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# PAUL AUSTER AND AUGUST BRILL'S SOLITARY ROOMS: THE SPATIALITY OF SOLITUDE<sup>1</sup>

Ru Chen<sup>2</sup>

Song Liu<sup>3</sup>


Jiaxin Lin<sup>4</sup>


Muhammad Khail Kan<sup>5</sup>


**Abstract:** For Paul Auster, a room is in essence “the substance of solitude itself”, a spatially defined solitude. In this respect, the phenomenon has transcended its physical limitations and assumed existential and philosophical significance. In his writings, a room is first and foremost an architectural space that a solitary writer occupies. Besides, it is metaphorized as the mind that is the room – an intellectually constructed space; and lastly, it is a place narrated in his stories where his characters meditate and compose, a space that exists in words. This paper studies Auster's life writings and one of his fictions, *Man in the Dark*, to present the complexity of the three forms of solitary rooms and their mutual inclusion in intersubjective solitude.


**Keywords:** Paul Auster. Rooms. The spatiality of solitude. Intersubjectivity. *Man in the Dark*.

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<sup>2</sup> Ph. D. School of Foreign Studies, Guangdong University of Finance & Economics, Guangzhou 510655 – China.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2826-2147>. E-mail: dannyr\_chen\_cuhk@163.com.

<sup>3</sup> Ph. D. School of Foreign Studies, Hunan University of Finance & Economics, Changsha 41000 – China/ College of English and Foreign Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100089 – China.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2248-4283>. E-mail: songjay@hnu.edu.cn.

<sup>4</sup> Professor. School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an 710072 – China.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1987-8281>. E-mail: jasonlin@gdufe.edu.cn.

<sup>5</sup> Ph. D. The Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Islamabad 999010 – Pakistan.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3580-5461>. E-mail: MKKan2022@21cn.com.

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## INTRODUCTION

Paul Auster strives to make sense of solitude as “[...] one of the conditions of being human” (ADAMO, 2002, p. 32), which is a dominant theme for him in *The Invention of Solitude*, *The New York Trilogy*, *Man in the Dark*, *Winter Journal* and beyond. In essence, Auster is a solitary writer who spends a large amount of time in a room, deep in meditation. Drawing inspiration from the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, author argues that truly transcendental solitude is only possible if a complete separation between self and other, subject and object exists. As long as we are aware of our separation from the other, we are in relation to what is other than the self and thus cannot claim our solitary state. In this case, solitude is “intersubjective” on account that any individual’s perception of the self essentially depends on his perception.

Combing through Paul Auster’s life, writings, and fiction, one will find the solitary room, in its architectural, mental, and narrative existence projects uncompromising complexities. For Auster, a room is in essence “the substance of solitude itself”, a spatially defined solitude. In this respect, it has transcended its physical limitations and assumed existential and philosophical significance. Moreover, his multifaceted exploration of the room adds additional depth to his journey into solitude. A room, primarily, is an architectural construction that accommodates a solitary writer. Additionally, it is one of the most frequently depicted substances in Auster’s fiction. Then, a room is also metaphorically constructed as a writer’s mind, where her/his thoughts and memories are contained. In Auster’s examination of the spatiality of solitude, the three representations of rooms always constitute an interlocked trio, manifesting solitude in collective intersubjectivity – the relation and intersection between people’s cognitive perspectives.

The following sections will firstly examine Auster’s life writings before proceeding to analyze one of his novels in an attempt to draw a preliminary picture of the mutual inclusion and transformation among the three forms of solitary rooms and the intersubjectivity (ALFORD, 1995, p. 13). The authors combined data to demonstrate in the Table (Table 1).

Table 1 - A list of Paul Auster’s major works of fiction and life-writing

Title	Fiction/ <i>Non-fiction</i>		Year of Publication	Three Dimensions of Solitary Rooms		
	Fiction	<i>Non-fiction</i>		Architectural	Mental	Narrative
<i>The Invention of Solitude</i>		●	1982	●	●	●
“City of Glass”	●		1985	●	●	●
“Ghosts”	●		1986	●	●	●
“The Locked Room”	●		1987	●	●	●
<i>In the Country of Last Things</i>	●		1987	●	●	
<i>Moon Palace</i>	●		1989	●	●	●
<i>The Music of Chance</i>	●		1990	●	●	
The Art of Hunger		●	1992	●	●	●
<i>Leviathan</i>	●		1992	●	●	●
<i>Mr. Vertigo</i>	●		1994		●	
A Red Notebook		●	1995	●	●	●
<i>Hand to Mouth</i>		●	1997	●	●	●
<i>Timbuktu</i>	●		1999		●	
<i>The Book of Illusions</i>	●		2002	●	●	●
<i>Oracle Night</i>	●		2003	●	●	●
<i>Brooklyn Follies</i>	●		2005	●	●	●
<i>Travels in the Scriptorium</i>	●		2006	●	●	●
<i>Man in the Dark</i>	●		2008	●	●	●
<i>Invisible</i>	●		2009	●	●	●
Winter Journal		●	2012	●	●	●
<i>Report from the Interior</i>		●	2013	●	●	●
<i>4321</i>	●		2017	●	●	●

