THE EMOTIONAL TOPOS IN MAX BLECHER'S PROSE

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Abstract: *The present work aims at capturing the image of the utopian fiction universe of Max Blecher's prose, which is placed at the boundary between the reality and unreality. From the perspective of Jung's abysmal psychology, the descriptive sequence from the novel* The lit burrow *will be analysed, namely the one of the dream garden, as a projection of the inner parts of the hypersensitive human being who regains the primordial balance through reflexive capacity. The mythology of the paradisiac space paints an archetypal mundus, a symbolic representation of the Self, in the sense of Jung's psychoanalysis, which is possible only through the oneiric experience of the vigil Ego which lowers in the abyss of the collective unconscious. Therefore, Blecher's space proves to be an emotional topos which draws the Ego-Self axis, defining the individualization process of personality through the act of writing.*

Key words*: emotional topos, Self, the vigil Ego, abysmal psychology, individualization process.*

While for psychoanalyst C.G. Jung the experiment with the self which confronts the unconscious entails a search for that *imago Dei* in the human being, attempting to provide an answer to the obsessive question "Am I dreaming or am I awake?" (Jung, 2012: 271), novelist Max Blecher, a visionary of oneiric aesthetics obvious at the level of his writings, explores this "terra incognita creator of symbols" (Jung, 2014b: 308) by turning fear into certainty: "Therefore dreaming and living is the same thing" (Blecher, 2014: 262).

Any existential dissociation is annulled in Blecher's text because "life overlaps the dream" (Manolescu, 1983: 58), thereby, the duality attempted by the protagonist in many instances is doomed to failure, as it is a temporary sequencing when psycho-ization takes place only in moments of crisis or self-imposed reverie, while the return to the daily present contaminates the being with the nostalgic feeling of lost identity. The stereoscopic view often used by the novelist to reveal the hidden miracle of the reality, the world within the world, the unreality acquired through "fantastic thinking" (Jung, 2012: 197) does not present itself as a distinct representation. Therefore, "abstract character and the real me" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 19) are overlapped to total demystification. Translating the identity and literary conceptualisation into psychological terms, the two defragmentations noted in Blecher's novels are, in fact, the Self and the Ego, or the spirit of the depth and the spirit of these times (Jung, 2012: 238), as Jung names them in *The Red Book.*

The proponent of abysmal psychology identifies three layers of the *psyche*, consciousness, who contents are related to the Ego, the personal unconscious, which consists in acquisitions of the subliminal personal living, and the collective unconscious, which acts at the oneiric level, rendering "the mythological connections" (Fordham, 1998: 14) of the humankind, as a house of archetypes. What is the most relevant is the archetype of the archetypes, the Self, "ordering and unifying centre of the entire psyche (conscious and

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unconscious) […] [which] subjects the Ego" (Edinger, 2014: 28). The relationship between the vigil Ego and the Self is a problematic one, in the sense that either do identities merge in a single image which describes "the inflation state" (Edinger, *op. cit.*: 32), or a visible demarcation is produced, determining "the alienation process" (*ibidem*, 38). However, the functioning of the human psyche allows a third state, that of individualisation, when the axis Ego-Self is created to allow "the blending of the unconscious into the conscious" (Jung, 2014a: 50). This individualisation process represents the definition of the psychological man, the personality completion, as the human being enters the relationship with world history, religion and mythology, with that *mundus archetipalys* which is the Self archetype.

The symbolic topos that Jung terms "unus mundus" (Franz, 2015:192) is the unlimitedness of objective identity, reminiscent of Leibniz's monadology, according to which monads have no windows and describe a perpetual ebb-tide movement. Permittivity is allowed at the level of the human psyche because "the Ego is windowless, while the Self is a window towards other worlds of being" (Edinger, *op. cit.*: 233). The Utopia where the Self dwells may be seen in one of the sequences of the Blecherian novel *Vizuina luminată*, namely that of the representation of the dream garden, an extremely poetic and picturesque fragment in which the topos functions "as a metaphysical *état d'âme*" (Băicuş, 2005: 149). Therefore, the analysis of this descriptive sequence will allow placing Blecher's writing in the context of an unreality capable of unveiling the interiority of the hypersensitive being, described by an entire array of symbols suggesting the Self archetype. The episode represents the fantastic journey of the Self into the sub-layer of the collective unconscious in order to acknowledge the authentic Self. Once the identity has been found again in the abyss of the unconscious, the Self's taking over marks the beginning of the individualisation process, which, of course, takes place at the level of the creative act.

