

Imaginary Space from “Bildungs” to “Builder” Artists’ Utopia at the Beginning of the 20th Century

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1. *The Space Lived. Wandering in the city. Artist’s bildungs*

AS AN anti-utopia of the perfect healthy body, the diseased atmosphere became a symptom for the disembodied city and for the whole world’s disenchantment starting with 1900. The ultimate thought of an apocalypse of art rises in this waning hour that only few real artists of the 20th century could avoid. Aware of the empty and fake character of their aesthetic condition, the artists of the *fin-de-siècle* can’t avoid the nature of death that deeply infused their reality; they have to face the Ultimate Judgement as uninvited witnesses to the eschatology of the old thoughts. Therefore, analysing the passage to modernism in *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Carl Schorske points out two dominant cultural traditions of early modern Austrian history as the Baroque and the Enlightenment. Their features exemplify the tensions and the interactions manifested in “two vital Austrian institutions: the theatre, queen of Austria’s art and citadel of Baroque secular culture; and the university, stronghold of the rationalism and the Enlightenment” (Schorske 1998, 11). Nevertheless, their fragile synthesis broke down toward the end of the 19th century being overcome by radically different kinds of modernism and surviving transposed as such. Therefore, the Baroque tradition of Grace, exalting the life of feeling and beauty fed the sensitivity and sensuality of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism as much as the Enlightenment tradition of the Word nurtured the rigorous pursuit of ethics and truth.

Embodied as the very crossroad of these tendencies, the work of the Viennese poet and dramatist Hugo Von Hofmannsthal sums altogether the cultures of Grace and the mighty power of Word, in order to dramatise the modern fate of this binary heritage and also the language system that sustained it. He also confronted in theatrical form an element of the early 20th century’s apocalyptic reality: the revolution. Inevitably framed by a mainstream phenomenon that conditioned this period such as the crisis of political Liberalism in Austria around 1900, these major directions shaped the Viennese literary movements of the time. Therefore, the effervescence of the Viennese literary café’s life and their literary purpose at the very beginning of the 20th century has been

in general misinterpreted. In fact it was a sign for the diluvium forces of society's death call, deeply imprinted with the cold wave of exhaustion and decay of the individuals. Professor Charcot's research of hysteria at the beginning of the century as well as Freud's studies on psychoanalysis opened the road for some diluvia forces in order to bring dispersion and denudation to the old system of thought. Therefore, recalling the Baroque aesthetics in order to describe such an imaginary environment was one of the proper solutions for the artists of the time, at least in Vienna. The winding shapes, the curves and the volutes, which are opposed to the old linear shapes as life opposes death, convey the image of form's continuous aspiration to cross over, to step out from all limitations. The proliferation of the Baroque structures is a perfect metaphor for the continuous quest, as long as their reiterations and incessant movement bring the idea of something new and indescribable for the thought system.

In one of his essays, *Ad me ipsum*, Hofmannsthal articulates the creation of his subjects as having an *allomatic* (*allomatisch*) experience. Benjamin Benett analyses the source of the term in his study: *Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The Theatre of Consciousness* and assumes that the word was apparently borrowed from Ferdinand Maack who wrote a curious Rosicrucian alchemical book, entitled *Zweimal gestorben!* (1912), that Hofmannsthal as much as his Viennese contemporaries must have read. Thus the *allomatic* can be explained as being principally a force acting upon the individual, that the individual stands in a passive relation to it, also definable as "being transformed by another." Maack's demonstration says with reckless disregard for Greek etymology that there are no "automes" (autos = self) among atoms; there are only "*allomes*" (allos = the other) and whatever a so-called Self possesses, it owes to something other. This still implies a logical difficulty that Maack does not clear up but Hofmannsthal does. And even if the Viennese writer never actually defines the word, and critics tend to use it rather freely, he let us have at least one clue about its signification as coming out from the unfinished novel *Andreas*... Therefore, Hofmannsthal's frequent use of the shortened name "Andres" in the novel suggests clearly enough the idea of Andreas as a person composed of "other things" (Bennet 2009, 252-3).

