Paul Auster's *The Locked Room* as a Critique of the Hyperreal

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ABSTRACT

Auster's The Locked Room (1986) presents a protagonist in a desperate quest for a lost character whose absence functions as the only significant storyline to which the narrative unfolds. Although, stylistically, the entire plot revolves around the disappeared Fanshawe, nowhere in the narrative can the reader identify with certainty any traces of his actual existence. Fanshawe never appears in the story, but all the characters and their lives centre firmly upon him, thereby creating the illusion that without his appearance their lives can never be fully restored nor can they make any real sense. Taking into account Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, this research tries to demonstrate that what Auster's characters go through is living obsessively with a non-present inaccessible Fanshawe whose abrupt disappearance leaves no clue of his existence, but just a lost memory which haunts the characters' deepest senses of reality. This claim especially strengthens itself in the end, when the reader finds out that it all has been Fanshawe's plot to keep his family and friend in dark in order to completely vanish from the realm of the real.

Keywords: Auster; The Locked Room*; Baudrillard; hyperreality; disappearance*

INTRODUCTION

In one of his last notable works of criticism, Jean Baudrillard writes "Let us speak, then, of the world from which human beings have disappeared" (2009, p. 9). This evocative assertion points directly to a recurrent twentieth-century phenomenon in which human beings have metaphorically disappeared and a new sense of reality has come into place. What is at stake here is how, under the sway of this experience, human beings can no longer fully meet their sense of individuality in modern-day societies, and how this new (notion of) existence has hastened the creation of multiple sources and definitions of reality. In other words, as Baudrillard goes on to claim, we need to have a renewed and rearticulated meaning of reality, since traditional definitions of reality are, as he says, "definitely alienated" (2009, p. 11). In his view, living in the modern world has taken on new implications, because this "real world begins, paradoxically, to disappear at the very same time as it begins to exist" (2009, p. 11). The form of disappearance it means to advertise is not the natural extermination of an entity or a species; rather it is the disappearance of the real and its smooth replacement by an attractive hyperreal, which can only be carried out by human species. It, indeed, is started, nourished by humans and objectifies humans' psyche as its intended target.

What appears to be a pervasive effect of this mode of modern disappearance is what Baudrillard aptly calls 'hyperreality' a phase in which "reality decamps into the image – the image ironically absorbs the space of the real" (Smith 2010, p. 96). The idea of hyperreality accounts for a large bulk of Baudrillard's philosophy and involves a steady effort on his part to sketch out and theorize on what happens to the notion of reality in contemporary culture.

The irony lies in the fact that, since it is presumed that 'reality' is a universal concept, it does come as a surprise to assume that there exist societies that do not face the reality as it is experienced in the real world. In primordial cultures a defined reality or a sign – theorised by Saussure – comprised of a signifier, a signified and a referent in which the 'referent' specified the outside world or what we call reality (signifier refers to the word and the signified represents the concept). The modern world, however, declines this rigid formulation. Evidently, as sciences develop over time, former definitions of what constitutes reality are reshuffled and reestablished and even understood as mere illusions which were once credibly satisfying constructs. This partly refers to a condition initiated by the mass media and entertainment culture towards the end of the twentieth century when the sign poses its very own foundations of non-reality or, in other words, hyperreality. In its truest sense, the spirit of the day remarkably shows that "there are only images or illusions; 'behind' images there are more images; there is no point at which the final illusion is stripped away to reveal . . . *reality*" (Pawlett 2007, p. 71).

In the contemporary cultural sphere, the recognition of this hyperreality is commonly marked by a widespread impact of mass media. It is also a logical base for Baudrillard's theory of a change from the bourgeois tradition of stage and spectacle to that of a culture represented by television and screens. This identified the subtle change of hyperreality to a virtual reality which overwhelms modern life. Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality concerns, among other things, the crisis of the sign through which there is a sharp irreconcilable break-down between the event – the image – as the signifier and its existence in the real world as its referent. Evidently, there remains no longer a genuine way to distinguish the real from an artifice or simulation which in turn causes an endless multiplicity of meanings and realities with no concrete resources. This causes the creation of societies with individuals who live consistently under the illusions of non-realities and who no longer question the validity of any signifier. "By their exceptional faculty of knowledge," Baudrillard writes, "human beings, while giving meaning, value, and reality to the world, at the same time begin a process of dissolution ('to analyse' means literally 'to dissolve')" (2009, p. 11). What individuals have to do with in this day and age is the excess of reality with no original copies to get back to, and this provides the opportunity for human beings to be "capable of fulfilling all their potentialities and, as a consequence, disappear, giving way to an artificial world that expels them from it" (2009, p. 15).

