

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20182> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Wesselman, Daan

Title: Reflections of/on the city : literature, space, and postmodernity

Date: 2012-11-28

2 – Beyond the Negative: Non-location and *The Crying of Lot 49*

After a reading of Barthelme's "The Balloon" and Auster's *City of Glass* as texts that present different ways to come to terms with urban space in the light of a world characterized by postmodernity, the question remains *what kind of new spaces* belong to such a world. After all, Lefebvre's lived space is a way of conceiving of spatiality rather than a description of an actual space, and the same goes for Foucault's heterotopia. Likewise, while the practices and tactics for which de Certeau argues certainly characterize a new usage of space, they do not themselves characterize new types of spaces. Just like Barthelme's and Auster's texts show a new approach to spatiality in relation to the (existing) modern urban space of Manhattan, another text – Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) – will allow for more specific elaboration upon the spaces particular to postmodernity.

81

In McHale's view, *The Crying of Lot 49* is a transitional text, moving from a modernist epistemological dominant to an ontological concern in the form of a glimpse of the possibility of multiple worlds. "Classically modernist in its form," according to McHale, Pynchon's novel follows an intricate detective plot – akin to the work of Raymond Chandler, for example – and the novel "represents the mediating consciousness of Oedipa, and through her the happenings in its fictional world" (23). In brief, the novel tells the story of Oedipa Maas, who is charged with executing the will of her former lover, Pierce Inverarity. This task leads her to the fictional city of San Narciso in Southern California, where she stumbles upon a secret and subversive postal network – W.A.S.T.E. – through which isolated and marginalized individuals and groups communicate. As her search expands, she discovers an intricate history behind this network and its almost all-encompassing extent in contemporary America, leading her to perceive all incidents as connected by a massive system that she dubs the "Tristero."

However, she is unable to definitively prove (to herself, at least) the actual existence of the Tristero, because all people who had led her to the system in the first place either die or become inaccessible in terms of reliable knowledge about the Tristero. At the end of the novel, she

has only one final connection to the system in the form of a mysterious bidder for Inverarity's stamp collection – but the novel ends precisely on that note, at the auction, waiting for the bidder to reveal himself. Hence, a final resolution of Oedipa's quest is denied, leaving only the *possibility* of the existence of the Tristero. The key phrase here is one she adopts from an actor who likens himself to the projector in a planetarium: "Shall I project a world?" For McHale, the fact that this phrase remains a question indicates the novel's liminal character when seen in the light of a distinction between modernist and postmodernist fiction: the possibility of a multiplicity of worlds is raised, but does not materialize, leaving the novel just on the modernist side of the threshold.

82 One could also say, of course, that such a liminal position is possible only by recognizing the two sides of the threshold. Although the novel may not tip over into full-blown postmodernism, the transitional character of *Lot 49* does offer both a modernist and a postmodernist perspective. Particularly for the present examination of spatiality, the novel's transitional perspective provides a view of distinctly postmodern urban spaces.

The transition from modern to postmodern urban space is apparent in the way in which the city of San Narciso is introduced in the novel. As Oedipa arrives in her car, the text provides a view of the city from above:

She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, on to a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the first time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of understanding. Smog hung all round the horizon, the sun on the bright beige

countryside was painful; she and the Chevy seemed parked at the center of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken. (145)

The view of the city from above, as Burton Pike notes in his thorough study of the representation of the city in modern literature, is a traditional narrative viewpoint common in nineteenth-century literature. As he remarks, no action takes place in such a panoramic view of the city, so from this vantage point “what is observed must pass through the filter of the narrating consciousness” (34). Within the context of *Lot 49* as a liminal novel between the modern and postmodern, one can see that this perspective on the city reinforces the primacy of issues of seeing and knowing, with the subject as the focal point for these concerns, which is particularly evident in the last two sentences in the passage above. Hence, this view of the city is characteristic of the epistemology of modernity, particularly as developed in the nineteenth century. For example, compare this passage from *Madame Bovary* (which, despite the obviously different historical context, is an illustrative modern correlate to the view presented in *Lot 49* well over a century later) in which Emma views Rouen from a carriage atop a hill:

83

Sloping down like an amphitheater, submerged in the mist, it spread out beyond the bridges, chaotically. And the featureless curve of open country sloped away up until it touched the far pale blur of the skyline. Seen like this from above, the whole landscape had the stillness of a painting; ships at anchor were crowded together in one corner; the river curved smoothly around the foot of the green hills, and the islands, oblong in form, looked just like big black fish, motionless on the water. Factory chimneys were pushing out immense plumes of brown stuff that were swept away on the breeze. You could hear the rumbling of the ironworks and the clear sound of church-bells from spires that rose above the mist. The trees along the boulevards, quite leafless, looked like purple bushes in among the houses, and the roof-tops, all gleaming wet, were a patchwork of mirrors, each piece at a different height. Sometimes

a gust would blow the clouds towards Côte Sainte-Catherine, like sea-waves in the sky crashing silently against a cliff.

From that dense-packed humanity she inhaled something vertiginous, and it gorged her heart, as though the hundred and twenty thousand souls pulsing down there had discharged all together the fumes of the passion she imagined theirs. Her love unfurled across vast space, dilated to a chaos by the vague murmur rising from below. She rained it down again, on the squares, on the parks, on the streets, and the old Norman city seemed to spread before her like some great metropolis, like Babylon unveiled for her. (244-45)

84

As Pike remarks, the first paragraph here “presents the city as an object in the reader’s line of sight” whereas in the second the city “disappears behind a non-specific vocabulary of passionate feeling,” making it “a screen on which this feeling is projected” (49-50). Both views of the city – as visible “object” and as screen for subjective projection – underscore the subject as the center of the viewing experience. For example, the “stillness of a painting” and the “great metropolis, like Babylon” for Emma, and the “well-tended crop” and the “astonishing clarity” of the printed circuit for Oedipa illustrate that the presentation of the city is focalized through the main character – a prototypically modern narrative device. Hence, the city is reduced to an image generated by the viewer, a product of the primacy and centrality of the position of the viewing subject.

Such presentation of the city from above thus foregrounds the characteristically modern emphasis on epistemology. The same is true for the opening of de Certeau’s description of Manhattan from the top of the World Trade Centre, for example, where the city becomes “a text that lies before one’s eyes” (92), leading to a consideration of the city not as material fact but as concept. In *Lot 49* the initial description of the city does not only implicitly foreground epistemological concerns by nature of the conventional top-down perspective, but it also explicitly raises these concerns in taking the city to be a signifying structure (like in de Certeau) with the promise (or hope) of some concealed meaning to be revealed (hinting at a modernist epiphany) once she is the city itself – a promise held at bay for the moment by distance, smog, and glaring sun. Moreover, by taking the urban (signifying) structure to be a pattern, the

presentation of city suggests a coherent totality – paralleling the reductive process of abstraction that is characteristic of epistemologies of modernity. Hence, Oedipa's (modernist) entrance into San Narciso uses urban space to reinforce the epistemological reason for her going there in the first place, to sort out Inverarity's estate, and the ensuing detective plot in which she gets entangled. In other words, the view from above reduces the city to an image, suggesting a coherent totality that foregrounds epistemology and the position of the viewing/knowing subject.

However, this use of urban space in conventional and stable conjunction with a concern with meaning and knowability quickly dissipates as Oedipa descends into the city itself. The unifying and totalizing perspective makes way for a description that is sequential, based on the perspective from a car moving along the freeway.

85

She gave it up presently, as if a cloud had approached the sun or the smog thickened, and so broken the 'religious instant', whatever it might've been; started up and proceeded at maybe 70 mph along the singing blacktop, on to a highway she thought went towards Los Angeles, into a neighborhood that was little more than the road's skinny right-of-way, lined by auto lots, escrow services, drive-ins, small office buildings and factories whose address numbers were in the 70 and 80,000s. She had never known numbers to run so high. It seemed unnatural. To her left appeared a prolonged scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers: soon an entrance whizzed by, two-sixty-foot missiles on either side and the name YOYODYNE lettered conservatively on each nose cone. This was San Narcissus's big source of employment, the Galactronics Division of Yoyodyne, Inc, one of the giants of the aerospace industry. Pierce, she happened to know, had owned a large block of shares, had been somehow involved in negotiating an understanding with the county tax assessor to lure Yoyodyne here in the first place. It was part, he explained, of being a founding father.

Barbed wire again gave way to the familiar parade of more beige, prefab, cinderblock office machine distributors, sealant makers, bottled gas works, fastener factories, warehouses, and whatever. Sunday had sent them all into silence and paralysis, all but an oc-

casional real estate office or truck stop. Oedipa resolved to pull in at the next motel she saw, however ugly, stillness and four walls having at some point become preferable to this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape – it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner LA, keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. But were Oedipa some single melted crystal of urban horse, LA, really, would be no less turned on for her absence. (15-16)

86 The view of the city from a car moving along the highway markedly differs from the static and totalizing view from above. The promise and expectation of an epiphanic moment are punctured once Oedipa drives into the city (prefiguring the progressive breakdown of Oedipa's epistemological framework throughout the novel). The promise of meaning and the order and clarity of the initial view, which together transform the city into a signifying whole, is replaced by the popping up of different elements one after the other. The centrality of the viewer in the first view – in a hierarchically superior position to the city viewed, in control over what is viewed and how – is displaced as well; it is not the viewer who directs what is seen, but the buildings appear to Oedipa in a parade of elements of the city whizzing by. The city presents itself to the driver, taking over control over the process of viewing.¹ Furthermore, whereas the first scene presents San Narciso as an autonomous whole, the second scene explicitly views the city in its relation to Los Angeles, positioned somewhere in a network of freeways. In addition, the city viewed from the road is "unreal," presenting only an illusion of freedom and unfolding landscape, contradicting a conventional (and highly romanticized) view of the open road in the US.

Similarly, the metaphors for viewing the city change. Whereas the first description sees San Narciso in terms of man-made elements – a well-tended crop, a printed circuit, and hieroglyphs – the up-close

1 In contrast, compare Emma's approach to the city in *Madame Bovary* as she looks out of the carriage, which completely affirms the primacy of the viewer: "Emma knew it from end to end; she knew that after a meadow there came a sign-post, an elm, a barn, or a road-mender's hut; sometimes, to give herself a surprise, she would close her eyes. But she never lost an exact sense of the distance still to be covered" (244).

presentation of the man-made elements of the city in the second scene draws on different terms. One of the first things Oedipa remarks is the “unnatural” character of address numbers that run into the 80,000s as the buildings whiz by, in apparent contrast to the initial likeness to an electronic circuit. Furthermore, this concern with “naturalness” is extended by viewing the individual parts of the city as bodies in their own right, “paralyzed” on a Sunday. Likewise, the network of freeways as a whole appears in bodily terms, as a network of veins for the purpose of sedation through intravenous drugs.

Overall then, this ground-level view of the city yields an entirely different picture: not the suggestion of an organized and signifying whole (with the promise of a revelation), but the city as an unnatural, paralyzed, and sedated body, no longer viewed as a passive object, but actively presenting itself. The contrast between these two views of the city is thus a spatial expression of the novel’s transitional character, effecting a transition from a modern city to a postmodern city that lacks such unitary definition.