Source: (ALFORD, 1995, p. 15)

1 PAUL AUSTER’S SOLITARY ROOMS

*The Oxford Dictionary of English* presents a succinct definition for “solitude” as the state or situation of being alone. Philosopher Philip Koch, in *Solitude, A Philosophical Encounter*, establishes that solitude, along with aloneness, isolation, alienation, and privacy, is a state of mentality/condition of aloneness. In another study, authors proposed that solitude differs from its fellow modalities in terms of its capacity of encompassing various and contradictory emotions, its nature as a free choice of the will, and its inherent

exclusion of others in consciousness. Aside from being a lonely state, it has been discussed as a “realm”, a “room”, or a “world”, a place that is constructed by an individual in her/his mind, where she/he has spiritual, psychological and philosophical experiences significantly different from what she/he has in a real society. Besides, writers and philosophers have been known to willingly confine themselves in a room to live in utter solitude. Though the “room” featured in mental tranquility and the real room with architectural details differ in many ways. They are nonetheless closely related as “the room of solitude”.

In many cases, writers and thinkers choose to stay in a room of solitude to achieve inner peace and self-knowledge. For instance, Montaigne (2003, p. 201) explained rigorously why elderly men who have already served their society and family should retire to solitude, suggests the following:

We should set aside a room, just for ourselves [...], keeping it entirely free and establishing there our true liberty, our principal solitude, and asylum. Within it, our normal conversation should be of ourselves, with ourselves, so privy that no commerce or communication with the outside world should find a place there [...] 2005. (AUSTER, 2014, p. 270).

In this sense, a room of solitude is a place for individuals who have been suppressing their feelings and emotions all their lives to reveal their true selves. It is also pertinent to mention that it is a space where an individual steps back to look into her/his life, detaching herself/himself from others' gazes in the attainment of equilibrium.

Similarly, Auster perceives his experience of solitude greatly in connection to solitary rooms, where he is frequently blessed with the euphoria of creativity and in-depth contemplation while occasionally agonized by loneliness and self-doubt. Accounts of experiences with a room of solitude are prolific in his life writings, especially in *The Invention of Solitude* and *Winter Journal*, in which he realizes that his solitude has never been fully contained even with the restrictions of solid, enclosed walls (ALLEN, 2020, p. 15; FOUCAULT, 1986, p. 22). While *The Invention of Solitude* approaches the spatial dimension of solitude from multiple intertextual readings of the rooms once occupied by Van Gogh, Dickinson, Ann Frank, Hölderlin, and many others, *Winter Journal*, a memoir that embarks on a journey of the body, covers sixty-three years of his life, with “twenty stopping places, then, a score of addresses leading to the one address that may or may not prove

to be permanent". Detailed accounts of his solitary rooms, serene moments contemplating the relationship between "body" and "writing," as well as the revelation of his several near-death encounters all facilitate an understanding of his embodied consciousness which starts from his sensual and physical experiences. The records are plain and mundane. Together the reservoir was built for embodied experiences, nurturing his solitary endeavors in writing.

Auster argues that a room is "not a representation of solitude", but "the substance of solitude itself". In other words, the room in itself signifies the solitude materialized into spatial existence. By equating a real room with the substance of solitude, he defined his solitude with an architectural signification and endows his room, originally a substantial construction, with intersubjective and intellectual details. Now a room is not simply a space occupied by a writer, but the philosophical existence of a writer's mind. Through this actualization of the mind, Auster explains the conundrum of staying in a room that is one's mind, depicting the bleak days in the room at Varick Street when he felt reluctant to go out:

By staying in this room for long stretches at a time, he can usually manage to fill it with his thoughts, and this in turn seems to dispel the dreariness, or at least make him unaware of it. 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, which takes real spiritual work. (AUSTER, 1998, p. 342).

Auster's identity is carried by the brick and concrete building, and he dreads leaving it much. He even goes so far as to identify the actual room with his psychological and spiritual substance, speaking of the contemplative work he has to engage in after leaving the room unattended. After spending long duration of time in a "room" that is his mind and the actual architectural substance that holds his physical form, Auster imagined transformation and/or substitution between the two. Gradually, he is convinced that the act of departure would undo his intellectual inhabitation of space, the restoration of which would demand tremendous effort. Facing such a dilemma between inward exploration and outward adventure, he proposes memory as the channel to unite solitudes in epistemological and perceptual communication.

Memory as a place, as a building, as a sequence of columns, cornices, porticoes. The body inside the mind, as if we were moving around in there,

going from one place to the next, and the sound of our footsteps as we walk, moving from one place to the next.