From the 1970s onwards, the fiction by J. G. Ballard, Jorge Luis Borges, Arthur C. Clarke and many others have attracted Baudrillard and set up the foundations of his ideologies as he drew on their pieces to frame his theoretical writings. A prime example would be Ballard's controversial *Crash* (1973) which portrays the extent to which the progress of technology can spark off extreme violation and psychic damage. In his treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* Baudrillard states that *Crash* discusses the "semiurgy of contusions, scars, mutilations, wounds that are so many new sexual organs opened on the body" (1994, p. 75). The protagonist's body is inflicted with jagged wounds and deep lacerations which uncannily for him lead to bodily pleasure. Baudrillard equates this type of mental disruption and damage as 'symbolic wounds' that the modern individuals fancy as technology transforms their lives. For Baudrillard, this novel is an illustration of the dark abyss which the world represents, and verifies his particular view of contemporary times: a world overrun with simulacra and simulation. It is no wonder why Buadrillard is interested in *Crash* since it excellently displays his theory and philosophy. On the other hand, Baudrillard's theories have also influenced the fiction of many contemporary authors like Douglass Coupland, Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon whose narratives provide contexts with profound hyperreal backgrounds. Not to mention DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) and the SIMUVAC that keep on making simulated evacuations to stop the possible 'airborne toxic

event,' showing how seriously a prefabricated world has replaced their real lives; or Gerald Vizenor's *Hotline Healer* (1997), which surprisingly presents a character named Baudrillard, and directly draws on his idea of simulation in order to demonstrate that Native Americans are not pictured the way they really are.

HYPERREALITY AND THE FICTION OF AUSTER

As a postmodern meta-fictionist, Paul Auster has proven tacitly to incorporate in his works Baudrillard's legacy of hyperreality. *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007) narrates the story of how "human experiences are shaped and governed by the hyperreal and the search for meaning is futile" (Alexander & Chatterjee 2014, p. 53). *Timbuktu* (1999) tells about the life of Mr. Bones and Willy who seek to reserve identity in a world of unstable images and simulations. In *City of Glass* (1985) Quinn, the urban walker, exhibits what it is like to find yourself living with the illusion of a physically ordered metropolis. He describes himself "trapped in a hyperreality, a vertical labyrinth in which all points of reference have been lost" (Eckhard 2011, p. 84). In his analysis of Auster's *New York Trilogy,* Paul Jahshan reads through the nuanced background of hyperreality underlying the trilogy, and believes that, for instance, in *Ghosts* (1986) Auster "negotiate[s] the new challenges presented by the dawning virtual age, focusing on the twin concepts of the mirror and the double and the resulting *spectral* images produced" (2003, p. 389). He states that the unstable status of identities, in addition to the fact that "the ultimate signified is forever deferred" (p. 398) lays the foundation for the hyperreal to take effect.

Similarly, postmodernism in Auster's *The Locked Room* includes traces of Baudrillardian simulation which at times make it rather difficult to identify the real from the hyperreal. Characters in this novel are often entangled with the sudden disappearance of an individual whose absence weaves together every single element of the plot. Thinking Fanshawe is gone with no trace to follow in searching for him, the reader occasionally begins to suspect the very existence of this character. Yet, what makes the narrative more engaging is how everything including the fate of all characters immensely depends on Fanshawe's reappearance. However, as they desperately keep on searching for him, they ignorantly disappear into a futile quest that creates a sense of non-reality in which without the presence of Fanshawe they can no longer continue their lives. This makes them forget the reality of their routine lives and become engrossed in setting up a completely new reality. Surprisingly enough, it eventually becomes clear that throughout the narrative they have been played out by the intricate scheme Fanshawe has plotted for them.

Building upon Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, this research argues that Auster's characters go through a kind of life which is obsessed with a non-present inaccessible Fanshawe whose disappearance leaves no clue of his existence but just a lost memory which haunts their sense of reality. Also, it can be argued that by using a non-present character as the centre of his narrative, Auster provides a scheme for deconstructing the conventional narratives. In addition, by subtly embedding a hyperreal essence into the structure of his story, he leads the reader to ironically follow on with a narrative which centres on a wholly disappeared character.