87

Yet the question of what to make of this difference is not immediately answered using the theoretical discourses on space discussed so far. The contrast between a top-down and ground-level view invites a comparison to de Certeau’s discussion of walking in the city. However, there is a key difference that characterizes the treatment of urban space in *Lot 49*. With regard to the view from above, *Lot 49* seems to be in line with de Certeau’s remarks on the Concept-city. But whereas for de Certeau the descent into the city sparks a discussion about the decay of the Concept-city, with cracks in the system becoming apparent when walking in the city, this process of decay does not seem to occur in San Narciso. At the ground level of the city in *Lot 49* there are no users whose tactics combat oppressive strategies of the Concept-city; the oppositional dynamic between strategies and tactics does not seem to be operative in San Narciso at all. The initial suggestion of an ordered whole carrying hidden meaning – a hieroglyphic “urban text” – is primarily a pre-conceived mode of viewing the city, based on (modernist) convention more than on an actual encounter with urban space. The ground-level view does not correspond to this conceptual totality viewed from above, but it also does not offer the kind of liberation that walking provides for de Certeau. On the contrary, Oedipa sees only an illusion of freedom offered by the road

and consciously rejects it.

More specifically, and more importantly, the model that de Certeau describes assumes an urban space in which users interact with the city and each other through the physical activity of walking. This is largely irrelevant in the type of urban space that *Lot 49* deals with, since it was built with drivers in mind, not pedestrians, hence precluding anything but distant viewing and purposive interaction with the streets and buildings of the city, and severely limiting the possibilities for unpremeditated (inter)personal encounters and interaction. As Oedipa's view of the industrial zoning of San Narciso illustrates, her driving is not analogous to walking. For de Certeau, walking in the city empowers the subject, giving it a multiplicity of tactics to materialize and turn the city into a "haunted" space (or "lived" space in Lefebvre's terms). Driving through San Narciso has precisely the opposite effect, turning Oedipa into a passive viewer of a parade of urban elements that present themselves. Therefore, the road in San Narciso is no substitute for the pedestrian use of public space in cities built as modern metropolises such as Manhattan. For movement through public space the user is surrendered to the traffic system.

88

To also use Lefebvre's terminology here, this means that the public space of San Narciso consists primarily of abstract space, in which the individual is reduced to a generalized subject within the traffic system. This dominance of such space in San Narciso is sustained throughout the novel, depicting urban space only as traversed in private cars (except, tellingly, for an excursion to San Francisco, which will be discussed later). There are no instances of "lived" space, as for example in "The Balloon." Hence, *Lot 49* does not adopt a trajectory like Lefebvre's and Barthelme's when it comes to identifying the key problem of modern urban space and suggesting an alternative.

The two scenes in *Lot 49* that make up Oedipa's arrival in San Narciso indicate a recognizable difference between a modern and postmodern approach of urban space, but only part of this presentation aligns with de Certeau's notion of the Concept-city and Lefebvre's view of the dominance of abstract space. If anything, the modern perspective from above is presented as hopeful – in its reductive overview – whereas the postmodern view at ground level presents an uncomfortable image of the city rather than a positive alternative to the ills of the modern city.

The transition that Oedipa's entrance into San Narciso marks therefore also indicates that what is at stake is not a different usage of an existing modern city – like in Barthelme and Auster – but rather a transition into a *different kind* of space.

In brief, taking *Lot 49* as a transitional novel with respect to modernity and postmodernity requires a different model for making sense of the treatment of spatiality. The novel takes an older mode of spatiality only as its point of departure – literally, in the beginning of the novel, but also conceptually, in that this calling-up of the image of the modern city only serves to indicate how the space of *Lot 49* does *not* operate. Hence, insofar as an analysis in positive (non-oppositional) terms is concerned, the question still remains what the characteristics of the urban space in *Lot 49* specifically are and how they can be understood.

89

On the surface, the characteristics of the city are simple to identify: after the hopeful initial view from above, the only feature of San Narciso that bears any particular significance is the network of roads and freeways. There are no scenes in San Narciso in public spaces like streets or squares; all of the locations in which events take place in the city are privately owned spaces – e.g. a bar, a theater, shops, or a private home – and almost all of them are identified in some relationship to the network of freeways or underscore the necessity of cars for accessing space. For example, The Scope – the bar in which Oedipa encounters the renegade postal network and its symbol (the muted post horn) for the first time – is “a bar out on the way to LA, near the Yoyodyne plant.” (31) When she visits a Yoyodyne stockholders' meeting, the first description of the plant itself is rooted again in the perspective from the automobile: “They gave her a round visitor's badge at one of the gates, and she parked in an enormous lot next to a quonset building painted pink and about a hundred yards long.” (56) Perhaps the most succinct example of the prominence and dominance of the network of roads in *Lot 49* is Zapf's Used Books bookstore, which is located “over by the freeway.” (53)

In effect, this last description is emblematic for the urban space of San Narciso: the city seems to be held together by a network of freeways that paradoxically seems to function as both a unifying principle and its opposite. Obviously, in a city designed only for transport by car, the network of roads is key in accessing the (private) spaces that make up the city. Accordingly, this consolidates the dominance of abstract space,

the functional separation it engenders through its reductive logic, and the suppression of social interaction in “lived” space anywhere beyond the private and particular. The relation of a place to this traffic system becomes a constitutive element of its location – hence the identification of the bookstore as being “over by the freeway.” At the same time, however, this dominance of the abstract space of the freeway paradoxically renders the (conventional) notion of location defunct. “Over by the freeway” nominally attributes the bookstore a location, but this is devoid of any particularity or specificity. In that sense, location is not a property of the site at all – it is not proper to the store. What this description allocates is precisely the non-specificity of location, identifying a site while denying it any particularity.

90

This last characteristic of “non-location” is highlighted in a key passage at the end of the novel. After Oedipa has lost almost all of her possible connections to the Tristero system and has become desperate in her epistemological insecurity, she drinks bourbon in her motel until after sundown. “Then she went out and drove on the freeway for a while with her lights out, to see what would happen. But angels were watching. Shortly after midnight she found herself in a phone booth, in a desolate, unfamiliar, unlit district of San Narciso” (122). From here, she telephones her last remaining (anonymous) connection to the Tristero, whom she met in San Francisco. After he hangs up on her without having been any help, the “hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning” that she suspected at the start has definitively slipped out of reach. At that point,

She stood between the public booth and the rented car, in the night, her isolation complete, and tried to face towards the sea. But she’d lost her bearings. She turned pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land. San Narciso at that moment lost (the loss pure, instant, spherical, the sound of a stainless orchestral chime held among the stars and struck lightly), gave up its residue of uniqueness for her; became a name again, was assumed back into the American community of crust and mantle. (122-23)

The definitive failure to unearth some concealed meaning underneath

San Narciso and behind the Tristero is prominently spatialized here in a sense of having lost one's bearings and the city being drained of any distinctiveness – and again the site where this takes place is somewhere near the freeway. So after the modernist epistemological detective plot has ground to a permanent halt, non-location in a network of freeways appears to be the main characteristic of the postmodern space of San Narciso.

Jameson's Bonaventure: moving from post-/non-to (post-non)-

When identifying the property of non-location as key feature of space in *Lot 49*, the first thing that becomes apparent is that this is still a negative term. Nevertheless, while this in the first instance still hinges on an opposition to a concept as used in a previous logic, the urban space in *Lot 49* does more than negate or depart from a modern spatiality – but it is *through* a negation of the previous that the novel arrives at a treatment of postmodern urban space in which a key concept like non-location can be understood positively.

91

With respect to the non-location of space in *Lot 49*, particularly the last passage cited above recalls Jameson's discussion of postmodern space. As a classic point of reference when postmodernism is concerned, Jameson's essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" has sparked many discussions already, but for the present purposes Jameson's arguments about postmodern space provide a theoretical "trajectory" for moving beyond the negative interpretation of non-location.²

In his essay Jameson's point of departure, as far as architecture and space are concerned, posits (high) modernism as characterized by "prophetic elitism and authoritarianism" and "credited with the destruction of the fabric of the traditional city and its older neighborhood culture" (2) through the uncompromising imposition of a utopian vision on an existing urban structure. This is in effect a familiar point, offering a neg-

² The edition of Jameson's essay used here is the publication in book form (1991). While the original publication in the *New Left Review* in 1984 had the greatest impact, the later version is preferred here because it corrects some mistakes in the original, such as misspelling and mislocating the Bonaventure Hotel, which is so central to his argument.

For discussions of the spatial aspects in Jameson's essay, see for example Philip Cooke's appreciative discussion, Mike Davis' sharp critique of Jameson's neglect of the urban environment, or Sharon Zukin, who, while acknowledging the importance of Jameson's essay for raising important issues, easily dismisses his discussion of the Bonaventure as "impressive though flawed" (432).

ative evaluation of the modern, highlighting the dominance of (abstract) discourses and programmers over the social and lived. Accordingly, Jameson gives architects like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe as examples, and buildings like the Wells Fargo building in Los Angeles.

Jameson's discussion of postmodern space revolves around John Portman's Bonaventure Hotel on Bunker Hill in Los Angeles, which he presents as a "full-blown postmodern building" that "offers some very striking lessons about the originality of postmodernist space" (38). Jameson describes several aspects of the building. Firstly, he points out that, contrary to modernist utopias, the building is popular, "visited with enthusiasm by locals and tourists alike" (39), which is possible because the building contains shops as well as a hotel, mixing different functions geared towards different types of users. Jameson takes this point a step further, suggesting that the "Bonaventure aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city" (40), which means that the building acts as a substitute for the city in which it is situated. This totality of the building is underscored by the fact that while it has three entrances, none of them is clearly marked (e.g. by a traditional marquee), rejecting the functional identifiability (and hence reduction) as a particular type of building. In addition, the building's exterior "skin" consists of reflective glass, which "repels the city outside" and gives it "power over the Other," similar to the effect of wearing reflective sunglasses (42). At the same time, this reflective skin means that the hotel's exterior does not show the building itself, but rather its surroundings – which, combined with its multiple unmarked entrances, makes the "disjunction" (41) between the hotel and the surrounding city less radical than in the utopian move of modernist architecture in Jameson's view.³

With respect to the building's interior, Jameson stresses particularly the hotel's escalators and elevators, and the lobby. He presents the escalators and elevators as more than functional devices for movement in space; rather, they "replace movement but also, and above all, designate themselves as new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper," replacing an older mode of movement (walking) by an autoreferential

³ One could, of course, make the reverse case with the same arguments. Particularly the interpretation of the building's reflective exterior is debatable, for such exteriors are by no means characteristic only of postmodern architecture, having featured in the steel-and-glass architecture of modernism as well, for example. However, the opposition between modernist and postmodernist architecture is not what is at stake in the present discussion.

“transportation machine” (42). Again, this is a familiar point when it comes to the postmodern: when the primacy of purposive instrumentality that characterized the modern is undone, there is no reinstatement of the symbolic (for there is nothing to symbolize) but rather a process of signification in which a sign cannot point to anything but itself. In other words, beyond the (de-emphasized) functionality of the escalators and elevators, there is only what Jameson labels autoreferentiality.

