imagine the adventures he was having. But I never learned what they were, since it was also against the rules for Fanshawe to talk about them after he climbed out.

Something similar was happening now in that open grave in the snow. Fanshawe was alone down there, thinking his thoughts, living through those moments by himself, and though I was present, the event was sealed off from me, as though I was not really there at all (NYT 220-221).

These are works which describe universes untouched by the conditions of narratability, trapped by an inenarrable closure. Auster uses the mystery novel to explore linguistic and philosophical absences, deliberately avoiding solutions, since he understands that, as an author-detective, he cannot find the single clue, the simple answer. He writes a novel about higher metaphysical quests. These references are meta-textual commentaries on an unknown original text, and they point to the world-creating and world-destroying power of language ("American postmodernism may be seen to endorse a rhetorical view of life which begins with the primacy of language"⁴¹) and to the relationship between fictional being and illusorily real being. A cycle of fictional creation, destruction, and recreation is evident in the cosmogonic process of the writer of fiction, underlining his freedom to project a world ("Shall I project a world?", cries Pynchon's hero in *The Crying of Lot 49*⁴²). In this process, we get a glimpse of some of the characteristics of the ontological structure of fictional works and of their worlds that postmodernism displays. The postmodernist simultaneously confirms and subverts the power of literary representation, since it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of a system in order to then reject and deconstruct it. That is what Auster does with Northern-American literary tradition (from names like Melville and Hawthorne to the tradition of the dark mystery novel *à la* Philip Marlowe), which he needs as the entity underlying its own parody⁴³. The postmodern equivocality emerges in Auster in his anti-mystery and anti-epistemological novel, leading him again to the ontological categories of writing⁴⁴.

The reference to the red notebook of *The Locked Room*, successor of the red notebook of *City of Glass*, immediately evokes the homonymous work from 1993, *The Red*

⁴¹ Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 64.

⁴² Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Bantan Books, 1966) pp. 59 e 63.

⁴³ An emblematic example of this subversion is the moment when the narrator of *The Locked Room* "baptizes" the girl in the Parisian bar as Fayaway, and himself as Herman Melville, evoking the author of *Moby-Dick*, a book that Sophie had given him.

⁴⁴ The fragmentation of the equivocal postmodern identity applies not only to the problematic of the subject but also to that of the literary genre itself: "The plausible coherence, pre-existent unity and propriety of the firm and fixed identity has also been called into question. (...) a recognition of subjectivity as the trace of plural and intersecting discourses, of non-unified, contradictory ideologies". Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 64.

*Notebook: True Stories, Prefaces and Interviews*⁴⁵. In his second true story, Auster describes a one year period he spent in south France, in 1973, staying at an isolated country house, an ideal place for a young writer to work. Solitude always appears in connection to the work of writing, and the stone house, a closed space demarcated by thick walls, works as the motor of the story. In that old labyrinthine space, the character lives a troubled existence (in itself a labyrinth), calling to mind the house of A.'s father in *The Invention of Solitude*, or the house-school of the childhood of Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*, a character chosen by Quinn as a literary pseudonym.

On the one hand, the place was beautiful: a large, eighteenth-century stone house bordered by vineyards on one side and a national forest on the other. The nearest village was two kilometers away (...) It was an ideal spot for two young writers to spend a year, and L. and I both worked hard there, accomplishing more in that house than either one of us would have thought possible.

On the other hand, we lived on the brink of permanent catastrophe... (RN 4).

As in *William Wilson*, the mansion, despite being a labyrinth, is a source of pleasure to him: "But the house! - how quaint an old building was this! - to me how veritably a palace of enchantment"⁴⁶. The interior space, filled by mirror-like multiplication of the rooms, is inhabited by shadows and by the ghost of the other, the double. Once again, the question of identity is inseparable from the importance of the space. Poe's mansion is a physical labyrinth with an interior counterpart at a mental level, which provides the story's tragic density, helped by its claustrophobic aspect, with its specular multiplication of the character, paralleling the mansion's rooms. It should be pointed out that, during a part of his stay in France, Fanshawe had inhabited a particularly solid and isolated building (in a fictional transposition of the autobiographical episode in *The Red Notebook*), but one which allowed him a unique work of observation, reflection, and writing, in a clear image of the subject himself (the self as a house), unwaveringly isolated from everybody else. The closed room where the narrator finally finds Fanshawe also has a physical situation (in Boston. See

⁴⁵ See *Le Cahier Rouge* by Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), French writer and politician of Swiss origin, and one of the creators of liberal ideology. *Le Cahier Rouge* is about the wanderings and experiences of his adventurous youth, through the cities of Europe, discovering the world, gambling, and women. Focalized on a narrator-self, it transcribes personal experiences, enriched and objectified through reflection. The manifest conflict between self and society is already the promise of an unstable future for the author. In its homonymous work, Auster also mentions his own bumpy passage through Europe, during a period of drift in his youth, and reflects on several important episodes of his existence. Cf. *Larousse Dictionnaire des Littératures Française et Étrangères* (1992).

⁴⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe: Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews*, edited with an introduction by David Galloway (London: Penguin Books, 1968) p. 161.

AH 276) and an intellectual situation (the narrator's mind, where Fanshawe had always been) at the same time. The room is at the same time actual space and space made of thought and for thought⁴⁷.

Even though dominated by the inhibiting ghost of Fanshawe, the narrator, being himself a writer (in a secondary role, evidently), is also aware of the cosmogonic power of writing and of imagination. However, since he is a character in self-fragmentation, that awareness only appears as a recollection from a distant past, or in moments of hallucination. Evoking the time when he was a census worker in Harlem, the narrator recalls the difficulties he faced to open doors, to get people to reveal their domestic interiors. He then became an inventor of infinite identities, locked in the solitude of his room, taking great pleasure out of that, and even a certain sense of social duty, in one of Auster's very rare references to external social and political context. The narrator elaborated a written cosmogony within the room: "It gave me pleasure to pluck names out of thin air, to invent lives that had never existed, that never would exist" (NYT 250), this is the work of writing, of the novelist. But this cosmogony, that the narrator assumes to be imaginary, penetrates the "reality" of the story imagined by Paul Auster (who had already been a character in *City of Glass*, although the author asserts he's not an autobiographical subject), in a *myse en abyme* about the work and the creative power of writing. Auster justifies that infiltration into the mechanisms of the book, in *City of Glass*, as a desire to climb over the walls that isolate fiction from reality. Later, in the period of delirious decadence in Paris, the narrator characterizes himself as a sublime alchemist who can change the world at will, just because he had attributed an imaginary identity to a stranger: "I was the sublime alchemist who could change the world at will. This man was Fanshawe because I said he was Fanshawe, and that was all there was to it. Nothing could stop

⁴⁷ On the other hand, the room which Poe describes in his essay "The Philosophy of Furniture" can be considered the "anti-room" of Auster and his characters, as though in a postmodern deconstruction of the American canon pioneered by Poe. "A mild, or what artists term a cool light, with its consequent warm shadows, will do wonders for even an ill-furnished apartment. (...) Even now, there is present to our mind's eye a small and not ostentatious chamber with whose decorations no fault can be found". *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Stuart and Susan Levine (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976) pp. 14-18. The Apollonian sobriety of the room of Poe, who seems to have inaugurated the literary motif of the closed room in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), does not reach the austerity of Auster's room. Poe seems to describe his own room as a space of superior refinement, while Auster's is instead a space of superior writing and meditation.

me anymore” (NYT 296). Nonetheless, this new image of the divine power of the writer ends violently for the “sublime creator”, with a great deal of irony.

The closed rooms where Fanshawe locks himself in (both in his mind and in external reality) possess points of observation of the surrounding universe, without which the reflection and written production would be merely abstract. The narrator mentions that Fanshawe’s capacity for observation has reached impressive levels of clarity and aptitude, being capable of seeing and writing almost simultaneously: “By now, Fanshawe’s eye has become incredibly sharp, and one senses a new availability of words inside him, as though the distance between seeing and writing had been narrowed, the two acts now almost identical, part of a single, unbroken gesture” (NYT 277). As mentioned before, the eyes convey images to the mind (in *Moon Palace* we read: “‘Dammit, boy,’ he would say, ‘use the eyes in your head!...’” MP 120) in the same way that windows carry images to the inhabitant of the room, with a resulting work of writing. The book is written within the room of the mind, and the windows that are eyes and words are interposed between the room and the world. As we read in *Ghosts*, relating to Blue and his reports: “Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world” (NYT 146). Here we find, in a metaphor, the relation between sign and referent, between word and world, being the latter sifted by the mind of the writer and by words, that is, denaturalized, as in Plato’s *Cratylus*⁴⁸. The power of literary representation reflects the cosmogonic power of the writer, who, in postmodernism, simultaneously writes and subverts narrative conventions, abolishing preexisting and independent meta-narratives, as pointed out by Jean-François Lyotard⁴⁹, challenging the realist notion of representation that presumes the transparency of the medium, and thus generating an alternative written universe.



⁴⁸ To *Cratylus*’ assertion that language corresponds to the deep meaning of things, Socrates objects that words express the image, and not the reality of the world.

⁴⁹ Lyotard, *A Condição Pós-Moderna*.

Leviathan (1992) works almost as a rewriting of *The Locked Room* in its revisitation of, among others, the theme of solitude, the exploration of closed spaces and their recurrent symbolism, and, in particular, in the eternal self-reflexive analysis of the scene of writing. Here, we find a marked metafictional awareness *ab initio* in the long contextualization that the narrator, Peter Aaron (P.A. / Paul Auster), gives us about the circumstances of the compulsive writing of that urgent narrative. When Aaron reads the news that an unidentified man exploded on a road in North Wisconsin, in an allegorical fragmentation of the postmodern subject, he immediately knows it is Benjamin Sachs, his best friend and a promising novelist. From that moment on, Aaron takes on the task of solving the mystery surrounding Sachs' life and death, starting a journey that is at the same time one of self-discovery.

The house in Vermont where Peter Aaron writes the story of *Leviathan* has solitude as its main appeal. The room in the small, deteriorated annex is the ideal place to write for the ascetic writer, calling to mind *The Invention of Solitude*, favored by both Sachs and Peter, his double. That room is dominated by written and spoken words getting trapped between its walls, hovering in the air or captured in writing:

It's as if his words were still hanging in the air around me (...) nothing that he said should escape this room. (...) Until the moment comes for me to show what I've written here, I can comfort myself with the thought that I won't be breaking my word (L 9).

The writing and the room are always linked together. Some of the dialogues and encounters crucial to the development of the action also take place there: the first and last scenes of the book (two interviews with FBI agents, between which Peter relates the entire story) happen at the house in Vermont, and address not only the mystery of Sachs but also the mystery of writing, in which agent Harris takes a keen interest. In the last moments of the novel, Peter takes Harris to the studio where he will set free the words of the story that was narrated and written in that place.

Symptomatically, Sachs' first book was written in the solitude of a prison cell, a peculiar "locked room":

The book itself doesn't mean much, But I suppose I'm still attached to the place where it was born.'

'And what place was that?'

'Prison. I started writing the book in prison.'

'You mean an actual prison? With locked cells and bars? (L 19-20).

The prison cell, like a monastic cell, prefigures the writer's isolation and asceticism at its most extreme, solitary as a monk in his mission of awakening others to reality through writing. The displacement of the protagonist from the center to the borderlines of society seems inherent to that mission. Emerson's epigraph "Every actual State is corrupt" should be kept in mind during the reading of *Leviathan*. There are no quotes taken from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* in Auster's homonymous novel. However, the characters' actions are framed within the conflict between individual interests and the common good. For Hobbes, it is selfish needs that rule human behavior, not common goals. Sachs was imprisoned (condemned to institutional and punitive isolation) for refusing to participate in the moral corruption of that same society, symbolized by the Vietnam War. But from isolation imposed by oneself or by others, the written work is born, as the power of the mind is unbreakable⁵⁰. A., Quinn, Blue, Black, Sam, Rushdie, and writers in general, in the way Auster sees them in *The Red Notebook*, also write in isolation, detached from the outside world by physical or metaphysical walls. When devoted to the written cosmogony, solitude offers incomparable freedom, allowing the subject to fill the empty space with entities from his imagination: "You'd be surprised how much freedom that gives you'" (L 21). Aaron, Sachs' eternal double, also finds his austere cell in the autobiographical recurrence of the minuscule apartment on Varick Street, where the work of writing is the only possible activity. This new space will be equally filled by meditation and words, as in the episode of A. and S. in *The Invention of Solitude*:

It was basic, nonsense survival, but the truth is that I was happy in that room. As Sachs put it the first time he came to visit me, it was a sanctuary of inwardness, a room in which the only possible activity was thought. (...) But I started working on my novel again in that room, and little by little my luck changed (L 56-57).

The biography and characterization of the characters in *Leviathan* are illustrated through the description of the spaces they inhabit. Rooms, houses, places where life and artistic creation occur, and their respective changes in the stories of Peter and Delia Aaron, Ben and Fanny Sachs, Maria Turner and Lillian Stern, are given great importance, making up a true biography in space. On the other hand, the characters'

⁵⁰ Cf. the poem of Richard Lovelace written in *London Gatehouse Prison*, in 1640: "Stone walls doe not a prison make, / Nor Iron bars a Cage; / Mindes innocent and quiet take / That for an Hermitage; / If I have freedome in my Love, / And in my soule am free; / Angels alone that sore above, / Injoy such Liberty".

existential crises are always associated with a change in living places. As had already happened to A. (Peter Aaron/Paul Auster/A.) in *The Invention of Solitude*, the troubled move of Aaron and Delia to the decrepit country house in Dutchess County illustrates well their economical and personal vicissitudes, with a marriage in its terminal stage. When Delia and David move to an apartment in Cobble Hill, in Brooklyn, there is an immediate rapprochement between father and son and an unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation by the couple. The apartment in Carroll Gardens, successor to the one on Varick Street, allows Peter to enjoy more time in the company of his son. Similarly, in *The Locked Room*, the progress of the emotional and economic success of the couple formed by Sophie and the narrator is reflected by the communion of interior spaces and by the successive moves from one apartment to the next. The later deterioration of that relationship finds its echo in the hotel rooms and brothel rooms that the solitary narrator frequents in Paris. The first characterization of the eccentric Maria Turner includes a reference to her attic studio on Duane Street. Ben and Fanny Sachs' happiness is reflected by the power of attraction of the house in Brooklyn. Peter's brief stays in the peace of this domestic interior accentuate, in a very negative way, the family war (described through the use of war vocabulary and metaphors) that awaits him outside, at his own house. The contrast between the interior comfort, within walls, and the discomfort of the outside world is equally visible in *City of Glass*, in the visit to the Austers' house, and in *In the Country of Last Things*, in the room of Anna and Sam in the library, or Boris Stepanovitch's small apartment. When Ben Sachs is transformed into Phantom of Liberty, his ceaseless and solitary pilgrimage through America is reflected by the whirlwind of successive hotel rooms and rented apartments, shelters, though not homes, where he patiently prepares his work of liberation, to which he will sacrifice his life.

