UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

BLACK BOXES:
AIRPORT SPACE, LIMINAL MECHANISMS, AND SYSTEMS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN CANDIDACY

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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January 2, 2008

Abstract

Treating the first-person experience of airport space as an ethnographic tool, this thesis examines spatial perception and its breakdown in multiple examples of imagined and real twentieth-century spatial constructs. First, it considers examples of failed or redundant mechanisms which function as liminal constructs, either through their presence as physical objects or through use as tools with which to perceive liminal spaces. It emphasizes their function as points of access for narrative and delineates their status as examples of failure in relation to Bruno Latour's use of the term "black box," appropriated from the world of air crash investigation, and to Walter Benjamin's collection and juxtaposition of research in *The Arcades Project*. Second, it explores the type and sequence of spaces encountered by a traveller in a large contemporary international airport, and those behaviours that are inscribed and prescribed upon people and mechanisms therein. It critiques Marc Augé's ideas of the "non-place" through explorations of a distinctly airport-specific culture and possible deconstructions of airport space by passenger use and mechanical and architectural functions. Finally, it relates these to narrative space through an examination and practice of systemic approaches to autobiography in works by Georges Perec, Michel Leiris, and Raymond Queneau. It uses the first-person construction of a narrative of airport space—a first-person "silent reading" of public space—to construct a system of research through which twentieth-century liminal space may be inhabited and critiqued from within and on its own terms. Thus the constraint and potential offered by these diverse liminal spaces are deconstructed in terms of the personal narrative, and through use of airport space demonstrate an inhabiting of research through an innovative and revealing method.

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Introduction

This project began with an intuition about space. I had (and still have) a feeling that there are certain kinds of spaces we encounter routinely that have something elusive in common. These are architectural spaces both concrete and imaginary, and inspire a common feeling in me, despite being on the surface unrelated to one another, whether in genre, aesthetics, or function. This something, the inspiration of a feeling in me when I pass through these spaces, is what I am attempting to describe with this project, and to seek reasons for this feeling. What about the experience of these spaces causes a change?

As I write this I am sitting in a small room in front of three sunny windows, looking out onto a pine-bordered back yard in western Massachusetts. Most of what I can see from here is green. It's a beautiful brisk day in the summer of 2007, and I am far removed in literal terms from the mechanisms I have lived with during this research. And yet, I had to pass through many of them in order to have this privileged seat in this picturesque region, all in bloom for the summer and the tourists that flock to it every year. It's nearly the fourth of July. Visiting my family and friends over here, returning to the place I came from while living and working abroad, is made possible by air travel. Air travel makes it possible to get away from it all (or more precisely, away from some things and towards other, different things), to sit on a porch in a small New England town and type out a narrative describing the coming-together of various ways of understanding space. Air travel makes possible this Venn diagram I am constructing of different types of spaces. It's that imagined area in the centre where each idea of these spaces overlap that I have been groping towards these last few years, conscious that though I may be describing some of its shapes, there is an all-important central concern, created by the overlay of different spatial ideas, that eludes easy description.

In writing about the experience of air travel and an awareness of its influence, I occupy a similar perspective to Marc Augé's protagonist Pierre Dupont, as he commences the journey whose narrative begins *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.[1] This opening narrative has been especially influential on this project and will be discussed further within it, however to begin exploring the motifs that form the central threads throughout this these, I would like to first turn to Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.[2] In order to investigate these motifs, I must begin by describing the genesis of this project in earnest, in the spring of 2003 in Denver,

[1] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

[2] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, after the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedeman (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

Colorado, and what has emerged through the past years' writing as the largest element to the shape and spaces of the project as a whole: the airport.

Airports offer examples of the liminal on many scales throughout their spaces. Taken as a whole, airports are a literal threshold between ground and air travel (and a threshold or portal between other ways of envisioning the elements of earth and air, but we will leave this to one side for the moment). Taking the inside spaces apart, we find that the jetway, for example, is a demarcated threshold; the lines at check-in, the security screening, down to such smaller components as the automatic doorways into the building, the on-ramp from the highway—these are all liminal elements within the larger space of the airport itself.

It is this idea of the airport, as a spatial singularity and as a group of liminally-functioning mechanisms, that I will keep turning towards as I investigate the other mechanisms and conceptions of space that in themselves evoke the intuition of space that inspired this project. In asking how each of these envision space, and how each is like airport space, I hope to get closer to a description of this feeling and what it might mean as a new way to spatially link disparate elements of perception. As David Harvey writes of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* work in his introduction to *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, "our imaginations, our dreams, our conceptions, and our representations mediate" the materiality of the world we live in.[3]

Why do each of these objects and ideas explored in this work lead me back to thinking about the airport? Each subject addressed in this project occupies a distinctly liminal territory, and one which links back to a perception of airport space. They offer "islands" of understanding of airport space, and reflexively, airport space is a means to bring the whole investigation explicitly together.

Picture the airport itself.