Meanwhile, in the very process of asserting the non-existence of the Self, Maack constantly locates it as a focus of external influences, as a transitory accumulator and condenser that he imagines as *psychic rays* streaming through the universe like electromagnetic energy. He also insists on the so-called: *aurea catena Homeri* (*golden chain of Homer*) recalling the idea of a universal interactivity ascribable to no individual, as something common to all things that organize the world. In any case, Hofmannsthal follows Maack when imagines the Self as a *place* where things arrive from without, and thus he associates the *allomatic* with some external influences. Nevertheless, one of the dramatist's note, this time referring to *Ariadne*, specifies *Das allomatische Element* right after *Die gegenseitige Verwandlung*, and lead the critics into the temptation of seeing in those two one and the same ethical process of mutual transformation, moreover recalling the Goethean terms of *werden* and *Gewissen*, corresponding to the alchemical formula of *solve et coagula*. But regarding the Self as a coherent utopian place, organized like Campanella's *City of the Sun*, or as Andreae's *City of God*—which Hofmannsthal might have had in mind when writing *Andreas*—, the allomatic experience functions as a dystopian force,

following another Maack assertion that states the consequences of the allomatic principle as being enormous, even monstrous and inevitably leading to the *radikalen Auflösung des Subjekts*—"radical dissolution of the subject" (Bennet 2009, 252-3).

The modern artist doesn't stand for himself; he is now a pale reflection of the others, of the outside world as if he is carrying with him a mirror all the way. He has a decomposed ego, sometimes even sliding toward its subtle erase. As already seen, in Hofmannsthal's work as for the others authors, the imaginary city became the proper place for projecting also the metamorphosis of his protagonists. Therefore, in D'Annunzio novel, *Il Fuoco*, Venice reflects the underworld heated by an inner fire, which is sometimes symbol of an ontological stage. As in Hofmannsthal's prose, this gestation process of the city prepares the metamorphosis to take place. The warm place of lust and passion hosts the process of crystallization of Effrena's Ego, the warm atmosphere of the lagoon being the proper athanor for the poet-chemist to prepare and burn his mineral matter in order to reshape it as gold, as the spiritual form of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's influence on Hofmannsthal as well as on D'Annunzio rejoins Paracelsus' idea of a universal, overarching spirit as in the novel *Andreas*, where the hero searches for himself, for the great Ego which doesn't reside inside or among us but in superior spheres, in a transcendental world.

But the presence always recalls an absence as well as the distance is sometimes foreshadowed by proximity and in this case, as Jean Roudaut admirably points out in *Les Villes imaginaires dans la littérature française*, "l'image de la spirale rassemble le divers visible et imaginable dans un mouvement constant de métamorphose. Elle est l'expression de la richesse et de la quête" (Roudaut 1990, 81). Sometimes, in these wanderings, strange and unexpected encounters take place. The body of the city with its streets and squares and the body of a lost loved one seem to be alike. Therefore, in George Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* or in Jensen's *Gradiva*, Bruges and Pompei borrow the features of the lost wives and lovers. We must also recall here the importance of the gaze as in the image of a shadowy Venice contemplated by Marcel—Proust's Narrator—just a sad trace for the already lost Albertine and mostly D'Annunzio's Venice in the novel *Il Fuoco*, when the autumnal city lagoon and Effrena's fading passion for the actress Foscarina go altogether. On the other hand, in Proust's novel, Venice is the climax of the voyage toward self discovery, the ultimate cultural experience. Consequently, the lagoon, with its controversial status, is the dystopian place by excellence and rather a fantastic *topos* where the images and the sensations go altogether, undercrossing as different temporal cores and networks, ultimately inverting the future and the past as if in an incessant mourning. The description of those cityscapes becomes extremely eloquent for staging what one might call the psychological evolution of the subject.

On the other hand, if the poet Effrena's gaze watches and follows his beloved *Perdita* ("already lost") all across the city of doges affectively reshaping the image of Venice by making forms out of words, in Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* Aschenbach's growing passion for the young polish boy Tadzio closely mirrors the widespread cholera epidemic in the lagoon. As a result, the deceased body of the city and the infatuated mind and body of the lover are associated once again in a very suggestive way. As in all others Thomas Mann's writings, under the straight influence of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer,

the illness, as much as death, or the passion are always the artistic features called to break the form by taking the energy out of its limits in order to render it to a boundless totality of no space, no shape, or time. In other words, the illness and the passion also carry out a dispersive and anarchical force that can deeply destroy city's perfect and healthy structure or body, as much as the body of those individuals who come to unleash them.