The character narrator of the posthumous novel is a pilgrim to archetypal spaces, in which the dichotomy *cursed-blessed* spaces is annulled, for what really matters in this existential adventure is that the breakout is not in the world, but in the interiority of the dreaming being, termed *the lit burrow* by Blecher: "the same intimate and well-known cavern, the same lukewarm burrow lit by spots and unclear images, which is the inside of my body, the content of my being from beyond the skin" (Blecher, *op. cit.:* 231)

The burrow metaphor occurs in all the spaces the Blecherian protagonist goes along the three novels (*Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*[1], *Inimi cicatrizate*[2], *Vizuina luminată*[3]), reiterating the cave symbol, reminiscence of the abysmal emptiness which denotes "the terrifying aspect of the unconscious" (Rocheterie, 2006b: 121), in which consciousness is at the risk of getting lost. The dream garden is preceded by other similar cave-spaces, "invisible traps" (Blecher, *op. cit.*: 20): the glade in the city park, the river bank nearing the oil factory, secret chambers, Walter's cellar, Clara's shop, the Berck, Leysin and Techirghiol sanatoria, the maritime cities, the cinema hall, the panopticon, the fair, Weber's house, the prompter's cage at the music hall, the cattle fair field, the reed shack, Elseneur Villa, the vegetable market of Berck, the peripheral wall, the dichromatic square in the front of the Post Office, etc.

[1] Adventures in Immediate Unreality
[2] Scarred Hearts
[3] The Lit Burrow

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The protagonist suspects reality of consistence due to the interferences between the real and the oneiric planes, ending up being certain of the "somnambulist aspects" (*ibidem*, 249) of the day-by-day actions. Dumitru Micu mentions the *de-realization*, the transformation of reality in unreality, which also entails a fictionalisation of the empiric ego, the Blecherian wanderer being "the messenger who transports reality into dream and immerses the dream into reality" (Micu, 2000: 301).

The descriptive sequence sets out with an affective tone triggered by the mnemonic exercise by which Blecher's protagonist invocates the dream experience as a hallmark of palpable reality. Although the imaginative undertaking seems to be in reverse, from dream to reality, the oneiric memory is placed somewhere between the possible worlds created by this dreaming soul: "I remember that I have dreamt for a long time the inside of a garden …" (Blecher, *op. cit.*: 249).

The image of the dream garden obsessively occurs in the protagonist's mind, its recurrence outlining, on the one hand, the being's predisposition to venturing in the unconscious world, where the functionality of the psyche is visible, and, on the other hand, invoking the prospective status of the actions capable of re-establishing the inner order. By having at stake this general function of the dream of eliminating the inherent disorders at the level of the psychic activity, Jung does not adopt the Freudian method of cataloguing the individual's complexes and frustrations, but becomes interested in the way in which the unconscious works over the conscious, as it provides "complementary and compensatory contents" (Jung, 2014b: 244). The symbolism of the garden has paradisiac connotations, being the appropriate space for establishing an extra-sensorial communion between man and universe, a connection which facilitates the energy transfer that reinvigorates and rejuvenates the being. The garden is the space of promise, spiritualisation and becoming, a trace left on Earth by divinity, a small paradise of the terrestrial universe, while psychologically speaking it marks the place where conflicts are reconciled. This insular space essentially expresses "the serenity of psychism which conciliates the plant with the gardener, the feminine with the masculine, the Eros with the Logos" (Rocheterie, *op. cit.*: 120). The protagonist who discovers the garden in the reality sphere does nothing but visualizes his own thoughts and reveries, building the image of the Self as totality at the conscious level. This extraversion of the Self and introversion of the Ego is sine qua non to the individualization process, as "the world is our image. […] The world's image is a projection of the world through the Self, inasmuch as the latter is an introspection of the world" (Jung, 2014b: 81).