The interior space, the room, the house, are the space of confidentiality. It is there Peter writes the confession that gives substance to *Leviathan*. That is how the book starts and also how it ends, by passing the secret to Harris. The secretive last revelations of Ben to Maria concerning the identity and fate of the Phantom of Liberty occur in interior spaces. After staying with Maria Turner, Sachs moves to Lillian Stern's house, with its closed and enigmatic space, and both cases result in more or less requited or consummated romantic relationships. After the incident of the fall,

during the celebrations of the Statue of Liberty, Sachs only tells Aaron his version of the events in the privacy of his house. This becomes even more significant if we recall that the main consequence of that fall was Sachs' total and inexplicable silence for several days. The fall illustrates the abrupt transition from a comfortable interior, in the seductive company of Maria, to the hostile exterior, a sea of darkness and death ("...and an instant later he was falling head-first into the night". L 111). The interior space is represented as a sanctuary, evoking the maternal womb, not only in its capacity to generate writing, but also in the affectionate protection it provides. Similarly, in *The Music of Chance*, Jim Nashe's car is a sanctuary, a refuge for wandering thoughts, like a room in motion: "The car became a sanctum of invulnerability, a refuge in which nothing could hurt him anymore" (MC 12). In a similar drift to that of the Phantom of Liberty, during his wandering about America, Nashe stays in innumerable hotel rooms and eventually spends some time with Fiona Wells. But these are ephemeral situations, devoid of meaning, which do nothing but make his solitude more acute. On the other hand, the proof of confidence in Pozzi and in his poker happens in the room Nashe shares with him at the Plaza Hotel, where he decides his fate by planning to go with him. That is also where he acquires a fatherly affection for Pozzi, when he tells him his story of abandonment. In *Mr. Vertigo*, it is in the successive hotel rooms shared by Walt and Master Yehudi, during their troubled tour across America, that they cement their partnership. These rooms also illustrate, by their increasing quality, *Walt the Wonder Boy's* ascension to fame. Much later, Walt will also share a room with Mrs. Witherspoon, occupying the place that was once Master Yehudi's and paying off an old debt of gratitude and friendship. The enigmatic Mother Sue is described by Walt as being "a wall", with connotations of silence and mystery, like a wall of death, of the unknown. Mother Sue is a depository of an ancient wisdom that Walt, a spokesperson for American common sense, cannot understand. But it will be during his illness, in the room, that Walt will observe the maternal love of the old Native-American and the power of her peculiar chants and prayers to the Great Spirit of the Oglala.

Time flows in the room, where the space and time of literary creation are located. Sachs recovers the power of writing by moving, like a hermit, to the house in Vermont:

...it was a bit like being in prison again. There weren't any extraneous preoccupations to bog him down. Life had been reduced to its bare-bones essentials, and he no longer had to question how he spent his time. Every day was more or less a repetition of the day before. Today resembled yesterday, tomorrow would resemble today, and what happened next week would blur into what had happened this week. There was comfort for him in that (L 140).

Writing is born of solitude, through populating it with imaginary characters and worlds. That creative solitude may be found in the cell of a prison or in the life of a hermit in the woods, as in Thoreau's *Walden*: "'It's odd', he continued, 'but the two times I've sat down and written a novel, I've been cut off from the rest of the world. First in jail when I was a kid, and now up here in Vermont, living like a hermit in the woods'" (L 141). Sachs wrote his first book and writes his masterpiece (*Leviathan*) in the cell of a prison or of a monastic austerity. By leaving those cells, he gets lost in the exterior space and the written cosmogenesis is interrupted. After jail, only in Vermont will Sachs write with the same complete dedication, but even that state of grace is interrupted when he gets lost, both metaphorically and literally, in the perpetually hostile exterior. Because when he is secluded in a room or in a cell, the writer-character has only the space that his mind creates, and that blank space is the true motor of literary creation. In the final scenes, Peter Aaron occupies his friend's space of writing, feeling the cosmogonic power of the writer and of the imaginary world created by him, which takes the place of reality:

There is a point at which a book begins to take over your life, when the world you have imagined becomes more important to you than the real world, and it barely crossed my mind that I was sitting in the same chair that Sachs used to sit in, that I was writing at the same table he used to write at, that I was breathing the same air he had once breathed (L 218).



In *The Country of Last Things* (1987), we find, once again, although in a strangely rare context in Paul Auster's work, the topic of the room as a space of comfort and written genesis, in addition to a sort of early gloss of the sentence in *Leviathan*: "There is a point at which a book begins to take over your life". In this dark tale about a chaotic, post-apocalyptic, walled city, everything points to aggression, violence, and death. Solitude is in everyone, in the generalized obsession with death and in the fight for survival at any cost. The others are always potential enemies, conflict is

permanent, and the insurmountable wall of death crosses the narrative at several occasions. In every street of the devastated city of *In the Country of Last Things*, deadly toll-walls are suddenly erected. The city itself is walled by the **Muralha do Violino** on the west, and by the **Porta Milenar** on the south. There is also the insane and cyclopean project of the **Muralha do Mar**, which would take at least fifty years to build. There are no confirmed reports of anyone surviving those walls of death (in a way, like the infamous Berlin Wall). The walls of this country of things that come last demarcate the frontier between life and death, block contact with the past, raise barriers against life. Those able to get in become trapped in the city and in its hellish horrors⁵¹. The isolated stones are themselves fragments of that violence. As the houses are destroyed and people are living and dying in the streets, the stones get scattered throughout the city. And, inevitably, they are used to kill and maim, as in the deaths by stoning of the Old Testament and of the Islamic culture:

Every morning, the city sends out trucks to collect the corpses. (...) Throwing stones at death-truck workers is a common occupation among the homeless. (...) One could say that the stones represent the people's disgust with a government that does nothing for them until they are dead. But that would be going too far. The stones are an expression of unhappiness, and that is all (CLT 17).

As a result, the rooms and houses, spaces of refuge and solitude, are ferociously disputed. The few overcrowded and filthy spaces that remain standing in the nameless city are invaded and ransacked, and their owners, legitimate or themselves looters, get thrown out, robbed, or killed. Frauds and extortions perpetrated by fake real estate agencies or fake owners multiply. The scarcity of housing also leads to the forced and quarrelsome cohabitation of several individuals under the same roof, which is, however, essential to their security and survival, as in the case of the protagonist, Anna Blume, who shares Isabel and Ferdinand's exiguous residence. Finally, the need for a shelter, for an illusion of comfort and safety, even if only for a few days, leads to the endless lines in front of the Woburn House, to desperate attempts to get in, and to even more desperate stratagems to avoid leaving, from supplications to self-mutilation and suicide. During their short stay, the guests can enjoy what is considered a normal

⁵¹ *All that Fall*, a 1957 piece by Samuel Beckett, constantly evokes images of an empty, sterile, and dead world. The uniqueness of the characters comes from the fact that they continue to exist, or to resist (as Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*) in an absurd world. This absurdity is emphasized by the juxtaposition of their ignorant and vulgar natures in a world where death is, in fact, the most common occurrence.

daily routine: a room, a shower, warm meals, clean clothes, a garden where they can go for a stroll, books to read, but transformed, in the eyes of the almost bestial characters of the novel, into invaluable treasures, worth dying for. At the Woburn House, there is a huge personal and financial commitment just to give the homeless ten days of comfort, in the safe normality of a house. This is certainly an illogical project, but nothing seems to make sense in this country of last things. Like the ephemeral happiness Anna experiences in the library, the guests at Woburn House are also returned to the streets after ten days, often by force. There is extreme violence in this apparent but always illusory solidarity and happiness. The individual dramas of Anna and Samuel Farr and the collective dramas of the Woburn House run parallel to the universal drama of the disintegrating city.

In the Country of Last Things seems to be truly agoraphobic. When chased by the crowd, Anna Blume finds shelter in the semi-destroyed national library, bringing to mind the medieval right of sanctuary within sacred spaces impervious to any external and profane authority, which was masterfully fictionalized in Umberto Eco's novel *Il Nome della Rosa* (1980), originally titled *La Libreria*. A reliquary of books coming from every horizon, the library of *Il Nome della Rosa* is almost like one gigantic book keeping record of all that is known. Once again recalling Borges, we return to the theme of the universe as a global and infinite library. Paul Auster, who as a student worked at the library of Columbia for a year, reintroduces the reality of this space of maturation and knowledge in his fiction. In *In the Country of Last Things*, as in *Il Nome della Rosa*, it is the unstable center of a world submerged in horror and emptiness, the refuge of a heteroclite population that includes not only researchers and writers escaping the Purification Movement but also the last community of surviving Jews. The library, the collection of all books, works, by synecdoche, as an image of the present book, providing the key to its interpretation⁵².

Safety and comfort, always very relative concepts, are only possible indoors. And the library, like the room, is a very special interior space, surrounded by literal and figurative chaos: an interior dedicated exclusively to books, the only possible safe

⁵² About the library as a character and as an image of the fictional universe, see: Gérard de Cortanze, "De la bibliothèque comme personnage de roman" and Alexandre Laumonier, "La bibliothèque post-moderne d' Umberto Eco", *dossier "L' Univers des bibliothèques: D' Alexandrie à Internet"*, *Magazine Littéraire* 349 (Dezembro 1996), 52-61.

haven in this disaggregated society's collective drift. To enter the books, the universe of fiction, seems to be the ultimate solution for survival when reality becomes unbearable. And, in another mirror-like fictionalized reflection, at the heart of the library is the most interior of all spaces, where someone still persists in creating a book. As if Sam's room were a representation of the creative mind (cf. "This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull". NYT 293), surrounded and protected by the library, by the walls that frame the scene of writing. Sam's room is a depository of the cosmogonic and world-ordering power of writing, devoted to the building of a life's work, with universal referential horizons: "The story is so big (...) it's impossible for any one person to tell it" (CLT 102). Sam is about to immolate himself to the book, but, at the same time, it is the creation of the book that keeps him alive: "I can't stop. The book is the only thing that keeps me going. It prevents me from thinking about myself and getting sucked up into my own life. If I ever stopped working on it, I'd be lost. I don't think I'd make it through another day" (CLT 104)⁵³. Here, Auster presents the room as a life-saving cell, in addition to a space of artistic creation. Since the characters have long lost the ability to dream and create, they survive one day at a time, desensitized by suffering and starvation. Art is a luxury from times of prosperity, and Sam seems to be punished for having devoted himself to the useless metaphysics of writing and of introspective solitude. Book and room eventually disappear in the same demoniacal and purifying fire.

Penetrating the library, Anna enters a magical space, a tale of wonders where she finds what can no longer be found outside, in the city: peace and safety, the friendly and attentive voice of the rabbi, Samuel Farr's love, a new shelter, a son, a book to write, a goal in life, a work to build ("I lived in the library with Sam, and for the next six months that small room was the center of my world". CLT 107). Later, it will be in the room at Woburn House, during her long and comforting conversations with Victoria Woburn, that her homosexual relationship will begin, in a feminine parallel of her passion for Sam. But if Woburn House is the point of convergence of all tragedies, the room at the library is one of the few spaces spared from the generalized

⁵³ *Bien des ouvrages nous touchent parce qu'on y voit encore l'empreinte de l'auteur qui s'en est éloigné trop hâtivement, dans l'impatience d'en finir, dans la crainte, s'il n'en finissait pas, de ne pouvoir revenir à l'air du jour. Dans ces oeuvres, trop grandes, plus grandes que celui qui les porte, toujours se laisse pressentir le moment suprême, le point presque central où l'on sait que si l'auteur s'y maintient, il mourra à la tâche.* Blanchot, *L'Éspace Littéraire*, p. 56.

chaos. It is also a space of miracles, since it is where Anna and Sam's son is conceived, in a city where children hadn't been born for a long time. In the miraculous room of the romance, a human being is conceived, as the book is generated in the room of the writer-character. Anna Blume is, thus far, the only female protagonist in Auster's fiction. Consequently, she surpasses her male counterparts in her maternal capacity to generate human life in addition to the capacity to generate writing, as if her body was a living and moving image of the room. Or as if the latter was a static and walled image of a mother's womb. Anna populates them both with life – the son corresponding to the book and vice-versa – but both gestations are cut short. When Anna imprudently leaves the room, the spell is broken, and the external terror penetrates the apparently immune, internal "White Space": the two lovers get lost, they return to a life of incertitude and solitude, the child dies before he is born, and a fire consumes the library, the room, and the book. Exterior reality swallows the impossible dreams generated in that oneiric island amidst the country of last things. When reading *In the Country of Last Things*, we realize that the last possible way to explore the world is to look at it as a labyrinth, a confusing and cryptic text. To decode that puzzle, to transform solitude into liberation, and to find a way amidst the chaos is the writer's responsibility, who appears in the form of a metaphor in the *Country of Last Things*, a veritable chronicle of a "world at the end of the world"⁵⁴. The city is a labyrinth where one travels without a destination, and the labyrinth is the great central theme of postmodernism, the new space of the novel, as the travel without a destination is the new type of travel. The postmodern travel novel is the narrative of a quest governed by chance, as in *The Music of Chance*, *Moon Palace*, or *Mr. Vertigo*. Anna Blume travels to a labyrinthine city where she wanders without a destination, in a succession of encounters and events generated by chance. After suffering repeated disappointments with different forms of affection and the book she was writing with Sam comes to an abrupt end, she turns to the solitary writing of the letter (source of the text of *In the Country of Last Things*) in her struggle against destruction. She is reborn thanks to writing, and the text itself mimics the work of reconstitution of the subject: the initial fragmentation gradually leads to a more structured and more chronologically ordered narrative, reflecting the way Anna devoted herself to writing

⁵⁴ Cf. Luis Sepúlveda, *Mundo do Fim do Mundo* (Porto: Edições Asa, 1995).

her letter, restructuring the surrounding chaos and reaffirming her identity. Anna writes what she was never able to say, but her writing, instead of bringing the expected comfort, does nothing but reopen real and symbolic wounds, since, although Anna has escaped the fate Dujardin had in store for her, she leaves the adventure diminished, fragmented, and sterile. Like Sam's, Anna's project is never finished: writing never exhausts its expressive possibilities, it never encompasses the complete reality of the different experiences, because the universe is infinite and the "sum of particulars" is monstrous (as in *Disappearances 1*), hence the constant and enigmatic open endings in Paul Auster's fiction:

I sometimes wonder how much I have left out, how much has been lost to me and will never be found again, but those are questions that cannot be answered. (...) Now the entire notebook has almost been filled, and I have barely even skimmed the surface. (...) I've been trying to fit everything in, trying to get to the end before it's too late, but I see now how badly I've deceived myself. Words do not allow such things. The closer you come to the end, the more there is to say. The end is only imaginary, a destination you invent to keep yourself going, but a point comes when you realize you will never get there. You might have to stop, but that is only because you have run out of time. You stop, but that does not mean you have come to the end (CLT 182-183).