This is a complex task... is there a single iconic building that comes to mind? A single example of idealized "airportness" you can draw upon? Or is there a memory of a first encounter with an airport that takes precedence here? Picturing the airport to me has been a process of assemblage. Different spaces are collected in our perception, depending on what they require of us, and what we require of them. How do we understand and process these complex, demanding, stressful spaces of contemporary air travel? How does meaning emerge from the passage through airports? It will emerge in my investigation that elements of narrative are key in shaping an awareness and imagination of self-in-space, and vice versa. The perception of narrative

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[3] David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006).

space offers ways into and out of the imagination of the self. In addition, airports and airplane travel reintroduce intimacy to a mechanically defined space.[4]

The first chapter of this work will address examples of liminally-functioning mechanisms which may each be used to question perceptions of airport spaces. This is a collection of mechanisms that each present a form, and thus perception, of liminal space that has failed to exist as the dominant one in each of their respective fields. I will explain more about this particular approach to failure within the chapter, however I have placed these mechanisms together in order to retrospectively test my instinct that they are related based upon my intuition for space. Returning to each of them by asking how they are like airport spaces will allow them to operate as a whole, rather than a collection of disparate investigations. These objects will provide ways into thinking about the complex scales and spaces of airports explored in the central (or hub, to adopt the airline industry's term) second chapter, and then of space in more abstract (and yet still machinic, systemic) terms when turning to systems of writing in examples of literary experiments by the Oulipo group.[5]

The third chapter turns more explicitly to examples of literary experiment and autobiographical narrative. The question asked here, recurring with each of these examples, is: where does this find us in relation to airport space? Other ways of asking questions of the airport include: how is each of the mechanisms explored in the first chapter like an airport? How does airport space describe a different way of being, a different form of everyday life and spatial perception—how does the space act upon us, and how do we attempt to act upon it? How do systemic literary experiments illuminate how we site ourselves within the space of airports? How do they permit an imagination of new kinds of spaces, and new ways of interacting with our ideas of spaces? How do they expand our perception of space beyond the physical?

In conducting literature reviews for this research, I became aware of a central question: why privilege airport spaces among all of the topics and subjects that could provide interesting threads through this project? I can best explain this by also explaining my use of the autobiographical as a device within the research and writing of this project. In any of my other work (including creative writing, photography, or even what I am currently paid to do in my work organising museum exhibitions), an awareness of process has always been key to an understanding of the whole. This manifests occasionally as a meta-structure to the work, a

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[4] Cf. Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

[5] See Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie, eds, *Oulipo Compendium*, Atlas Archive Six: Documents of the Avant-Garde (London: Atlas Press, 1998), 205-6. Oulipo, an abbreviation for *Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle*, or workshop for potential literature, is a group dedicated to research into and composition of writing according to "severely restrictive methods."

conscious writing-in of the process itself. Explaining this to a reader in an autobiographical voice and narrative is a way to illuminate the process of researching a slippery subject, and a way into the conjunction of autobiography and systems I will address in the third chapter on systems of writing. The process of research should not be removed from the process of daily life, and the things we use to go about it—these questions I am asking about airport spaces, narrative, and what liminal spaces mean for the individual encountering a space designed for mass movement and thoroughfare are lived questions, and the process of exploring them must be made visible via a first-person narrative in order to create a whole, functioning, legible thing out of what would otherwise be thinkpieces merely placed next to one another. This project depends upon narrative, as I hope it will become clear that the spaces described within it do as well.

Chapter 1

Failure, Mechanisms, and the Imagination of Public Space

What does failure mean?

Vignette: Form and Mutability

Discard and Panorama: the example of the spiral escalator

Vignette: Cabinet Portraiture

Hemisphere of Distortion: The Robin Hill Fisheye Lens

Vignette: Paris Las Vegas

The Paternoster Lift and Multiple Infinities

Vignette: The Ring of Saturn

The Great Victorian Way and the Ring of Saturn

Vignette: Always Open, Always Closed

The Revolving Door

Conclusion: the Black Box

What Does Failure Mean?

My main practical and theoretical source to begin addressing this project's intersection of disparate aesthetic concerns was Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.[6] It was a source of inspiration not only for the descriptions and collections inside each of its dossiers, but of the juxtapositions, variety, and scale of collection therein—the whole arc of its various subjects coming to mean something at the same time as its detailed parts are visible in close-up view—I picture this dual regard for meaning as like looking at an aerial photo of a city you know and recall well at street level.[7] Like Susan Buck-Morss describes, I began by attempting a similar experiment: "[The *Arcades Project*] experiments with an alternative hermeneutic strategy more appropriate to [Benjamin's] 'dialectics of seeing,' one that relies, rather, on the interpretive power of images that make conceptual points concretely, with reference to the world outside the text."[8]

