ARTICLES

GLIMPSES OF A NEW YORK EMERGING FROM SILENCE:

Joseph Mitchell's[1] journalistic memorial essay

MATEUS YURI PASSOS
Faculdade Cásper Líbero, Brazil

ABSTRACT - This paper discusses 'Street Life', 'Days in the Branch' and 'A Place of Pasts', excerpts fragments from *The New Yorker* reporter Joseph Mitchell's unfinished memoir book he started writing during his famous period of silence from 1964 to 1994. Within the scope of Mitchell's writings, this group of texts may be considered as part of his fourth period of writing, one that was gradually established between the mid-1940s and early 1960s. They also constitute a unique genre of journalism which is referred to here as his memorial essay.
Keywords: Literary Journalism. Essay. Memoir writing. Joseph Mitchell. The New Yorker.

OLHARES DE RELANCE SOBRE A NOVA YORK QUE EMERGE DO SILÊNCIO: o jornalismo ensaístico-memorial de Joseph Mitchell

RESUMO - Este artigo discute "Street Life", "Days in the Branch' e "A Place of Pasts", fragmentos do livro de memórias inacabado que Joseph Mitchell, repórter da revista *The New Yorker,* começou a produzir durante seu famoso período de silêncio entre 1964 e 1996. Dentro do contexto maior da obra de Mitchell, os textos podem ser compreendidos como uma quarta fase de sua produção, formada gradualmente entre a segunda metade dos anos 1940 e o início dos anos 1960, e constituem um gênero jornalístico singular, aqui denominado ensaio-memorial.
Palavras-chave: Jornalismo literário. Ensaio. Memória. Joseph Mitchell. The New Yorker.

MIRADAS SOBRE LA NEW YORK QUE EMERGE DEL SILENCIO: el periodismo de ensayo-memorial de Joseph Mitchell

RESUMEN - Este artículo discute 'Street Life', 'Days in the Branch' y 'A Place of Pasts', fragmentos del libro memorialístico inconcluso que Joseph Mitchell, reportero de la revista *The New Yorker*, empezó a escribir durante su famoso periodo de silencio entre 1964 y 1996. En el contexto más amplio de la obra de Mitchell, los textos pueden ser comprendidos como una cuarta fase de su producción, gradualmente formada entre la segunda mitad de los 1940 y el inicio de los 1960, constituyendo un género periodístico singular, aquí llamado ensayo memorial.
Palabras clave: Periodismo literario. Ensayo. Memória. Joseph Mitchell. The New Yorker.

1 A laboratory for innovation

It is not without reason that the American weekly magazine *The New Yorker* is recognized as the best reporting magazine in the world (YAGODA, 2001). It was the magazine which first published and developed profiles as a genre (REMNICK, 2000). Romance short stories written by established authors or promising newcomers were published as well as literary criticism, music criticism and other expressions of art criticism that all led to establishing new standards in the press. Some reports are still well-read even decades after being published; e.g. John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

The magazine's reporting techniques and its experimentation in style and scope makes it a laboratory for innovation in journalism, able to support its reporters financially for years thereby leading them to produce high-quality material (SIMS, 2007). The repercussion of some of these works has been felt beyond the field of journalism, influencing trends in fields such as political philosophy (Arendt) or even taking a prominent role in forming new areas such as science, technology and society (Carson). One of the magazine's most acclaimed outputs is Joseph Mitchell's body of work, particularly due to the major transformations it went through over the years. A deeper look at Mitchell and his work allows us not only to observe the changes in style and textual strategy he employed – which played an essential role in establishing the profile as a genre – but also the progressive development of a more empathetic and comprehensive view of his characters.

His only book released in Brazil was *Joe Gould's Secret*; a kind of premature swansong since he lived for another 32 years after its publication in 1964 and never published or even finished another piece, all the while continuing his daily routine in his office at the *New Yorker* and receiving his regular salary of US$ 20,000 per year (YAGODA, 2001). There was expectation that he would eventually produce a new work – so much so that Harold Ross, the magazine's editor in chief, approved Mitchell's request for a raise in salary in the mid-1970s, more than ten years after his last completed work had been published (KUNKEL, 2015).