As the garden is a subtle allusion to the completeness of the universe, the traveller briefly renders a few aspects of the topos, sketching at first the bigger picture of the luxuriant overview. The lawns, the greenery and the leaves are metonymies of the forest, whereas the statues point to the titanic image of the stone gods dwelling in the mountains. The cave symbol is also there, rendered through those carvings in the grass, mystically denoting "an opening towards the maternal bosom of the collective unconscious" (Rocheterie, *op. cit.*: 121).

The planes gradually overlap, « the boundary between reality and the illusive unreality is blurred" (Morar, 2006: 82), the protagonist being a simultaneous presence in dream and in reality, a revealing moment for the one who lives more than ever the Baroque

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experience of life as a dream. By adopting Jung's Latin dictum "vita somnium breve" (Jung, 2014b: 275), one may admit that the existential journey of the protagonist is overseen by Morpheus. In this respect, Nicolae Manolescu assesses that Blecher's narrator is a descendent from an unreality that "can be oneiric, surrealist, spectral or mythical" (Manolescu, 2008: 749). This escape into the fantasms' world represents the Blecherian protagonist's desire to sense his alterity, which has also been attempted in other circumstances. In his study, *În căutarea identității pierdute [In Search of Lost Identity]*, Radu G. Țeposu outlines the defining experiences lived by the Blecherian character, betraying the desperate gestures of the one subject to ipseity: "Having tested the sensorial virtues of the organic matter in *Adventures* and the ontological resources of the erotic act in *Scarred Hearts*, Blecher's character throws a last bait into the void" (Țeposu, 1999: 29). The exegete eventually refers to the dream experience which, in his view, produces, at long last, the same illusion of the communication with the absolute. The dream is a reality converter which can destroy all the hallmarks of contingency and institute another world under the impulse of the spectacular.

Starting from this premise of the dream which distorts the reality and reinvent it according to the oneiric laws, the garden is discovered in the maritime city of Berck, near the sanatorium where the character narrator had been admitted, being ill of bone tuberculosis. The sanatorium, a space of damnation and mortification, where the patient lives in plaster corsets and humbly accepts his role as a living corpse, is presented by contrast with the scenery at the outskirts of the city, a topos of a wild beauty which gives the traveller the illusion of supreme freedom. The road is taken in a special carriage, adapted for the immobilized in petrified bodies, "an ambulant coffin or a bier" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 118) which allows only a horizontal view. It is pulled by Blanchette, "a Normand animal" (*ibidem*, 160) which empathises with the master and accompanies him in his pilgrimages, ending up being more than a companion, a guide and a witness of the mysteries revealed within and without the world. The symbolism of an initiating path is set up, where the carriage pulled by the horse is an equivalent to Charon's boat. The journey in the inferno is not pejoratively construed, but as an intrusion into the world beyond the living, into the Blecherian unreality, when existence is suspended and the being is annihilated. In Jungian psychoanalysis, the descent into depths is always followed by the flight, in the direction of a spiritual evolution, so that the descent is necessary "as a requisite of ascension" (Jung, 2014a: 28). Moreover, the horse also reveals an entire array of symbols: it is a sign of the wind, fire and light, a benchmark of time, and a psychopomp (Rocheterie, *op. cit.:* 56), but also suggests the maternal dimension by being "the vehicle of the evolution process" (*ibidem*, 60). It represents the instinctual nature of the human being, the non-human and, in a wider sense, expresses the potential of the unconscious psychism. There are also other details which contribute to a large extent to the protagonist's placement in a new experience of unreality. The adventure is reserved for the initiated, which is why the garden seems to be a great mystery which puts people's trust to a test: "they didn't really believe that the garden I was talking about actually existed" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 250). But the image of the traveller returned to the sanatorium "with a carriage full of flowers" (*ibidem*) is a sign of revelation, of the miracle which keeps existing in the middle of the real. The symbol of the flower is a determiner of affectivity, which suggests that each visit of the protagonist in the dream