Interpreted spatially and substantiated into a “place”, memory accommodates the world, the objects in it, and the body itself; moreover, as a product of bodily perceptions and mental activities, memory constitutes a container for such perceptions and activities. It is then rendered in an intersubjective capacity when Auster maintains that “[...] memory is not simply as the resurrection of one’s private past, but an immersion in the past of others.” (ALLOA, 2019, p. 157). In other words, with the faculty of memory, the boundaries between the spatially defined solitary realms are therefore traversable with a willingness to embrace one’s situation in memories. The individuals in solitude are bound to engage in communication with other embodied consciousness. The boundaries between the spatially defined solitary realms are therefore traversable with a willingness to embrace one’s situation in memories. They are not isolated architectural existence; instead, they indicate relation, connection, and transformation. With the writer’s endeavor of creative writing, the solitary room constitutes a site capable of including seemingly incompatible times, places, acts, and entities in an exhilarating interplay.

To a certain extent, Auster’s notion of “room”, in its interconnective and encompassing manifestations, resonates with Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec’s exploration of “space”. In “Of Other Spaces” (ALLOA, 2019, p. 165), Foucault and Miskowiec expound that the space we occupy is never a kind of “void” where individuals and things are placed; instead, we live in “a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and not superimposable on one another”. Emphasizing the relational nature of space, they propose the concept of “heterotopias” – places that can be found within culture but are not confined to any places, which are “[...] simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” (AUSTER, 1998, p. 342). The two scholars have come forward with several principles. To begin with, heterotopias are not privy to any culture but are instead prevalent among all civilizations. Secondly, heterotopias can function differently as history evolves. An example is presented regarding the changes in locations of “cemeteries” and how they have developed from a symbol of sacred resurrection to an emphasis on individual privacy, blood affiliation, and social rank. Thirdly, heterotopias are “[...] capables of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.” (AUSTER, 1998, p. 356). For example,

the garden, as a microcosm of different geographical and climatological environments, mimics the diversity of nature and accommodates plants from a wide range of habitats. Then the fourth type of heterotopia is the heterotopia of time, in which completely different objects from different eras are put together to show the integrity of time. Museums, in their endeavor to capture and preserve exhibitions of diverse periods, belong here. Foucault and Miskowiec have yet summarized several other forms of heterotopias, such as libraries, holiday villages, and amusement parks, all of which are featured by a concentration and accumulation of times, natural ways of life, and intense experiences in a single locus (BALSHAW, 1999, p. 404).

A comparison between Auster's "room" and Foucault and Miskowiec's "heterotopia" might lead to the conclusion that both conceptions are spaces rooted in culture and reality. They are not independent architectures. Instead, they indicate relation, connection, and transformation. In addition, complexity and constant evolvment mark both concepts, as "room" in Auster's interpretation constitutes a space that is encompassing enough to hold both inner examination and outward excursion. With the writer's endeavor of creative writing, the solitary room constitutes a site capable of including seemingly incompatible times, places, acts, and entities in an exhilarating interplay. Hence, his notion of "room" can be seen as a particular representation of heterotopia in its interrelating inclusiveness.

Exploring the spatiality of solitude, Auster strikes a relation between his mind – an intellectually constructed room that holds his memories, and a spatially structured room that contains his physical existence, as he proposes, "Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits. As in the image: 'a man sat alone in his room'." This philosophical notion of reciprocal containment constitutes the essence of Auster's interpretation of a solitary mind. On the one hand, his mind functions as a container of his recollections of the past, supporting his literary creation and expanding the infinite possibilities of intersubjective connections; on the other, his mind which is the "room" is also included in the tangible room with four walls. In essence, a solitary "room", in its varied manifestations, is inclusive and encompassing, and accordingly, the notion of "room", when put under examination in Auster's texts, should never be perceived as a merely isolated space where a writer is located.

When Auster's conception of solitude is discussed in terms of the interrelation between "room" and "mind", an essential piece – the physical



body, deserves particular attention. A writer, or any individual in a room, is indifferent to the excitement, tranquility, or torment in solitude without a mind solidly posited in her/his body. To feel and contemplate any thoughts, emotions, and experiences conjectured in the room, she/he must first and foremost situate in a tangible body. In this sense, Auster's spatial solitude is essentially "embodied". When a solitary individual walks in a room, ruminates on her/his past, and writes down her/his words, her/his solitude within the room unfolds and disseminates, becoming perceivable and meaningful. In this sense, even with limited space, these solitary "rooms" show great potential. In conclusion, with the embodied consciousness, an individual is endowed with infinite interaction even in the most solitary room.

The subsequent perceptions of interrelations slacken the boundaries between the room and the outside, leaving the embodied subject – a paradoxical experience of constraint and freedom. In this sense, a room of solitude, in the experience of body-mind unity, expresses simultaneously agonizing restriction of containment and immense freeness of transcendence.