"This is Anna Blume, your old friend from another world. Once we get where we are going, I will try to write to you again, I promise" (CLT 188), we read, in the last moment, when the letter and the book come to a close. Once the writer-character crosses the gates of the city and leaves the walled space, the narrative can no longer continue. The city itself is in the end revealed to be the most insurmountably closed of all the spaces of writing in *In the Country of Last Things*.

To tell stories, Paul Auster's art and occupation, is a form of exercising the divine power to give life, an exclusive attribute of God and of the sacred space of the maternal womb, which Anna Blume possesses: "A voice that speaks, a woman's voice that speaks, a voice that speaks stories of life and death, has the power to give life" (IS 153). Auster gives his characters a single task: to cross a space that is simply the space of solitude. Life then appears as a riddle to be solved, the enigma of the chaos in *In the Country of Last Things*, of the wall under construction in *The Music of Chance*, of seeing in *The New York Trilogy*, of walking over water in *Mr. Vertigo*. Auster's characters, extreme ascetics, walk inside their own minds, despite also moving in the closed space of the room and on the blank space of the page. Auster's writer-character, after having infused routine actions with the rarest emotion, becomes a stranger in his

own eyes, almost an imaginary creature. It is not the actions that count but the way they are thought, lived, and written, in an individual journey that leads to a clairvoyance of cosmogonic implications.

We may conclude by elaborating on a quote from Gaston Bachelard: *La casa alberga al ensueño, la casa protege al soñador, la casa nos permite soñar en paz*⁵⁵. Substituting the room for the house, we find the purest characterization of Paul Auster's literary space, to use the notion developed by Maurice Blanchot. The room is the universe of the writer-character, a true cosmos, built and inhabited by the solitary protagonist. The mind of that character is in turn inhabited by a cosmic immensity which can be ordered and conveyed through the work of writing. This cosmic immensity is associated with an expansion of being that everyday life represses and externally instituted prudence hinders, but is revealed and exercised in solitude. In the solitude of the room, the writer-character is in a different space, dreaming the universe within an immense world. The cosmogenesis is the dynamic result of the structured dream of the protagonist ("The world is in my head"), framed by the white space of the room and of the page, in the form of written work with its entire poetic and fictional universe. Auster uses writing to mirror that same writing and its creation, as if he is putting a mirror in front of the page as he fills it with words. Throughout Paul Auster's work, his different writer-characters reveal one prominent aspect of their individuality. In this chapter, we have paid special attention to those which most resemble Auster himself, that is, those who have more characteristics of a writer than characteristics of a character in the hands of that same writer. We have addressed confinement as a sublime and constructive phenomenon, like a womb where the sacred mystery of life manifests itself. But Paul Auster also offers us a disaggregating and destructive confinement, where the closed space is comparable to a tomb, part of death's domains. When characters forget the possibility of using their creative potential (the cosmogonic writing), they let themselves be controlled by events manipulated by someone else, and no work results from their isolation, chaos overcomes the cosmos, and the subject is fragmented to the point of total annihilation. In the following pages, we will explore the dysphoric antithesis of those *Black Spaces*.

⁵⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poética del Espacio*, trans. by Ernestina de Champourcin (Madrid: Breviarios del Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994) p. 36.

III
THE GENESIS OF NOTHINGNESS IN THE SPACE OF
CHAOS

From the exploration of the setting of the written genesis, we concluded that, between the four walls of the room that is the book, creative capacity exists in complete freedom, a pure wild state that may lead to the construction of a cosmos or of chaos. The room is where the unstable, creative, and sometimes dangerous encounter between life and writing takes place, and its positive connotations of protection can be contrasted with the negative connotations of confinement, the downside to the psychic nourishment that solitude provides. “Freedom, confinement, those are the two sides of a single thought, and the one couldn’t exist without the other”¹. With these words, Paul Auster acknowledges the ambivalence of the context of writing, a space where apparently contradictory states exist simultaneously. If freedom of imagination builds the book, confinement can transform the room into a chaotic space when the writer-character is engulfed by solipsistic excess, sterile in terms of the construction of an orderly universe, forgetting about the cosmogonic power of solitude. If solitude does not result in writing, the room that is the book cannot exist, bringing about the end of the existence of the writer-character that inhabits it, thwarting the preservation of life itself in that space. There is nothing left to do but either leave and get diluted in the hostile exterior, in the city that has evolved from original and mythical benevolence to contemporary and realistic malevolence, or give up the identity conferred by the status of character when the book ends. In either case, leaving the room and the book equals non-existence, deletion of identity and consequent death as an individual being. Without a connection to the surrounding structure comparable to the totality of the self, the subject feels alienated from the great realities of being. Presence becomes absence, a characteristic of postmodern fiction that Ihab Hassan contrasts with the modernist presence². Or, according to Peter Currie: “It becomes a matter of equal importance to recognize the vital process and experience of negation in postmodernism as an essential opposing force to the abstract pseudo-affirmation, the yea-saying of commodity culture as a whole”³. When the walls around the writer-

¹ Irwin, "Memory's Escape", p. 113.

² Hassan, "Postface 1982", pp. 81-92.

³ Currie, "The Eccentric Self", p. 69.

character are seen as a demarcation of the supreme confinement of death, and not as the absolute freedom of the space of literary creation, the individual locked inside finds him or herself in a tomb instead of a room: “It is as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole” (IS 77).

In the specular reading that we have been following, based on the exploration of the scene of writing by the writer himself, the space of chaos is created in fiction but it does not create fiction. That non-cosmogonic black space destroys the character that inhabits it, marking the end of the story⁴. *The New York Trilogy* is a succession of spaces where nothing happens and everything gets fragmented. Nothingness surrounds the characters and annuls them, writing becomes anti-writing, consuming itself and dying, as nothing can be itself and its own antagonistic double at the same time. The expansion of the imaginary cosmos cannot be confined to the closed space of the room and begins to implode, a return to the obscure place where it had its origin, in the mind of the writer-character who thus sees his cosmogony thwarted. Infinitely closed around itself, the potential white space of the page becomes a black space from which no message emanates. However, for the written work to survive until the moment of its reading, so that an effective dissolution of the character is produced, Paul Auster creates strategies to guarantee the verisimilitude of the narrative of nothingness, of fragmentation, of the dominion of chaos. Instead of giving us direct access to the white space of the room and of the book, filled with the alternative cosmos, we witness the inverse process through annotations and reports collected afterwards (*City of Glass* and *Ghosts*), through the more or less lucid and credible testimony of close witnesses (*The Locked Room* and *Leviathan*), or, in the best example, through the disheartened and inconclusive autobiography of the experiencing subject himself (*Moon Palace*), because, let us not forget: “Impossible, I realize, to enter another's solitude” (IS 19).

⁴ Cf. the commentary of the anonymous narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), a novel about the disappearance of the individual and the collapse of the moral perspective: “(...) the mind that has conceived a plan for living must never lose sight of the chaos against which the pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge”. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 468.

“The room. Brief mention of the room and/or the dangers lurking inside it. As in the image: H”lderlin in his room” (IS 98). The room is thus, and demonstrably, a space of potential danger and insanity, as in the case of H”lderlin, mentioned in *The Invention of Solitude*, who lived submerged in schizophrenia for thirty six years in the room that Zimmer built for him. Similarly, in *Moon Palace*, Zimmer embodies the room where he takes in the dying, half-crazy Marco Fogg. Both characters, with their curious names, are rooms that have built other rooms, showing a capacity for self-duplication beyond the reach of a disaggregating character, who can no longer preserve his own identity and has nothing left to do but withdraw to that final space (“These four walls hold only the signs of his own disquiet”, IS 78).

The written work of art is created in the room, through a sort of white magic, in contrast with the black magic of the black room, a paroxysm of seclusion where, in *City of Glass*, the young Peter Stillman had to discover the words of a new language, after the most immense of solitudes had been invented for him: “In the dark I speak God's language and no one can hear me” (NYT 21). If no one can hear him, the words will not survive their utterer, they will die with him, never leaving the black space of the unknown mind and of the insurmountably sealed room. The narrative function loses its key elements, its heroes, its vicissitudes, trajectories, and goals. It gets dispersed in clouds of linguistic elements, plunging into global deconstruction, into chaogony. At a literary level, the plot of the narrative is dismantled, the classic delimitations of the several narrative fields go through a work of problematization, canons disappear, miscegenations take place at the boundaries between genres. In this dissemination of language games, it is the individuals themselves that seem to dissolve.

The three narratives making up *The New York Trilogy* – *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room* – repeat essentially the same story. All of them use and deconstruct the conventional elements of the detective story, resulting in a recurrent investigation of the nature, function, and meaning of language, but also of solitude, seclusion, and the problematic of identity. The labyrinth of *The New York Trilogy* is populated by mysterious observers, alternative authors, mirrors looking into mirrors, and characters that have more or less disappeared, structured by the observation and search for lost

and rediscovered entities. This universe of chaos and non-solutions leads Auster's detectives through very different paths from those initially established.

City of Glass, the first story of *The New York Trilogy*, fictionalizes the degeneration of language, the changes of identity, the struggle to preserve human characteristics in a great metropolis, when the city itself is immersed in its disaggregating mechanical routine that completely erases every individual. Although this trilogy has New York City in its title, external setting, and common leading thread, it is the interior scenes that trigger the action and make it progress. *City of Glass* begins at the apartment owned by Quinn, a writer going through a literary and existential crisis under the sign of death, who has already experienced several ways of life and identities. Quinn is a drifter in the labyrinth of the city, a man who, through motion, creates his own emptiness, an aimless utopian. He lives the postmodern condition described by Lyotard: (...) *la dissolution du lien social et le passage des collectivités sociales à l'état d'une masse d'atomes individuels lancés dans un absurde mouvement brownien (...) un monde dans lequel les événements vécus se sont rendus indépendants de l'homme*⁵.

After the first phone call, Quinn wonders about what would Max Work do, since the writer cannot resist the temptation of leaving reality to enjoy a few moments in the space of fiction. Once he accepts the case, the spatial focus switches to Peter and Virginia Stillman's apartment, in an initial structure similar to that of *Ghosts*. The immediate narrative of Peter Stillman's childhood, violently trapped in the "dark place" in search of the signs of a new divine language, establishes a dysphoric parallel with the rooms where the artist locks himself to discover the poetic word in solitude. But Stillman's isolation is inherent to the creation of a whole new language and not just to its recreation with aesthetic goals in mind. The narrative of Peter, captive of darkness in the name of a threatening pseudo-god, occupies nine pages of uninterrupted direct speech, and, at the end, Quinn realizes that a whole day has gone by and they are now sitting in the dark. Quinn recalls several examples of children who grew up in complete solitude and silence, and the influence of that solitude in the language they acquired, tragically illustrating the enigmatic relationship between silence and words. Ironically, when Stillman-father is arrested, he too is incarcerated

⁵ Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979) p. 31.

in a punitive dark place, according to the son's narrative. That dark place is like a tomb for the living, for involuntary inhabitants of a space to which they were led by others. Stillman-father buried his own living son there, establishing a dysphoric dichotomy with Quinn's dead son in his coffin ("He thought of the little coffin that held his son's body and how he had seen it on the day of the funeral being lowered into the ground. That was isolation, he said to himself. That was silence. It did not help, perhaps, that his son's name had also been Peter". NYT 35), or, intertextually, with the son of Mallarmé in *Mallarmé's Son* and in *A Tomb for Anatole*⁶.