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garden has a powerful impact on his psyche. The flower is, otherwise, "an archetypal figure of the soul" (Chevalier, Greerbrant, 1993b: 58), invoking a spiritual, and not a material journey. The place which illuminates the being is hidden from the eyes of the neophyte, who must first look into his own reality and then see the entrance to unreality, should he be ready to hear the utopian call: "Many times had I roamed around there and nothing had made suspect the splendour beyond the walls …" (Blecher, *op. cit.*: 250-251)

The protagonist is informed by the presence of the miracle about to happen, but he seems to lack courage and, under the guise of ignorance, postpones for a while the journey to the Self. One of the villagers often speaks to him about a castle, but the character is still a prisoner of reality and refuses to see and perceive things beyond their natural limits. As the Blecherian character is a chosen one of the destiny, with a latent soul *in potentia,* he is given the chance to evolve, to accomplish himself spiritually, and to attain fulfilment as an individual totality.

The garden is a topos whose spatial hallmarks are undefined, no one knows exactly where it is because the traveller's view is obstructed by the trees and by the thick, tall walls. The allusion made to the veil of nature marks a transposition of the being in the upper plane, describing "the transcending from the former state (the old man) to a new one (the new man) (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, c: 66). The veil has the intrinsic power of revealing the sacred, but also that of enciphering it, as it is "what is revealed by hiding, what hides by being revealed" (*ibidem*, 432). The walls surround a privileged, securing, mystical space, the garden being "that grand treasure concealed in the cave of the unconscious" (Jung, 2014a: 163). The two visual barriers, the row of trees and the walls, represent the hard to cross boundary to the utopian world, because not everyone has the revelation of this topos which acquires consistency if and only if the traveller believes in its existence. Therefore, the anticipating symbols of the frame (the dream, the garden, the cave, the horse, the flowers, the veil and the walls) confirm the transgression of the vigil Ego to the plane of the collective unconscious.

Entering the garden firstly allows a prefiguration of the space with the help of the physical eye which greets the eye of interiority. As in "a vision of magical lunette" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 251), the sight is narrowed by "a completely exceptional opening" (*ibidem*) which half reveals the mystery beyond the walls. The utopian space seems more charming and wider as the observation point gradually widens its spectral horizon and focuses on the spatial benchmarks. A corner of the garden is presented, one coming to life when the sight moves further into the paradisiac perimeter, and each revealed image gives birth to another one, more spectacular, following a suite of visual flashes.

The topos is labyrinthine, each frame presenting itself as a conglomerate of elements which reveals their infirm oasis of beauty and naturalness: a water basin in front of a terrace full of flowers and a monumental door. The interrelated details provide the harmony of the scenery. In the basin there is an artesian well "in iridescent and continual spout" (*ibidem*), a symbol of the living water, purification and rebirth, for it comes from the earth and ascends to the ethereal skies. As a primordial matter, water reminisces of "the origin of life, spirit and truth, of the Self manifesting itself into the depths of the maternal unconscious creator of conscious" (Rocheterie, *op.cit.*, b: 132). Water has symbolic connotations in the sphere of the human, it is the blood that flows through the body of the

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mortal, the vital force which makes the soul vibrate. In relation to "the sacred and sacralizing value" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, a: 112) of the aquatic element, one can affirm that it holds "a soteriological power" (*ibidem*, 111), which, once having been triggered, allows the being to jump into another stage of their becoming. The other elements are also evolution indicators which complete the integrating image of the being which tries to adapt to this topos. Behind the well, there is "a terrace covered in climbing flowers" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 251), a sojourn of the exhausted soul, overwhelmed with beauty. The symbol of flower had also been seen in the plane of the conscious, as a sample of the unreality explored by the Blecherian character, an answer of the inner interrogations: "who am I, exactly?" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 19). Also, the labyrinth is a space of the doors, multiplied, locked and majestic. One of the thresholds to unreality is "a monumental, ornamented iron door" (*ibidem*, 251), marking the passage between worlds. The door has a "psychological, dynamic value" (Chevalier, *op. cit.* c: 113), as it represents an invitation to somewhere else, where man becomes an initiated traveller. The passage is one-way only: from profane to sacred, from real to unreal, from the Ego to the Self, being, at the same time, "the path to revelation" (*ibidem*, 115) in the sense of the Jewish and Christian traditions – which may also be suggestive of Max Blecher's dual belonging to the Jewish and the Romanian spirit. These three benchmark glimpsed upon through the niche share a symbolism of ascension: the water rises in a chromatic rain, the flowers are climbing and the door is grandiose.