The duality of solitary rooms is further discussed in the passage about S.'s room in Paris, which exhibits a confined space with no bounds. At first sight, the room was too small to accommodate even one person comfortably – its existence defied being entered, without contracting your mind to some infinitely small point within itself." He got settled in the room. Auster was surprised by how much the tiny room could sustain and inspire, realizing that no matter how contorted S.'s body needed to be to adapt to the size of the room, he "managed to surround himself with the things there were inside him," for this room that is hardly bigger than a body. In this description, S.'s room has assumed intersubjective importance, symbolizing a spot where inward inquiry and outward ventures are unified. It is at once claustrophobic (to the body) and inititely generative (to the mind), seemingly circumscribed and yet spacious with liberating intersubjectivity. For someone like S., whose existential perceptions can transcend the limitation of the immediate architectural restrictions, the mutual transformation between the incommodious room and the expansive mind indicates vigorous development of meanings. With a renewed vision, Auster exclaims:

The room he lived in was a dream space, and its walls were like the skin of some second body around him as if his own body had been transformed into a mind, a breathing instrument of pure thought. This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of the imagination. By placing

himself in that darkness, S. had invented a way of dreaming with open eyes. (BOETTECHER, 2013, p. 221).

Auster's notion of spatial solitude is fundamentally based on the embodied subject. The mutual transformation between "wall" and "skin", as well as "body" and "mind", must be firmly situated in the "embodied" consciousness in order to achieve living experience that originates one's perceptual contemplation from corporeal and physical activities. From the very rootedness in the body, existential experience, acquisition, and exploration cultivate imaginations in solitude, which in turn transcends the boundaries between here and there, solitude and communication.

Such an existential paradox constitutes the inexorable union of inner and outer that accompanies every heartbeat of a person from birth until death." (MERLEAU, 1964, p. 311). Self-knowledge is never structured solely by inner search or outward interaction. Its construction depends on interrelating multiplicities, taking into account the relation between mind and body and their respective connection to the world. The mutual conversion between the intellectually and architecturally constructed rooms is only made possible based on Auster's phenomenological understanding of his mental and carnal existence. On the one side, a room accommodates a solitary individual, providing substantial asylum for both her/his body and mind. On the other side, his mind, as an embodied mental entity, contains the boundless immensity of images and texts, including the room itself. In Auster's examination of solitude and its spatial manifestations, the room where the solitary writer posits and the encompassing embodied consciousness constitute an interconnected duo; their mutual containment is a key to comprehending the inclusiveness and transcendence of his notion of solitude.

The conversion between the embodied mind and the solitary room is often facilitated by solitary writing. In yet another of his analyses of the rooms of solitary minds, Auster recalls the experience of walking into Emily Dickinson's chamber and his rumination on the poet's extremely productive seclusion, in which she composed over 1,700 poems: "For if words are a way of being in the world, [...] then even if there were no world to enter, the world was already there, in that room, which means it was the room that was present in the poems and not the reverse." To a certain extent, Dickinson's "world" is narrow and limited on account of her self-enforced isolation – she has "no world to enter" because she refuses to leave her room. However, with

her embodied mind engaged in literary creations, Dickinson's solitary room is easily crowded with intersubjective interaction and encounters, to the extent that the "world was already there". Solitary writing is Dickinson's way of being in the world, thus, she could easily encompass the world in her poetic endeavors.

Likewise, as a fellow writer, Auster finds meditation in a room, as sedentary and unproductive as it may seem, serves as the starting point where he embarks on a journey to know the world. He insisted, "He cannot be anywhere until he is here", after he is "here". He is free to go anywhere with his recollections and imaginative powers. Such intersubjective encounters would eventually breach the boundaries between solitudes, engaging the solitary mind in communication with other writers:

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. But surely that is impossible. For once a solitude has been breached, once a solitude has been taken on by another, it is no longer solitude, but a kind of companionship. (AUSTER, 2005, p. 115).

Transcendence among solitary rooms issituated primarily in corporeality. As an embodied subject engaging simultaneously in the act of observation and translation, he conceives his interaction with the other writer a convergence of prevalent signifiers, which enables outward expedition in the confinement of a solitary room. More significantly, the embodied experience does not cease as he finally enters another person's solitude, for there is no "replacement", "substitution" or "taking on the other's solitude as one's own". Instead this, the solitary rooms become communal, communicative and interrelated. Auster thence announces, "Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two.

The above complexities regarding the spatiality of solitude stem mainly from Auster's multi-layered interpretations of the notion of "room", which have been embodied in at least three dimensions in his life writings and fictions. In the following section, one of Auster's fictions, *Man in the Dark*, is to be analyzed in an exploration of the expansive, collective, interactive intersubjectivity of solitude (BROWN, 2007, p. 371).