In contrast, while this interpretation of the escalators and elevators consists of definite assertions, Jameson is “at a loss” (42) when it comes to finding the terms in which to describe the lobby itself. “Given the absolute symmetry of the four towers, it is quite impossible to get your bearings in this lobby,” according to Jameson, so that “such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize” (43). The difficulty in experiencing this space, or making sense of it, is complete and all-enveloping, leading to the assertion that “[y]ou are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body” (43). Jameson’s repeated use of word “impossible” is telling here. His point about the lobby is basically the familiar approach of the postmodern as the not-or-no-longer-modern. Hence, his self-acknowledged difficulty in finding the terms to discuss the space is perhaps more pertinent than his description of the space itself. The issue is not the possibility of talking about this space (for Jameson discusses the lobby at some length), but the inadequacy of a negative means of expression.

In this context, Jameson’s ultimate point about the Bonaventure is strikingly close to the ultimate experience of space in *Lot 49*. In discussing Portman’s hotel as a new type of space, Jameson’s main point is that “this latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world” (44). The experience of this “hyperspace” is almost identical to Oedipa’s experience after the phone call to San Francisco: unable to get her bearings and feeling isolated amidst an epistemologically impenetrable space that seems at the same time total (America) and non-distinct. The similarity between the two descriptions is even more pertinent here precisely because they relate to two different kinds of space: the interior of a building for Jameson and a city dissipating into the whole of America

in *Lot 49*. In both cases, the particularity of a specific space is not what characterizes it as postmodern – a programmatic autonomy that is only sustainable under the dominance of modern abstract space – but it is rather the way of coming to terms with space, as it emerges from the experience of space. It is in this light that the interpretation of the Bonaventure as a “total” space aspiring to function as a city must be seen; the hotel is not a substitution at all, but its mode of spatiality stands as a model for how postmodern urban space works. Accordingly, Jameson presents the hotel as a “mutation in space,” an instance of an abstract development, rather than as a particular (single) instance of a “mutated space.” In the end, his discussion of the Bonaventure serves to move beyond the architectural – to the spatial in general, or (more specifically relevant here) the urban. In other words, the similarity between Jameson and *Lot 49* on this point shows how spatiality is more important in the postmodern than the specifics of a particular space per se.

Therefore, Jameson’s point about the Bonaventure underscores the fact that Oedipa’s sensations at the end of the novel are notably characteristic of postmodernity. The sense of loss and isolation at the end of *Lot 49* – when all connections to the Tristero have been played out and Oedipa is left empty-handed – is not just the final stage in a narrative progression of events. The story of the novel portrays a gradual breakdown of an epistemological quest, in which the sense of non-location can be taken as a spatialization of the ultimate confounding of the detective plot. More importantly here, the spatial isolation at the end of the novel also completes the transition that began hopefully with the modernist vision of San Narciso to the experience of postmodern spatiality – a process already started by Oedipa’s actual entrance into the city. Hence, with Jameson’s discussion of the new space of the Bonaventure in mind – the “latest mutation in space” – one can see the “loss” of San Narciso’s uniqueness not as an endpoint (in spite of its position at the end of the novel), but rather as the entrance into postmodernity. While McHale posits *Lot 49* as teetering on the brink of becoming postmodernist – based on the fact that the question “Shall I project a world?” remains a question and does not actually lead to a multiplicity of worlds – one can say that with respect to (urban) space the novel identifies the transition into a postmodern spatiality.

Yet while Jameson still relies primarily on negative terms to underscore the postmodernity of non-location, a critical reading of his essay points to two key issues through which it becomes possible to move beyond the negative, which also makes the immediate similarity between Jameson and Pynchon all the more pertinent: the focus on signification on the one hand, and the focus on the body (which will be addressed in depth in the following chapter) on the other.

Jameson's concern with signification and the space of the Bonaventure is apparent on several levels. First of all, his discussion in and of itself presents the hotel as a space that signifies, which accounts for his "being at a loss" in describing the lobby in the first place. Jameson does not seek a neutral description of the Bonaventure, but very deliberately (though not outspokenly) seeks meaning in the elements of the space and the space as a whole. This is clear, for example, in statements like "[h]anging streamers indeed suffuse this empty space in such a way as to distract systematically and deliberately from whatever form it might be supposed to have," (43) – where the operative word is "distract," showing that the interpretation hinges entirely on preconceived notions about space. Although he does not greatly elaborate on the conceptual limits of his interpretation, Jameson does (at least nominally) acknowledge that the position from which he speaks is one in which his "perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space [he has] called the space of high modernism" (38-9). In other words, his difficulty with what he labels a "mutation in space" is completely inherent in his approach; if the premise is that he is dealing with a new kind of space, Jameson has already acknowledged that he cannot present it as anything more than being not the same as the old. Hence, his "being at a loss" with respect to the Bonaventure lobby has little to do with the space at all, but it is rather characteristic of an attempt to force the hotel into a previous mode of signification that does not apply.

This leads to statements about the hotel's space that should not be taken at face value, for they are really more signs of the modernist frame of reference than characteristics of the space. The above-mentioned treatment of the elevators as "allegorical autoreferential devices" is such an example, upon which Jameson elaborates in a passage that is noticeably florid:

Yet escalator and elevator are also in this context dialectical opposites; and we may suggest that the glorious movement of the elevator gondola is also a dialectical compensation for this filled space of the atrium – it gives us the chance at a radically different, but complementary, spatial experience: that of rapidly shooting up through the ceiling and outside, along one of the four symmetrical towers, with the referent, Los Angeles itself, spread out breathtakingly and even alarmingly before us. But even this vertical movement is contained: the elevator lifts you to one of those revolving cocktail lounges, in which, seated, you are again passively rotated about and offered a contemplative spectacle of the city itself, now transformed into its own images by the glass windows through which you view it. (43)

96

This passage explicitly links the upward movement of the elevators along the towers with the city of Los Angeles, but this is by no means unproblematic in Jameson's analysis. Apart from the fact that the hotel was posited before as a disjunction from the surrounding city, it is not clear what Los Angeles is the referent *of* here, or what the relation of this referent would be to the autoreferential elevators. Moreover, while it is also difficult to see how the city is transformed into an image of itself by viewing it through a window (because that would imply "postmodern windows" that produce self-referential images, or imply that glass windows have been postmodern all along), the last point in this paragraph is the familiar view of the city from above, as seen before in de Certeau or early on in *Lot 49*, which is prototypically a *modern* perspective.

In other words, Jameson's discussion here prominently foregrounds the subject as a knowing and interpreting entity, which is also how he frames his overall point about the "latest mutation" of space:

My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore – like many of the other cultural products I

have evoked in the preceding remarks – stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions. (38-9)

Jameson's proposition here is an interestingly problematic one. At the most immediate level, these claims can hardly be taken literally with reference to architectural space, for example. The implication would be that either Portman's design is more "evolved" than the capabilities of the architect himself, or that Jameson's evolution (and that of all other subjects) lags behind Portman's or his design – neither of which leads to any productive standpoint. In this sense, Jameson's argument here is also a reactionary claim, with reverberations of generational differences, speaking as a representative of a previous generation that is out of touch with contemporary reality. The implication would then simply be to wait until the subject (or a new generation) "catches up" with the object, making it a simple matter of time to let any difficulties resolve themselves. Hence, as the call to growing new organs also indicates, one is not to take these propositions literally or at face value.

97

Instead, one can take Jameson's viewpoint as an attempt to defend the privileged position of the subject of modernity. Jameson may present "postmodern hyperspace" as further evolved than the subject, but he nevertheless clings to the primacy of the subject, maneuvering the subject into the role of the underdog, yet without relinquishing the position of the subject as the center of experience. In other words, one can take Jameson's proposition here as a reactionary defense of the modern subject in the guise of a critical appraisal of postmodern space.⁴

However, as with all surreptitiously reactionary claims, Jameson here also points to precisely the elements that allow one to transcend the reactionary – in two notable instances. The first lies in the "imperative to grow new organs." While this issue of bodies and space will be dealt with in greater detail later, it needs to be noted here that Jameson's point recalls (almost literally) and recasts Georg Simmel's famous essay

4 Likewise, though in a different context – of religion, the loss of the social bond, and the work of Daniel Bell – John O'Neill criticizes Jameson as "neo-modernist" in this respect (502). Similarly, in a related, more overarching perspective, Douglas Kellner points out that Jameson's view of postmodernism is founded on binary oppositions within a totalizing "Marxian Master Narrative" (262).

on the modern city, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903). In brief, Simmel’s argument is that the modern metropolis (e.g. Berlin or New York) engenders social and emotional distancing between people, and instead favors the intellectual and a blasé attitude; physical proximity in the urban masses goes hand in hand with great intellectual distance. This characteristic stems from the fact that in the metropolis one is continuously bombarded with external stimuli, against which the individual needs to protect itself. One of the terms in which Simmel presents this argument is by saying that one must develop “a protective organ for [oneself] against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it” (326).

98 Thus Jameson’s proposition seems to be an updated version of Simmel’s argument, with the distinction between the modern and the postmodern at stake rather than the distinction between the rural/traditional and the modern. However, there is a key difference in that Simmel’s argument, while speaking of defense mechanisms, is ultimately in favor of the modern. He acknowledges the loss of close interpersonal ties that were possible before, but also finds great freedom in the favoring of the intellectual in the metropolis. Hence, his point is explicitly a positive one, not mourning a loss but praising a new-found freedom. Jameson’s reference to “new organs,” therefore, reverberates with associations of benefits gained rather than possibilities lost.

Recalling this aspect of Simmel’s classic argument opens up Jameson’s discussion further and makes it possible to take his point further than he does himself. After all, in contrast to Simmel, Jameson halts at the negative opposition to the old, pointing to limitations and impossibilities. Hence, he constructs his discussion of the Bonaventure to affirm these limits. One can see this in a revealing instance that, tellingly, revolves around signification. While Jameson’s discussion is predicated upon the idea that space and spatial features act as signs, he objects to signage when that counteracts the sense of non-location:

Given the absolute symmetry of the four towers, it is quite impossible to get your bearings in this lobby; recently, color coding and directional signals have been added in a pitiful and revealing, rather desperate attempt to restore the coordinates of an older space. I will take as the most dramatic practical result of this spatial

mutation the notorious dilemma of the shopkeepers on the various balconies: it has been obvious, since the very opening of the hotel in 1977, that nobody could ever find any of these stores, and even if you located the appropriate boutique, you would be most unlikely to be as fortunate a second time; as a consequence, the commercial tenants are in despair and all the merchandise is marked down to bargain prices. (43-4)

Jameson's discussion is at its most value-laden precisely on a point that concerns signs, and this passage is problematic with respect to several key issues in his overall argument. Firstly, the description is not in line with the earlier claim about the hotel's popularity ("visited with enthusiasm by locals and tourists alike"), for if the shops were unfindable even, if not especially, in a second instance, the "enthusiasm" with which the hotel is visited would rely only on the novelty of a first experience – making the building a model for a theme park, not a substitute of a "total" space. On a practical level, Jameson's hyperbole here also either implies that the shopkeepers themselves would also have difficulty locating their own businesses, or that customers are somehow less skilled in locating shops than the poor shopkeepers. The qualification of the shopkeepers' difficulties as "obvious" is also puzzling here. It seems to acknowledge the reality of the problem, yet Jameson seems unwilling to take this problem seriously, by not identifying the problem as a flaw or shortcoming (despite its obviousness). But more importantly, the curious double move here acknowledges a problem inherent in the space of the hotel in the first place, while rejecting the solution to that problem on the grounds that the added signage undermines the important characteristics of the space. In other words, the "impossibilities" with which the subject is confronted in this space are taken to be constituent elements – any attempt to resolve them is a "revealing," "pitiful," and "desperate" return to modern spatiality. Hence, the interpretation of the hotel is geared entirely towards maintaining the subject in the position of confusion, faced with all sorts of impossibilities. Since this was already a construal in the first place, one could say that this position is here defended solely for the sake of presenting postmodern space as problematic.