Although this "nice, quiet and stylised" (Blecher, *op. cit.*: 251) scenery seems to be dominated by an absconds silence which entails freezing in the patterns of a landscape picture, the dynamics of the topos is rendered either by the vibration of nature – "the artesian well was spouting curves of graceful water in the air" (*ibidem*) or by the presence of some animals with particular symbolism: a few chickens grubbing in the dirt and a dog which smells the trace of the estranged. The presence of these beings, suggesting archetypal echoes, is further proof that the topos exclusively belongs to the individual inner self. The hen grubbing in the dirt evokes the gesture of the mother who feeds her broods, therefore, by sketching the maternal reflex, one reaches the embryonic, uncreated, unconscious state of the being. A more profound symbolism is offered by the dog, "the image of the devouring mother" (Rocheterie, *op. cit.*b: 67-68), entailing, from a psychoanalytical perspective, a reversion to the primary state, to the maternal utero. The dog's smelling suggests the psychic function of the human intuition that senses a change: "consciousness racing towards the unconscious" (Jung, 2014a: 437). Together with the horse that accompanies the traveller, the hens and the dog are mythological representations of the psychopomp animals which offer the underworld initiation, ad infernos, in the oneiric sea of the unconscious, which is followed by revelation, illumination and individuation.

If, up to this moment, the Blecherian protagonist resorts to the contemplating look, the integration proper into the scenery makes him see the unseen. To look is the admiring attitude of the being to the revealed beauty, but to see represents much more than that, it is an affective and reflective involvement. The physical eye is interiorized, poeticized, and unreal. The glance notices the paradise, while the sight feels the inferno. The glance belongs to the vigil Ego, whereas the sight is governed by the Self.

The coming into the topos is made official by two human presences, the doorman and the gardener, who, in the context of this paradisiac-infernal topos, complete the

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architecture of symbols. The portraits of the two may be framed in a certain archetypal typology, according to the Jungian concept, which justifies the presence of the collective unconscious. The doorman has a dark, distorted, precarious face: "a little man, fat and red-faced as if asphyxiated" (Blecher, *op. cit*.: 251). He may be the embodiment of the Shadow archetype, that "moral problem which represents a challenge to wholeness" (Jung, 2005: 16). He is a sinister oneiric apparition who expresses a powerful hostility. The Shadow displays a pluralism of negative traits which the individual tries to conceal as "an inferior, primitive and worthless side" (Samuels, Shorter *et alii,* 2014: 257).

The hybridized dimension of the doorman represents a caricature of the Shadow, all the defining elements – small, fat, asphyxiated – suggesting the distorted image of personality, an overestimation of the psychic content which needs be corrected. In the consciousness plane, the Ego appears as the centre of the psyche, alterity being impossible, which contaminates the being with a painful identity amnesia. The individual has to accept his shadow and become aware of the inflationist side of the self in order to free himself from the tyranny of this projection at the level of the unconscious. By contrast, the gardener seems to be a nice old man who borrows from the physiognomy of the plants, which proves their numinous side: "He was a tall, jaunt and wrinkled man, with a lot of white hair, as a distaff of wool, with white moustache and thick brows and a red tip of the nose, as a small, innocent bud waiting to bloom…" (Blecher, *op. cit.:* 252). This is the archetype of the Great Old Man, a *mana* personality, "an ideal and incorruptible image" (Samuels, Shorter *et alii*, *op. cit*.: 162), relevant in the process of the initiation of the being which walks the path of individuation. The portraying attributes which point to old age have the role of rendering the nature god's prototype, whilst the hair, the moustache and the brows are metonymies of the vegetal, herbs, plants, suggesting, from a psychoanalytical point of view, life in "its simplest, strictest authenticity, not deformed by the ego" (Rocheterie, *op. cit.*b: 252). The red and white dichromatism is an obvious dissociation of the existential breath that exists in each and every type of representation: reality/ dream, life/ death, conscious/ unconscious, individual/ collective, light/ darkness, Eros/ Logos, Ego/ Self. This archetypal figure opens the path towards the unconscious, the Blecherian protagonist being thus granted access to the dream garden.