## 2 AUGUST BRILL'S SOLITARY ROOMS

In his 2008 novel *Man in the Dark*, Auster explores the transformation of the solitary rooms from the architectural, narrative, and mental dimensions (CROSSLEY, 2013, p. 46). An insomniac writer who is imprisoned to his isolated mind and one of his characters who is forced to face the author's overpowering power set up the conflict, particularly on the narrative level. The story begins with evasion of the unbearable past (EVINK, 2013, p. 13). The plot is staged in one room – a room of solitude inhabited by an old, lonely, insomniac writer. August Brill, is a 72-year-old retired book critic and Pulitzer winner, and as the title of the book indicates, he is in essence “a man in the dark”, tortured by insomnia induced by an urge to escape from “the things I would prefer to forget”. The house that August lives in is, in principle, a pertinent representation of a house of loneliness, where the three inhabitants are ridden with guilt, sadness, and self-depreciation. When the night is still young, lying in bed wide-awake. August contemplates:

I am alone in the dark, turning the world around in my head as I struggle through another bout of insomnia, another white night in the great American wilderness. Upstairs, my daughter and granddaughter are asleep in their bedrooms, each one alone as well, the forty-seven-year-old Miriam, my only child, who has slept alone for the past five years, and the twenty-three-year-old Katya, Miriam's only child, who used to sleep with a young man named Titus Small, but Titus is dead now, and Katya sleeps alone with her broken heart. (MARRATTO, 2012, p. 61).

“Struggle”, “alone”, and “broken” – are the words he uses to describe the life experience of his household (KHAZAEI, 2015, p. 211). What aggravates August's agony and binds him corporeally to his solitary room is his physical condition. Severely injured in a car incident, he is mostly confined in his wheelchair and bedroom, making him an epitome of “a writer in a solitary room”.

Following the first layer of solitude – the architectural solitude that is the room, Auster presents the second modality, which is a solitary room in narration. Set upon self-damnation, August spends his sleepless nights alone in his mind, creating a story of massive destruction. He embarked on a project unfamiliar to his old critical self, in which a story of parallel worlds is in motion, simply to the story and then see what happens if I make it to the end. August projects himself in one of the frame worlds, assuming the exact

identity as August, in reality, namely, a writer in solitude. In this world that resembles highly the one where August lives, the sad catastrophe of 911 and the war in Iraq both remain. Then, a second and parallel world, deviating narratively from the imagination of August in the first one, is broken into two Americas – the Federals and the Independent States of America (KOCH, 1994, p. 264). In these worlds, August indulges himself in an examination of a writer's spatially constructed solitudes and explores the multiple realities all writers have to encounter and embrace. In the meantime, the two “realities” created by August are a narrative experiment by the author, Paul Auster, to test the varied possibilities the country has to face after George W. Bush takes on presidential responsibilities. Outright with his dissatisfaction, Auster expressed his doubts about President Bush in *The Brooklyn Follies*, saying, through one of his characters, “We’re marching backward. [...] every day, we lose another piece of our country.” (LI, 2019, p. 24). If Bush is elected, there won’t be anything left.” This strong repulsion and the ominous prediction are then substantiated in August’s mental writing, where the two parallel worlds suffer the unsatisfactory, non-convincing governance of the Bush administration to various degrees.

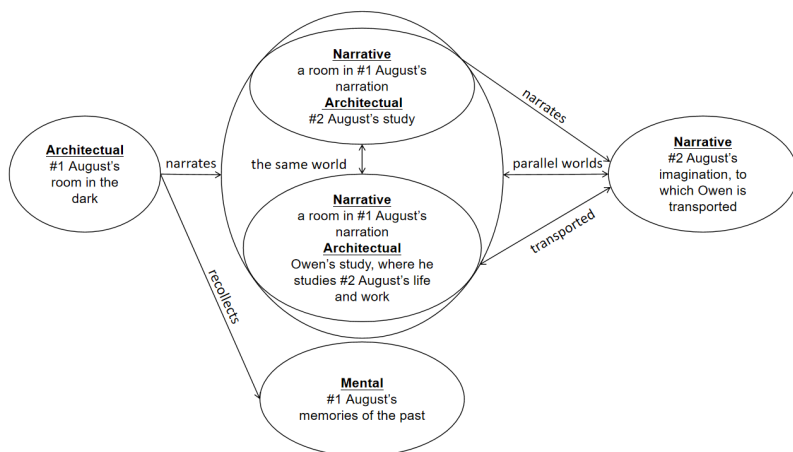
One crucial character bridges the two narrative worlds. Owen Brick, a magician in his late twenties, has been unwittingly transported from one world to the other. In the world where he comes from, just as in August’s world (and in Auster’s world as well), Bush launches an anti-terrorist invasion of Iraq, whereas, in the world to which Owen is transmitted, though the twin towers stand erect, the Iraq War has never happened, thirteen states sever their connection with the Bush Administration and declare independence (LOW, 2013, p. 199). As a harmless, gentle-tempered magician, Owen is utterly surprised when he finds himself lying on his back in a cylindrical hole. Owen assumes he must have been attacked and lost some of his memory. But he is soon disillusioned when he is rescued by Sergeant Tobak, who informs him of the impossible situation he has been thrown into – he is now in an alternative world where America is at war with America, and he is to accept the mission of killing the originator of the chaos, August Brill (MARRATTO, 2012, p. 364). The tension thickens when Owen is told by yet another stranger, special agent Lou Frisk, about the intricate relationship he has with his creator: Owen is a character created by August and transported to the turbulent world with the American civil war, and meanwhile, he exists in the same world with August, making it possible for him, once transmitted back to the original world, to conduct an assassination to end August’s imaginary blast.