If one veers away from the negative valuation here, one can see that Jameson identifies another key characteristic of postmodern space,

namely the prominence and importance of signage. In fact, this is a familiar feature of postmodern space that is foregrounded in *Learning from Las Vegas* by Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour – a work to which Jameson refers several times.⁵ To recall my brief discussion of this classic book in the introduction of the present study: the point of *Learning from Las Vegas* is to take the “vernacular” architecture epitomized in Las Vegas seriously, rather than dismiss it as too far removed from what could be called “high architecture.” Hence, *Learning from Las Vegas* fits in with a general effort to depart from the elitism of modernist architecture and the International Style, for example. One of the main points in which Las Vegas architecture notably differs is in the prominence and primacy of signage. To develop this issue, Venturi et al. distinguish between the model of “the duck” and the “decorated shed.” “The duck” is taken from an old hamburger drive-in called “The Duck” that was located in a building actually shaped like a duck. This architectural form embodies and exhibits the “meaning” or function of the building; in this sense, “the duck” is the vernacular equivalent of cathedrals and palaces, for example, whose forms themselves are integral to all other aspects of the building. In Las Vegas this older model is superseded by that of the “decorated shed,” basically a featureless box with a façade at the front. The shape of the building carries no meaning and performs no function in and of itself, but instead it is the façade that signifies the building’s function and identity. Hence, the determining character is not architectural form, but *signage* in the shape of a façade. In an urban structure designed for the automobile, the façade is also a sign visible from the road, which lines up with the signs of the traffic system. The model of the “decorated shed” represents a spatial system in which one is guided, in a private automobile, by traffic signs, billboards, and other (neon) signs to the desired destination, marked by a (neon) façade, which itself also functions as a homing beacon once the individual steps out of the private car onto a desolate parking lot. In other words, signage is the key and dominant feature of this type of space.

While this is a familiar type of space, and a notably different type of

⁵ Jameson refers to *Learning from Las Vegas* several times as a key text on postmodern architecture (e.g. in his discussion of Frank Gehry’s house in a later chapter), but he introduces the Bonaventure as “in many ways uncharacteristic of that postmodern architecture whose principal proponents are Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, and ... Frank Gehry” (38). Framing Portman’s building in this way indeed downplays the importance of signage.

space compared to the models and practices of modernist architecture and urban planning, this is clearly not the kind of space Jameson takes into account in his discussion of Portman's hotel as a model of postmodern space. In fact, Jameson does not take the automobile or urban infrastructure into account at all.⁶ Although the decorated shed of Las Vegas and the Bonaventure of course do not vie for a position as sole or primary model for postmodern space, in rejecting the prominent role of signage in his discussion of the hotel, Jameson also disregards the complementarity of these two models.

For apart from resolving a problematic limitation in the discussion of the Bonaventure, highlighting the prominence of signage, as "learned from Las Vegas," also lends further aptitude of Jameson's point about postmodern space (i.e. as a distinct mode of spatiality) for understanding space in *Lot 49*. After all, the experience of spatiality is very similar, but the automobile-oriented urban space of San Narciso resembles the "vernacular" of Las Vegas far more than it does the Bonaventure hotel – as can be seen in the ground-level view of San Narciso upon Oedipa's arrival already cited above, after which she arrives at the motel where she will be staying throughout the novel, marked by a "representation in painted sheet metal of a nymph holding a white blossom towered thirty feet into the air; the sign, lit up despite the sun, said 'Echo Courts'" (16). The city of San Narciso, where things can be located simply "over by the freeway," is therefore spatially very much akin to Las Vegas.

In fact, signage is a key aspect of space in *Lot 49*. Apart from the obvious framing of San Narciso in terms of signification in Oedipa's arrival, this is most apparent in the ubiquity of the symbol of the Tristero, the muted post horn. Oedipa's encounters with this symbol range from stamps to bathroom walls to a reference in a seventeenth century play, for example. More importantly, though, this symbol is also a particularly *spatialized* sign, as becomes very clear in the excursion to the Bay Area.

6 In this respect Jameson's discussion of postmodern space is highly traditional, focusing on a single building, disregarding spatial usage by actual people, and also viewing it in an atemporal framework – in short, putting primacy on the design of the space alone (Lefebvre's dominance of abstract space), in effect an essentialist move focusing on the moment right before the first opening (without yet being "contaminated" by actual usage). Jameson's perspective thus seems grounded in the logic of "the duck," which fits in well with his modern(ist) framework (not that signage per se is exclusive to postmodern space, but the disregarding of the vernacular of Las Vegas architecture, especially as model for a shift in logic and "dominant" – to recall McHale's term – is one aspect of the reductionism that is part of a modern perspective). This conventional mode of understanding buildings is also the background for Jameson's rejection of added signage in the Bonaventure.

Again, on this point also see Davis' critique of Jameson's neglect of the larger urban setting in which the Bonaventure is situated.

As soon as Oedipa's initial errands in Berkeley turn up little more than dead ends, she decides to drift through San Francisco at night. She seeks to use this shift to a more "conventional," more modern urban environment precisely for the purpose of getting away from the Tristero, which dominated the Southern Californian setting of San Narciso. However, it becomes clear already at the start of this *Walpurgisnacht* section of the novel that the Tristero also saturates this different urban environment:

102

She had only to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix. She got off the freeway at North Beach, drove around, parked finally in a steep side-street among warehouses. Then walked along Broadway, into the first crowds of evening.

But it took her no more than an hour to catch sight of a muted post horn. She was moseying along a street full of ageing boys in Roos Atkins suits when she collided with a gang of guided tourists come rowdy-dowing out of a Volkswagen bus, on route to take in a few San Francisco night spots. "Let me lay this on you," a voice spoke into her ear, "because I just left," and she found being deftly pinned outboard of one breast this big cerise ID badge, reading HI! MY NAME IS Arnold Snarb! AND I'M LOOKIN' FOR A GOOD TIME! Oedipa glanced around and saw a cherubic face vanishing with a wink in among natural shoulders and striped shirts, and away went Arnold Snarb, looking for a better time. (75-6)

Along with the tourists, Oedipa is swept into a gay bar where she sees the post horn as pin worn by the Anonymous Inamorato, whom she telephones at the end of the novel in the episode already mentioned above. After this first encounter, she ventures into "the infected city" (80) and there runs into the symbol of the muted post horn at every turn. She encounters the sign as used by children for a game like hopscotch, as a tattoo, or among Chinese characters in a herbalist's shop window in Chinatown, for example. On her nightly tour Oedipa runs into all manner of people outside of mainstream society, either rejected or alienated, and finds the post horn to absolutely saturate the city: "Decorating each alienation, each species of withdrawal, as cufflink, decal, aimless doodling, there was somehow always the post horn" (85).

The impact of the abundance of post horns, however, lies not just in the mere presence of the sign. The episode is unsettling not because of the unusual encounters with unusual people, but more because of the capacity of the symbol to (re)signify the urban spaces as belonging to the system Oedipa dubbed the Tristero. As before, the modernist foundations of Oedipa's detective quest, which before were attached to her initial view of San Narciso, also form the (conceptual) point of departure for the episode in San Francisco:

The city was hers, as, made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight to its far blood's branchings, be they capillaries too small for more than peering into, or vessels mashed together in shameless municipal hickeys, out on the skin for all but tourists to see. Nothing of the night's could touch her; nothing did. The repetition of symbols was to be enough, without trauma as well perhaps to attenuate it or even jar it altogether loose from her memory. *She was meant to remember.* ... She tested it, shivering: I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is *supposed* to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike 'clues' were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night. (81, emphasis in the original)

103

Oedipa here identifies San Francisco as a modern metropolis, a cosmopolitan seat of culture, this one particularly marked by the symbol of the cable car (which might as well be substituted for the Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower to designate another metropolis). She also acknowledges the "direct, epileptic Word" (or logos, one might say) as her epistemological anchor point. Hence, the frame of reference here – although she identifies it as lost – is built on knowable and legible "master signifiers." By extension, Oedipa takes the multitude of post horns in the city as "clues" in her detective quest and she hopes they will act as a substitute for her lost epistemological framework. Unsurprisingly, since this would constitute a replacement of one modernist framework for another based on the same model, the plethora of post horns does

not form a set of clues at all, but presents an overload of signification. At the end of the nightly tour of the city, exhausted, Oedipa still places her experience within the framework of the detective story: “But the private eye sooner or later has to get beat up on. This night’s profusion of post horns, this malignant, deliberate replication, was their way of beating up” (85). Within the novel as a whole, however, one can see that Oedipa here clings to the detective idiom in vain (for the detective will not solve the case after being beat up on), reinforced by the uncertain “their” in this passage, which has no direct antecedent but refers to the presupposed “they” behind the Tristero.

104 The effect of the incessant recurrence of the post horn amounts to an overdose of signs, which recalls the Simmelian stimulus overload, though there is a marked difference. Simmel discusses a bombardment of different stimuli in the modern city, whereas Oedipa is bombarded with the same sign all over San Francisco. For Oedipa the overload consists not of a multitude of different impulses, but of a persistent and significant difference between the model of signage in space that she encounters and the (modernist) framework for space and signification with which she entered the city, with the (reductionist) promise of patterns and legible structures. In other words, it is not the sign itself, but rather the model for signage in space – the potential of a sign to determine the meaning or usage of a space, rather than the strictly spatial/material aspects of urban space. The primacy of signage, the model of the “decorated shed” associated at first only with the landscape of Southern California, undoes the perception of and presumptions about the more familiar urban space of San Francisco. Hence, it is not so much the sign, but the model of signage that has “infected” the city and that makes the episode so unsettling for her.