2. *The Space Conceived. Clausturation. Ascetic thoughts and Limit situations. The Other and the Outer world*

THE SHORT analysis of these wanderings in search of identity as the first of the two sides in the important motion of the being that leads to evanescence—using Baudelaire's characterisation from *Mon Coeur mis à nu*—have to be compulsory suited, as the French poet has pointed out, by the venture of focusing the Ego. The inner space becomes the proper stage for this convergence to take place, symbolically represented as the core, the heart of the quest. Also, living a space supposes a body, a soul and their antagonist reunion. Using the distinction made by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Milles Plateaux*, the very flatland of the *flâneur's* city space is now streaked by the enclosing walls which fasten the subject. Also, the description of the interior spaces as having a core like an alchemical flame imagined as symbol for the human soul could sometimes bear dangerous consequences. For that reason, to burn in excess means to turn the inner space into an incineration room, in other worlds, it leads to the subject's or structure's death, while the absence of light characterises the obscure rooms, which symbolizes the lack of spiritual elevation.

In Hofmannsthal's play, *The Death of Titian*, the Old Master frenetically paints in his deadly hour and "a radiance, as a saint's, / Shines through his pallor" (Hofmannsthal 1920, 13). He is twice isolated from the outside world, first from his disciples who wait for him in the garden sitting on the steps and second from the double-faced city of Venice:

DESIDERIO (standing by the balustrade, to Gianino):

See's thou the city as it rests below, / Veiled in the golden sunset's flaming glow. / Where rosy saffron, and pale shades of grey / About its feet with deep, blue shadows play / To weave a cloak of dew-drenched purity. / Alluring in its calm serenity / Alas! In yonder mystic haze there lies / A world of ugliness and moral bright / Where madmen live like swine in filthy sties! / But distance has concealed from thy sight / This place of loathing, hollow in its shame / . . . But only similarity of name / Exists between their joy and grief and ours. / For, though we slumber deep in midnight hours, / Our very slumber differs from their sleep... (Hofmannsthal 1920, 19)

This striking difference between the "golden sunset flaming glow" and the filthy "place of loathing, hollow in its shame" shows the two faces of Venice as Canaletto's painting *Campo S. Vidal and Santa Maria della Carita* does by showing a Venetian landscape

with some paupers' huts projected on the image of Serrenissima's golden palaces at sunset, in the background. Similar with the unfinished novel *Andreas...*, where the hero's quest is divided between daily and nightly escapades in the city of Venice, or recalling also the schizoid *bildung* of Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* guided by the two masters, Settembrini and Naphta (by opposing the image of a Celestial city of light to an infernal world of poverty and sins), Hofmannsthal's play envisions an uncanny isolated space. Therefore, Titian's garden and villa becomes the shelter of the chosen few, those who already know that art raises from the sacred sufferance, as Antonio, another Master's disciple, explains:

*Hence tall and slender gratings stand about / The garden that the Master planted here,
/ Through which sweet, flowering vines trail in and out / That one may feel the world-
not see, nor hear.* (Hofmannsthal 1920, 20)

The room recalls the outside world but meanwhile it's a mirror for an inner psychological world. Consequently, the house is the heart, the cell of the macrostructure, *pars pro toto*, recalling the city's structure itself. In this case, the room is a secret place, an intimate space, both reserved for itself and protective against the any outer intrusions. Here the individual depicts his personal realities sheltered against the curiosity of any external viewers. The noisy roads are replaced by the reclusion in a quiet and austere place that urges reflection and remembrance.

Briefly, by dramatising this problematical relationship between the world polarities, this scene is more than representative for the end of the 19th century aesthetical thought. But sooner then, this kind of beautiful utopian world, sumptuous and perfectly organised, isolated, protected and marked by an self-sufficiency, proved itself to be terribly isolated, weak and shamefully unsatisfying, guilty for its solipsism and un-socially culpable. In counterpart, the other world is often described using fantastical imagery and abstract language, as if in a dream or rather in nightmares. Not surprisingly, Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann and D'Annunzio had chosen Venice as frame to set these dramas of art and life here, the city being extremely dual as *topos* and as an image continuously changing shapes, often turning into its opposite, staging different attitudes from fulfilment to failure, from glory to desolation, from sensuality to absence and waning, from illumination to mystery.