The writer's block he suffered from ran much deeper than what most originally believed; a supposed internal ethical conflict

stemming from the fact that the man he profiled whom he had also had a troubling relationship with, and for whom he felt a strong indentification, turned out to be a fraud. Rundus (2005) describes a more intricate set of factors leading to his writer's block including the death of A. J. Liebling (a close friend of Mitchell's who was also a reporter at the *New Yorker*), his growing involvement in literary and scientific societies, quitting smoking, the praise that Calvin Trillin gave him which, to Mitchell, put him on a level he didn't believe he could ever surpass, and the disappearance not only of the old New York that Mitchell was obsessed with, but also of the kind of characters that so fascinated him – he said that radio and television produced "flat" personalities which were a bad influence on the public.

This period of silence, however, was not completely unproductive – Mitchell himself (Feb. 16, 2015) mentions a daily journal he regularly wrote in since 1968, but this document remains unpublished. While researching for his biography of Mitchell, *Man in Profile*, Thomas Kunkel found a series of texts he had been writing since the late 1960s with no precise dating – works which, due to their composition and style, might lead us to see Mitchell as more than a 'reporter'. Among such works were 'Street Life', 'Days in the Branch' and 'A Place of Pasts'; three chapters from an unfinished book of memoirs that Mitchell was trying to write. They were made public by the *New Yorker* between 2013 and 2015.

In this article we will perform a qualitative analysis of the content and style of these aforementioned chapters which could potentially have been a fourth phase of Mitchell's work - according to Noel Perrin's classification (1983) discussed here later - developing the memoirist/elegiac element even further, and placing the *flanêur* Mitchell at the center of the narrative. Our main purpose here is to understand these texts as samples from a distinctive genre that, while different from reporting, are still considered as literary journalism. We therefore examine which elements would differentiate them from their genre, how this fourth phase would be different from the three previous ones, and lastly, which phase would Mitchell's most highly regarded work, *Joe Gould's Secret*, belong to.

Thus, in the next section we will describe the elements that define the three phases proposed by Perrin and, through examining excerpts from the three fragments of Mitchell's memoir book, we will determine the elements that identify a change in his writing strategy, style and genre as compared to his previous phases, which will be

summarized for the purposes of contextualization and comparison. The fragments, 'Street Life', 'Days in the Branch' and 'A Place of Pasts' were selected because they are, at least up until now, the only pieces Mitchell wrote after *Joe Gould's Secret*. Four excerpts were extracted from the fragments – two from 'A Place of Pasts' and one from each of the other two. Each part of these excerpts summarizes its link with the essential element of the set: a focus on discussing the past, in this case, not the individual past that is typical with writing memoirs, but rather a collective past, composed from decades of reporting and personal experience.

We identified which types of memory and past Mitchell evoked and how they articulate the overall plan of the set, as well as each individual text. Thus, we analyzed the thematic elements of the excerpts and of each fragment, the link to Mitchell's personal life or to his work as a reporter and the modes of exposition of his narrative – according to Eason's (1991) categories of realist and modernist modes. We then compared this set of texts to his previous works in order to give new meaning to the three phases proposed by Perrin (1983), in particular where to place *Joe Gould's Secret* within this classification.

This article is part of a broader study research to characterize the changes in Joseph Mitchell's reporting strategies, not only in terms of style, but also the manner in which he reconstructed the world around him in profiles and memoir essays, attempting to preserve a New York on the verge of evanescence in text form, thereby understanding how his view of the city and its residents changed as well as how he went about trying to better understand its essence.

We use the term "literary journalism" to define a group of very distinct speech genres[2] that lay in between journalism and literature; material which is originally produced for newspaper or magazine reading but is also consumed as literature, having its lifecycle expanded by being mainly republished in book form[3]. Texts belonging to such genres are thus read for enjoyment instead of just collecting information, as is the case with news and feature stories.