In the interior of the writer "Paul Auster"'s house, Quinn finds an attentive interlocutor, hospitality, and an image of the family he has lost, while the streets are the setting of the darkest moments of his existential path. New York symbolizes the nothingness that Quinn has built around himself and which he will never be able to escape. The postmodern agoraphobia tends to see the urban process as inescapable and chaotic, where anarchy and constant change play a prominent role, in such inconclusive situations as the urban narratives of *The New York Trilogy*. When he leaves the Austers' apartment, Quinn realizes the extent of his own loss and solitude: "Quinn was nowhere now" (NYT 104), even though he is in his domestic space, of potential happiness. Quinn would like to occupy Auster's space, which frames a perfect universe, in a cruel intervention by the pseudo-author, displaying his happiness in front of a character whose emotional void was caused by him, in a caprice of his almighty writing. In the meta-space between Auster and Auster (the author and the writer-character), Auster (which one of them?) stages a complex game involving his own name and status, at the same time associating and dissociating himself from a writer-character who can either be a secondary character or the main figure, the first author. Realizing that he is no more than a mere object by and in the hands of the writer, Quinn, who is so accustomed to use literary pseudonyms, decides to take control over his identity, in a childish but not inconsequential attempt to take revenge. Quinn contemplates the walls of his own room, their color showing the passage of time:

He sat down in his living room and looked at the walls. They had once been white, he remembered, but now they had turned a curious shade of yellow. Perhaps one day they would drift further into dinginess, lapsing into grey, or even brown, like some piece of

⁶ Stephane Mallarmé, *A Tomb for Anatole*, trans. by Paul Auster (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983).

ageing fruit. A white wall becomes a yellow wall becomes a grey wall, he said to himself. The paint becomes exhausted, the city encroaches with its soot, the plaster crumbles within. Changes, then more changes still (NYT 104).

White can become gradually closer to black, until they become indistinguishable, as in the growing identification of Black with White in *Ghosts*. The city covers the walls with its soot, as it will cover Quinn's face and clothes with the indelible marks of the days spent at the alley, in progressive degradation, illustrating the intangibility of the eternal. Also in the story of Peter Freuchen, in *The Invention of Solitude*, the protagonist breathes against the walls of the igloo he built as a shelter, hastening his own death. At the alley, Quinn hides for an indefinite period of time, sometimes protected by the walls of a garbage bin, fused into the city: "It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city" (NYT 116). This confinement within the walls of New York may represent an urban, postmodern revisitation of the theme of isolation in the forest of Thoreau's *Walden*, obsessively reread in *Ghosts*. However, it is even more conspicuously similar to the hypnotic contemplation of the wall by Bartleby, with whom Quinn shares common traits⁷. Quinn's path and space retract like Bartleby's, from the island of Manhattan to the small windowless room, before they themselves withdraw from the world and from the text. The scrivener's anti-writing corresponds to Quinn's inability to solve the Stillman case. Like the Scrivener, Quinn also reduces his needs for sleep and food to a minimum, and spends his last time alone, in a room, mysteriously fed, and devoted to strange thought and writing exercises. Both write naked or semi-naked (according to the standards in Melville's time), in a prelude to the final identification of Quinn with Peter Stillman-child, as if he were at the same time the new subject and object of the project that Stillman-father had abandoned. "(...) language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden,

⁷ Bartleby is completely isolated from others by the walls and curtains that surround him, internal walls of a social nature which separate different professional hierarchies, culminating in the pure emptiness of a plain brick wall, the only landscape he can see from his window. Bartleby is who is nearest to the wall in the universe of the office. That is his great distinguishing mark, he is the one who most clearly perceives the walls that demarcate and isolate us. The very building where he works and lives is walled by other, taller, buildings, like Quinn's alley. Bartleby refuses to be a copyist of the reality established by the society "of the wall" (of Wall Street), but he does not create an alternative writing, he does not become the fictional image of the recalcitrant writer, perhaps because he has in the past worked at the Dead Letter Office, a space of death for writing. Bartleby's solitude is not constructive, his rebellion is but silence and negation, without acquiring cosmogonic power. He merely contemplates the wall, prisoner of his own consciousness, becoming the static occupant of an empty room. The wall (of Wall Street and of The Tombs) encloses him, as impenetrable as death. But what ends up killing the scrivener are not the walls in themselves but the fact that he confused the walls made by man with the wall of human mortality.

therefore, records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language” (NYT 43): Peter’s captivity is carried out in the name of this need to invent a new language, pure, divine, and untouched by communication vices. Peter is imprisoned within walls of made up words. However, Stillman here draws a plausible parallel between the inadequacy of the signifier/signified system and the fragmentation of the postmodern universe:

For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos (NYT 77).

The trilogy seems to contain the blueprint for a writing that is illegible, chaotic. Its entire construction promises a future resolution that is always postponed. Everywhere, we see the predominance of the degradation of objects, of an order in the process of crumbling down, a generalized setback against which coincidences, the system of true and false identifications, doubles, symmetries, the games of mirrors, and the textual structure are put in place, in an attempt to oppose it.

At the alley, Quinn discovers the true nature of solitude, when he realizes that he is irreparably compromising his identity, reflected by the exacerbated degradation of this new living space: “(...) he began to understand the true nature of solitude. He had nothing to fall back on anymore but himself. And of all things he discovered during the days he was there, this was the one he did not doubt: that he was falling” (NYT 117). The surveillance of the Stillmans’ building was so exclusive, so claustrophobic, that not only did Quinn not realize his own deterioration but also ignored, after two months had passed, the news of the suicide of Stillman-father, ending up losing all contact with the case and with the story that he was the protagonist of. Unconsciously, Quinn starts moving in the direction of another story, that of the search for the lost paradise, with its universal language. In this context, the reductive immersion in the alley and in the garbage may mean the need to die in order to be reborn purified and to access that adamitic innocence.

When he returns home, Quinn realizes that he will not be able to resume his abandoned existence. The last memories of his past happiness had remained in the lost interior: the desk where he used to write and the drawings made by his son, a thin reflection of the domestic space of the Austers. In *The Music of Chance*, the beginning of Nashe’s wandering journey, which will lead him to death, is also triggered by the dismantling of the house, the unifying center of the subject. Escaping a new drift, Quinn locks

himself in the smallest, darkest and most inaccessible room in the Stillmans' house, which reduces itself to a series of bare, immaculate white rooms, and ignores those opening to the exterior ("We stepped in cautiously and discovered a series of bare, empty rooms. In a small room at the back, impeccably clean as all the other rooms were, the red notebook was lying on the floor". NYT 132). There, in the space where everything started, where he set out on his final journey, Quinn reaches a truly omniscient capacity for reflection and evocation, remembering even the moment of his own birth, as if he had penetrated his own self (which he no longer recognizes), his own disperse identity. Quinn becomes a kind of spectator of his own existence, recording what he sees, aware that he has reached the bottom of the abyss and that the spiral is about to be reversed. The space-time circle begins to close: solitude, darkness, and words are again reunited in the room. Free from his clothing, Quinn assumes the posture of a child about to emerge from the womb. Quinn actually inhabits himself, in the most obscure corner of his brain, where time becomes relative, represented by the dark and ignored room where one day it can be reduced to brief instants of light, until the final darkness:

(...) he was inside now, and no matter what room he chose to camp in, the sky would remain hidden, inaccessible even at the farthest limit of sight (...) He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again (NYT 127 e 131).

The true labyrinth resides in Quinn's interior, in the rooms of his mind, where he wanders in an infinite drift, without being able to build a definitive text about the universal reality. Quinn does not achieve a cosmic solution. Fragmented and chaotic, the world remains, at the end of his quest, exactly as it was in the beginning. Quinn's contact with pure adamitic language was partial, momentary, and inconclusive. His own fate, like those of so many of Auster's characters, remains a mystery, and the reader is abandoned in the middle of a narrative declaration of renunciation about the omitted, the imprecise, and the undecipherable.

The beginning of *Ghosts* shows traces that are recurrent in the context of the opening of *City of Glass*. After the sentimental disappointment with the ex-future Mrs. Blue, detective Blue returns home to assess the situation. Looking at the wall and at the image of Gold, Blue recalls his tragic case, eternally unsolved, and begins to define a plan, aware that the time to turn the page has arrived, just as Quinn did, after having

seen the marks of the passage of time. In both stories, meditation about the interior space (the room and the walls setting its limits) comes after a moment of great dramatic intensity (becoming aware of the lost happiness and acquired solitude), preceding an extreme, borderline mad, decision, the beginning of the process that will lead to the protagonist's annihilation.

By accepting White's proposal (much like Quinn when accepting Stillman's), Blue becomes a prisoner of the case and of the room:

And yet White is the one who set the case in motion - thrusting Blue into an empty room, as it were, and then turning off the light and locking the door. Ever since, Blue has been groping about in the darkness, feeling blindly for the light switch, a prisoner of the case itself (NYT 169).

Blue is doubly confined by White, whose intervention is revealed to be as dark as the name of the character to be observed, and with whom he will eventually feel identified. *Moby-Dick*, the White Whale, and the black-white wall of *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, are intertextual evidence that light and darkness can blend, as well as their connotations of good and evil. Cosmos and chaos can coexist in the same space, just as White and Black reside in the same character. In this way, Blue's room can also be both a white space and a black space. Black, White's counter-color, is in reality its equivalent in terms of absolute value, as both are at the ends of the color range – negation or synthesis of colors. Blue fills empty reports: no matter how much he blackens the white page with words, he inscribes nothing in it but absence. Blue states from the beginning that words are transparent (invisible) to him; thus, re-reading his notes, he is surprised to discover that, instead of engraving them tangibly in the world, they have made facts disappear. When white or black proliferate, the lasting impression is that of a constant erasure of the entities in narration.

Blue cannot separate the room where he was locked from the case itself, since, in fact, one is dependent upon the other and the offer of the room as an observation post was one of the few points that White made clear from the beginning. Forays to the outside are not significant, and Blue seems to eventually become only interested in the buildings, caressing their stone fronts. His case is to be in a room observing a man in another room and observing himself at the same time. But it is also a step towards self-erasure, towards the growing awareness that he is only living a half-life, through

mere words, of someone else's life. Blue feels like a character in a book with no action:

But if the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action - nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book (NYT 169).

Here, we find a clear metalanguage, a penetration of the character into reality in terms of both the construction and the reception of the story, in addition to Blue's desire to free himself of his increasingly conscious status of dramatic persona. Black is presented as the presumable author of the book, bringing self-irony to Paul Auster's occupation, with a proleptic reference to his status of true motor of the case: "As for Black, the so-called writer of this book, Blue can no longer trust what he sees. It is possible that there really is such a man - who does nothing, who merely sits in his room and writes?" (NYT 169).

Blue knows that he is becoming a ghost by way of the room and of writing. The combination of these two motifs explains the reference to Hawthorne, who, according to his biography, spent twelve years locked in a room in order to write. But Black's observations also reveal a preoccupation with the solipsistic existence of the writer, similar to Blue's:

Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there.
Another ghost.
Exactly (NYT 175).

The synopsis of *Wakefield* constitutes a new intertextual prolepsis of the central motifs of the next short-story, *The Locked Room*, besides illustrating some of the moments in *Ghosts* and *City of Glass*. Wakefield retires to a room, initially as a joke, where he ends up forgetting his identity and disappearing from the world, leaving his own wife a widow and becoming a living ghost. Wakefield consciously observes his own death (like Blue), having the room as observation post and base for the process of self-erasure. Entering his old house, twenty years later, Wakefield resumes his lost identity. If Auster's postmodern re-writing denies its protagonists such a conclusion, Nathaniel Hawthorne achieves an enigmatic final identification between the closed space of the house and the closed space of the tomb, whose door Wakefield is about to cross, raising a very postmodern doubt about the story's eventual happy-ending:

“Stay, Wakefield! Would you go to the sole home that is left you? Then step into your grave! The door opens”.⁸

As already pointed out, the space of creation of a work of art can be simultaneously the space of its author’s self-destruction. Black dies at the hands of Blue, but he had planned everything except the escape of the latter (“You’ve written your suicide note, and that’s the end of it. Exactly”. NYT 194). Perhaps it is for that reason that Black states that he wishes to finish the book of a lifetime (the book of life) soon. Blue will appear in the room to bring death to Black, counterpointing the moment when Anna Blume miraculously appears at Sam Farr’s door to save the author and his work. The circle closes over Blue and Black when it becomes clear that the journey of looking and of writing about that looking has never left the space of the two rooms. A closed labyrinth-like circuit has taken shape, without apparent logical reason, destroying the canonical detective story and its narrative instances, with an addressed-addressee (White), a subject (Blue), and an object (Black), as in *City of Glass* the “whodunit” has given way to the “who-am-I?”. In reality, there was no external manipulation, White was nothing but a ghost. The character finds the true author, Black, who lived through Blue, through his eyes, his routine path, his weekly writing. Blue had always shown confidence in the words he used in his reports, those great windows standing between him and the world, until he started to question the process: “It’s as though his words, instead of drawing out the facts and making them sit palpably in the world, have induced them to disappear” (NYT 147). Blue’s reports did not express reality but only what he thought was reality, illustrating the postmodern doubt about the supposedly unequivocal relation between reality and the signs that translate it, product of a post-Eden language, the great riddle of *City of Glass*.

Black is an existential parasite, a vampire of Blue’s vital energy. Without knowing it, Blue also inhabits Black’s room with his observation and as the reason for being of the object of that observation (“You were the whole world to me, Blue...” NYT 194). The lethal power of the room does not spare even its ghost inhabitant. The process of Blue’s fragmentation unfolds over four simultaneous spaces, facing each other in the urban scenery: the room and the mind of Black, and the room and the mind of Blue himself. Thus, by entering Black’s room, Blue entered himself and another at the same

⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 298.

time. He put together too many co-present entities in the same space, conjuring an imploding blackout. The existence of the double reinforces the story's structural unity, through the psychological identification with the opponent, but it also fragments the subject in more than one entity, eliminating the canonical notion of an indisputable individual identity. Looking at White also as a double of Black, he would be his visible and luminous face, hiding the character's dark and secret side.

In the several days Blue spends locked in the room, after the shock in Black's room, he strolls meditatively between the four walls, lengthily analyzing the several images that embellish them, as in a gallery of all the ghosts that have accompanied him through the story. And, for that reason, the ex-future Mrs. Blue, a living and non-ghost entity, who was, nonetheless, rejected in favor of the mystery of *Ghosts*, is just "a certain blank spot on the wall" (NYT 190), since this is a story by, about, and for ghosts. As Blue gets again close to the window and to the outside world, the drama quickly approaches its final scene. The starting signal is given by Black, by the mere fact that he is no longer inside the room, but outside the building. The window demarcates the space between dream and reality, separating the fictional from the real world, as is clear in Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fenêtres*. In the last moment, when Blue gets out of the room, he also gets out of the story, prompting the epilogue: "For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing" (NYT 196). The riddle has not been solved, Blue simply abandons the room and the book, without us finding out anything about his fate or about Black's work and motivations, since the postmodern novel problematizes riddles without trying to solve them. The final dialogue is a dark duplication of the initial dialogue with White, this time marking the closure of the case, in the room belonging to Black and to all the presences.