Accordingly, Hofmannsthal inverts the spatial perspective from *Death of Titian* in the play *Death and the Fool*, switching from the outside garden to inside artist's enclosed room in order to have a closer and clear view upon the protagonists tremendous encounter with death. As a response to an unstable equation of the Self, and slave to artificial forms, Claudio's aesthetical quest is already bound to fail. Here, death freely interferes and functions as anarchic principle. Claudio's regrets and lament in the beginning leads him to the wrong paths toward confusion, opacity and darkness. Therefore he finds himself a hopeless prisoner of his own aestheticism.

*Nor life, nor hearts, or world of me were visioned, / Held by these as a swarm of motes
imprisoned; / . . . / The artificial so completely bound me / That dead mine eyes looked*

*on the golden sun, / And deaf mine ears were to the world around me. / The mystic
curse forever on my head, / Ne'er conscious quite, ne'er quite my senses lost, / To live my
life e'en as a book that read / Is understood but half, while for the rest the brain / Gropes
in the somber realms of life and gropes in vain. (Hofmannsthal 1914, 19-20)*

Marked by lack of life, Claudio's writings as well as his existence irreparably fails and leads him to the ultimate confusion in confrontation with death as inner monster and constant gardener, who imprisons, encircles and punishes, as Superego who came to penalize the devoid of spiritual perfection. On the other hand, in Hofmannsthal's early works, the precondition for the Self improvement seems to be that of creating bondages, to bind and to be bound. This means also to insert oneself in a chain of beings and of aesthetical thoughts. But Claudio "sits alone" (Hofmannsthal 1914, 19-20) and is to be punished just for not creating this bondage. His enclosed tomb-like studio becomes the stage for the theatre of shadows to be performed: Death, Mother, Friend and Lover (as Don Juan's stone guest) come to haunt him by punishing his stupid and heartless over-attachment to the world of ideas.

As Hermann Broch explains in his essay, *Hofmannsthal and His Time*, Claudio's adventure and his aesthetical failure seem to forecast Hofmannsthal's subsequent total abandonment of lyrical poesy, as a desperate act to inhibit and to remove any traces of subjectivity in his writings by *Ego-Suppression* and *Ego-Concealment*. Thus, Hofmannsthal's attempt to break the bounds of all oppressions resulting from that self-regarding cultivation of aestheticism and subjectivity is rather visible in his remarkable *Lord Chandos Letter*. Published in 1901, this text can be read as an extremely able manifesto for the turbulent decadent features of late Romanticism trying not only to annihilate itself but also to propose a new way of seeing and describing facts, called Modernism. What Lord Chandos describes in his letter is the total failure of his relationship with the language, with the others, with the object's word, with art and literature but also with his own state of mind in contrast with a prior stage of a fantastical golden age prior to any dissolution of sensibility. A regressive movement is thus underlined by a nostalgic need of the simple undifferentiated identity, of a lost unity. Conclusively, Hofmannsthal articulates here once again the extremely perished state of the Ego as long as the imperative need for integration and for the regained unity of "an irremediable lost self which prevails in all Modernist programs and ideals" (Tanner 1992, 210-228).

3. *The Space Perceived. Mineralisation, The Gaze, Catabasis and psychoanalysed body*

ELIOT IMPLIES that he had written *The Waste Land* according to a mythical method, something that would give "a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot 1999, 122). Regarding this literary text that nurtured the modern literature, Michael Levenson has drawn a special attention to another Eliot's comment that "the problem of the unification of the world and the problem of the unification of the individual, are in the end one and

the same problem” (Eliot 1999, 121). Again, we can find here one of the greatest lesson that the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer gave to the generation of 1900: the individuation process seen as being both modern virtue and also an illness with dramatic psychological and social consequences for the human subject.¹

On the other hand, the choice of Venice or Bruges, the two drowned cities, wasn't made by chance, but embodying the Freudian notion of the *Id*, precisely imagined as foetus surrounded by amniotic liquid as if in permanent gestation. Therefore, this marks a very important step in the construction of the individual self when, in Bachelardian terms, the deepest waters are explored as being a strong metaphor for the unconscious. The enclosed rooms like coffins as well as the black gondolas quiet floating on the Venetian canals are the pale indicators for a symbolical death, a limit situation which opens the road to the next stages of sensuality and morality. In other words, the need for reclusion is meant to prepare the subject for catabasis, seen now as the descent into the inner self. On the other hand, as in the Platon's myth of the cave where due to the fire nearby the man in chains could only hear and see the wall projections coming from the outside world, isolation condemns the enchained Ego to helpless assist the theatre of shadows performing at his sight.