THE LOCKED ROOM AND THE SOVERIGNTY OF THE HYPERREAL

From the outset of the novel the narrator remarks on various occasions on how the borders of reality and non-reality have become blurred. Fanshawe's absence disturbs his mental

uniformity and troubles his sense of reality, though he holds that "the truth is far less simple than I would like it to be" (*The Locked Room*, p. 153). Although the routines of the lives of Auster's characters run as regular, Fanshawe's absence complicates their lives, and Auster's narrator believes "some unquenchable fire was keeping him alive, that he was more truly himself than I could ever hope to be" (p. 153). Occasionally, Fanshawe's memories and recollections weigh heavily on the narrator's thoughts and impel him to keep on searching for any clue to find him. This functions as an element of order without which the narrator seems to be lost. The way Auster's plot unfolds reveals that the memories of the past including about Fanshawe dominate the narrative and construct a circle of convergence in which the narrator can never get rid of them. These memories lead his life and force him to start thinking the same round of thoughts. His doubt about the reality of his life and the incidents that take place around him make him admit their unreality. Yet, what seems to possess a deeply real essence that reigns over his life is still what he remembers of Fanshawe and "the aura of those days inside me, and to the extent that I can feel what I felt then, I doubt those feelings can lie" (p. 153). The narrator's descriptions of Fanshawe explain to what extent his personality is extraordinarily inspiring for him. Despite the close friendship between the two, Fanshawe is by all means out of reach and unapproachable for him, and this allows for the creation of a magnanimous character with ingrained hyperreal qualities. On the one hand, Fanshawe had "good grades, varsity letters, awards for whatever it was they were judging us on that week" (*The Locked Room*, p. 155), while on the other hand he "remained aloof from all that, quietly standing in his corner, paying no attention" (*The Locked Room*, p. 155). For the narrator, he possesses the towering greatness of an aloof individual whose uncanny grandeur makes him want to follow his mannerism as a sign of magnificence and order. In Fanshawe's absence, the narrator keeps recalling the past and how he played as a great actor in a plot the whole of which was "infinitely complex, with the outcome hinging on something like the confused identities of two sets of twins" (p. 156). This alludes to the affinity that the plot presents with their current odd status in which the unnamed narrator plays the role of the famous Fanshawe while the latter in turn becomes the lost unnamable guy who only leaves some fading and confusing memories. Thus, it is no wonder that "In 'The Locked Room,' Auster explores this 'democratic' relationship, the hyper-intense link between individuals and between souls" (Donovan 2005, p. 64). The narrator confirms that "by the time he was thirteen or fourteen, Fanshawe became a kind of internal exile…cut off from his surroundings…[and] he simply withdrew" (p. 157). Although the narrator always accompanies Fanshawe and continues "to go along with him, … , sharing in the quest but not quite part of it" (p. 157), it is proved that in reality they are quite apart.

The character of Fanshawe reveals the significant role that simulacra plays in the lives of the modern individuals. While Auster's narrator occupies himself with finding clues of where Fanshawe could live, he fervently searches all of Fanshawe's personal documents and works of art. In his view, he knew everything about him, but "there were no letters, no diaries, no glimpses into Fanshawe's private life" (*The Locked Room*, p. 161). As his search takes on new stages of development, he comes to the conclusion that "there was nothing. Fanshawe had left me entirely on my own" (p. 161) despite all that he has left of himself. This can run in line with what Baudrillard states in "The Vanishing Point of Communication" (2009) that "you no longer neutralize [people] by repression and control … you paralyse [them] by excess than by deprivation of information" (p. 19). This seems to be the case with Auster's narrator when he takes "a week to digest and organize the material, to divide finished work from drafts, to gather the manuscripts into some semblance of chronological order" (p. 161). To find more about him, he reads many things including a "hundred poems, three novels (…), and five one-act plays" (p. 162). However, they are only a set of simulacra

giving the impression that they are never written by Fanshawe, and this excess of information – which signifies nothing – makes him drown deeper in a kind of hyperreality.