Owen is agonizingly confounded by the co-existence of his textual self-created from a room of solitude and his corporeal experience in an open field, not to mention the interconnection between an “actual” world and a textually constructed one (MILDORF, 2019, p. 125). Sensing his confusion, Frisk tries to enlighten him on the possibility of multiple realities, challenging, “Are we in the real world or not?” Perplexed and frightened, Owen can only answer: “How should I know? Everything sounds real. I’m sitting here in my own body, but at the same time I can’t be here, can I? I belong somewhere else.” (MARRATTO, 2012, p. 42). Convinced of his existence as an embodied subject, Owen tries to distinguish reality from fantasy by arguing that his perception and comprehension are firmly based on his physical senses and his bodily relation to the world. However, his vivid memories remind him of another life, and he is baffled by his seemingly equal rootedness in both “realities”. To relieve Owen from his current bewilderment, Frisk expounds on the fictionality of reality:

There’s no single reality, Corporal. There are many realities. There’s no single world. There are many worlds, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds, and each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world. Each world is the creation of a mind. (MARRATTO, 2012, p. 69).

The parallelism between the real world and the mentally created universes testifies to the sturdy unity between body and mind. While Owen posits his understanding of existence in his embodied connection, he is a product of a writer’s creative mind. In this sense, August Brill lives in a world created by Paul Auster, whose existence is largely subject to another individual’s imagination (MONTAIGNE, 2003, p. 201). The ceaseless chain of creation announces the dual nature of fictionality-actuality in every individual. In addition, it exposes writing as the very embodiment of the mind-body duo in action. Subsequently, a writer in solitude is on an ever-transcending journey, to the extent that even when she/he is confined in spatial solitude, she/he can still traverse the boundaries between narratively and mentally structured worlds (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – The architectural, narrative, and mental dimensions in *Man in the Dark*



Source: (MONTAIGNE, 2003, p. 212)

In yet another regard, *Man in the Dark* is an exploration of the author-reader-character triad as posited in the solitary room. To a certain extent, August (and Auster as well) exerts great authority, at least initially, over his characters, projecting his political setbacks on their sufferings. Galia Benziman, in her studies of *Man in the Dark*, summarizes that the controversial leadership of George W. Bush is represented as a failed figure of authority that induces catastrophe in the parallel worlds (PANZANI, 2011, p. 76). In August's world, Bush's decision to invade Iraq leads to the death of Titus, and in his psychological fiction, the dissent regarding the results of the 2000 presidential election initiates a bloody, brutal civil war. Ironically, while blatantly denouncing the Bush administration and its mistakes, August deliberately invents himself as another highly despicable, authoritative figure who masterminds a war that endangers the lives of millions. But his intention is soon revealed, when he invites his character, Owen, to terminate the destruction through an act of textual patricide (PEACOCK, 2010, p. 64). Designing the communication between the parallel worlds and deliberately slackening his authority, August welcomes his characters to explore unexpected outcomes, while at the same time venting his long-harbored self-disgust.

August's characters in the frame world are well aware of their author's existence and their fictionality. When Sergeant Tobak attempts to persuade Owen of the necessity of the assassination, he explains why the brutal war is but a figment of the old man's imagination. Then, he further demonstrates his point of view and proposes a plan to revert the situation, with an explication that August is.

God, Corporal, just a man. He sits in a room all day writing it down, and whatever he writes comes true. The intelligence reports say he's racked with guilt, but he can't stop himself. If the bastard had the guts to blow his brains out, we wouldn't have this conversation.

The characters' knowledge of their creator has given them a variety of choices in manipulating the plot development. They understand they cannot cross the boundaries of the text and be transported to the world where the author lives; but at the same time, they can get in touch with a person who can bridge the gap by being rooted in both realms. With this lever, the characters are far from helpless or passive.