Going forward, the interpretation may recall here the image of *Titian's* disciples impatiently waiting in the garden. As in Plato's myth, they don't have full access to the Master's creation process. Instead, Titian is seen as a mighty god that has access to the real world of ideas and who, isolated in his room, paints giving birth to life out of death. Hence, the disciples are the symbol of unconscious and that's the very reason why Hofmannsthal let them wait in the garden suggesting their lack of knowledge, the undifferentiated state of consciousness. Also, they are twice bound, first being chained one to another by having the same state, embodying the idea of the cell which is strictly identical with all the others and also interchangeable, and then, they are bond to their Master as to the exclusive keeper of the divines secrets of art, the one who fully discovered his distinctive character, because breaking the chain means being unique. A similar artist's search for the inspiration—as the enlighten core of creation that have to burst from inside—occurs in the well-known scene from Proust's novel, when Bergotte, the writer, gazes at the “little patch of yellow wall” in Vermeer's painting and is forced to recognize himself caught in a deadlock, as being one among others—in artistic thought, a metaphor suggesting sheer mediocrity, also associated with death.

Analyzing Hofmannsthal's works, Jacques le Rider underlines the omnipresence of yellow as the absolute indescribable colour that enchants the viewer sometimes like Freud's Medusa stands for the effigy of the feminine and of the castration, and otherwise embodies the masculine power of the Patriarch figure and the Oppressive Father. He notes: “Le jaune est un des couleurs qui obsèdent Hofmannsthal à l'époque de *Les Chemins et les rencontres*. Elles a tantôt la valeur d'un signe de déchéance et de mort, tantôt celle d'un signe de puissance mâle et de fécondité” (Le Rider 1991, 88). Le Rider's interpretation came also to follow the ambivalences of yellow described by Goethe in the *Theory of Colours* (1810) as the closest colour to light, bearing a beautiful impression of fire and gold in honour's delight and meanwhile the symbol of hate, adultery and disgust, the colour of impurity and illness.

Going back to the spatial interpretation in *Death of Titian*, the garden represents here both a protective space and an unconscious, undifferentiated stage. Like in the utopian imaginary cities, the master's chamber is the very heart of an encircled structure: like an *omphalos*, house of a secret king that sometimes could be or could become void surrounded by garden and then by external walls that separates it from the city. This kind of utopian structure with walls between walls is organized according to some hierarchical patterns as in Morus' *Utopia* or in Campanella's *City of the Sun*. Therefore, the garden seems to be a place of rules, necessity and measure which forbids the diversity recalling the ideal of the utopian world: the equivalence. Similar, in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, arriving to Davos sanatorium, Hans Castorp loses his individual features. He becomes indistinct among the others, all alike: a patient among other patients, an admirer of Mme Chauchat among other admirers.

As seen in *Death of Titian*, being protected by walls—symbol of artistic achievement in order of forms—the imaginary citadel of Art comes to neutralize death. Hence, opposed to Titian's villa which was a shelter against time and history, Claudio's room and garden are invaded by old fashioned silhouettes, representing the haunting memories:

*They're sitting in the garden even now, / Upon the sandstone figure of Apollo some, /
A pair are hidden in the shadows there / Beneath the fountain, one is on the Sphinx, /
The yewtree hides him, you can't see him now. / . . . / Some men and women also, / Not
beggar-folk, old fashioned are their clothes. / They look just like the etchings on your walls.
(Hofmannsthal 1914, 23)*

Meanwhile, if Proust's novel can be seen as an organized pilgrimage to the souvenirs which borrow their immortal essence to the text to come, Claudio's narcissistic position as a melancholic subject opens the gate of infernos by the anarchical state of his remembrance. Mother, lover and friend are the pale shadows of a past that doesn't comfort the subject's Ego but rather comes to oppress him in order to overcome the aesthetical crisis by sensuality or morality. As a result, this orphic act of descent into the inferno of memories—as individual spiritual achievement—easily transposes itself into another discourse, about vanities, into *memento mori*. Claudio fails in this encounter, he doesn't have the power to fight neither to regain, nor to save himself and return. Thus he remains stock-still in his lack of hope, seeing the limitation but failing to delimitate himself from it.