This condition presents an epistemological challenge: since literary journalism belongs to both fields, it faces some challenges trying to find its place in each of them. The elements of hybridization that allow the author to travel not only between the worlds of journalism and literature but also across them simultaneously are problematic and often lead critics to place literary journalism on a

lower level than literature and journalism[4]. The hybrid and border genres of literary journalism often frustrate readers and critics because they do not belong exclusively to one field or the other. Grouping them under this nomenclature is justified because of their distinct nature, while characterizing them simultaneously as literature and journalism puts them apart from both fields. Tom Wolfe's rant (2005) on the existence, the urgency and the supposed superiority of New Journalism over the press and fiction of the 1960s was an attempt to respond to this friction and defend territory for New Journalism, although in his reasoning he denied its historical heritage and links with older forms such as sketches (SIMS, 2007) and the tradition of narrative journalism in outlets such as *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, *Harper's*, *Gatopardo*, *Etiqueta Negra*, *Realidade*, *piauí* etc.

2 Joseph Mitchell: trajectory and development of style

Noel Perrin (1983) organized Joseph Mitchell's works into three different phases. Each phase primarily focuses on people and their personal experiences – bricklayers, gypsies, fishermen, hotel owners, and preachers – but also on profiling ideas and places. In short, they describe the profile of a rustic New York that was gradually disappearing, a subject of not only modernization, but also gentrification, and they also describe the lives of people who were on the outside of this process looking in.

Mitchell was not from New York. He was born in 1908 in a farm in Fairmont, Robeson County, North Carolina. He moved to New York in 1929 where he started reporting on crimes for the newspaper *The World*. In the beginning of his career, he would report the main information on a crime over the telephone and another journalist would write down what he said. He was also a reporter for the *Herald Tribune* and *World-Telegram* before being hired by the *New Yorker* in *1937*. He continued working there until his death in 1996. His works were collected in five books. The texts themselves contained little to suggest they were written by the same person. In *My Ears Are Bent*, a 1938 collection of his daily newspaper writings and his early stories for the *New Yorker*, Mitchell is not only a newcomer to the city, but also to journalism and letters. While trying to find his narrative voice, he showed little

involvement with the topics and the people he met; he treated them as mere curiosities or eccentricities who were foreign to him, something that may have been conditioned in part by the speed of newspaper production.

In his intermediary phase (1938-1939), Mitchell became more accustomed to the editorial freedom regarding issues, treatment and deadlines at the *New Yorker* and began writing profiles representative of a writer who felt more confident with his style and the issues that interested him and who started to research them extensively, especially by conducting long and multiple interviews. From that moment on his writing took on a broader scope and consumed more time, his characters were more complex, more human; he was more involved with them, had more empathy for them. Noel Perrin (1983) credits this change to a "feeling of the past" due to the greater number of life stories for the people he profiled, stories which were told in order to give the readers some clues to the character's present life. This change is evident when reading the two texts on Mazie P. Gordon, the owner of a movie theater in Bowery who walked the streets late at night giving change and assistance to homeless people in the neighborhood. The sketch 'Except that she smokes, drinks booze and talks rough, Miss Mazie is a nun' from *My Ears Are Bent*, and the profile 'Mazie', published in *The New Yorker* in 1940, were collected along with some of Mitchell's other writings from his decade at the magazine in the book *McSorley's Wonderful Saloon*, published in 1943 and considerably expanded to include later pieces in 1992. Mazie was revisited by Mitchell because he had found new narrative possibilities due to the progression in his style as well as to the different conditions for textual production and reproduction which the *New Yorker* offered. The later piece in 1940 depicted Mazie as a more complete and distinct person; in Perrin's words (1983, p.174), "a brilliant sketch has turned into a portrait full of light and shadow". Yet its textual structure – which at the time became the standard for other reporters in the magazine – shares some formulaic features with other profiles in *McSorley's Wonderful Saloon*. In a way, Mitchell creates his own *lead* style by presenting a summary of the main character at the beginning of each profile.