The interior space is thus the decisive space for the progression of the action⁹. Even if that interior is, as in *Leviathan*, a wood so dense that it becomes closed, anticipating

⁹ The action in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is also set entirely in Gregor's room and adjacent rooms of the Samsas' house. Only at the end do the surviving characters go to the outside, on a jaunt to forget the whole story and to start a new life. A new and hopeful vision of the future appears only when they leave the oppressive atmosphere of the house. The fate of Gregor, the "monster", was confinement and death in the prison-cage of the room, tacitly ignored by his family. The identification between Gregor and the room is so strong that the emptying of the latter of its furniture is equivalent to the emptying of the former of his

the night and bringing about another turning point in Ben Sachs' troubled existence. Maria Turner's project, *Thursdays with Ben*, is born of his visit to her apartment. It is inside the house that the relationship that will directly or indirectly lead to the birth of the Phantom of Liberty, to all the events in the book, and to Sachs' death has its start. To find Fanny with another man in the room, invading an intimate space, justifies the protagonist's disappearance. The dialogue at Maria's house, the next step in the desperate search for a welcoming interior, triggers a deadly effect when the identity of Joe Dimaggio and Lilian Stern is revealed to her. The room is presented as a womb that can generate countless forms of life and death. Alternative existential paths that are infinitely multiple are born of that seminal confined space.

Like the preceding narratives of *The New York Trilogy*, *The Locked Room* revolves, as its title indicates, around a succession of closed spaces, of interior settings. The first step into the story is taken when the narrator enters Fanshawe's apartment, an austere space, dominated by the work of writing: "It was a small railroad flat with four rooms, sparsely furnished, with one room set aside for books and a work table" (NYT 201). Curiously, Fanshawe is portrayed as the narrator's alter-ego, inhabiting the interior of his mind, already in the first few lines of the story. The written exploration of that closed room motivates the novel:

It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am. (...) He was the one who was with me, the one who shared my thoughts, the one I saw whenever I looked up from myself (NYT 199).

The link between Auster and Hawthorne materializes in this story: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* (1828) has as its homonymous hero an intellectual who withdraws from the world and immerses himself in solitude. The fact that Auster names his heroine Sophie, like Hawthorne's wife, plays a preponderant role in

last human characteristics. Gregor himself realizes that by wanting an empty room he has yielded to his most primitive instincts ("Nothing should be taken out of his room; everything must stay as it was; he could not dispense with the good influence of the furniture". Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, pp. 116-7). The compartmentalization of the participants in closed and sealed spaces, with permanently locked doors that prevent communication between irredeemably isolated universes, is clearly visible. In Kafka's claustrophobic world, the outside seems to communicate more tranquility, harmony, and light than the inside. Because Kafka, unlike Auster, fears solitude and does not associate the confinement in the room with artistic creation, but only with disintegration and death. Auster always offers a possibility of redemption, he is a postmodernist, but not a nihilist like Kafka. The name of Kafka conveys the most universal anguish of the modern world: a dead-end situation, an oppressive atmosphere, a labyrinth-like space.

Fanshawe's self-destructive fascination by the author, whose tendency towards isolation, both in his private life and in the themes he used in his writing, is well known. Hawthorne clearly looked at his hero as a noble and unpolluted aspect of himself, like this narrator, frequently confused with his childhood friend. But this Fanshawe's initial biography was completely taken from Paul Auster's own biography. Therefore, both the narrator and the object of his quest represent the author, that is to say, we are looking at the writer's search for his own identity. The narrator does not even have a name, he is just the man who tells the story of the locked room, existing solely as a narrating entity. Like his eccentric predecessors of *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, Fanshawe developed his attraction for secret closed spaces (the tomb and the box are prominent motifs in the biographical details that the narrator discovers) until it becomes an implacable and ritualized privacy, so severe that it is undistinguishable from death. We can again quote from *Wakefield* to illustrate the consequences of this dominant characteristic in Auster's and Hawthorne's oeuvre:

Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe.¹⁰

Stillman, Black, and Fanshawe are, all three of them, Wakefields leaving their daily routine to pursue insane visions, and it is ironic to note that the characters that go look for them (Quinn, Blue, the narrator) are themselves dispossessed of their identities during their search.

While the narrator's mind is dominated by the ubiquitous Fanshawe, Sophie's is gradually emptied of his presence. Sophie sees her missing husband as a temporary gift, irretrievably lost, and now substituted by her son who is about to be born. Sophie apprehends that transition in physical, spatial terms, as if she herself were a space (room) that is emptied to be refilled with a new content (inhabitant). The narrator plays semantically with the word "room" and with Sophie's notion of pregnancy: "(...) as though there was no more room inside her for Fanshawe. These were the words she used to describe the feeling - no more room inside her" (NYT 203), evoking the verbal sequence "Room and tomb, tomb and womb, womb and room" from *The Invention of Solitude* (159-160), about the universal mysteries of life and death.

¹⁰ Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches*, p. 298.

The suitcases removed from Fanshawe's house by the narrator, containing the written work, weigh as much as a man, according to the comparison made in the text, since the work represents the man himself. Even here, Fanshawe is locked inside a closed minimal space (the suitcases), as if the narrator were carrying him out of Sophie's space, who has no more room for him inside her, and to his own space, which Fanshawe will now inhabit. The narrator mentions the courage he had to gather in order to open those suitcases, as he will have to do, much later, to open the boxes with Fanshawe's belongings, in the house he will share with Sophie. To open those spaces is the same as to set their occupier free, to let him at large to haunt the lives of those who surround him, like the ghosts in the preceding story.

When the narrator enters in the room of Fanshawe's childhood alone, that experience turns out to be equally painful. The rooms are the most intimate spaces, where the memory of those who inhabited them lingers. If Fanshawe is locked in the room that is the narrator's mind, the latter too will access Fanshawe's mind and room, exploring the interior of the man who already knows and inhabits his own interior, in a scene similar to the one in *Ghosts* where Blue penetrates Black's space: "I settled down behind the desk. It was a terrible thing to be sitting in that room, and I didn't know how long I would be able to take it. (...) I had stepped into the museum of my own past, and what I found there nearly crushed me" (NYT 257). The narrator has a violent emotional reaction, caused by the memories (photographs and letters) revealed in the specific atmosphere of the room. If we look at the house as a metaphor for the person who inhabits it, that room at the top floor becomes the dwelling space of thought, recollections, and the subconscious where every secret is hidden.

The day before the narrator's break-up with Sophie and the self-destructive expedition to Paris, the last space where Fanshawe still inhabits is opened: after the suitcases, the office, and the room of his childhood, the closet with his belongings is unveiled, once again releasing the ghost. The characters discuss the presence that haunts their lives, as if the boxes and the closet contained the man: "Now, as Sophie opened the door of the closet and looked inside, her mood suddenly changed. 'Enough of this,' she said, squatting down in the closet. (...) 'Enough of Fanshawe and his boxes'" (NYT 284). Sophie had opened the doors of memory, one of the locked rooms where Fanshawe's spirit resides. Inadvertently, she also mentions "his boxes", evoking the magic box of

his childhood and his powers, by then already super-human. “Enough of this” and “All of it”: we do not know whether Sophie is talking about the spaces and objects or about Fanshawe, in a deliberate metonymy of container and content. Already in Paris, in the only postcard that the narrator writes to Sophie, we read: “At the very least, remember to clean out the closet before I return” (NYT 289), underlining the need to exorcise the ghost of memory, since it is inside the most interior and unventilated space of the mind (the closet) that the fears of the subconscious hide.

Very similarly, in *Leviathan*, Ben Sachs devotes himself to meticulously cleaning the several rooms of Lillian Stern’s house, as if he were trying to solve every compartment of Lillian’s troubled existence, as full of secrets as a closed room. The process of Sachs’ adoption by Lillian and her daughter Maria is illustrated by the progressive discovery of the several rooms in the house, until he conquers Lillian’s. Finally, Sachs finds the courage to enter the room of the man he had killed, and whose absence he is trying to fill:

‘I finally found the courage to go into his room,’ Sachs said. ‘That’s what started it, I think, that was the first step toward some kind of legitimate action. Until then, I hadn’t even opened the door. Too scared, I suppose, too afraid of what I might find if I started looking. (...) I found a copy of his dissertation. That was the key. If I hadn’t found that, I don’t think any of the other things would have happened (L 223).

As in *The New York Trilogy*, by entering the room Sachs enters the mind of the character and simultaneously discovers what his next mission is. The dissertation is the key, since *Leviathan* is centered around the consciousness of the simultaneity of life and of writing. At the threshold of his new existence, at the decisive moment, Ben feels he is about to begin “a long voyage into the darkness of his soul (L 198), like someone who’s just run into a brick wall” (L 227). A true wall of death, since Sachs decides to kill his previous identity and set out on a new journey that will only end with the accident on a road in Wisconsin.

Remembering his adolescence spent in Fanshawe’s company, the narrator realizes that the dramas lived by Fanshawe were always more painful, because they were more internal: “By the time he was thirteen or fourteen, Fanshawe became a kind of internal exile, going through the notions of dutiful behaviour, but cut off from his surroundings, contemptuous of the life he was forced to live” (NYT 216). The ending of *The Locked Room* sees the protagonist’s terminal confinement in a space of literal and figurative seclusion, paralleling the nature of his dramas. The possession of the

narrator's interior shatters his apparently unified and coherent world. However, that occupation is doubly destructive, since both Fanshawe and the narrator begin a path of disintegration, to which only the latter will survive. Fanshawe's actions (like giving his birthday present to Dennis) had revealed new worlds and attitudes to a fascinated narrator-child, in a representation of the process of maturation and exploration of reality through self-discovery. The narrator could have found those possibilities inside himself, without Fanshawe's intervention, but, if Fanshawe is presented as the central element in this process, that is because he has always inhabited the intimate interior of the narrator, dominating him.

In his biographical digression, the narrator mentions that the final strengthening of the relationship between the young Fanshawe and his dying father occurred in the privileged space of the room. Only in that space of intimacy, also connoted with death, which is awaited within its walls, do father and son recognize each other in their forgotten affective ties. At the moment of his father's death, Fanshawe is lying on a freshly dug tomb, experiencing the sensation of maximum isolation, looking at the sky, at the antipodes of the life-generating womb, the other universal closed space. The tomb is as remote as the box inside which Fanshawe used to enclose himself in his childhood, to gain access to unique experiences and travels, which he shared with no one. The same happens here, when accessing the experience of death completely alone, oblivious of the presence of the narrator. Fanshawe simultaneously fulfills the zen ideal of pure detachment, of perfect indifference, and the American dream of absolute individualism, affirming, sheltered from the world, his identity. In spite of being a writer, Fanshawe does not seek to publish, his writing remains personal, an expression of his individualism, invulnerable to social pressures, more authentic than those that seek superficial success. In contrast, the narrator, by abandoning his literary dreams to write articles, follows a path opposite to that of Fanshawe, accepting the compromises that the latter always refused.

The narrator owns a space devoted to solitary writing, which he supposedly does not share with anyone, but which, in reality, is equally haunted by Fanshawe, an invisible but pervasive presence both in the biography that he is going to write and in the letter sent to that address, in a clear invasion of what the narrator thought was an intimate space, safe from any ghost: "The fact that I did not once stop thinking about Fanshawe,

that he was inside me day and night for all those months, was unknown to me at the time” (NYT 242). In Paris, the narrator finds out that Fanshawe had worked as a ghost writer for a Russian filmmaker’s wife, but, in reality, the whole trilogy is one vast system of ghost writing. Stillman invents the ghost Henry Dark to articulate his ideas about the rediscovered paradise. Blue, in turn, makes reports for White where he transforms Black’s life into writing, but, since White and Black are the same person, the recipient reads his own life described by another. In *The Locked Room*, there is a rumor that the anonymous narrator is the true author of *Neverland* and that the name Fanshawe is just an artifice. And here is also included Quinn’s red notebook, a text abandoned by a man that has disappeared and on which, according to the narrator, a big part of the story of *City of Glass* is based. As if in an unaware gestation, Fanshawe is inside every space inhabited by the narrator because he is inside himself, preventing him from achieving a capacity for visionary isolation similar to that of the box, of the tomb, or of the room. Incapable of prospering within the limits of the existence he inherited, the narrator stagnates, as if his talent was now the exclusive property of Fanshawe, although his marriage and financial security seemed to give him the freedom to explore his own literary projects. Once again in the trilogy, a character becomes conscious of being as though trapped in a book written by someone else. The threat of psychological disintegration by subjection to Fanshawe is greater than the threat verbalized by Fanshawe himself that he would kill the narrator in case he tried to find his location.

“The letter was opaque, a block of darkness that thwarted every attempt to get inside it” (NYT 238): Fanshawe’s letter announces an impenetrable darkness that gradually takes over the narrator’s entire existence.

Only darkness has the power to make a man open his heart to the world, and darkness is what surrounds me whenever I think of what happened (...) My only hope is that there is an end to what I am about to say, that somewhere I will find a break in the darkness (NYT 235).

The narrator longs for a way out of the darkness, out of the dark room where he is locked, antithetical to the creative liberation of the White Spaces, since the spaces of the narrator (room, mind, and book) have become spaces of chaos. When the narrator physically penetrates Fanshawe’s mother, he feels like he is also penetrating his own darkness, without, however, deciphering it. In a way, he is inside Fanshawe, through

the person who generated him, inside the man who is, in turn, inside him. A spiral of violated (“I was fucking out of hatred”, NYT 266), chaotic spaces, which annihilate both the invader and the invaded, is drawn.