Claudio's Louis XVI room, with walls "covered with a very light wall-paper, stucco and gilt" (Hofmannsthal 1914, 13), echoes the enclosure by the style that infinitely multiplies forms and mirrors. As a result, he seems to be caught up in an architectural labyrinth repeating and reiterating the same pattern until madness suggesting both his lack of transcendence and the winding gap of his inspirational process. Surrounded only by death forms, Claudio finds himself in a deadlock condition, therefore he "sits alone," illustrating a melancholic state. The "glass cabinets containing antiques," the "dark Gothic carved chest" with "ancient musical instruments hang above it," and the picture signed "by an old Italian master, almost black with age" (Hofmannsthal 1914, 13) are all reflecting the propensity to collect things, of archiving, also an indicator for melan-

cholic status as pointed firstly by Freud and, then, by Derrida. Hence, as Freud illustrates in *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud 1984, 245-268), without the experience of a radical separation from a prior state of narcissistic self-sufficiency, the subject has no truly understanding of his own finitude and manifests no necessity in order to experience that. By following this interpretation, Derrida suggests us to imagine the melancholic subject precisely as a place, a *topos*, always already inhabited by its own loss, in effect becoming an archive where loss is maintained and nourished. Traditionally conceived as a space of knowledge, the archive is the location for history and the past to be accommodated. Thus, as according to the French philosopher, the term archive comes from *Arkhé*, which “names at once the commencement and the commandment. The name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there were things commence—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given—nomological principle” (Derrida 1995, 1).

Consequently, the image of the *glass cabinets containing antiques* was not randomly chosen. And generally speaking this is the very point of archiving and collecting and therefore of conserving the world history minor or grater scale. Thus, Claudio’s collecting antiques echoes here—analogue to Derrida’s demonstration—not only a sort of problematical relation with the past but rather a preference for building a space of anxiety, an anxiety already built on the possibility of loss. It is precisely here, in the anxious relation to what will be that the spectrality of the archive comes into play, staging the melancholic thoughts and waiting for a constant presence of death to come and reign here. Hence, as a response to his narcissistic and melancholic stage, Claudio’s drama marks the lack of any coincidence between the inside world and the outside world. And, as we will see, letting the door open for the super ego to manifest freely and until total annihilation would definitely lead to self destruction.

4. *The Spiritual Space. Rethinking the city. Artist as Master Builder*

BY AWAKENING the same “troubling symptom of ruins” (a Baudelairian expression) in the subject’s imaginary, the library can be seen as an archive of death thoughts and ideas, but also as a collection of immortal essences trespassing any time limitation. Furthermore, as another theatre of memory, the library stays in direct correspondence with the knowledge and settles another orphic descend in the land of dead, in order to reach for the secret of life and death altogether. Therefore, Proust sees the library neither as an *archive*, nor an *arkhé*, but an *ark* to get back in time and bring to the present some memory conserved there. A spectral messianism seems to tie his actions to a very singular experience of the promise, anticipating the things to come. In fact, the melancholic state, as Derrida demonstrates, inevitably became “a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of

a responsibility for tomorrow” (Derrida 1995, 36). Meanwhile, his action can be seen as a response to loss, to trauma reshaping space as a memorial, something that helps her to remember, to become that loss or to anticipate and create the proper conditions of future loss.