Old Mr. Flood, from 1948, belongs to this same phase even though it presents some transitional elements. It detaches itself

from this period and is seen today as a work of fiction due to its protagonist being a composite character (MARTINEZ, CORREIA; PASSOS, 2015). Hugh Griffin Flood, a 90-year old retired demolition man who lived in a hotel in the Fulton Fish Market area, only ate seafood and believed he would live to be 115. He did not have a real-life counterpart in any individual person, but instead, in a handful of people Mitchell had interviewed, and in the author himself, who shared several aspects with Flood; e.g. date of birth, food and religious preferences, and named his character after his grandfather, Hugh Griffin Mitchell (RUNDUS, 2005). At first, Mitchell had planned to write a profile representing life at the Fulton Fish Market, its main character being a person he had interviewed, a retired purveyor in the market, or perhaps one of his neighbors, all of whom were retired and elderly. They allowed the reporter to interview them, but refused to authorize him to write a piece about them. The decision to make a composite was made after Harold Ross, editor and owner of the *New Yorker*, suggested it so that a ten-year effort of interviews and gathering of information would not be lost (KUNKEL, 2015). The use of composite characters was common at the time (SIMS, 2007) – there was, for instance, a profile of a soldier who had returned home from World War II that was a summary of the experiences of several people in a single character. Decades later, however, it was questioned whether it would be ethically acceptable to call such groups of works nonfiction.

Four of the six pieces collected in *The Bottom of the Harbor*, published in 1960, were originally published in the magazine between 1951 and 1959 and present a new voice and style, often with a more personal tone resembling that of an essay – with the exception of 'The Rats on the Waterfront', published in 1944, and 'Dragger Captain', from 1947, both of which are more similar to the previous period of his work. In these four pieces Mitchell becomes a character who not only observes, but also acts together with his protagonists, describing his own actions and reactions in stories published once every two or three years. Perrin (1983) calls this the *elegiac* phase, in which some aspects of New York that were forgotten from the past were commemorated by Mitchell and the few remaining members of communities and lifestyles that were disappearing over time.

The last of Mitchell's finished stories is *Joe Gould's Secret*, originally published in two parts in the September 19th and 26th

issues of the *New Yorker,* in 1964. Similar to "Mazie", Mitchell brought a new perspective on a person he had already profiled: Joseph Ferdinand Gould, the protagonist in "Professor Seagull", first published on December 12th, 1942. His final work, better defined as a memoir essay and which Fiennes (2012) considers an essay-novella, has a triple significance to Mitchell's body of work. Regarding his style, it consolidates and further develops the changes of his later period in a more personal and essay-like narrative; combined with Gould's first profile, it presents a unique study of a real-life character in three strongly contrasting approaches. If revisiting Mazie P. Gordon showed how much Mitchell had matured as a writer and offered a sample of the differences between the first two phases of his career, the gap between both versions of Joe Gould is even wider and allows us to catch a glimpse of how much authors can reinvent themselves as their interests and worldviews change – and simultaneously consolidate. *Joe Gould's Secret*, published years after its protagonist's death, offers a counter-profile (PASSOS, 2016). A review of both the content and structure of 'Professor Seagull' introduces the reader to a deceitful and irritating Gould. Here Mitchell assumes the first-person narration and intervenes in the story with comments and digressions, thus reinventing his own style by making it very similar to Gould's. While the piece from 1942 was an exemplary, complete and closely-knit profile, Mitchell's last work may only be referred to as a profile if the concepts around the genre for including memoirs and personal essays are revised.