After having access to the secret that Fanshawe still lives, the narrator himself becomes a conscious locked room: “I locked up the secret inside me and learned to hold my tongue” (NYT 239). The permanently postponed biography and its protagonist become inhibiting presences. In the room of the mind, they undermine his relationship with Sophie, with the world around him, and with himself. In the room of writing, they make his work impossible: “my new workroom (...) seemed too cramped” (NYT 244), a similar feeling to the one experienced by Sophie when she stated that there was no more room inside her for Fanshawe. “I was truly lost, floundering desperately inside myself” (NYT 244), observes the narrator, as if he was immersed in Peter Stillman’s dark room. As in the entire trilogy, the closed room that is inside every one of us is always the hardest to explore. By trying to write Fanshawe’s biography, the narrator is not creating a cosmogony, as had happened with the census in Harlem when he had found the doors of reality closed, but a chaology. Fanshawe had had his tomb in his youth, which had brought him, and just him, closer to the indecipherable mystery of death. The narrator will now have another tomb, which does not lead him to any revelation: “I was digging a grave, after all, and there were times when I began to wonder if I was not digging my own” (NYT 250). The pages of the book had built a wall of death, transforming it into a tomb, the most lonely and enveloping of spaces, the ultimate room.

For several pages, the narrator summarizes a series of stories that Fanshawe is fond of, where confinement in small spaces (cave, room, igloo) is a constant, always connoted with death, true tombs for the living, like the locked room of Fanshawe himself. These deadly, falsely protective walls can be built with words, like the ones spoken by Mrs. Fanshawe, hovering around the narrator, forming a protective chamber that is a trap and will haunt his life for a long time:

Her voice was hypnotic. As long as she went on speaking, I felt that nothing could touch me anymore. There was a sense of being immune, of being protected by the words that came from her mouth (...) I was floating inside that voice, I was surrounded by it, buoyed up by its persistence, going with the flow of syllables, the rise and fall, the waves (NYT 264).

In Paris, the narrator tries to fill the still empty rooms in the edifice of his memory in order to finish the cursed construction of the written work. But the awareness of his growing inner darkness becomes acute, as does that of the self-incarceration he had reached. The process of duplication reaches its peak at this point. Simultaneously, and without the narrator knowing it at that moment, Fanshawe too is enclosed in darkness, under the recurring name of Henry Dark, waiting only for his own and self-imposed end. Alone in the hotel room, the narrator experiences the Kafkaian final metamorphosis.

Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there since the beginning. From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been - but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude - living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull (NYT 292-293).

At this crucial moment, the narrator accesses the central motif (and title) of the story that encloses him as a character, enters the last closed room, and finds himself in Fanshawe. Like Blue, when he entered the room of his double, Black, an image of the interior chaos and of the unknown inner-self, and found his own writings. If writing is a way of attaining identity, the presence of the double is an image of the unknown self of the subject. The pilgrimage through the rooms of memory is always tortured by the strangers occupying them, intruders that speak for him. On the following page, Paul Auster interferes in the narrative to offer the key to that duplication and circularity, by asserting, himself, that *The Locked Room*, *City of Glass*, and *Ghosts* are all the same story at different and increasing levels of understanding of the theme at hand. The recurring setting of the postmodern metropolis, inherited from Kafka, Beckett, Borges, and Jabès, is as labyrinthine as the human mind, reflecting a psychological complexity that has its roots in Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Dickinson.

Finally, the narrator heads for Fanshawe's microcosmic locked room. But will this be an actual encounter at a house in Boston¹¹ or just a final duel inside his mind? Is the narrator next to a door behind which Fanshawe is hidden or is he inside his own

¹¹ The room and the house of the final scene of *The Locked Room* exist in real life. Paul Auster incidentally found out about the sordid story of the house in a visit to Boston, where he heard an account of the dramatic events that took place in its rooms (see *The Art of Hunger*, p. 276).

subconscious? The quest of *The Locked Room* is but the description of a spiraling movement with its center on the narrator, who penetrates a labyrinth-like abandoned mansion (evoking *William Wilson*, another story haunted by the idea of the double) opening door after door, in an imagistic representation of a movement of self-discovery. When Fanshawe's room, the fulcrum of a suffering consciousness, is reached, and despite the door that separates them, the two interlocutors are so close to each other that it seems to the narrator that Fanshawe's words are coming from within his own head, growing evidence that that is where Fanshawe in fact resides.

The destructive seclusion of Fanshawe, also experienced by his double, represents an antithesis to the solitude of cosmogonic writing. Narrating the process of his own erasure, already manifest during his travels in the Greek freighter, Fanshawe reveals never to have left the closed space of the ship, "living like a dead man" (NYT 310). Through the door, he describes how he would lock himself in his cabin, at the bottom of the ship, the darkest and most inaccessible space, a veritable floating tomb, an antiphoric response to the visionary challenge from youth. Fanshawe has been living for two years in his house in Boston, the final stage of his journey, in complete isolation, under the name Henry Dark, the sinister character from Peter Stillman's book, since darkness has already taken over him. Fanshawe recognizes that the house is too big for a single person and that he has never even tried to explore the upper floors, in a parallel with the human mind, which Fanshawe and the narrator explore together (as one), and of which only a small parcel can be known or used. Fanshawe would have known about its most obscure rooms, and, because of that, he decided not to go any further. The narrator traveled with him, and, after living on the edge of the final darkness, decided to abandon that exploration and to kill Fanshawe, definitively locking him in a room forever closed.

In spite of his insistence, the final door remains closed¹², under a death threat, showing the impossibility to reach absolute truth about ourselves and about the universe around

¹² A very similar scene occurs in Herman Melville's *Jimmy Rose*, a character already present in *Ghosts*, in the hobo disguise chosen by Blue. In Melville's work, Jimmy Rose refuses to open the door of the old house where he locked himself in an eccentric and desperate exile, going as far as to make death threats to a friend who goes looking for him after learning the secret of his whereabouts. As in the final scenes of *The Locked Room*, the narrator friend, who centers his entire discourse on the protagonist, must decipher the unaltered rooms of an old mansion, the former property of the missing Rose. His spirit haunts the mansion's rooms, prompting the narrative of the story. Once again, Auster reveals himself to be a "plagiarist in praise", an expression of Melville curiously conspicuous in the text of *Jimmy Rose*. See Herman Melville, *Selected*

us, since there will always be one last closed room in our subconscious. We cannot open the door isolating us from the world, or let that last bastion of the unknown penetrate into a book written in a room with windows to the exterior. The book written in those magical or sinister interior rooms never reaches the eyes of the public. What did Fanshawe do or write during his long seclusion? What did Black write? What did Quinn write in the red notebook, with the pen he bought from a deaf mute, an inhabitant from the world of silence? What did Sam write in *In the Country of Last Things*? In contrast with Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, or even Phillip Marlowe, Auster's detectives never reach a solution. The drifting mind, in a constant state of meditation, motivates the narrative, codified in drifting signs, producing other signs in their movement towards an established goal. When that goal remains unattained (or unattainable), we are left with the inconclusive endings of *The New York Trilogy* and of *Moon Palace*.



In the elliptic synopsis of the first paragraphs of *Moon Palace*¹³ (1989), three key elements of Marco Fogg's troubled biography immediately stand out: the room at 112th West Street, the 1492 books he kept as his only company, and the boxes sent by Victor, mobile spaces that stored those same books and contained the memory of the character, like Fanshawe's box, since the books were his most precious possession, slowly accumulated over a period of thirty years, the only inheritance left to Marco, after the estrangement and death of such a striking personality as Victor. The beginning of Marco's story blends with the story of that empty room, populated by nothing but the written word. Every stage of his subsequent biography is accompanied by moves into new and more or less chaotic living spaces.

In *The Invention of Solitude*, the dramatic story of A.'s grandparents, and of how Anna Auster killed her husband, is also seen preferably through the constant house moves and, consequently, the absence of lasting reference points, which marked and

Tales and Poems, edited with an introduction by Richard Chase (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) pp. 132-143 and Sousa Santos, "Plagiarism in Praise".

¹³ A merely nominal restaurant-space, devoid of description or significant meaning to the progress of the action.

irreparably isolated the Auster family. The murder happens at the house and a succession of cells and courtrooms immediately follows, in a claustrophobic saga, like the very family from which the father is never able to escape. The family is a true cell (jail), and not a cell (body), a group closed in on itself, walled, as a defense against the creditors and every danger immanent to the condition of poor Jewish immigrants. That prison cell is tyrannically dominated by the matriarch Anna Auster, who imposes her authority on all her children until death.

During Marco Fogg's infancy, he and Victor create imaginary worlds which make up for the cruelty and loneliness of the surrounding reality (the mother's death, the illegitimacy, the unknown father, the school classmates). Together, they build perfect universes, described in detail, with a prominent place within the closed space they both share, in a perfect image of the work of cosmogonic writing of the writer that is isolated in his room. Marco and Victor are two creators of alternative universes in perfect inner harmony:

Within a month of my arrival, we had developed a game of inventing countries together, imaginary worlds that overtuned the laws of nature. Some of the better ones took weeks to perfect, and the maps I drew of them hung in a place of honor above the kitchen table. The land of Sporadic Light, for example, and the Kingdom of One-Eyed Men. Given the difficulties the real world had created for both of us, it probably made sense that we should want to leave it as often as possible (MP 6).

To Victor and Marco, real life and writing are the same: every human being can, in the course of his entire existential path, also write the book of his own life: "'Every man is the author of his own life," he said. "The book you are writing is not yet finished. Therefore, it's a manuscript. What could be more appropriate than that?'" (MP 7), are Victor's words, when Fogg discovers, delighted, that his initials can represent the word "manuscript".

The room at 112th West Street marks the beginning of Fogg's independent biography, strewn with detailed descriptions of inadequate furniture, rentals, shared rooms, and eternal financial problems. A few minutes after he gets inside, the seventy six boxes with Victor's books arrive, and become the only furniture of that empty space. Fogg creates a modular prison of sorts, a bed, a desk, out of those peculiar materials. This is a vital setting for Fogg, as evidenced in the enthusiastic declarations of affection for that small private space of reading and meditation. Books are a salient element of originality, which, like a puzzle, can build anything at all if assembled in the right

way, representing the construction of the written work through the correct placing and ordering of stone-words. The diversified reading allows Fogg to travel to any space and field of knowledge between those four walls, revisiting some of the passages in *White Spaces*.

But emptiness will begin to progressively take control of Fogg's life after Victor's death. Instead of filling the blank space of the room, Fogg will allow that white absence to fill him, in a solitary and cloistered inactivity, intertextually indebted to the static nihilism of some of Kafka's¹⁴ and Beckett's characters and to the theater of the absurd¹⁵. "I decided that the thing I should do was nothing: my action would consist of a militant refusal to take an action at all. This was nihilism raised to the level of an aesthetic proposition. I would turn my life into a work of art" (MP 20-21): this seems to be a peculiar way of writing the book of life, with artistic aspirations, more by omission than by effective construction. Fogg starts to move into another world, discarding his belongings and concocting increasingly bizarre excuses for his apparent indifference to discomfort. In reality, Fogg shows every sign of schizophrenia: his behavior becomes increasingly erratic, he loses notion of time, experiences hallucinations, and his reasoning powers weaken considerably.

The room is an image of the protagonist of *Moon Palace* (they are both excessively filled with literary fiction and empty of reality), a mirror of his biography and mental processes. The character blends with the room, and the room with the books that

¹⁴ "I am more and more unable to think, to observe, to determine the truth of things, to remember, to speak, to share an experience; I am returning to stone, this is the truth. I am more and more unable even in the office. If I can't take refuge in some work, I am lost." Franz Kafka, *I Am a Memory Come Alive: Autobiographical Writings by Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1974) p. 115. The work (of writing) is the means of salvation for many of Auster's characters. Inactivity, on the other hand, is the vehicle of fragmentation, as proven by Fogg's trajectory.

¹⁵ All the playwrights of the absurd are concerned with the modern and global lack of communication. In Edward Albee's plays, each character exists within the borders of his own private ego. The dramatic technique he uses is to elaborate on a theme centered on communication, presenting a series of apparently disconnected discourses. The cumulative effect of these discourses is a devastating commentary about the failure to communicate (solitude) in modern society. Beckett's *Endgame* (1957) takes place in a room isolated from all contact with the exterior. The characters are confined to that empty room, which is possibly suggestive of the interior of the human skull, the windows being the eyes that observe the world, or, according to some critics, we may be inside the maternal womb. Most of the values that western civilization represents do not seem to matter anymore in this play. Here, everything has lost its meaning, as the game reaches its end. Outside, everything is zero. The only persons left are sterile and desperate, a despair similar to that of *In the Country of Last Things*. Also in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), Krapp, an old man, performs his last soliloquy to be tape-recorded, repeating gestures and words in solitude, in an empty room. "How can one be sure, in such darkness", asks the nameless narrator of *The Unnamable*, referring to the solitude that surrounds and blinds him. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable: Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 1965) p. 292.

inhabit it, the only entities that differentiate it from a completely empty closed space. Fogg lives through the books, his principal possession and activity, which, nonetheless, he gradually sells, in an irreversible process of physical and mental emptying. The fragmentation of the human being is visibly effective, there is a symbiotic relation between the real and the imaginary, between the book and the world, between the subject and the room:

As I sold off the books, my apartment went through many changes. (...) My life had become a gathering zero, and it was a thing I could actually see: a palpable, burgeoning emptiness. Each time I ventured into my uncle's past, it produced a physical effect, an effect in the real world (...) The room was a machine that measured my condition: how much of me remained, how much of me was no longer there. I was both perpetrator and witness, both actor and audience in a theater of one. I could follow the progress of my own dismemberment. Piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear (MP 24).