Originally, a controlled character, Owen showed strong initiative in investigating and interacting with his inventor. Instead of either submitting to the fictionality of his existence or accepting the orders from the independent states to carry out the assassination, he steps back and questions the feasibility of the patricidal scheme (PRIEST, 1998, p. 131). And as a magician by profession, Owen is unenlightened by the complicated rules of metafiction; nor is he equipped with any knowledge regarding the intricate interrelationship between the creator and the creation. Impervious to the crude solution allegedly designed by the author, Owen determines to personally examine the old man after he returns to the world where he lives. He starts reading the book reviews written by August, and every time he comes across an article about a book that sounds interesting, he checks it out of the library. With his active participation in textual communication, the thin line between the narrative and architectural dimensions of the solitary room is blurred. His endeavor to breach the walls of the author's solitary reading/writing eventually leads to his intended confrontation with August. He entertains the possibility of driving up to Vermont and discussing with him the issue at hand. What he fails to envision is that, with all the initiation and freedom he has been granted, he is essentially a character under close surveillance (SIEGUMFELDT, 2020, p. 35). Even his strong interest in his author's literary output and his eager endeavor to establish a tie are initiated, anticipated, and overseen by his



creator, who decides. “It seems important that my hero should get to know me a bit, to learn what kind of man he’s up against, and now that he’s dipped into some of the books I’ve recommended. Thus, we have finally begun to establish a bond”. Accordingly, it is no wonder just when Owen’s plan of the meeting is going to be carried out with Virginia Blaine’s help, both of them are blown to pieces in a fierce attack by the Federal troops, while in reality August Brill is awake, lying in bed and staring into the dark. And the war goes on.

Owen’s abrupt death engineered by August in his dark and gloomy solitary insomnia appears to be an ultimate betrayal of the interplay between various dimensions of spatial solitude in the reestablishment of authorial dominance. However, it is argued that August terminates his fictional narrative because he realizes the meaninglessness of being closed and isolated and the need to engage himself in the mind that is solitude and embrace his memory collectively and continuously. August’s ending of the self-referential narration is thereupon conceived as an attempt to knit himself into intersubjective communication in solitude.

The French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, discussing the futility of pursuing transcendental solitude, advances “[...] we are truly alone only on the condition that we do not know we are; it is this very ignorance which is our solitude [Accordingly] the solitude from which we emerge to intersubjective life is not that of the monad.” (TALLY, 2013, p. 54). Truly transcendental solitude is only possible when a separation between self and other or between subject and object exists. If we are aware of our separation from others, we are still about things other than ourselves, we cannot claim that we are in a lonely state. Denouncing the Cartesian dichotomy, he concludes, that even though solitude is considered a solipsistic practice, it is in essence “intersubjective” on account that any individual’s perception of the self essentially depends on his perception of others, and hence, there would be no precedence of individuation over intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty proposes to resonate strongly with August’s enlightenment. Even when he plunges into the darkest moments of solitude and distances himself on purpose from his memories, he fails to deny the existence of “others” once and for all. For one thing, his effort to escape the torturous images of the beheaded Titus is defeated by his uncontrollable imagination of an America devastated by the brutality of war; and for another, his escapement from the painful thoughts of his wife is compromised by Virginia Blaine’s projection – his first love, and Owen the magician – a reflection of his infidelity. In this sense, his seemingly enclosed isolation in the dark is still inevitably intersubjective despite his determined resistance.

*Man in the Dark* lasts for 180 pages, and the embedded story about Owen Brick ends on page 118, which symbolizes the third layer of spatial solitude – the embrace of the solitary mind that is a room of intersubjective existence. Following his war-ridden fiction, August's recollections are naturally directed at related atrocities. He explains, "My subject tonight is war, and now that war has entered this house, I feel I would be insulting Titus and Katya if I softened the blow." His memories then reach long and far into a most savage, brutal execution during the Nazi invasion of Belgium in the 1940s, an exceptional an innocent Berlin girl's rescue and her family, and a DGSE agent's tragedy who had fallen as one of the last causalities of the Cold War. In contrast to his imaginative warfare designed as an evasion from painful memories, the series of real-life stories is crowded with recollections of actual sufferings of flesh-and-blood individuals. Forgoing his unwillingness to reminisce, August has shattered the boundaries of his mentally constructed solitude to embrace universal perceptions.

When August finally comes to accept an interrelated, rather than confined, solitude in the dark, he has built up his courage and prepared himself to revisit the most unforgettable part of all his memories – the bloody vision of Titus's execution. He then relives the painful memory to its fullest details: When the head is finally severed from the body, the executioner lets the hatchet fall to the floor. The other man removed the hood from Titus's head, and then a third man took hold Titus's long red hair and carried the head closer to the camera. Blood is dripping everywhere.