3 Fragments of silence: the streets, the branch, the pasts

As mentioned above, Perrin (1983) proposes that the reporting and profiles written by Mitchell after 1951 constitute an elegiac phase in his work – stories which, even when observing and describing the world at its present time, focus on the past and a celebration of it; an attempt to scrutinize all of its recoverable traces and to mourn everything that is lost. However, *Joe Gould's Secret* and the three fragments of Mitchell's memoir, 'Street Life', 'Days in the Branch' and 'A Place of Pasts' (eventually published in the February 11th, 2013, December 1st, 2014, and February 16th, 2015 issues of *The New Yorker,* respectively) are quite distinct from the collection

of stories in *The Bottom of the Harbor.* They are not written from external stimulations that activate memories but, on the contrary, from memory stimulation in order to observe and comment on the external world, albeit unequivocally derived from reporting experience – not just the long quarrelsome period of friendship between Mitchell and Gould, but also the countless years of wandering through the streets of New York, watching and talking to people. This series of fragments requires a revision of the classification of journalistic genres, in particular those labeled as literary journalism in order to protect other forms similar to memoirs and essays.

As we are about to see, the three memoir essays which have that digressive-argumentative quality that is so particular to essays were built with growing introspection. 'Street Life', thought to be the first chapter of the unfinished book, deals with the relationship between Mitchell and urban New York. He describes how he knows every neighborhood due to his work as a reporter and his leisurely strolls throughout the city, like the ones narrated in the opening of most of the stories from *The Bottom of the Harbor*. He also describes how certain neighborhoods and streets *haunt* and *pursue* him – memories of a past that he cannot forget.

Mitchell confesses his love for New York and his condition as a hopeless *flâneur* who roams the city on foot, by subway or by bus, only in order to know it more and more. He was fascinated with buildings, particularly the small details of older buildings, which attracted him like a magnet. He would often attend mass in old Catholic churches just to admire their architecture, which soon became one of his obsessions. He also began visiting all the Roman and Orthodox Catholic churches that he could in a number of different countries.

The thematic element of the past which unites the three fragments is evident for the first time at the end of the chapter: Mitchell would soon reach the conclusion that it was not the masses themselves, nor the faith or rituals that attracted and *haunted* him (the word *haunt* is quite recurrent in 'Street Life') but their age, their link to the past, like so many other places:

> As I said, I am strongly drawn to old churches. I am also strongly drawn to old hotels. I am also strongly drawn to old restaurants, old saloons, old tenement houses, old police stations, old courthouses, old newspaper plants, old banks, and old skyscrapers. I am also strongly drawn to old piers and old ferry houses and to the waterfront in general. I am also strongly drawn to old markets and most strongly to Fulton Fish Market. I am also strongly drawn to a dozen or so old buildings,

> most of them on lower Broadway or on Fifth and Sixth Avenues in the Twenties and Thirties, that once were department-store buildings and then became loft buildings or warehouses when the stores, some famous and greatly respected and even loved in their time and now almost completely forgotten, either went out of business or moved into new buildings farther uptown. I am also strongly drawn to certain kinds of places that people aren't ordinarily allowed to "visit or enter upon," as the warning signs say, "unless employed herein or hereon"—excavations, for example, and buildings and other structures that are under construction, and buildings or other structures that are being demolished. (...)
> I used to feel very much at home in New York City. I wasn't born here, I wasn't a native, but I might as well have been: I belonged here. Several years ago, however, I began to be oppressed by a feeling that New York City had gone past me and that I didn't belong here anymore. (MITCHELL, Feb. 11 2013)

Mitchell first attributes this feeling of not belonging to his status as a foreigner. He tries to strengthen his bonds with his homeland of North Carolina, but also feels out of place there; the past is his place, his home – but it eludes all his attempts to capture it. This feeling comes from the depression he suffered from throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The main theme of his memoir book, as he states at the end of 'Street Life', is the inner transformation which helped him overcome the depression, bit by bit. This change, however, is a gap that might not ever be filled for readers and critics.