The emptying of the room symbolizes the emptying of Fogg's life, body, and mind to the point of absolute stupor, of suicidal asceticism. If, until now, the books have been Victor's incarnation, they are now Fogg's shrinking incarnation, his furniture, company, and main activity, besides his only source of income and subsistence. Indirectly, through their progressive sale, the books are the actual sustenance of Fogg, who devours them in a literal and a figurative sense; Fogg is the books, psychosomatically speaking. Anna Blume too burns the books of the library so she can survive the Terrible Winter, but she destroys the library to save her life, since she understood that reality must take priority over fiction.

"The world has shrunk to the size of this room for him, and for as long as it takes him to understand it, he must stay where he is" (IS 79): Fogg cut ties with humanity, in a simple denial of the external world, trying to get as close as possible to the point zero (zen) of existence¹⁶. Postmodernism is disqualified from any political involvement due to its narcissistic and ironic appropriation of existing images and stories. The deliberate rupture with history means the destruction of the relation between human society and space, along with the rupture of the relations between public and private

¹⁶ "The deteriorative surveillances of *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*; the *Locked Room* narrator's absorption into the Fanshawe biography; the slide of the urban society in *In the Country of Last Things*; Fogg's starvations and eviction and the parallel trajectories of wandering and loss in the lineage Effing-Barber-Fogg in *Moon Palace*; the wall-building sentence in *The Music of Chance*; Sachs' abandonment of wife, lovers, and carrer in his drive toward literal fragmentation in *Leviathan* - all are variants of getting back to zero." Eric Wirth, "A Look Back from the Horizon", *Beyond the Red Notebook*, p. 174.

spaces, motivated by pure indifference towards anything outside the room, the book, and fiction¹⁷.

Literary creation is clearly demarcated from the delirium caused by Fogg's deprivations, since it implies a work of building and not a passive cataloging of feverish and obscure thoughts, wild associations, and day dreams, such as the ones experienced by the protagonist during that period. The writer's isolation between the four walls of the room must be a source of work and construction, not sterile oneiric reveries. That solitary productivity sets the writer apart and gives him the power to fill the white spaces of the room instead of expanding them like Fogg. In a similar way, Franz Kafka's *The Hunger Artist* also took his passive isolation too far, to the point of actual physical deletion, being forgotten by everyone and quickly replaced. Quinn, on the other hand, combines his solitary disaggregation with a unique visionary ability and sublime thoughts annotated in the unreachable book, since solitude can be (re)invented in several ways. When, after the period of delirium caused by starvation, Fogg grasps the reality of his situation, he starts to attribute a deathly connotation to that white space that surrounds him, both in the physical and in the existential plane, in a phonic evocation of the white whale: "(...) back in the world of fragments, back in the world of hunger and bare white walls" (MP 33). This is, in reality, a black space, the antithesis of the seminal text of Auster's prose, the stage for the fragmentation of the individual.

The moments unfurled one after the other, and at each moment the future stood before me as a blank, a white page of uncertainty. If life was a story, as Uncle Victor had often told me, and each man was the author of his own story, then I was making it up as I went along. I was working without a plot, writing each sentence as it came to me and refusing to think about the next. All well and good, perhaps, but the question was no longer whether I could write the story off the top of my head. I had already done that. The question was what I was supposed to do when the pen ran out of ink (MP 41-42).

Fogg's existence is reduced to the depopulated room and its walls are the pages of the book of life where, very much like Quinn, he mentally inscribes the events that transform him into nothing, in a nihilistic reformulation of Victor's teachings. The door and the windows, out of which the *Moon Palace* can be seen, are the means of communication with the exterior that Fogg rejects, in the process of his solipsistic

¹⁷ "O momento pós-moderno é muito mais do que uma moda, revela o processo da indiferença pura na medida em que todos, todos os comportamentos, podem coabitar sem se excluírem, tudo pode ser escolhido conforme o gosto, tanto o mais operatório como o mais esotérico...". Lipovetsky, *A Era do Vazio*, p. 39.

implosion, a white, non-violent suicide by isolation and inanition. Inadvertently, Simon Fernandez, the building superintendent in charge of the task of throwing Fogg out, synthesizes that identity between the room and the life of its only inhabitant, both in a terminal situation: "'You've got some place here, my friend. If you don't mind me saying so, it reminds me of a coffin. One of those pine boxes they bury bums in'" (MP 45). The walls of the room enclose its solitary inhabitant like a sarcophagus. "This is what I deserve, I said to myself. I've made my nothing, and now I've got to live in it" (MP 54): inside the room, Fogg has created a dark cosmogony, consciously building chaos and destroying the cosmos that that space once was.

Moon Palace is a story of wanderings driven by chance, alternating interior and exterior spaces. Leaving the room, Fogg continues the process of his dissolution outside, in the city of New York, a new stage in the process, and a new setting. But the exterior can be even more hostile and empty than the nothingness of the room. Fogg paradoxically finds an external space closed to the turbulence of the city: Central Park, where he becomes a kind of postmodern Robinson Crusoe. This intermediary space contrasts with the restlessly uniform behavior of the urban crowd, where collective hostility, the fragmentation of the individual, and robotic massification reside. Central Park is a vestige of nature, an outdoor open space, but closed to the horror of the streets of New York, attentively observed by Fogg in his wanderings. There, calm and generosity exist, and time and individuality can be enjoyed, no matter how eccentric that individuality may be, in an imperfect urban Garden of Eden. However, Fogg will use this new space only to fill it with an even larger amount of nothingness and self-destruction ("...Zimmer and Kitty kept asking me how I had managed to do nothing for so many days". MP 62). Besides the humiliating activities of mendicancy, Fogg spends his time in hallucinated internal colloquiums, or in repetitive games of cataloging, already patent in *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *Leviathan*, in contrast with the characters of *The Invention of Solitude* and *The Music of Chance*, who try to fill their empty spaces with writing or with the construction of work, even if that work is just a wall without an apparent purpose.

Fogg eventually withdraws to a natural cave in Central Park, a closed space of death, the apparent antithesis of the maternal womb, a closed space of life. The cave becomes an image of final solitude, a recurrence of the motif already announced in the room-

coffin, where Fogg had enclosed himself before he voluntarily buried himself in the cave-tomb. But the miracle occurs and Fogg, unlike Quinn, is saved *in extremis* and reborn to life: he is pulled out of the cave by his friends, as though in a birth, thus leaving that paradoxical womb of death, that metamorphic cocoon which would have annihilated him if he had insisted on staying there. The cave is comparable to the dark and secret depths of the mind, with a limited view of the exterior, a possible stage for a somber state of isolation. But it can also be the place for a resurrection, since the journey to the subterranean world is one of the archetypical imageries for the experience that precedes the birth of a new man. Relating both symbolisms, the imagery of the cave represents a descent to the unconscious that involves the death of the ego. Fogg, however, will only switch from a state of hibernation to one of apparent life.

In Fogg's peculiar biography, a transitional period of recovery in the company of Zimmer ensues, along with his discovery of Kitty Wu's love, with a curious annotation about the difficulties lovers face when there is no room available. However, his stay at Zimmer's house is short-lived and a new period follows, related to the move to a new interior space of work and residence. By leaving the room, Fogg also leaves Zimmer, who he will not see again until thirteen years later. Fogg's new room, at the house of a monomaniac who calls himself Thomas Effing, is as austere as a monk's cell. Once again, although without the extreme eccentricities of the previous room, books are the only decorative element. In this frugal setting, the re-aggregation of the protagonist will occur, through the construction of a written work, Effing's *Obituary in the Present Tense*, like the homonymous poem in *Ground Work* (GW 90)¹⁸. Fogg will fill the room with words, preventing it from turning back into a lethal white space, simultaneously exorcising death and the future fading of Effing's memory, through the elaboration of the extremely detailed obituary, a task in all aspects similar to that which triggered the writing of *The Invention of Solitude*. In both cases, words are a force in opposition to the emptiness of death. Effing, like Victor,

¹⁸ *Obituary in the Present Tense* (GW 90) possesses, besides its title, two passages which can point to the text of Moon Palace. "Egg white, the white / of his eye" brings to mind the episode of desperation brought about by the broken egg oozing on the floor at one of those moments of penury in the room of 112th West Street. But it is, without doubt, the verses "He memorizes / none of it. Nor does he write / anything down. He abstains / from the heart / of living things. He waits (...)" that best illustrate the nebulous trance experienced by Marco Fogg in his last days in the shelter of the room and during his drift through Central Park.

wants to be the author of his own biography, so he forges an identity and an obituary, while his crippled body points in another direction. He persistently demands descriptive precision, which raises linguistic and philosophical doubts in Fogg: there are no two identical objects, nor is any object identical to itself. Language deceives, in the same way it hounded Stillman, Quinn, or Blue in *The New York Trilogy*.

The motif of the cave will reoccur in the narrative in the story of the youth of Effing/Barber, Fogg's grandfather, a wild version, amidst the American wilderness, of the domesticated cave in the middle of Central Park in New York, the capital of the postmodern civilization. To gain access to the cave of renewal, Effing too had to go through a painful experience connoted with death. After being forced to bury his friend and travel companion Byrne with his own hands, Effing lets himself go insane, closed in himself and in the wild solitude of the lost canyon. Reaching the cave, Effing takes possession of the murdered hermit's identity and again embodies an identity which was by then nothing but a ghost, a shadow within those walls, revealing reminiscences of Plato's myth. For Effing, that was the beginning of the happiest period of his life, of inner peace and esthetic productivity. The cave was located in a sort of natural oasis, a small Eden in the West, as Central Park is located amidst the eastern urban jungle, spaces that are simultaneously open and closed, which grandfather and grandson fill with diverse activities. Effing fills solitude with the construction of works of painting and writing, which reorder his universe and existential chaos. Solitary writing is thus intimately connected to the esthetically ordered transcription of the world, in a process almost as visual as painting itself:

In one notebook he recorded his thoughts and observations, attempting to do in words what he had previously been doing in images (...) then he had found that writing could serve as an adequate substitute for making pictures. (...) He had descended so deeply into his solitude by then that he no longer needed any distractions. He found it almost unimaginable, but little by little the world had become enough for him (MP 171-172).

Yet, the power of solitude is dangerous and must be managed in a very cautious way, under the danger of becoming aggressively hermitic, by avoiding, often violently, contact with others, besides the always present danger of self-destruction by excessive seclusion, as in Fogg's case. After a certain moment, the cave where Effing had created a perfect cosmos becomes the equivalent of an impregnable fortress, which must be defended at any cost, even if that means killing or forever maintaining the lie

of a stolen identity, with all its subsequent anguish. Absolute solitude is always risky, since it is artificial, contrary to man's natural gregarious instinct. Without advocating for the ideologically motivated artist, Auster seems to point out the unsustainable artificiality of those who completely isolate themselves from surrounding reality, who close every door and every window to the world:

He had worked steadily for the past seven months at being alone, struggling to build his solitude into something substantial, an absolute stronghold to delimit the boundaries of his life, but now that someone had been with him in the cave, he understood how artificial his situation was (MP 176).

Effing then decides to leave the cave, that mental refuge and tomb of the past, closing another chapter of the book of life, which will continue to be written by Fogg, the unknown grandson. Listening to Effing's narrative, Fogg feels prophetically identified with his solitude, with the cave where he himself had lived: "I had my own memories of living in a cave, after all, and when he described the loneliness he had felt then, it struck me that he was somehow describing the same things I had felt" (MP 183). Both had visited the most remote of spaces, since they had confused the room and the cave with their entire being, identifying themselves with the walls surrounding them to exhaustion, until physical and mental annihilation. Both grandfather and grandson had closed themselves within themselves, in a claustrophobic solipsism which Fogg begins to realize after several days locked in a windowless room, smothered by Effing's haunting voice narrating its story of solitude: "As the days went by, the atmosphere in the house became more and more claustrophobic. (...) I began to live inside that voice as though it were a room, a windowless room that grew smaller and smaller with each passing day" (MP 183-184). Fogg lives inside the room and in the words hovering within it, building the book.

Finally, and as a result of the episode of the distribution of money in the streets of New York, Fogg comes to fully understand Effing's generous madness, as if he had finally entered a forgotten room of his own mind, with a secret passage in space-time to Effing's mind: "It was as though I had crossed some mysterious boundary deep within myself, crawling through a trapdoor that led to the innermost chambers of Effing's heart" (MP 213). Fogg entered his grandfather's cave, the cave of his mind, the same which, in times past, had materialized in the middle of the wild

West. The cave(s) where Effing, the artist of the image and of the word, created a universe, an identity, an art, where he was mad and from where he was reborn. The closed space, the mind, and the genesis of art are always interlinked in Paul Auster's writing.

In the room of the dying Effing, the final conciliation between grandfather and grandson (who are unaware of their family tie) will take place, in an atmosphere of friendship encouraged by the intimate space, anticipating the other scene of final conciliation, this time between a father and a son who recognize each other as such (Barber-Fogg), in the hospital room of the dying Solomon. Fogg fills time with words, with infinite stories, true or imaginary, and even with inventories of the objects in the room, in a last attempt to order the world around him, so as to soften Effing's last moments. Fogg feels that he has carried out an arduous task in that room, a work of words, of writing in the air, in the solitude of a space shared with a living-dead. But that virtual writing has, once again, the power to postpone the ghost of death and forgetfulness.

With Effing dead, and thanks to a new intervention of chance, Fogg will get to know his father, Solomon Barber, the solitary balloon-boy, locked inside his deformed body. The body can be a dungeon, a ghostly cave enclosing the unknown truth of the soul ("His body was a dungeon, and he had been condemned to serve out the rest of his days in it..." MP 240), and solitude can be lived inside the space of the books, as though they were rooms where Barber locks himself to get away from others and from himself. Out of the chaotic solitude of his existence, Barber emerges as a character immune to ridicule, with a new entity (like Effing, the father he never got to know), in an inner world created by him, as a result of his isolation: "By plunging into the chaos that inhabited him, he had become Solomon Barber at last, a personage, a someone, a self-created world unto himself" (MP 242).