Quitting Paris and then turning back, Proust’s Narrator in *Time Regained* has to take part to a musical soiree at the Princess of Guermantes. But being late, he is invited to wait in the library room for the representation to end. Here, surrounded by an interesting collection of books, he freely projects an imaginary reading room organised to his heart’s content. Therefore, once again, we find here the image of a celestial city pictured as a world of ancient books whose architect, meanwhile *liber* and *biblos*—as Umberto Eco would characterize him—combines remembrance’s freedom with the antiquary’s minuteness, in order to build an utopical space of vegetal memory:

La bibliothèque que je composerais ainsi serait même d’une valeur plus grande encore, car les livres que je lus jadis à Combray, à Venise, enrichis maintenant par ma mémoire de vastes enluminures représentant l’église Saint-Hilaire, la gondole amarrée au pied de Saint-Georges le Majeur sur le Grand Canal incrusté de scintillants saphirs, seraient devenus dignes de ces “livres à images”, bibles historiées, que l’amateur n’ouvre jamais pour lire le texte mais pour s’enchanter une fois de plus des couleurs qu’y a ajoutées quelque émule de Fouquet et qui font tout le prix de l’ouvrage. (Proust 1946b, 40)

As Eric Karpeles perfectly infers in a visual guide to the Proust’s novels, the painter Fouquet wasn’t used by chance but deliberately referring to the image from *The Book of Hours* of Étienne Chevalier representing *Saint John of Patmos* and signed by Jean Fouquet (1455). Thus, the imagined library rises from artist’s memory as a cathedral or rather as a *Book of Wisdom*, which remains secret to secular gaze by being visible only to chosen few.

Built according to the classic mnemotechnics skills, Proust’s image of library recalls the author’s idea of an ultimate book conceived as a theatre of universal representation. By codifying an image of urban utopia, the library is a systematic, rational scientific plan regarding a coherent spatial organisation, based on a harmonious coexistence of thoughts, times and forms. Recalling here another image from Proust’s novel when Elstir paints landscapes by inverting the space attributes in order to gain more authenticity, Marcel’s imaginary library conjoins once again the idea of books as realities and meantime of a reality as great *Book of Wisdom*.

Embodying the aim of the utopian Self, this kind of book conceived as an imaginary cosmic organization repeating the model of a stable universe does not necessitate miracles or metamorphoses. In this case, writing means doing a civilizing act, an incessant quest for a celestial city very similar to the symbolic image of the biblical St. John’s Jerusalem. Starobinsky remembers the utopia as having a simple and strict geometry, reined by geometrical rules, by the strict order of the ruler and of the compass. As a result, a systematical organized utopian and celestial city is always opposed to the anarchical state of artists’ citadel as indicator of the very limits in human mind and apprehension. The labyrinth of the quest evokes the impatient need to discover that place inside the heart that eyes cannot see, the particular essence sometimes divine, otherwise demon-

ical. Hence, there are two worlds in Proust: the outer world that exists and couldn't be known as such, and another one, the insight world unmediated known by living it.

For example, Proust, as well as Huysmans, permanently refers to the city as reflecting the building of a book. The body of Proust's writings is his citadel of memory. As we had already seen, the city echoes in his novels the incessant adventure of our insights, the memory that rebuilds and reshapes, reversing the everyday degradation process into new shapes of a hope for tomorrow. Thus, the chronological order loses its power in this city seen as a mental space. The work of art as an imaginary city became, as we have already seen, a spiritual, Earthly projection of a celestial map. Although in Proust's writing creating space equals to an incessant diminution of time, the vertical, transcendental movement regarding the spiritual achievement rests unchanged. Meanwhile, in Proust's novel, time refines itself in such a manner until it becomes space, just as in *The Magic Mountain* the Davos sanatorium, as an imaginary realm, is organized according to a utopian time beyond time.

The imagined space became thus the set or the scene for the history of the self to take place. But the obscure room as a mineral stage of the subject has to be illuminated by some inner light or inspiration and rearranged memory by memory, word by word as if in a successful alchemical process. On the other hand, the kaleidoscopic images from memory are decomposing the old representation and gather into a new one, similar, but also very different.

Proust's novel and precisely the very first scene where the *madeleine* dipped in the tea is a strong metaphorical image for introspection stands for the architectural power of memory:

Et comme dans ce jeu où les Japonais s'amuse à tremper dans un bol de porcelaine rempli d'eau de petits morceaux de papier jusque-là indistincts qui, à peine y sont-ils plongés s'évirent, se contournent, se colorent, se différencient, deviennent des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages consistants et reconnaissables, de même maintenant toutes les fleurs de notre jardin et celles du parc de M. Swann, et les nymphéas de la Vivonne, et les bonnes gens du village et leurs petits logis et l'église et tout Combray et ses environs, tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé.
(Proust 1946a, 81)