Mitchell moves his focus from New York to his homeland, Robeson County. In the first pages of 'Days in the Branch' he reveals that even the fascination he felt for the big metropolis was not enough to diminish the deep nostalgia he felt for the farm where he grew up and its surroundings. The essayist in him became lost while reminiscing of the afternoons he spent by Lumber river where he used to watch a variety of animals – birds nesting in tree branches, mice running in the grass – and pick an assortment of fruits for the pies his aunt would make. He used to climb the trees, or even just lie about gazing into the river and its ripples.

In this second fragment, Mitchell also recounts how he was a subscriber to the *New York Times* and *The Robesonian*, the local daily newspaper that would arrive twice a week at his apartment in bundles of three or four issues at a time. He would avidly read them all, paying special attention to small events – purchases and sales, weddings, obituaries – which would give him an indication of how life was for the people who were part of his childhood.

> I look upon the items in each issue of the *Robesonian* as a few more paragraphs or pages or even chapters in a novel that I have been reading for a long time now and that I expect to keep on reading as long as I live, a sort of never-ending to-be-continued serial about the ups and downs of a group of interrelated rural and small-town families in the South, a sort of ever-flowing roman-fleuve. Because I know the person or persons mentioned in an item, and know or knew their fathers and their mothers, and in some cases their grandfathers and their grandmothers, and in a few cases, for that matter, their great-grandfathers and their great-grandmothers, I can sense the inner significance and the inner importance of the occurrence that the item tells about; it lurks between the lines. Quite often, what is between the lines of an item is far more interesting than the item itself. (MITCHELL, Dec 1 2014)

On one hand the author seems fascinated with the changes in Robeson County, with the progress of life; however, when he speaks of the land, he gives the impression that it is his place of residence, highlighted by his fascination with the fact that the surnames, and even first names, of the people who lived there in 1790 were in essence the same as his contemporaries; a counterpoint to the unstoppable progress of New York where remnants of the past that fascinated him were disappearing. Mitchell goes on to state that with the given name and surname of someone from Robeson County he could predict, with high accuracy, not only the profession and the part of the region where the person lived, but also what kind of person he or she was. When he describes how he was following the events in the region, it seems like a kind of eternal past that he wants to follow – and the moment he becomes aware of his immersion in the past is the main subject of the following fragment.

'A Place of Pasts', the third and shorter installment in the series – the one that may be most truly regarded as a fragment – begins with a self-diagnosis:

> In the fall of 1968, without at first realizing what was happening to me, I began living in the past. These days, when I reflect on this and add up the years that have gone by, I can hardly believe it: I have been living in the past for over twenty years—living mostly in the past, I should say, or living in the past as much as possible. (MITCHELL, Feb. 16 2015)

This excerpt is very significant in several aspects. Firstly, it is the only one of the would-be chapters that allows for a tentative dating of its writing – "over twenty years" after the fall of 1968 points to writing which had started at the end of the 1980s and the

beginning of the following decade, close to the time of Mitchell's death. We know through Kunkel (2015) that he had already started writing for the memoir book at the end of the 1960s, some years after the publication of *Joe Gould's Secret*, suggesting that preparation was very slow or occurred at irregular intervals – even in the last years of his life Mitchell continued to nurture some hope of finishing the book and maybe publishing it. On the other hand, this memorial essay brings forth strong evidence of what Perrin had sensed even before this last fragment had been written: Mitchell became a distinct journalist – or rather something very distinct from a journalist – by changing the focus of his writing from the present to the past; but not his own past and experiences:

> And I should also say that when I say the past I mean a number of pasts, a hodgepodge of pasts, a spider's web of pasts, a jungle of pasts: my own past; my father's past; my mother's past; the pasts of my brothers and sisters; the past of a small farming town geographically misnamed Fairmont down in the cypress swamps and black gum bottoms and wild magnolia bays of southeastern North Carolina, a town in which I grew up and from which I fled as soon as I could but which I go back to as often as I can and have for years and for which even at this late date I am now and then all of a sudden and for no conscious reason at all heart-wrenchingly homesick; the pasts of several furnished-room houses and side-street hotels in New York City in which I lived during the early years of the Depression, when I was first discovering the city, and that disappeared one by one without a trace a long time ago but that evidently made a deep impression on me. (MITCHELL, Feb. 16 2015)