The onerous quest for Fanshawe gradually affects all his deeds and takes up his entire existence. Since the narrator realizes that all his efforts are futile, somewhere in the middle of the story he helplessly brings the search to a halt. From this point onward, unable to face the fact that his attempts are of no consequence, he has to embrace a new life which is given up by Fanshawe. A family, a set of books and essays, and a sum of money are what he gains out of the absence of his long-lost friend. Not until the end of the novel does he realize that he has unknowingly played a game which has been perfectly devised by Fanshawe. It is no surprise that he has accepted a new life and is cherishing a new reality – set up thoroughly by Fanshawe. "It was probably necessary for me", the narrator says, "to equate Fanshawe's success with my own" (*The Locked Room,* p. 166). The more he lives Fanshawe's life, the better he adapts himself to the new cause, and he finds it a "thing that justified me and made me feel important, and the more fully I disappeared into my ambitions for Fanshawe, the more sharply I came into focus for myself" (p. 166). In fact, after some time, the constructed hyperreal world replaces his reality; in Baudrillard's words "the universe ha[d] swallowed its double, it ha[d] lost its shadow" (*Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion* 1997, p. 13). This way he can readily define a new reality for himself which he chooses, essentially and necessarily, out of free will and conscious desire. This delineates how a hyperreal condition compels an individual to be absorbed by a new system in which he finds himself reluctant to look out for an authentic reality.

When the narrator admits that everything has lost its sense of reality, things take a more genuine hyperreal effect. Even the meaning of the incidents around him shifts and adopts an arbitrary fashion. For example, the way he used to describe his relationship with Sophie changes, and this gives him a new perception of life in a way that "everything had changed for [him], and words that [he] had never understood before suddenly began to make sense" (*Locked Room*, p. 166). An interesting point here is that his simulated life has numbed his mind and rendered him an indifferent spectacle of events to the point that things make a new sense to him which they never did before. Between his genuine and true self and his newly simulated self he feels a thorough duality. So, he hugely feels displaced spiritually, for he says that "my true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable" (p. 167). As a result, his perception of the world becomes twisted, and he is no longer able to distinguish between the real and the imaginary. He affirms that "This was the tiny hole between self and not-self, and for the first time in my life I saw this nowhere as the exact center of the world" (p. 166), making it clear that he has lost his grip on his existence in a Neverland which has constantly denied him the ability to locate his self in the world.

Halfway through his investigations, the narrator begins to realize that all his attempts to find Fanshawe have, actually and ironically, led him astray and thrown him even deeper into the dark of simulations. His efforts to trace Fanshawe prove futile, and this counts for the end of all searches to find the disappeared individual. "In some sense, this is where the story should end," for "The young genius is dead" (*The Locked Room*, p. 168). But contrary to his expectations, "it turns out that this is only the beginning. What [he has] written so far is no more than a prelude" (p. 168) to his struggles via which he wants to draw a line in the borders of reality and simulation. He comes to describe his earlier condition when he was involved in the case as completely dark and hopeless; a hyperreal condition that blinded him to ever make sense of who he is and what he is in essence after. This was initiated and supported by the fact that his "reality [was] absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and of simulation" (Baudrillard 2001, p. 120).

The obscure nature of reality and his unstable state of living makes him vulnerable to the extent that he believes "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" (*The Locked Room*, p. 168). Notwithstanding, what worsens the situation is the feeling that haunts the narrator ever after, the fact that he feels tremendously helpless, because in dealing with the effects of hyperreality one uncontrollably goes into deep confusion.

As the narrator's search proceeds to new stages of development, it takes hold of his life, not much as a case to investigate to help out a friend, but to take the form of a critically and obsessively personal issue. His entire existence depends upon a target whose absence completely deprives him of the power to decide between the real and the hyperreal. "Thoughts stop," he keeps telling himself, "where the world begins" (*The Locked Room,* p. 201). To him, the whole world changes to take up the form of a hyperreality, to the usual calculations and planned desires of which the original world, which is the understandably real world, no longer responds. The moment the narrator decides that he has found a clue to trace Fanshawe is exactly the time when he realizes that on the scale of cause-and-effect nothing can happen. He recalls the time when he felt that he "could no longer make the right distinctions" (p. 202). Although "everything was beginning to have the same taste to [him] (p. 202)", his desperation exceeds from the differentiation of real/simulation to that of even doubting his true self and freewill. If his motives still encourage him to remember and find Fanshawe while marking a clear line between the normal realties of the outward world and the ones he has built up in his mind, one can conclude the line is fully cleared up as "the nether world [rises] up to the surface" (p. 173) and the excess of information and possibilities ultimately dry up his critical thinking.