This repetition, against the background of the “they” behind the Tristero, also allows one to see the recurring sign of the post horn in this episode as a spatialized instance of the novel’s concern with paranoia. While *Lot 49* deals with paranoia in a number of a guises – from Miles’ band the Paranoids to Dr. Hilarius’ choice for “relative paranoia, where at least I know who I am and who the others are” (94) – for the present concerns the most important point is the way in which the novel treats paranoia not so much as a psychological pathology, but as a (semiotic)

regime or paradigm.⁷ As Leo Bersani argues (about Pynchon in light of *Gravity's Rainbow*, but many of his points apply equally to *Lot 49*), paranoia is based on a (preconceived) idea of a “truth” or “real” of which the world, as encountered by the paranoid, is a deceitful repetition; “[t]he paranoid sees the visible as a simulated double of the real; it deceptively repeats the real” (108), because the world displays but never matches the preconceived idea of “truth” or the “real.” Therefore, as a system for engaging the world, “[p]aranoia repeats phenomena as design” (102). The repetition of the post horn in San Francisco can thus also be seen as not so much a property of the urban space that could be “objectively” established, but rather as characteristic of an experience of urban space that is marked by a paranoid world view.⁸

The problem for Oedipa, evident in her feeling of being beat up on, is that the notion of “truth” underlying this paranoid view is aligned with the modern epistemological framework that underlies her entire detective quest. Rather than being fully autonomous and finding its genesis solely in the paranoid subject – a perspective on paranoia beyond that of a problematic disorder, as Bersani’s with respect to *Gravity's Rainbow* – Oedipa’s paranoia is tied to a modernist epistemology that already links the position of the subject to “true” knowledge of the world. The repetition of the post horn thus confronts Oedipa with her desire (as a detective) to see clues and hidden meaning behind the visible, yet her frustration also indicates precisely that she is *not* in the “orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia” (126); the inaccessibility of that hidden meaning only *suggests* the world as repetition of a paranoid truth, but her modern epistemological anchoring renders this world view inadequate for her. Paranoia is a temptation, a paradoxical possibility to salvage some of

105

7 For a thorough inventory of the many ways in which *Lot 49* deals with the theme of paranoia, see John Johnston’s article “Towards the Schizo-Text: Paranoia as Semiotic Regime in *The Crying of Lot 49*.” For a discussion of paranoia in *Lot 49* in a more conventional sense, in relation to Orwell’s Big Brother, see Aaron S. Rosefeld’s “The ‘Scanty’ Plot: Orwell, Pynchon, and the Poetics of Paranoia.” For an insightful critique of Jameson’s approach of postmodernism and cognitive mapping (and his totalizing theory and reliance on “Marxist science”) through a reading of Pynchon, by drawing on the ideas of paranoia and the postmodern sublime, see Jon Simons’ “Postmodern Paranoia? Pynchon and Jameson.”

8 Building on *Lot 49* and the work of Don DeLillo, as well as Immanuel Wallerstein’s world systems theory, Emily Apter develops an idea of paranoia as paradigm for the “oneworldedness” of the contemporary world. This oneworldedness “imagines the planet as subject to ‘the system’” and “fails the optimists (left or right) by endorsing the idea that there are legitimate reasons to be paranoid in a world bent on civilizational self-destruction” (370). Hence, this oneworldedness counters positive utopian visions (e.g. Jameson’s ultimately Marxist utopian view), as well as pluralist conceptions. On this last note, Apter’s view would contradict McHale’s view of the postmodern as characterized by a plurality of worlds. One could say that Apter’s oneworldedness, “allowing the unimpeded flows of capital, information, and language” (370), subsumes plurality (as in McHale’s approach) in a single world. However, full resolution of the question of plurality or oneworldedness is beyond the scope of the present study.

her defunct modern epistemology (evident in the binary oppositions in which she tends to frame paranoia), but hence never a realistic option for her. One could therefore see the repetition of the sign of the Tristero in San Francisco as battleground for the “hieroglyphic” meaning behind the city streets, as identified upon first viewing San Narciso and again at the end – “Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth” (125). Moreover, the paranoid aspect of this episode highlights the involvement of the subject in the process of signification; hence this paranoia underscores not only the importance of signage in postmodern spatiality, but also the implication (if not necessity) of the subject in space too. Therefore urban space and signage are the primary domains where the novel’s transition from modernity to postmodernity takes place here.

Therefore, the effect of signage in this episode adds further complexity to postmodern space and non-location in *Lot 49*. Oedipa’s feeling of being “beaten up” at the end of this episode prefigures her sense of non-location at the end of the novel. The connection between the two experiences of urban space underscores that (a different model for) signage is lacking as a key factor in Jameson’s account of postmodern space. In effect, his “perceptual habits” formed in modernism correspond to Oedipa’s view of San Francisco – a modern metropolis typified by cable cars. Yet while Jameson vaguely refers to a need to grow a new organ to come to terms with postmodern space, *Lot 49* is more specific in pointing out a key area of difference, namely the different role of signage in urban space.

Non-location, Augé’s non-places, and the prominence of the sign

The role of signage in postmodern space and the way signage figures in the experience of non-location can be further specified by drawing on Marc Augé’s concept of non-places (“non-lieux” in the original French), developed in his *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995). Although this is yet again a term formulated negatively (at first sight), the way in which Augé constructs the concept of non-places further opens up the issue of non-location in *Lot 49*.

The context within which Augé develops this idea is the anthropological study of contemporary France, as a change from anthropological

studies of non-Western cultures (West-African in Augé's case). He presents contemporary France as being in a situation of "supermodernity," which is typified by excess of time and of space, made possible through technological developments (29-31) and amounting to a description familiar in different contexts as time-space compression (e.g. Harvey). Augé adds an important nuance to this familiar account in his positioning of supermodernity, which also illustrates his approach of positive and negative definition: "We could say of supermodernity that it is the face of a coin whose obverse represents postmodernity: the positive of a negative. From the viewpoint of supermodernity, the difficulty of thinking about time stems from the overabundance of events in the contemporary world, not from the collapse of an idea of progress which – at least in the caricatured forms that make its dismissal so very easy – has been in a bad way for a long time" (30). While Augé's move here might seem only a matter of semantics, it does set the stage for the rest of his ideas. He acknowledges the "bad reputation" of the postmodern here – as being little more than a facile set of ideas that mark "the end of..." – and rather than dismissing this view, he focuses on a positive approach of the same situation. The semantic shift from "post" to "super" here indicates an approach that does not dismiss, but takes on board the difficulties he seeks to explore – and is in that sense akin to Barthelme's approach in "Not-Knowing," for example. While the present study disregards the semantics of this shift to "super-" (foregrounding the positive view of postmodernity already), the attitude it expresses with respect to postmodernity is key in making sense of postmodern space.

With this view of the contemporary situation of supermodernity, Augé explores the "hypothesis ... that supermodernity produces non-places" (78). He defines non-place in opposition to what he terms "anthropological place," which is a "concrete and symbolic construction of space" (51) of "identity, of relations and of history" (52). In this type of space, cultural identities, interpersonal and socio-economic/political relationships, and histories (whether local, regional, of national) are inscribed in material forms that guide practical usage, which in turn reinforces these social formations and their inscription. One could think of a traditional marketplace, a town square with a town hall, monuments, or religious structures like churches or temples, all with accompanying symbols and signs that indicate the ties between different people and of

people to this type of place. Augé readily acknowledges the limitations of this idea of place: “Of course, the intellectual status of anthropological place is ambiguous. It is only the idea, partially materialized, that the inhabitants have of their relations with the territory, with their families and with others. This idea may be partial or mythologized. It varies with the individual’s point of view and position in society” (56). Nevertheless, while this notion of anthropological place may only be an ideal-type, Augé’s point is to indicate a type of space which is primarily *relational*, embodying and engendering (traditional) cultural formations and (interpersonal) ties.

108

This view of anthropological place is what Augé defines his idea of non-places against: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (77-8). However, this negative opposition only accounts for the term “non-place” itself. In non-places the relationship to anthropological place is not negated or denied, nor should one be “tempted to contrast the symbolized space of place with the non-symbolized space of non-place” (82). Augé stresses that neither (anthropological) place nor non-place exist in “pure form,” but that they should be seen as “opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten” (79). Hence, one must not see this distinction between place and non-place in the one-dimensional terms which the labels themselves suggest (consisting either of something or its absence); instead, one must see the distinction as consisting of two “dimensions” between which there is some fluidity and overlap. The continuity is illustrated, for example, in the relationship between already existing (historical and anthropological) places and non-place, in which non-places “do not integrate the earlier place: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position” (78). Rather than annul or negate, non-place acknowledges and reassigns anthropological place. Hence, Augé’s aim is not to construct an absolutely waterproof system of definitions in a descriptive or prescriptive sense; his terms are concep-

tual tools to make sense of contemporary spaces.⁹

By discussing several types of actual space that he considers exemplary of non-place, Augé makes his idea of non-place more concrete and develops it further. The types of spaces he has in mind are airport lounges, freeways (specifically the French *autoroutes*), and supermarkets, for example. Portman's Bonaventure would also qualify as a non-place, but Augé is much more specific in discussing this new type of space, stressing two aspects for considering non-place:

the word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap to a large extent, and in any case officially (individuals travel, make purchases, relax), they are still not confused with one another; for non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. (94)

109

Non-places are characterized by a purposive program in which individuals engage with that program on a solitary basis, leaving interpersonal and social ties largely irrelevant. Hence, in Lefebvre's terminology the non-places of supermodernity are clearly conceived and abstract spaces, spatial materializations of a discursive program geared towards instrumentality and a concomitant generic individual subject.

Augé's valuation of these non-places, however, is not at all damning like Lefebvre's, and he also offers a much more detailed framework for understanding them. Augé points particularly to the discursive nature of their purposive/programmatic dimension, which is apparent both in "the words and notions that enable us to describe them" (107) as well as in those spaces themselves. With respect to the former, one can see how understanding non-places in terms of "transit" and "interchange" differs from seeing places in terms of "dwelling" and "crossroads," for example.

⁹ Peter Merriman makes a similar point in his study of the British M1 motorway, where he points out that the clarity with which Augé presents the non-place (particularly in opposition to anthropological place) disregards some nuances and complications that arise when using the concept to discuss an actual non-place like the M1.

Non-places have their own vocabulary for being discussed, which – one could say – is tied in with the discourses of and in those spaces themselves. After all, signage is key in conveying the ends of these purposive spaces, especially since the goals are not achieved or indicated by any shared or social knowledge (or *savoir-faire*) but need to be communicated to each individual in isolation. As Augé underscores, “[t]he link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts” (94). While the idea of a word conjuring up an image of a place – like “Tahiti” for people who have never been to Tahiti, for example – is already familiar, “the real non-places of supermodernity ... have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their ‘instructions for use’, which may be prescriptive (‘Take the right-hand lane’), prohibitive (‘No smoking’) or informative (‘You are now entering the Beaujolais region’)” (96). In other words, Augé accords a very prominent role to signage in the space of non-places (for while he speaks of “words” here, he also includes other types of signs, like ideograms and traffic symbols).

110

As with the necessary supplication of Jameson’s view of postmodern hyperspace with Venturi’s lessons from Las Vegas, Augé’s account underscores the importance of signage in postmodern spaces and also supports the reading of the San Francisco episode in *Lot 49* above. The symbol of the post horn itself signifies the Tristero system – which is already unsettling enough for Oedipa – but what makes the symbol so vexing in this episode is that it is the marker of the model of signage that belongs to non-place, a purposive system in which signs work to convey goals to a solitary individual, rather than aggregate to a larger understandable “narrative” guided by a “master signifier” – something that is not commensurable with the (modern) epistemological framework with which Oedipa set out in the beginning. The problem that this poses is reinforced by an additional property of non-place, which Augé illustrates with the example of the motorway. Large signs are placed alongside the motorway, as it cuts through the landscape, to indicate details in that very landscape (e.g. a famous hill) or a picturesque village, for example, both of which are nominally nearby yet completely removed from the road itself. Hence, as Augé notes, “[m]otorway travel is thus doubly remarkable: it avoids, for functional reasons, all the principal places to which it takes us; and it makes comments on them” (97). The sign in

non-place thus has the function of representing something which it purposefully keeps at a distance. This function of the sign also runs counter to the (modern) purpose of Oedipa's detective quest.