The tradition of more or less hallucinated and death-connoted isolation runs deep in Fogg's family. Barber's mother too, the abandoned wife of Julian Barber, the first Effing, died insane after a life of voluntary incarceration in a room. The story of Barber's infancy blends with that of the house where his mother filled the emptiness of the room and of life with the most fantastic narratives, dictated by her madness. For Barber and for his descendants, the concept of home is a purely imaginary one,

the house is simply the destructive shell of a desperate childhood. In Fogg's company, Barber plans to seek Effing's cave, the enigmatic cave lost in the middle of the desert, closing in space the circle of time and generations. Fogg then summarizes the above mentioned spiritual dimension of the cave, so clearly symbolic that it casts doubt about its actual existence: "Even if there wasn't an actual cave, there was the experience of a cave. It all depends on how literally you want to take him" (MP 276). Very similarly, the reading of *The Locked Room* leads to a persistent doubt about Fanshawe's actual existence outside the narrator's mind. However, the project comes to an end when Barber, when his paternity to Fogg is revealed, falls to his death in the open tomb, enclosing himself alive in the ultimate walled space and establishing a partial parallel with *The Locked Room*, in which Fanshawe is inside an open tomb at the moment of his father's death. In *Moon Palace* it is the latter who falls into the tomb at the moment of his birth as a father. Fogg's identification as a son is so briefly inconsequent as the life of his own son. Since none of Fogg's actions leads to the construction of a finished system (from the *Obituary*, which was refused by every editor, to the drift across America, cut short by the theft of his car), the life he had planned together with Kitty Wu inevitably ends in a miscarriage.

At the ironic Eden Rock Hotel, Fogg experiences a rapid passage through hell, where he masterfully conjugates isolation with self- and hetero-destruction by vandalizing the room, since "If accommodations are provided in hell, I said to myself, this is what they would look like" (MP 302). Marco Fogg understands that, by using his will and determination, he is able to transform the existential fragments into an orderly system, a cosmogony. However, he remains immersed in a militant refusal to act in the face of chaos. At the end of the novel, Marco reaches the western end of the American continent and contemplates the emptiness stretching out without obstacles to the coast of China. He only wishes to keep looking at the world, even if the effort required by that looking makes him vulnerable and ignored as an individual, in a pure and neutral perception that Auster associates with Charles Reznikoff's poetry.

For the Austerian character struck by the discovery that the universe can become dominated by chaos and dissolution, the main question is how to react. Only when

imagination fights the chaos with new ideas and new cosmoi can the determinism of the everyday world be altered. Auster's writing shows us that nothing can stop the fragmentation of reality, but, thanks to the richness of imagination, new worlds can be born. In the 1974 essay *The Art of Hunger* (AH 9-25), Auster recognizes himself in a quote by Samuel Beckett:

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else... To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now (AH 19).

To Auster, as to Beckett, art must integrate chaos. And that is what the characters in Auster's fiction do, recognizing without hesitation the presence of chaos in their paths, from Anna Blume, who is never conquered by it, to Quinn and Marco Fogg, who irreparably dive in it. It is, then, necessary to admit the existence of chaos, to extract from it that which can survive it, and, ultimately, to use imagination to build a new cosmogony. It is necessary to understand the workings of the universe before fighting it with the power of creativity: that is the writer-character's task.

CONCLUSION

In the previously mentioned essay *The Art of Hunger*, Auster quotes Samuel Beckett, and, in doing so, defines his own ideological and literary orientation, reflecting a profound critical acuity and sense of artistic mission: “To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now” (AH 19). Throughout his work, Auster shows a rare talent for observing the human diversity, besides taking clear pleasure in the deconstruction and reformulation of language, as though immersed in the exploration of Beckett’s chaos. All his writing seems fascinated by the abstraction from reality and from experienced moments. But if Auster’s linguistic virtuosity may have its roots in French formalism, with which he had extensive contact, the underlying matter remains classically American, from the search for liberty at the expense of homogeneous normality, to the quixotic tests his characters impose on themselves, during the course of a trajectory that is bumpy but carefully engraved in space-time. Auster’s work presents sophisticated surfaces with a subliminal mythology, aside from a special predilection for tracing the sinuous and unpredictable paths of chance, as through there was a musical harmony in the chaotic tension of individual existence. In the journeys of his characters, Auster tries to apprehend how lonely or how multiple the human mind can be.

In Auster, the penchant for intertextuality and the theme of writing are not merely a fictional strategy. The relation between life and text is not a simple rhetorical metaphor. Life (which often is a recollection of other lives, as in *The Invention of Solitude*) is a text that must be written with the greatest urgency, while the wall of death does not surround the writer-character (the dominant variable), even if, fatally and finally, that text turns out to be the memory of other texts. In the solitude of life, close to the edge of annihilation, some words are aligned on the page, and written sentences start a dialogue with the pages of those who occupy or haunt other scenes of writing: “He finds a fresh sheet of paper. He lays it out on the table before him and writes these words with his pen. It was. It will never be again. Remember” (IS 172). In *In the Country of Last Things*, for instance, Auster achieved, with a cruel factuality that is evocative of Jonathan Swift, to build a world of demolished objects that we are immediately and painfully forced to recognize as our own world. The ancestors of such tales of an intolerable present, made viable through the dislocation to another context, make up a vast list that includes Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley’s

Brave New World and Beckett's *Endgame*. Auster shows that writing is a form of self-translation: he reflects metaphorically about his fictional doubles and ghosts, making that translation one of the central motifs of the book.

Inside the room of the book, Auster masterfully stages the writer's central dilemmas, dilemmas that are eternal and universal. To Blue's question "How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (NYT 169-170), the only decisive answer would be to leave the room that is the book. But to the writer, infinitely vulnerable to accusations of not meeting the ideological requirements enunciated in the writing, leaving the room is impossible: that would mean to stop writing. The imagery of the room is vital to Auster: even though every individual is seen as an isolated entity, a network of connections and correspondences that needs to be unveiled subsists. To fulfill this goal, it is necessary to plunge into the core of individual solitude and to order the chaos of chances and incoherent objects, keeping what makes sense and maintains a link with the surrounding world. Naturally, the possibility of absolute confinement, of refusing to look at the outside world, remains, but by choosing that attitude the writer-character is suffocating the part of himself that is the most alive. If the imagination generates fragmentation, the written work will never be able to codify the order of the new imaginary cosmos, establishing the connection between the room and the world.

In the course of his literary journey, Auster, based in New York, explores mysterious and unexpected areas such as solitude, doubles, the limits of language, paternal absence, death by progressive detachment from every desire and need, the role of the past, infinite enumeration, and chance. His way of addressing these complex obsessions is framed by a preference for the postmodern procedural game, not meaning by that that his work is limited to the current categorizations. His prose systematically tends toward austere simplicity, but it is not restricted to the characteristics of minimalism. Similarly, Auster has always escaped the simplification of the term "postmodern", since his exploration of the ambiguity of perception and identity bears the imprint of global modernity. Auster cultivates his art also as a means to find new meanings in experiences; Auster's writing is at the same time epistemology and ontology.

In the last paragraph of *City of Glass*, the narrator notes: “As for Auster, I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout” (NYT 132). The narrator is himself a critic, reminding us that this real-fictional character-writer, the apparent architect of the novel, has allowed his other characters to disappear without explanation, irreversibly fragmented his point of view, did not provide a solution to the intrigue, let his excessive determination result in indetermination, and allowed the narrative codes to converge in irreparable undecipherability. We thus observe how the Austerian postmodern novel parodies other genres, exposing the conventions in their forms and language. In Auster’s metafiction, we find a fundamental refusal of the notion of univocal classification, since metafiction is a process in constant motion, fiction in a state of metamorphosis. It could be the case that Auster’s apparently obsessive orientation towards epistemology would reduce the novel to an academic endeavor. However, literature possesses an intrinsic value that goes beyond the codification of dominant ideologies. Literature is aesthetically justified, and the fusion of theory and representation reveals and exercises the capacities and limitations of both aspects. Auster never manipulates his characters, because he knows he too is prey to the inner need to write, assigning to literature the role that Montaigne used to assign to philosophy: to learn to live.

The fictional plot may be the story of the quest for a vision, as in *City of Glass*, *Leviathan*, or *In the Country of Last Things*, perhaps reflecting Auster’s posture with respect to the nature of the postmodern condition. The reworking of the detective story as a search for the ultimate language shows that what is most appropriate to the postmodern world is not the final and specular textualization of reality but the text about the text. Stories about stories and books of questions instead of answers are the forms in which the difficult reality of our times is better embodied. *The New York Trilogy* participates in the deconstruction of the mythological tower of the ancestral city and of its language, describing the Babel-like fragmentation of the contemporary metropolis, in parallel with the postmodern crisis of linguistic representation. Its ideological structure of wandering and detachment with regard to preexisting canons puts the postmodern subject under the obligation of questioning the basic foundations of every mythical archetype. Auster’s novels evoke traditional logocentric ghosts (presence, reality, truth), which reflect the principle of inseparability between word

and meaning, only to dissolve that identity through a textual orientation that emphasizes fictionality and consequently reinforces the illusory effects of signification. Auster alters the mechanisms, thwarting the reader's expectations regarding the epilogue and textual transparency that a mimetic pact would imply. The resulting empty space imbues the text with the freedom of a plurality of meanings, which disperses all certainties and carries with it a cosmogonic/chaogonic power. Under the appearance of narrative fluency, Auster's writing hides the subversion of the basic premises of realist literature and of referential signs, in a fictionalized self-reflexive poetics about the structuring of an imaginary universe.

Auster's protagonists are self-exiled (locked in a room, in a book, or in themselves), vagabonds, and explorers of a country, of a closed space, or of a page, who conquer unknown regions through their writing. The character's attempt to name objects and to decipher signs is also the job of the ontological traveler, as adventures only exist in the language that narrativizes them. Since language is unstable and its meanings are imprecise, no space can be completely occupied by its discoverer. The uncertainty of language also negates the self-discovering traveler access to the absolute origin, the ultimate identity of the subject, the final locked room. The semantic journey never reaches its destination, since it consists in an endless spiral of arrivals and departures, of travels in space and time. The multitude of orientations results in an infinite referential framework which continually alters the spatial meaning for the traveler of the imaginary universe. In Auster's writing, objects and the language of the mental processes that conceptualize those same objects are often indistinguishable:

(...) the beating
drum of words
within, so many words

lost in the wide world
within me, and thereby to have known
that in spite of myself

I am here.

As if this were the world.

(...) For the crumbling of the earth
underfoot

is a music in itself, and to walk among these
stones
is to hear nothing
but ourselves.

(...)
then count out my life
in these stones: forget
I was ever here. The world
that walks inside me

is a world beyond reach.

In Memory of Myself (GW 97)

Quarry (GW 80)

From the space dominated by stones, we hear the voice of the writer-character, as though they had taken upon themselves the task of narrating his solitary and silent journey. The stones, the wall, and the room (the words, the page, and the book) ontologically structure the imaginary cosmos generated by Paul Auster's mind, like a real world born of a magma of words contained in another, interior, world.

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INDEX:

ABBREVIATIONS USED

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I – STONES AND WALLS: THE MUSIC OF WORDS

CHAPTER II – THE ROOM THAT IS THE BOOK: THE WRITTEN

COSMOGENESIS

CHAPTER III – THE GENESIS OF NOTHINGNESS IN THE SPACE OF CHAOS

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Bibliography

Secondary Bibliography

Abstract

The crime of tax evasion in relation to VAT

Economic actors are required to deliver to the state the taxes paid by their customers, as otherwise they would be breaching a relationship of institutional trust and committing a crime of tax evasion.

The question we want to analyze is whether the non-payment of the output tax to the state is, according to art. 105 of the General Regime on Tax Infractions [*Regime Geral das Infrações Tributárias*] (RGTI), a crime of tax evasion, classified as a continuous crime, and whether it also qualifies as a crime of breach of trust under the definition established in art. 205 of the Penal Code of Portugal [*Código Penal*] (PC).

The analysis of article 105, paragraph 1, relates it to a simple crime, and paragraph 5 refers to a crime that is aggravated due to its consequences, which depend on the amount that was not paid. Paragraph 4 imposes a sanction if there is a delay of more than 90 days in the payment. Failure to pay within that period is a tax infraction according to art. 114 RGTI.

The non-payment of taxes constitutes a breach of the fiduciary relationship between the taxpayers and the state (relating to the subjective element). This breach of trust involves an act of recklessness or willful negligence, covered by art. 14 of the PC - direct, necessary and possible.

Conflict of interest or duties related to the contractual obligations of the company cannot be used as a defense against the accusation of tax evasion. The obligation to pay taxes takes precedence over the fulfillment of any contractual obligations.

Also, fiscal sanctions cannot be concurrent with the penalties of the general law, or there would be a violation of the *ne bis in idem* principle and of the specialization of criminal sanctions principle. A breach of tax liability cannot be subject to the simultaneous application of ordinary criminal law and tax criminal law. Such positive conflict can be resolved using the *lex specialis derogat legi generali* principle, which applies the special tax law instead of the general law.

Regarding its classification as a continuous crime, as defined in paragraph 2 of art. 30 of the PC, the question that arises is whether a series of tax offenses can be seen as a single continuous infraction, where the applicable penalty corresponds to the most serious infraction in that series. It is also necessary to verify if the continuous failure to pay is due to serious and urgent financial problems, and whether we are in the presence of a single crime of tax evasion, whose penalty results from the joint application of art. 71 of the PC and art. 13 of the RGTI.

In conclusion, when a VAT taxable person receives from his costumers the output tax and does not deliver it within the statutory period, he commits a crime of tax evasion, as established in art. 105 of the RGTI. Repeated failure to pay the tax is a continuous infraction, in accordance with article 30, paragraph 2, of the PC, which the doctrine and the jurisprudence hold to be applicable to Tax Criminal Law.

The crime of tax evasion, when committed continuously, is therefore subject to art. 105 of the RGTI in conjunction with art. 12 and 13 of RGTI, and also art. 40, 70, 71 and 79 of the PC, in accordance with art. 3 (a) of the RGTI, besides the obligation of delivering the tax to the State, as mandated in art. 9 of the RGTI.