The excerpt above brings the content of both 'Street Life' and 'Days in the Branch' together – and it is interesting to think that the fragmentary remnant of a book which would have had a larger scope may still be read as a closely-knit series. It simultaneously points to why Mitchell was so attached to the pasts of others (people who were familiar to him and an immediate part of his past) and the past of the city that had enraptured him and became the major theme of his works.

The memories shift from a personal past to the external world by recalling three characters that left a profound impression on Mitchell: Lady Olga, a bearded woman who was born in a castle in Potsdam, Germany. But he found out that she came from the same region he did, and she longed to once again see the farm where she grew up; James Jefferson Davis Hall, a preacher who lived in the streets and believed he was blessed with the ability to interpret

the Bible in order to decipher and deliver God's true message; and Madame Miller, a Serbian gypsy who presented an interesting dualism – Mitchell's impression of her was that of a good, kind old grandma whose presence was comforting, yet all the while he was aware that she was involved in dozens of larceny cases. The brief summary of the three characters concludes with what really fascinated him: it wasn't the promises of a bright future offered by the metropolis of New York; it was the city as a place that gathers several pasts which were slowly fading away.

This group of fragmentary chapters allows us to hypothesize on why Mitchell opted to write a memoir book instead of continuing to write elegiac reports and profiles. For Mitchell, the past had become more real, concrete, palpable and present than actual reality, and in a way, writing about his memories and the conflicting relationship between present and past became the best solution for dealing with it.

4 Journalistic memorial essay: considerations

David Eason (1990) organizes New Journalism, one of the periods of American literary journalism, into two large departments: realist authors, who believed they could accurately portray the events they had observed with no interpretive mediation; and modernists, who presumed interpretation to be something taken for granted and intended to read the world and present it through the filters of their minds. From the texts in *My Ears are Bent* to 'The Rats on the Waterfront' and 'Dragger Captain', Mitchell unequivocally practices the former, but in his 1950s collection *The Bottom of the Harbor* there is a clear transition as personal and interpretive elements start to appear in the narrative, particularly in the opening of the pieces. This process deepens considerably in following works – whether finished or unfinished – which leads us to suggest the existence of a fourth phase of his work in which the elegiac substance mobilizes a very distinct textual strategy, more essay-like than reports or profiles – adding it to the end of Perrin's three phases.

The path of Mitchell's transition from a "realist" to a "modernist" is paved not only with the construction of the narrative from the inside – most of his writings are on contemporary life and

the immediately experienced events, while *Joe Gould's Secret* and the three fragments recently published are based in the realm of memory, but also by the construction of a protagonist based on himself. Alexander (2009) states that Gould is Mitchell's *double* and represents a darker side of Mitchell; an aspect that led Sims (1990) to suspect Gould never existed at all and was a fictional creation. The confusion between Mitchell and Gould reached a different level as Mitchell himself started to suffer from writer's block and never published another story. As Hyman (1978) pointed out, Mitchell *became* Gould and the *Oral History* that the bohemian from Greenwich Village could never finish is, in a certain way, precisely the one gradually constructed by the reporter at the *New Yorker*. The body of his works was a collection of voices being suffocated by official discourse and those personalities who were simultaneously funny and melancholic and who could not find their place in the world anymore. It is nonetheless ironic that, in Mitchell's later works – especially during his silent period – the genre he practiced was the essay, which was precisely what he had repudiated when he read the samples from Gould's *Oral History*.