In addition to the signs which indicate the purpose or details of a particular non-place (such as "Frozen Foods" in the aisle of a supermarket, or the example of "You are now entering the Beaujolais region"), there are also signs which more immediately direct the interaction between an individual and the space. These are what Augé labeled the "instructions for use" (which also eliminate and pre-empt socially constructed and transmitted knowledge, or *savoir-faire*). One of Augé's examples here is the ATM machine, which directs usage through messages like "Please withdraw your card" and "Thank you for your custom" (100). Such messages "are addressed simultaneously and indiscriminately to each and any of us: they fabricate the 'average man', defined as the user of the road, retail or banking system" (100). On top of generalizing, such signs may also individualize this 'average man', for example in the case of a flashing sign to indicate an individual driver is speeding. These signs are in effect the material implements of Lefebvre's abstract space that generate a generalized subject. Hence, they do not only structure spatial usage (in the form of queuing and keeping distance in the case of the ATM, for example), but they also form spatial "interfaces" between the individual and larger (abstract) systems (e.g. the money economy, or the traffic system) that mediate the interaction between individuals within that non-place.

111

This function of signage in non-place is of particular relevance to space in *Lot 49*. Each of the signs referring to the Tristero – the post horn, or the letters W.A.S.T.E. – is not just a sign pointing to some renegade postal system, but each also carries an instruction for using the system. This begins already with the introduction to the system in the deliberately misspelled message on the envelope of Mucho's first letter to Oedipa, "report all obscene mail to your postmaster," and also applies to the message D.E.A.T.H. (Don't Ever Antagonize The Horn), for example. In this light the most illustrative message, and one of the most frustrating for Oedipa, is the one accompanying the post horn in a laundromat, "if you know what this means... you know where to find out more" (84), which is simultaneously an imperative for use of the system and a perfect exclusionary statement. In addition, and perhaps most

importantly, the Tristero is a particularly spatial system – of mailboxes, postal carriers, and their routes – that consists of non-places. Oedipa's tail job of a W.A.S.T.E. carrier underscores the spatiality of the system, and also the non-places that this system is made up of: desolate places with trash can mailboxes and anonymous bus rides. What she sees in action is a spatial system with a purpose, without any social dimension to it, and also a system whose purposive use makes the urban space lose its distinctiveness:

112 They rode over the bridge and into the great empty glare of the Oakland afternoon. The landscape lost all variety. The carrier got off in a neighborhood Oedipa couldn't identify. She followed him for hours along streets whose names she never knew, across arterials that even with the afternoon's lull nearly murdered her, into slums and out, up long hillsides jammed solid with two- or three-bedroom houses, all their windows giving blankly back only the sun. (90)

In effect, Oedipa's experience here is one of non-place: her tour is guided by a functional purpose, the urban space is devoid of any sociality, and thereby the city also loses any distinctiveness beyond this purposive use of space. One could even say that the W.A.S.T.E./Tristero system, as a system like the banking or traffic system, is predicated upon non-place in the same way as the "mainstream" systems for which it acts as an alternative. The irony is then that this system with the purpose of connecting individuals isolated from mainstream society functions as a "system of non-place," which inherently counteracts the social, and generalizes the individual. Hence, in a larger perspective one could also say that the Tristero and its signs are representations of the idea of non-place, as a key characteristic of postmodern urban space. In this light, Oedipa's ultimate experience of non-location – exemplary of the experience of postmodern space – occurs when she is forced to accept that the Tristero system is assumed in the larger system(s) of post/supermodern non-place that make up America.

In addition to signage, Augé also highlights mechanisms of individuation as characteristic of non-place. As mentioned above, the relationship of an individual to non-place is both purposive and contractual. In other words, engaging the (discursive) program that underlies the purpose of

a non-place requires some sort of sign and guarantee that warrants the individual's position in non-place. As Augé puts it, "[a]lone, but one of many, the user of a non-place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it). He is reminded when necessary, that the contract exists" (101). In the example of the ATM, which individualizes its users through the signs it displays, the "contract" that mediates the individual and the use of non-place is the bank account, with the bank card as the material signifier of that contract. In transit, the same applies to having a ticket or passport as a sign that one is allowed to be in a particular space, sometimes reinforced by signs saying "one must be in possession of a valid ticket to...". Augé points out that while a ticket or passport holds the individual's name, "[t]he contract always relates to the individual identity of the contracting party" (101). The ticket will always bear the identity of the non-place to which it allows access, reducing the individual to the "average man" in non-place with the "shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers" (101). Furthermore, identity checks and confirmations of the "contract" are a precondition for engaging non-place; one may not enter without showing a passport, ticket, or bank card. Hence, "the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he has given proof of his identity; when he has countersigned (so to speak) the contract... There will be no individualization (no right to anonymity) without identity checks" (102). Although some enjoyment is to be drawn from this paradoxical property of non-place – "the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (103) – Augé's main point here is that "[t]he space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude" (103).

113

The same principle – of the precondition of identification for identity-less individualization in non-place – is also at work in *Lot 49*. As mentioned above, on Oedipa's visit to the Yoyodyne plant, for example, she is given a visitor's badge upon entering and after attending a meeting, she ventures into the plant:

Somehow Oedipa got lost. One minute she was gazing at a mockup of a space capsule, safely surrounded by old, somnolent men; the next, alone in a great, fluorescent murmur of office activity. As far as she could see in any direction it was white or pastel: men's shirts, papers, drawing boards. All she could think of was to put on her

shades for all this light, and wait for somebody to rescue her. But nobody noticed. She began to wander aisles among light blue desks, turning a corner now and then. Heads came up at the sound of her heels, engineers stared until she'd passed, but nobody spoke to her. (58)

114

The procedure here is that of non-place: an identity-check at the entrance gives access to an impersonal space, in which a functionally anonymous individual's relations are geared towards the purpose of that space. However, since this passage concerns a factory, this is not an unfamiliar spatial organization. More importantly, though, the same aspect of non-place can also be seen in the San Francisco episode, where its workings are foregrounded and also more pertinent. Identification is also the precondition for Oedipa's episode in San Francisco; while it is not her own identity, her episode begins with her receiving a name tag designating her as Arnold Snarb. She is then herded into a gay bar "along with other badged citizens" (76) where she encounters the member of the Inamorati Anonymous, after which she ventures into the city and realizes that she has "safe-passage to its far blood's branchings" (81). The start of the whole episode follows the procedure of the identity-check for access to non-place. It is not the misidentification as Arnold Snarb that provides Oedipa with the anonymity needed for her tour of the non-place of the city, but rather the fact that she is identified itself – if not simply the *act* of being identified. Hence, the point of her exploration of the modern metropolis of the cable car is thus already undercut from the beginning: by adopting the generic "identity" of the subject in non-place, what she finds in the city is the solitude and similitude that are the hallmarks of non-place. Instead of a detective gathering clues, she is simply one isolated individual unable to connect with others in the same space. What little connection she can establish is mediated by the post horn, the sign that marks the space as non-place.

This issue of identification as precondition for anonymity is immediately driven home in the convolutions of Oedipa's first encounter. Once anonymous, the first person she meets is the member of the Inamorati Anonymous, whose identity is marked by the post horn as a pin in his lapel, paralleling Oedipa's badge. His namelessness, backed up by the rules of the IA, also affirms the anonymity of the non-place that Oedipa

has entered. Apart from taking the IA's name literally, this programmatic anonymity also skews the principles of the organization upon which the IA is modeled – the AA, where speaking at meetings is often started by stating one's name – by acknowledging the status of outcast or reject from mainstream society, but by precluding meetings and the formation of a community, which in turn aligns the IA with the logic of non-place as well.

It also needs to be pointed out that the setting for this encounter is a gay bar, a space for the first marginalized group of the evening and a space for cruising – based on anonymity yet geared towards (sexual) contact with others. As a space that fosters anonymity, the bar is itself already a non-place, for the functional purpose of facilitating sexual intercourse. Yet while the sexual nature of the space is fully acknowledged, it is at the same time counteracted by the encounter with a man who has forsworn all forms of love (though that does leave the unanswerable question of why he is there in the first place) and by a group of tourists being herded into the bar. As Mark Hawthorne remarks, “[t]he movement of tourists into the bar defines heterosexual curiosity about those whom sexual polarity has marginalized and, by treating this curiosity as ‘normal,’ blurs the distinctions that position straight sexuality over and ‘deviance’ from it” (66). The presence of tourists simultaneously affirms and counters the gay bar as space of outsiders based on sexual marginalization. However, these very counteractions mark the bar as a non-place, the first of a night of non-places marked by the sign of the post horn.

115

Lastly, in addition to signage and individualization, Augé highlights a third characteristic of non-place that is relevant for postmodern space and the space in *Lot 49* – namely the importance of travel. While anthropological place is characterized by relations of the people to the space itself and to each other, the traveler by definition notably lacks relations to the place he is in; hence, a traveler is always in a place *as traveler*. Conversely, the place that a traveler inhabits is a traveler's place, which is not characterized by (social) relations to the space, or in other words a non-place. Hence, Augé argues that “[t]he traveler's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*” (86, emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, the traveler (especially in the guise of the tourist) does engage with space by *visiting* it and looking at the space with a traveler's gaze. In Augé's view, therefore, travel “constructs a fictional relationship between

gaze and landscape” (86). The relationship between the traveler and space is not inherent in the space itself, but is generated through the act of travel, and is therefore primarily dependent upon the traveler.¹⁰ Accordingly, Augé suggests that it is as if “the position of the spectator were the essence of the spectacle, as if basically the spectator in the position of a spectator were his own spectacle” (86). One can see that in contemporary images of tourism (e.g. in leaflets), but also in holiday snapshots, the tourist himself often takes center stage, for example. Hence, it is not only the spatial characteristics space (signage, construction, etc.) that constitute a non-place, but also the usage of a space. Simply put, it is not only the tourist trap that is a non-place of tourism, but any space visited by a tourist is a non-place (at least for the tourist) simply by his or her very being there.

116

This aspect of Augé’s idea of non-place places Oedipa’s nightly tour of San Francisco in a slightly different light. It is obvious that the episode starts by Oedipa adopting the position of the tourist Arnold Snarb, joining a group of fellow travelers on a guided visit of a gay bar (adding yet another “layer” of non-place to that bar). However, after she leaves and moves deeper into the city, the terms in which her tour is framed are worth repeating here:

The city was hers, as, made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight to its far blood’s branchings, be they capillaries too small for more than peering into, or vessels mashed together in shameless municipal hickies, out on the skin *for all but tourists to see*. (81, emphasis added)

Oedipa purportedly has greater access to the city, being able to see things on the surface of urban space that tourists cannot – presumably because of their predetermined mode of looking (the tourist’s gaze), which is represented in the herd of tourists in the gay bar. However, as argued above, Oedipa’s experience of the city at night is not at all that

10 Augé discusses this prominence of the travel in the context of Chateaubriand’s 19th-century travel writing, and hence against a background that does not (yet) feature spaces designed particularly for tourists. While this places the discussion in an “ideal” and “lost” context, the prominence of travel in non-place is increased even more when taking contemporary tourism into account.

of a detective uncovering an increasing amount of information, but that of non-place – specifically the tourist’s non-place, as marked by Oedipa’s adoption of the non-place non-identity as the tourist Arnold Snarb. As a result, while she imagines herself a detached observer that night, she is less far “removed” from the scenes she witnesses than she thinks; as a tourist she is a determining factor in what she sees, as opposed to the (modern) detective who stumbles upon bits of information.