August's reluctant recollection of Titus's death does not surface until the end of the book, but it certainly has mapped intertextually with his exploration of the parallel worlds. Saddened by the innocent young man's demise, he seeks alternative solutions from equally violent associations, only to discover the stories created by his solitary mind are just poor imitations of the memories from which he desperately escapes. Just as Auster once explicates in *The Book of Memory*, "Memory exists not only as the resurrection of one's private past, but also the immersion in the past of others", what August comes to comprehend is exactly the inherent collectivity of memory. Even the deepest unconsciousness is a consciousness of the others, and even the most solitary reminiscence of the past is but a highly intersubjective process of communication. Admitting the futility of his previous evasion, August decides to revisit, though painfully, the mental images that have once driven him into isolation.

His renewed perception is soon to be shared by Katya, who, also suffering from a sleepless night, seeks comfort from her grandfather (WOODS, 2003, p. 414). Together in the darkness of August's room, they embark on a journey through the memories that August has been evading, in particular those related to his wife and his failed marriages. His flight from the past, as he confesses to Katya, is triggered by his daughter's request to write a memoir. He fears that with the act of writing, he would be cornered to face up to his mistakes and unfaithfulness, which might darken the already depressing days. Questioned by Katya about the reasons for his discontinuation of writing, August replies, "It got too sad. I enjoyed working on the early parts, but then came the bad times, and I started to struggle with them. I've done such stupid things in my life, I didn't have the heart to live through them again." The reluctance to look back and reflect explains his indulgence in imagination during the first half of the night. However, just as August has already found out, even when he confines his thoughts in a seemingly enclosed, solely textual experiment, his invention is still tainted with the consciousness of others. Accordingly, he admitted, any act of escaping into the darkness of solitude would eventually turn into a realization of its intersubjective nature.

In this sense, August's act of inviting Katya into his room of solitude and their ensuing conversations are endowed with intersubjective significance, for they have encompassed two beforehand separated parties in the same spatial solitude to convey and share their thoughts. Therefore, compared with the first two-thirds of the book, which is filled with intermittent narration and cinematic discussions, the last one-third of *The Man in the Dark* becomes much more interactive, where August, with Katya's encouragement and pressing, has told his life with meticulous details. After two years of intentional postponement, he acquiesces to facing his treachery and the harm he once incurred, retelling not only the sweet and exciting days he had spent with Sonia from their first meeting to their fantastic marriage but also his not-so-proud moments of procuring prostitutes, adultery and the two heart-broken divorces. Gradually, August summons up his courage to dig deep into his darkness and expose his inner defects. Though August has never revealed whether he has gathered his strength to resume his writing of the family memoir, the story that starts with "I am alone in the dark" and comes to an end with "the weird world rolls on" has delivered hope enough for its eventual embrace of intersubjectivity.

## CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the above analyses, Paul Auster's invention of solitary rooms has exhibited at least three dimensions. A room accommodating the physical form of a writer signifies an architectural structure, whereas the embodied mind constitutes an intellectually constructed room that encompasses the world. Additionally, a room substantiated in writing brings Auster's exploration to the narrative realm. The co-existence and mutual conversion of various "rooms of solitude" constitute the essence of comprehension of Auster's spatiality of solitude. August Brill's spatial solitude is also multi-fold. While his bedroom in the dark is an architectural representation of his desperate solitude, his embodied mind forms an intellectually structured room, from which extends his narrative exploration of the parallel worlds. August then moves around several spaces of solitude as he journeys in his memories, personal sufferings, and fictional creativity. Through August, Auster reaffirms his conviction that the essence of any solitary writer is the willingness and aptitude to remember. Solidly posited in their embodied memories, Paul Auster, August Brill, and any other solitary writers could travel back and forth in intersubjective perceptions, interactions, and creations around the architectural, mental, and narrative triad of solitary rooms.

CHEN, R.; LIU, S.; LIN, J.; KAN, M. K. Quartos solitários de Paul Auster e August Brill: a espacialidade da solidão. *Transformação*, Marília, v. 45, n. 4, p. 183-204, Out./Dez., 2022.

**Resumo:** Para Paul Auster, um quarto é, em essência, "a própria substância da solidão", uma solidão espacialmente definida. Nesse sentido, o fenômeno transcendeu suas limitações físicas e assumiu significado existencial e filosófico. Em seus escritos, uma sala é, antes de tudo, um espaço arquitetônico que um escritor solitário ocupa; além disso, é metaforizado como a mente que é a sala – um espaço construído intelectualmente; e, por fim, é um lugar narrado em suas histórias, onde seus personagens meditam e compõem, um espaço que existe em palavras. O artigo realiza estudos sobre os escritos da vida de Auster e uma de suas ficções, *Homem no Escuro*, para apresentar a complexidade das três formas de quartos solitários e sua mútua inclusão na solidão intersubjetiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Paul Auster. Quartos. Espacialidade da solidão. Intersubjetividade. Homem no Escuro.

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