Now the traveller is ready to confront the Self that he will discover inside of this affective topos. The gates are wide open, and the scenery reveals its panoramic beauty: a higher terrace, a staircase of ornamental stone with "offshoots of plants with bizarre yellow and reddish leaves" (Blecher, *op. cit.:* 253), four stone pillars supporting enormous bowls covered in blue cobalt and decorated with yellow leaves, the garden, the white roses alley, the arcades, the statues surrounded by "chambers of greenery" (*ibidem*), the artesian well and the small waterfalls drowning the piles of flowers, the castle and the iron gate "with small, round, colourful windows" (*ibidem*)

All the defining elements of the garden are representations of the Self: the circularity of the topos given by the three-dimensional sight, the leitmotif of the circle, the abstract symbol of the white rose, an equivalent of the alchemic golden flower, the symbol of the stone, which suggests the state of permanence, "that thing which is not dying within us" (Rocheterie, *op. cit.,* b: 191), the dualist chromatics: yellow/ red, yellow/ blue, green/ white. Also particularly interesting is the coloristic lucidity of the scenery, which can be

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translated into psychoanalytical language: the red is "blood and affectivity, the physiologic reaction which binds the body with the soul" (Jung, 2014a: 357), the yellow represents the numinous, the blue is "the mental process" (ibid), whereas the white with its translucent variant of the water is a non-colour "of revelation, of the state of grace, of the astonishing transfiguration" (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, a: 80). This chromatic tetrad can be rendered through the consciousness-orientation design, in which at least one represents the unconscious: blue – thought, red – feeling, yellow – intuition and green – sensation. Although the last colour is not explicitly mentioned in the text, it actually dominates the entire scenery through the frequent allusions to the vegetal world: the plants, the grass, the leaves, the flowers, and the trees. Green is the matrix colour of the topos, it is the background against whom the garden is projected, and the unconscious function that the reality lacks. Being associated with sensitivity, it enters a complicated relationship with reality, which is taken for unreality. However, the inferior function is visible at the level of the collective unconscious and may establish a communication path with the conscious psyche.

The topos may also be deciphered with the help of numerology, numbers three and four prevailing: three zoomorphic apparitions (the horse, the hen and the dog), three human hypostases (the traveller, the doorman and the gardener), four pillars and four colours. Three is suggestive of masculinity, whilst four is a representation of femininity, this numeric conjunction defining the image of the Self: "an androgyny, consisting of a male and a female principle" (Jung, 2014a: 419). The outlined opposition, triad versus tetrad, is known in alchemy as "Mary's axiom" (*ibidem*, 263), a representation of the opus, an analogy of the world genesis, of the Jungian Self.

The end of this initiating journey leaves behind the nostalgic sensation of exploring the utopian universe, the world of the unconscious, dominated by the archetype of totality: "In everything I was watching, I was retracing that dream nostalgia which, upon awakening, leaves the sadness of having walked through beautiful, deserted places, the melancholic wasteland of the extraordinary gardens" (Blecher, *op. cit.:* 253).

The space that reveals itself to the traveller is not a certainty of the reality, neither is the unconscious able to provide but the memory of a temporary alterity extant only in the oneiric sphere. At last, the Blecherian protagonist experience this in a suspended chronology, reinvented according to his own interiority, in which the Ego-Self axis is just a flashing apparition, and in which individualization is acquired only in the temporal interval of the reverie: "But who could understand that I had only visited a garden glanced while dreaming […]?" (*ibidem*, 254).

To conclude, the unconscious becomes a privileged space in the Blecherian writing, "the depositary of all chimeras" (Ţeposu, *op. cit.*: 12) which can be symbolically represented through elements of a secondary reality, allowing the simultaneous visualisation of exteriority and interiority, the author being a refined "observant of the world within and without" (Norman, 2004: 276).

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