The intense quest for Fanshawe takes on a different turn as the narrator finds it all to no avail. He journeys to Paris, walks in different untrodden ways and fields, starts reading detective novels, and does whatever that might lead him to Fanshawe. But, eventually, he gives up life to offer himself a space to restore his energy and concentration. It is at this juncture that he no longer feels he is trapped. For him, the "whole process had been reversed. After all these months of trying to find him, I felt as I was the one who had been found" (*The Locked Room*, p. 203). He states that instead of looking for Fanshawe he "had actually been running away from him" (p. 203). By the time he finds the space to make sense of his life, his consciousness regains power to re-identify the reactions which are taken either out of freewill or by obsessive surge. He feels a hyperreal force due to which he guesses that finding Fanshawe is equal to a real exploration "somewhere beyond me, beyond the limits of my life" (p. 203).

He understands that the reality he has constructed in his mind in order to find Fanshawe to restore a lost cause in a way may not even sound real enough since the object of his quest seems out of reach or not even real. The irony is that "his quest for Fanshawe turns out to be a quest for himself, for his own identity" (Russell 1990, p. 80), which emphasizes the significance of his desperate attempts to make sense of the world around him. That is why he creates a new picture of reality and adopts a new way to deal with the quest, for he realizes that he will "attempt to ward him off, a ruse to keep him as far away from me as possible" (p. 203). He feels the need to convince himself that when he "was looking for him, then it necessarily followed that he was somewhere else" (p. 203), making him out of reach and only a hyperreal object of thought.

The narrator recalls his memories of the past and the entanglements when he was involved in never-ending effects of complex simulations that made ineffectual all his attempts in order to recover his sense of order and reality. The baffling quest for Fanshawe takes the narrator to a far old apartment in Paris in which Fanshawe supposedly lived "alone, condemned to a mythical solitude—living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows

what" (*The Locked Room*, p. 203). Yet, he afterwards realizes that "this room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull" (p. 203). This proves that the force of the quest, which is propelled by the effect of the hyperreal, weakens and locks his mind, and that the entire process can take shape in his thoughts rather than in the external world.

He even gets delusional, for he mistakes other people for Fanshawe thinking that he is everywhere and nowhere, looking at random individuals assuming that "if he's no one, then he must be Fanshawe" (p. 204) who parallels the idea of nothingness in his head. He tries to get rid of the search and the suppositions about Fanshawe, but he can only lie to himself that he is gone. Ironically, even when he forces himself to abandon the place and quit the search, he mutters that Fanshawe "was gone—and I was gone along with him" (p. 204). This makes it clear that he has become essentially one with the simulation. That is why when he is summoned by the letter which is likely to have been written by Fanshawe, he goes to a locked room in Boston for a restoration of his disrupted sense of reality "expecting to find a presence outside of himself, a correspondence between his thoughts and external reality" (Russell 1990, p. 81).

FICTION WRITING AS A FORM OF HYPERREAL MAKING

Auster's work has occasionally proven to reverse the conventions of fiction in profound ways, for it often crafts counter-narratives which use postmodern features. Structurally, for instance, *The Locked Room* presents a narrative whose main storyline concerns a quest for Fanshawe who is entirely absent from the story. The identification of this absent narrative cause can be a main direction in the study of the structure of a work of fiction, which is, of course, a fixed element of narratives which many theorists of literary structuralism have comprehensively talked about. However, in *The Locked Room* this absent cause is literally and by all means absent, and so its existence in Auster's story-world is outstandingly precarious. Quite possibly, a sensitive reader of Auster's novel may feel that the system of cause and effect and the narrative quest which wants to bring a conventionalized coherent account into effect are all pointless.

This pointlessness of the narrative cause-and-effect in turn creates a sense of hyperreality, since it deals with a narrative space or a story-world offering a cause which is absent or does not exist. Deep under the forces of simulation, Auster's narrator – who works as a prolific novelist and essay writer – expresses his joy in writing stories; an occupation which "gave [him] pleasure to pluck names out of thin air, to invent lives that had never existed, that never would exist" (*The Locked Room*, p. 177). This idea is reinforced in the role of the narrator who works as an author, and who presumes that through imagination as the essence of writing fiction you can create actual lives. In the case of Fanshawe, the narrator is much like Auster the man, for he takes to write the life of Fanshawe, because he assumes that "Once, I had given birth to a thousand imaginary souls. Now, eight years later, I was going to take a living man and put him in his grave" (p. 117). This testifies to the role of fiction as a medium to simply bring someone into existence, though with hyperreal functions. This power to create and terminate also expresses itself more clearly when Fanshawe reveals that he (like an omniscient writer of fiction) was the one to decide what the fate each character would be in the end:

> I turned everything around. He thought he was following me, but in fact I was following him. He found me in New York, of course, but I got away—wriggled right through his arms. After that, it was like playing a game. I led him along, leaving clues for him everywhere, making it impossible for him not to find me. But I was watching him the whole time, and when the moment came, I set him up, and he walked straight into my trap.   (*The Locked Room*, p. 213)

The power of simulation affects not only the narrator but Sophie as well. Sophie is left drowning in the excessive possibilities of Fanshawe's whereabouts, and this leaves her no space of a free life. With Fanshawe's disappearance, she too becomes greatly anxious and acutely lost. From the onset of this process, her everyday life turns out to be an obsessive search for him which is a simulated process since she has helplessly played in a game about which she is completely unaware. Even when the narrator suspects that half the truth lies in the fact that Fanshawe has left her alone, he still does not let her know it, for "In my stronger moods, I argued to myself that keeping silent was the only way to protect her" (*The Locked Room*, p. 171). This assertion shows how deeply she is involved in a simulated scheme that entirely paralyses her perception of the reality of her life. The interesting part is that at times the narrator mentions how he reckons that they are all involved in a reality which is but a fiction. Yet, this fiction protects them from the unbearable sides of the reality for "no one wants to be part of a fiction, and even less so if that fiction is real" (*The Locked Room*, p. 161).

CONCLUSION

As tragedy is the effect with hyperreal cases, the narrator realizes how long he has left his family and goes utterly mad in the end since finding his deserted wife has to be his new task of achieving hope. Furthermore, the novel reveals that it was all Fanshawe's intricate plot that yoked them all tightly to a set of simulations, and it was all Fanshawe who was the mastermind to finely orchestrate a stratagem which made them all recurrently suffer and wonder about his existence. Upon their unexpected meeting in the deserted apartment – though Fanshawe never leaves the locked room to appear in person – the narrator talks about how he assumed Fanshawe was already dead, yet he replies back that it "is what you were supposed to think" (*The Locked Room*, p. 215), and that the entire time "I watched you and Sophie and the baby. There was even a time when I camped outside your apartment building. For two or three weeks, maybe a month. I followed you everywhere you went" (p. 216) showing to what extent everything was no more than a pure simulation. Apart from a completely troubled narrator with a broken family relation, the novel adds to the intensity of the tragic ending when Fanshawe commits suicide in the locked room, picturing how a hyperreal situation can dreadfully end.

The Locked Room is the tale of individuals who grapple with the modern crisis of identity. In this novel, Auster presents a narrative in which the characters are not able to distinguish false from true, and real from hyperreal. The looming presence of the hyperreal effects embedded deep through the narrative background justifies the simulatory conditions with which the modern individual has to cope. It also casts light on how tragic our fates usually become when we continue living under the influence of simulations that endow us with no dependable realities to hold on to. This feature is not a simple coincidence of Auster's creative literature. In this regard, Hutcheon correctly argues that the "postmodern art works to contest the simulacrisation process of mass culture" (2003, p. 223). In fact, much of Auster's fiction presents individuals in locked rooms and closed spaces to evaluate and critique how they affect human psyche.

To put it into its socio-historical context, Auster's fiction gets across the idea of how "a change in society's modes of production changes social conceptions of space and how, in turn, space constructs, and is constructed by, individual consciousness" (Woods 2004, p. 138). Fanshawe commits suicide in order to get rid of a life in which he feels completely lost and confused. Though he is somewhat absent from the plot, he proves to represent a sort of media which absorbs the attention of others. He is a postmodern figure who blurs "the

boundary between reality and simulated copy" and this "denial of others is the plague that has devastated one culture after another in the postmodern age" (Habibi 2013, p. 139). The narrator ends up being terribly shaken up in the end and tears up the pages of the notebook Fanshawe gave him as he finds himself falling victim to the non-realities of a society of spectacle and simulation. This more than anything disappoints him since he has lost his sense of control and authority over his life and reality, probably because he knows that the "idea of self-assertion in the postmodern culture has been reduced to nothing but an illusion" (Behrooz & Pirnajmuddin 2016, p. 195). It well describes the conditions the narrator deals with when Fanshawe claims that "you can't possibly know what's true or not true. You'll never know" (*The Locked Room*, p. 219).

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