The focus on small-scale events is one of the elements specific to Mitchell's works and is noticeable as we watch him meandering through tiny, obscure aspects of everyday life in New York instead of setting his eyes on prominent and radiant happenings in a city that was becoming more and more important on the global cultural and economic scenes. Furthermore, his persistent interest in decadent places indicates a fascination with remnants of the city's past, of the worlds and cultures that were fading, and the heritage of unknown people. In this sense, the reporter might be seen as a reviewer who, in the words of Walter Benjamin (2012), avoids or distrusts the story's official elements, the narration of victorious people and conquerors, and searches for other versions to reveal the past. On the other hand, his work is also exemplary in demonstrating and portraying great interest and respect for unofficial ideology, as defined by Bakthin (2012) in opposition to the official ideology that was established by powerful political and economic institutions and natural sciences.

Passos (2014) suggests that Mitchell constructed three different characterizations of Gould in 'Professor Seagull' and *Joe Gould's Secret* - the third Joe Gould that emerges was the product of a dialogue between the writer and the profilee. This would be made

clear in the text when Mitchell, after his confrontation with Gould was interrupted by an editor from the *New Yorker*, began digressing on the literary project he had nurtured in his earlier days; a New York version of James Joyce's *Ulysses* featuring a rookie reporter from the countryside – a fictional representation of Mitchell himself. He concluded that his mystical initiation to the metropolis, of which he believed not even a word had been written, would hardly have his high-quality planning – just like Gould's *Oral History*, if it had ever been finished. After all, he saw his talents as a writer as being very limited, and the nonexistence of his would-be *magnum opus* as something more beneficial than its existence; Kunkel (2015) points out that the ever-growing depression that led to his writer's block was brought on by the pressure that Mitchell had put on himself to produce a high quality piece to follow *Joe Gould's Secret*, which he believed he was unable to do.

If the untitled memory book had never been finished in the same vein as memorable works from the twentieth century such as Franz Kafka's three romance novels and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Petrolio*, its fragments would still be appreciated by readers – and even more so by the academic community, in terms of both criticism and education in journalism. This is a genre which effectively combines journalistic praxis – more precisely the memories of countless wandering and information gathering – and essay. It is an introspective view on one's own life which unfolds into a view on the world – in particular that fleeting New York that was already old and fading away when the young Mitchell arrived in the late 1920s. In this work we are not only able to identify and sketch a characterization of the genre, but also to contribute towards understanding Mitchell's progression as a writer by suggesting the development of a fourth phase in addition to the three proposed by Perrin.

*This paper was translated by Mateus Yuri Passos and revised by Lee Sharp

NOTES

1 An early version of this paper was presented in September 2016 at the XXXIX Brazilian Congress on Communication Science – Intercom.

2 Here we understand speech genres under Bakhtin's proposition (2011), which defines them as relatively stable types of utterances regarding thematic content, style, and compositional structure. This bakhtinian notion does not have the purpose of organizing or hierarchizing genres in a small set of nomenclatures, since it perceives them a field of infinite possibilites: variations in any of the three essential aspects would generate new genres, which are often derived from already established gernes or even "hybrid forms" that combine aspects of one or more genres, or groups of genres, which is the case regarding literary journalism and journalistic memorial essay.

3 The criteria used is are the ones proposed by Eagleton (2006), who states that the critics' notion of what is considered as literature depends less on the inherent aesthetic features of a text, or even its original purposes, and more on its reception and survival.

4 As as example we may recall the repudiation of 1970s *romances-reportagem* [reporting novel] by brazilian critics who considered them as aesthetically old-fashioned (COSSON, 2007) – Hartsock (2000) has noted a similar attitude in the american criticism-, and the manner that part of the american press has dismissed 1960s New Journalism as "parajournalism" (WOLFE, 2005).

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Mateus Yuri Passos. Postdoctoral fellow, Cásper Líbero College (FCL); Capes scholarship. PhD in Literature, University of Campinas (UNICAMP). Master's Degree in Science, Technology and Society, Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar). BAs in Journalism, Catholic University of Campinas (PUC-Campinas), and in Literature Studies, University of Campinas (UNICAMP). E-mail: mateus.passos@gmail.com

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