Consequently we can investigate the poetical act of naming which gives birth and facilitates this transgression from the real life to the imaginary as a fairly good reason for creating fictions and also the way literature search to find out the proper words in order to depict them. A theatre of memory is displaced here and it's up to the language to facilitate and to reinvent it. The goal of every artist, as well as that of the nature, is to re-establish the relation of the underworld fire and the celestial light within his work of art. The ardent effort of building the book, the city, the library comes to represent an iconic figure and meanwhile a coherent vision of a spiritual universe. The individual who gets to now himself gets in direct relation with the universe. By emulating the demi-urgic activity, the artist builds his world by naming it. Thus, the imaginary city, as Proust's Narrator often underlines, is placed at the very core of his discourse:

Par l'art seulement, nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune. Grâce à l'art, au lieu de voir un seul monde, le nôtre, nous le voyons se multiplier, et autant qu'il y a d'artistes originaux, autant nous avons de mondes à notre disposition, plus différents les uns des autres que ceux qui roulent dans l'infini, et qui bien des siècles après qu'est éteint le foyer dont ils émanaient, qu'il s'appelât Rembrandt ou Ver Meer, nous envoient leur rayon spécial. (Proust 1946b, 54-5)

But in order to avoid the danger of artificiality, Proust, as well as many other writers and artists, knows that he has to borrow from life for his construction to stand before time. Therefore, in order to enforce the book's architecture, he gradually reshapes his memories by burying himself inside the pages as in a coffin. Like in a curious game of shifting roles, life became book and book became life. And, as one of Hofmannsthal's characters suggests: when the house is ready the death would definitely come. In Proust's novels, both author and character are patiently waiting for the Promethean punishment to come, knowing that the only solution left in this impasse might be, to let Death slowly pass in, shaking his head and saying:

How wonderful these humans are, indeed, / Who do explain the inexplicable, / And what was never writ, they read; / The intricate they, subjugating, bind, / And thru eternal darkness paths they find. (Hofmannsthal 1914, 45)

Hence, it's extremely interesting how Proust's protagonist concludes the same things, but in a very subtle, different way:

Ce travail de l'artiste, de chercher à apercevoir sous de la matière, sous de l'expérience, sous des mots quelque chose de différent, c'est exactement le travail inverse de celui que, à chaque minute, quand nous vivons détourné de nous-même, l'amour-propre, la passion, l'intelligence et l'habitude aussi accomplissent en nous, quand elles amassent au-dessus de nos impressions vraies, pour nous les cacher maintenant, les nomenclatures, les buts pratiques que nous appelons faussement la vie. En somme, cet art si compliqué est justement le seul art vivant. Seul il exprime pour les autres et nous fait voir à nous-même notre propre vie, cette vie qui ne peut pas s'"observer", dont les apparences qu'on observe ont besoin d'être traduites, et souvent lues à rebours, et péniblement déchiffrées. (Proust 1946b, 55)

□

Notes

1. Jacques Le Rider sketches a detailed interpretation of this phenomenon in his book *Modernitatea vinează și crizele identității*, translated by Magda Jeanrenaud (Iași: Ed. Universității "A. I. Cuza," 1995), 40 et passim.

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Abstract

**Imaginary Space from “Bildungs” to “Builder”:
Artists’ Utopia at the Beginning of the 20th Century**

The Modern artist doesn't stand for himself. He is a pale reflection of all the others, of the outside world as if he would carry a mirror all the way. At the very beginning of the 20th century, aware of their uncertain aesthetic condition, the artists couldn't avoid the nature of the dispersion that deeply infused their reality. Soon, the diseased European atmosphere became a symptom for the disembodied space and for the whole world's disenchantment. Hence, building imaginary spaces out of words prevails in all Modernist programs and ideas and came as a quick response to the extremely perished state of the dissolved Ego but also as an imperative need of regaining a lost unity. Extremely eloquent for staging the psychological evolution of the subject, the space textuality comes to re-establish the relation of the underworld fire and the celestial light. Inner and outer space echoes the individual's quest of himself just as microcosm and macrocosm mirror each other. For that reason, the tremendous effort of building (a book, an imaginary city, a library as utopian space of vegetal memory) fuses iconic figures with a coherent vision of a spiritual universe.

Keywords

imaginary city, modernist artist, allomatic experience, catabasis, utopian space.