All in all, on her nightly tour of San Francisco Oedipa engages the Tristero as a particularly spatialized system of non-place, and concomitantly her experience is that of the user of non-place as well. Even though Oedipa engages the city in the hope of “returning” to a more familiar mode of spatiality, her experience there does not offer relief but instead underscores that recourse to modern spatiality is not a viable option (in that respect already contradicting Jameson’s “neo-modernism”). The episode affirms that postmodernity and non-place are properties of the contemporary city. Moreover, the San Francisco episode shows how her (desired) position of the detective, of the observing subject, is not possible anymore; instead Oedipa is an onlooker, a tourist, occupying a position implicit in the contemporary city and thus fully complicit with the non-place of postmodernity. Hence, this part of *Lot 49* illustrates that postmodern space is not so much characterized by what Jameson describes as “a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject.” Instead, especially when taking into account the importance of signage and its mediating function between non-place and its users, *Lot 49* in that respect shows that the “mutation” into postmodern space goes hand in hand with a distinct difference for the individual in urban space.¹¹

117

11 Although not immediately pertinent to the further understanding of postmodern urban space as in *Lot 49*, it is worth noting that a view of space that in a way combines the approaches of Jameson and Augé can be found in Siegfried Kracauer’s essay “The Hotel Lobby” (originally written in 1922-25 as part of his study of the detective novel). Contrasting it to the congregation in a church, Kracauer (who had been a student of Simmel’s) views the hotel lobby as “the space of unrelatedness” where “the change of environment does not leave purposive activity behind, but brackets it for the sake of a freedom that can only refer to itself and therefore sinks into relaxation and indifference” (179). In addition, individuals in this space “can vanish into an undetermined void, helplessly reduced to a ‘member of society as such’ who stands superfluously off to the side” (179), leaving them “deprived of individuality, since their anonymity no longer serves any purpose other than meaningless movement along the paths of convention” (182-3). In taking the hotel lobby as paradigmatic and in presenting it as a space of unrelatedness that strips away individuality, there are obvious parallels to Jameson and Augé. However, Kracauer’s critical perspective on the lobby focuses on the negative, and the comparison to the church bears more than a trace of nostalgia, which for the purposes of the present study limits the usefulness of Kracauer’s analysis. For further discussion of Kracauer’s work in relation to space and particularly architecture, see Anthony Vidler’s *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (2000).

Watts, L.A., and the generic subject of non-place

Augé's analysis does not only break away from a negative approach (of "post- = no longer") so that non-place can be defined on its own terms as a characteristic of postmodern space, but his approach also highlights the interplay between space (whether anthropological place or non-place) and the subject in space. With the figure of the traveler/tourist as illustrative model of a subject without any specificity in relation to the surrounding space, non-place is oriented towards a generic subject, or produces the "average man" in Augé's words.

118 In *Lot 49* Oedipa is confronted, almost at every turn, with the necessity of discarding the specifics of her identity and of adopting the position of the generic subject. For example, her first encounter in San Narciso already highlights the need to shed the specifics of her own identity. For the game of "Strip Botticelli" she puts on all her clothes at once, which one could take as a maximization of identity in order to be stripped away entirely, and she experiences "a moment of nearly pure terror" (27) because she cannot find her image in the mirror (because it was shattered by a broken can of hairspray whizzing around like a projectile). Other related instances of identity-loss and the generic range from Dr. Hilarius trying to recruit Oedipa as another subject for his experiment with hallucinogenic drugs on "a large sample of suburban housewives" (10), Oedipa's name being converted to "Edna Mosh" for transmission via radio, after being instructed to "just be yourself" (96), and of course her adoption of the anonymous identity of Arnold Snarb in the episode in San Francisco.

In addition, one can see this necessary interrelationship between spatial system and subjectivity as core element in Oedipa's difficulties with the Tristero as "alternative" system:

if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or a cry, then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew. She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? (125)

Against the background of taking non-place to be characteristic of postmodernity, the difficulty here lies not so much in choosing between mainstream society and the Tristero, or even in the epistemological problem of determining whether the Tristero exists or not, but the exclusionary nature of the constellation Oedipa constructs here. The intertwining of (spatial) system and subject position entails that one cannot take part in a different system without the concomitant change in subjectivity. What Oedipa seems to wish for, based on her anchoring in a modern epistemological framework, is to engage the alternative (the Tristero) while retaining her position as a (knowing) subject – as if she is free and autonomous in that respect. This framework is also where the phrasing of her problem, as consisting of two mutually exclusive choices, comes from; it hinges entirely on oppositional logic and the knowability of the world. When, as Augé does, letting go of the view of postmodernity as derived, one can see that Oedipa's difficulty concerns not simply an alternative to mainstream society, but the choice between a fixed singular or a plural conception of the world – not “this world or the other,” but “this world or any other,” or in other words, the acceptance of postmodernity on its own terms. Hence, the novel's key question, “Shall I project a world?” has consequences not only for the view of possible worlds, but also for the subject positions that these worlds bring along. Once again, while *Lot 49* may not “tip over” into “full-blown” postmodernity and Oedipa clings to her modern (epistemological) framework, the liminal character of the novel does ensure that the postmodern comes into full view.

119

Taking postmodernity on its own terms therefore has consequences not only for how specifically postmodern space can be viewed, but also for the subject in postmodern space. One must note here that while postmodern non-place may produce a generic subject, this subject position is far from neutral in a political or ideological sense. Oedipa's feeling of being beat up on in the San Francisco episode does not only indicate the struggle that is the transition from the modern to the postmodern, but it also shows how postmodern non-place excludes her from taking part in what she sees as a “tourist.” While Augé may point to the “passive joys of identity loss” and the generic subject position may not be particularly problematic in straightforward cases concerning ATM machines or the signs along the motorway, this connectedness of

non-place and generic subject also produces exclusionary strategies that serve to marginalize or even eliminate certain people, identities, and subjectivities.¹²

By fully acknowledging the prescribed generic subject position, the concept of non-place thus also gives a broader view of the postmodern space represented in *Lot 49* that takes into account the positions that are under pressure in postmodern space. Non-place has effects not only on the people entering it (like the traveler with his airline ticket and passport), but it also has effects on people who are *denied* access. This exclusion takes place not only on an incidental or individual level, but can be implemented on a systematic scale as well, putting the dynamics of non-place to use in exclusionary strategies (in line with de Certeau's use of the term). In other words, non-place can be utilized for socio-political purposes, for the benefits of some, but also at the expense of others. Non-place can thus have an obverse (and "ugly") side, a political dimension that one cannot overlook.

While the Tristero in *Lot 49* is already entirely oriented towards marginalized groups, Pynchon offers a much more explicit view of the urban landscape of Southern California in an essay published a year after *Lot 49*. In "A Journey into the Mind of Watts" (1966), which appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, he discusses the neighborhood of Watts in Los Angeles, primarily known at the time for the race riots of August 1965, in which he also expounds a more "immediate," non-fictional vision of urban space in Southern California. What he presents in this essay is precisely how the (postmodern) city privileges the white middle class and excludes the black population of Watts – through the workings of non-place, highlighting the mechanisms through which this group is excluded from the spaces and spatialities of the postmodern city. So while *Lot 49* elaborately explores the workings of non-place in a general framework of a search for gaining access, and ending up in this type of postmodern urban space, Pynchon's essay looks at the same mechanisms from a different angle, showing its political effects and implications. The essay thus shows the obverse, which (in my view) adds perspective that needs to be taken into account when considering the postmodern city.

Pynchon's essay begins with an account, perhaps the immediate

12 See Cathy N. Davidson for a thorough discussion of the masculinity of the subject positions that Oedipa has to occupy – thereby reading *Lot 49* as critique of the "cherished myths of a male-dominated society" (50).

reason for writing the essay, of a case in which a white police officer chased, stopped, shot, and killed a black man, Leonard Deadwyler, who was rushing his pregnant wife to hospital. A token inquiry dismissed the incident as an accident, but as Pynchon points out, “[i]n the back of everybody’s head, of course, is the same question: Will there be a repeat of last August’s riot?” Pynchon takes the case as symptomatic of the persistent racial and socio-economic inequality of the situation of Watts and its residents. At the heart of this inequality, according to Pynchon,

is the coexistence of two very different cultures: one white and one black.

While the white culture is concerned with various forms of systematized folly – the economy of the area in fact depending on it – the black culture is stuck pretty much with basic realities like disease, like failure, violence and death, which the whites have mostly chosen – and can afford – to ignore. The two cultures do not understand each other, though white values are displayed without let-up on black people’s TV screens, and though the panoramic sense of black impoverishment is hard to miss from atop the Harbor Freeway, which so many whites must drive at least twice every working day. Somehow it occurs to very few of them to leave at the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go east instead of west only a few blocks, and take a look at Watts. A quick look. The simplest kind of beginning. But Watts is country which lies, psychologically, uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel.

121

What Pynchon describes here is basically a view of the postmodern non-place, dominated by signage, that contrasts with the reality of immediate and basic problems in Watts. The different time-space dimensions of non-place entail that Watts, while geographically at the heart of the city, is nevertheless a world away from the postmodernity that surrounds it, which Pynchon describes by contrasting it with Watts, where “all of it is real, no plastic faces, no transistors, no hidden Muzak, or Disneyfied landscaping, or smiling little chicks to show you around.”

Pynchon also explicitly ties in the urban space of L.A. with the media and entertainment industries, which themselves revolve around the

foregrounding of signage (and thereby the production of non-place). However, this intertwining of the city and these industries is not merely economic; Pynchon extends this alliance between the two by viewing L.A. as being

122

a little unreal, a little less than substantial. For Los Angeles, more than any other city, belongs to the mass media. What is known around the nation as the L.A. Scene exists chiefly as images on a screen or TV tube, as four-color magazine photos, as old radio jokes, as new songs that survive only a matter of weeks. It is basically a white Scene, and illusion is everywhere in it, from the giant aerospace firms that flourish or retrench at the whims of Robert McNamara, to the “action” everybody mills along the Strip on weekends looking for, unaware that they and their search which will end, usually, unfulfilled, are the only action in town.¹³

What Pynchon seems to suggest here is a conflation of the city and its (self-produced) image in the media, of actual space and its representation – a view of Los Angeles as autoreferential in Jameson’s terminology (or simulacral in Baudrillard’s familiar terminology, for that matter). The urban space Pynchon describes is the postmodern non-place of solitude and similitude, with the “plastic faces” and “smiling little chicks” as the impersonal, anonymous functionaries of a city designed to be occupied by the generic subject. He is therefore clearly critical of the postmodern city here, with its Disneyfication, Muzak, and media images. In *Lot 49* these foregrounded aspects of media and imitation are presented with irony but also with a certain degree of (comedic) enjoyment – e.g. in Pierce’s impressions of The Shadow, a crime-fighting vigilante from a radio drama, the actor/lawyer convolutions of Metzger and Manny di Presso, or the development of Fangoso Lagoons, with real human bones for recreational divers in Lake Inverarity and an “Art Nouveau reconstruction of some European pleasure-casino” (37). In the Watts essay, on the other hand, Pynchon examines these aspects from the perspective of an excluded racial minority, which highlights the negative and exclusionary dynamics of this landscape.

13 Note the parallel here between the “giant aerospace firms” and *Lot 49*’s Yoyodyne Inc.

The relatedness between the non-place of L.A. and the generic subject is also one of the problems for Watts and its residents, one of the characteristics that sustains inequality in postmodernity, because the position of generic subject is not neutral. After all, this position is a product of the purposive program inherent in non-place, dependent upon larger societal systems (e.g. the banking system) and the relations between (generic) individuals which that program accords. The individual in non-place may be reduced to anonymity, but the generic subject there is by no means featureless, having to comply with the program of the space. Hence, non-place does not accommodate outsiders or marginalized groups, and can therefore sustain existing inequalities. In *Lot 49* the W.A.S.T.E. system illustrates that outsiders have no way of relating to each other within mainstream society in the first place, and particularly the episode in the Bay Area shows that, even in the non-place of alienated individuals, these marginalized groups do not relate to each other.

123

In his discussion of Watts, Pynchon shows how the generic subject position is an exclusionary device to sustain the “white culture,” “white Scene,” and “white fantasy” he speaks of, in a description of what a day for an unemployed kid in Watts could look like:

If you do get to where you were going without encountering a cop, you may spend your day looking at the white faces of personnel men, their uniform glance of suspicion, their automatic smiles, and listening to polite put-downs. “I decided once to ask,” a kid says, “one time they told me I didn’t meet their requirements. So I said: ‘Well, what are you looking for? I mean, how can I train, what things do I have to learn so I can meet your requirements?’ Know what he said? ‘We are not obligated to tell you what our requirements are.’”

He isn’t. That right there is the hell and headache: he doesn’t have to do anything he doesn’t want to do because he is The Man. Or he was. A lot of kids these days are more apt to be calling him the little man – meaning not so much any member of the power structure as just your average white L.A. taxpayer, registered voter, property owner, employed, stable, mortgaged and the rest.

The little man bugs these kids more than The Man ever bugged their parents. It is the little man who is standing on their feet and in their way; he’s all over the place, and there is not much they can do

to change him or the way he feels about them. A Watts kid knows more of what goes on inside white heads than possibly whites do themselves. Knows how often the little man has looked at him and thought, “Bad credit risk” – or “Poor learner,” or “Sexual threat,” or “Welfare chisler” without knowing a thing about him personally.

The natural, normal thing to want to do is hit the little man. But what after all, has he done? Mild, respectable, possibly smiling, he has called you no names, shown no weapons. Only told you perhaps that the job was filled, the house rented.

124

The “little man” that Pynchon sketches here is the “average man” in Augé, produced by and fully complicit with the socio-economic structures that maintain the dominance of certain groups and marginalization of others. The Man, the little man’s conceptual predecessor, is the representation of existing power (state, establishment, capital, etc.) and an expression of an oppositional logic – and perhaps therefore a phrase favored in the counter-culture of the 1960s. The situation that Pynchon describes is one in which there is no defined power to oppose (even in abstract terms such as The Man) because the little man is perfectly generic: a legitimate product and agent of a system that allows no access to those who are not already part of it – “if you know what this means, you know where to find out more,” and like the symbol of the post horn, this generic subject saturates the city (as taxpayers, voters, and property owners). The only way into this system, when a job is concerned, is “to look as much as possible like a white applicant,” as the governed-sent youth counselors try (without much success) to convey to the unemployed kids. In other words, the only way to take part in the system is by adopting the position of the generic subject that belongs to that system.

This exclusionary strategy inherent in the generic subject position is not only a socio-economic phenomenon, but it is a spatial phenomenon as well. Not only is the generic little man “all over the place,” but access to the postmodern city, beyond the enclave of Watts, is also largely restricted to the generic subject. The policing of Watts can therefore be seen as the identity checks necessary to enter non-place. For Pynchon, “besides protecting and serving the little man, the cop also functions as his effigy”; the cop functions not so much as a representative of the government or of The Man, but as a sign of the socio-economic power

system of postmodernity, as the signage of non-place with legs, a car, and a gun. The cop, then, performs the same function as the material devices that regulate (the access to) non-place, like turn-stiles and barriers. His job is not only “to protect and serve,” but also to maintain a spatial order; he is a mobile agent of the spatiality of non-place. The Deadwyler incident was a trigger that

reminded everybody of how very often the cop does approach you with his revolver ready, so that nothing he does with it can then really be accidental, of how, especially at night, everything can suddenly reduce to a matter of reflexes: your life trembling in the crook of a cop’s finger because it is dark, and Watts, and the history of this place and these times makes it impossible for the cop to come on any different, or for you to hate him any less. Both of you are caught in something neither of you wants, and yet night after night, with casualties or without, these traditional scenes continue to be played out all over the South central part of this city.

125

Such police procedures are scenes, scripted and produced by the dominant discourse that informs the non-place of the postmodern city. Hence, one could see the harassment by the police that the people (particularly young men) need to suffer in Watts as the mechanisms of the regulation of non-place, analogous to signs directing usage of space (“please wait behind the white line”) and the identity checks required for access to non-place (or rather, in these cases, to deny access). In effect, such police actions are not meant to effectively (or silently) enforce power, but are designed to be in full view, at least for those over whom power is exerted – like signage in urban space. In that sense, one could take such policing to be counter-panoptic, not the workings of a machine that keeps the execution of disciplinary power out of the public eye, but instead purposely visible set-pieces aimed at maintaining the discursive borders of postmodern non-place and regulating its points of entry – somewhat like the sign saying “You are now entering the Beaujolais region,” but with a prohibition and threat of violence.

Therefore, Pynchon’s portrayal of Watts complements the representation of the city in *Lot 49*. The novel presents mainstream society’s outcasts, those for whom there is no place in the non-place of the

postmodern city, while their alternative can offer no connections for marginalized groups either, providing only the different non-place of the Tristero. It is the non-choice between these alternatives – the false choice between ones and zeroes, convention or Tristero – that shows the impregnability of these two systems of non-place, at least within the framework of Oedipa's task of "sorting it all out" (5). Hence, by showing that non-place cannot usefully be reduced to or framed by a modern epistemology, the novel offers a view of the particularity of postmodern space. In his essay on Watts, Pynchon extends this perspective on the postmodern city by looking at it not through the modern-postmodern distinction, but through the distinction between mainstream society and socio-economically excluded minorities. In effect, the essay looks at non-place not only from the "inside," but particularly from the "outside" – from the position of those who are denied access to the non-place of the postmodern city, as part of their exclusion from part of the postmodern world. This lays bare that non-place is not neutral or innocent (politically or ethically), but requires discursive and sometimes physical force in order to be maintained. One could even say that Pynchon's "little man," as a figure that connects the generic subject of non-place to the socio-economic politics of the postmodern city, also affirms the relation between the postmodern in a cultural and in a politico-economic sense – akin, though along different lines, to Jameson's connection between postmodernism and late capitalism. Therefore, the essay on Watts in effect shows that Oedipa's experience in San Narciso – of the opacity of the Tristero and the post horn, and of the feeling of non-location at the end – is a representation of the experience of the postmodern city which, particularly in terms of spatiality and subjectivity, has characteristics that are not merely abstract properties, but that have substantial consequences in the real world and particularly the lives of those on the outside, without access.

Thus, *Lot 49* provides an insight into the spaces of postmodernity, especially when supplemented with the perspective from Pynchon's essay on Watts. At the most visible level, the postmodern city consists of a network of freeways connecting privately owned spaces, in which "over by the freeway" is a meaningful qualification of location. It is an environment in which signage is more prominent than social interaction; where Muzak, neon signs for motels, post horns, and W.A.S.T.E. bins determine

the usage of a space, the roles of individuals, and their (im)possible interactions. Hence, perhaps the most important feature of postmodern space that emerges from *Lot 49* is that the city is a non-place, a regulated and monitored place of “solitude and similitude” for anonymous (yet identified) individuals, for the generic subject produced by the program of the postmodern city.

By way of an afterthought, one can see the postmodern city which foregrounds the generic subject and locations “over by the freeway,” as it emerges from *Lot 49*, as a model for today’s “global” city, or particularly the city as part of a global network of capital flows (e.g. as in the work of Castells). For instance, this global city is discussed by architect Rem Koolhaas in his essay “The Generic City,” which one can take as moving even further away from de Certeau’s decaying Concept City, and also as even more outspoken than Augé’s discussion of non-place in the move beyond negative opposition to the modern. Koolhaas extends the generic subject as produced by non-place in Augé (and Pynchon) to taking the Generic to also be the main feature of urban space itself, describing the Generic City as “the city liberated from the captivity of center, from the straitjacket of identity” (1249-50). He posits the Generic City as a model for cities today that originated in the Western world, but is now “a concept in a state of migration” (1262), on the move towards the equator (cities to think of are Bangkok, Singapore, or Hong Kong). The image he presents is in many respect close to the urban space of *Lot 49*.

127

The serenity of the Generic City is achieved by the *evacuation* of the public realm, as in an emergency fire drill. The urban plane now only accommodates necessary movement, fundamentally the car; highways are a superior version of boulevards and plazas, taking more and more space; their design, seemingly aiming for automotive efficiency, is in fact surprisingly sensual, a utilitarian pretense entering the domain of *smooth* space. What is new about this locomotive public realm is that it cannot be measured in dimensions. The same (let’s say ten-mile) stretch yields a vast number of different experiences: it can last five minutes or forty; it can be shared with almost nobody, or with the entire population; it can yield the absolute pleasure of pure, unadulterated speed – at which point the Generic City may even become intense or at least acquire density –

or utterly claustrophobic moments of stoppage – at which point the thinness of the Generic City is at its most noticeable. (1251)

128

Like San Narciso, the Generic City here is a city without any public spaces for interaction, but instead prominently features a system of free-ways for which the idea of position and location, or time for that matter – the “dimensions” for Koolhaas – are entirely flexible. This underscores the time-space compression of non-place, the prominence of the car, the city in which things can be located “over by the freeway.” The Generic City thus emphasizes certain features, at the cost of others, especially those people who are unable to go along with its dynamic, or those who are denied access. Despite the ethnic diversity in the Generic City, there is little room for otherness (“[g]olf courses are all that is left of otherness” [1251]) and mobility and migration are preconditions (“[t]he Generic City is always founded by people on the move, poised to move on” [1252]). What one sees in Koolhaas’ essay, therefore, is that this city depends on exclusionary methods – of the type illustrated in Pynchon’s essay on Watts, as a world away from the rest of Los Angeles – that produce the condition of the generic, both for the city as a whole as for the subjects in the city. With respect to signage, the Generic City is also in line with the treatment of signage in the non-place of *Lot 49*. There is a

redundancy in the iconography that the Generic City adopts. If it is water-facing, then water-based symbols are distributed over its entire territory... If it has a mountain, each brochure, menu, ticket, billboard will insist on the hill, as if nothing less than a seamless tautology will convince. Its identity is like a mantra. (1263)

What little identity the Generic City has is established through persistent repetition of signs – strikingly analogous to the repetition of the post horn in San Francisco – that follows the logic of signage in non-place. In short, many elements of the Generic City can be traced to the kind of space of which *Lot 49* offers a representation. Especially against a background of ideas like Koolhaas’, one could therefore say that the experience of non-location at the end of the novel (where San Narciso “gave up its residue of uniqueness for her; became a name again, was assumed back into the American community of crust and mantle” [122-23])

moves beyond oppositions between the modern and postmodern, and beyond the particularity of the U.S.; the reflection upon urban space in *Lot 49* – in its representation of non-place, signage, and the generic subject – indeed takes the space of a postmodern world on its own terms.