This chapter's failed mechanisms are understood in this context as a means of thinking about spatial perception. Starting with failure as a means to understanding space is a way to interrogate this dialectic by examining the forms in which it might break down, as we'll see in the examples of this project these breakdowns serve to describe the form more fully than is possible through ordinary function. By examining images of spatial failure, the breakdown of space as embodied in an object or way of approaching or interacting with space, failure itself becomes a strategy for thinking about how that space works, and how imagination, or more specifically the idea of potential within space, comes to function in an everyday interaction with it. I began by imagining the arcades themselves as a means of examining failure by looking at public spaces and the mechanisms designed to function within them. It is important to clarify that failure in this sense is not in binary opposition to success, but rather constitutes an encompassing term for the consideration of disparate, non-dominant or unobserved elements: what may also be determined as redundant.[9]

In making case studies of these particular subjects, I am interested in public space and the individual's perception and experience of it, examined via discarded mechanisms. In a sense I

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[6] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.
[7] Now it's possible to readily access this type of image thanks to Google Earth.
[8] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 6.
[9] Matthew Goulish and Tim Etchells, Directors, *The Institute of Failure*, A Shooting Live Artists Project, 2002, http://www.institute-of-failure.com, (accessed January 1, 2007). See also Matthew Goulish, *39 Microlectures: in proximity of performance* (London: Routledge, 2000), and "Lecture in the Shape of a Bridge Collapsing to inaugurate the Institute of Failure," http://www.institute-of-failure.com/mattEssay.html, (accessed December 23, 2007). This non-standard regard for failure is inspired in significant part by the Institute, which lists types of failure as: "1. Accident 2. Mistake 3. Weakness 4. Inability 5. Incorrect Method 6. Uselessness 7. Incompatibility 8. Embarrassment 9. Confusion 10. Redundancy 11. Obsolescence 12. Incoherence 13. Unrecognizability 14. Absurdity 15. Invisibility 16. Impermanence 17. Decay 18. Instability 19. Forgetability 20. Tardiness 21. Disappearance 22. Catastrophe 23. Uncertainty 24. Doubt 25. Fear 26."

seek to present case studies as biographies of the discarded and/or redundant—imagining and examining the experience of paths not taken to bring the "now" into relief. In addressing the *Arcades Project* via this convolute-collecting method, I am drawing a conscious parallel with Benjamin's attention, and the subsequent attention in criticism around Benjamin's work, to obsolescence and the obsolete object. It is necessary to clarify this in relation to a definition of failure and the failed mechanism.

The obsolete object and the failed mechanism may appear at first to be more related than apart. Both may be defined and re-shaped by the industrial circumstances of the 19th and 20th centuries. Both occupy similar aesthetic silhouettes and have a similar pull on the imagination; both give access to the past while asserting physical presence in the current moment. However, the separation occurs when considering the space occupied by each in relation to the individual. The obsolete object occupies the status of a discrete piece, an item that may rest (with a price) on a shelf in a shop; the failed mechanism is necessarily comprised of parts with disparate but integrated functions. The obsolete object may more readily attain a value. The mechanism itself, as more than sum of its parts, becomes the failure, less readily salvaged through a conversion into consumer object. This "more than," will be defined via these biographical convolute examples as a critical revision of the individual's perception of public space, and will in turn provide means into looking at and thinking about airports—an oblique start to the airport dissections to follow in the subsequent chapter.

These failed mechanisms are understood in this context as a means of thinking about spatial perception, but what separates them from the obsolete object extends further than the ability of the latter to be labelled with a tag of "vintage" or "antique" and priced accordingly. Failed mechanisms also place the individual, as first person singular, within a public field of potential—first person plural. In some way these failed mechanisms function(ed) in their designed life in primary relation to public (and by extension often urban) space. Motion and time become essential factors here also. An individual moves through, and records, a space that encompasses the multiple. The fact that the individual is not necessarily active in that movement, whether exposing a photograph, standing on an escalator or elevator, or riding a train around the center of the city, means that the mechanism in this sense acts as viewfinder. The obsolete object's potential future may have remained obscured or unrelated, where the failed mechanism's persistence situates the perception of space on an individual level within a continuum of cultural memory.

Vignette: Form and Mutability

> By its various objects it would produce new and soothing pleasure to the mind.[10]
> --Joseph Paxton, arguing against the destruction of the Crystal Palace following the Great Exhibition of 1851

One of my cameras is a cheap medium-format Holga model 120s. The images produced by this camera tend towards a drawing-in or darkening at the corners of the square frame, the moulded plastic construction and lack of optical sophistication creating this border effect known as a "vignette." It was through photography with this camera that I first came to study the vignette as a phenomenon. The pincushion distortion of the lens renders the image somewhat blurrier towards the edge anyway, and in some frames these fade to black entirely at the edge of the print, more visible in the contact sheets as a rounded shape to the frame. Robin Hill's photos, subject of this chapter's "fisheye lens" section, are vignettes as well, due to the crisp difference between the circular image edge and the square shape of the actual negative surface.

As a word, vignette connotes smallness to me, the –ette ending implying a relatively diminutive size. The framing has the effect of rendering a more modern image antique, inviting us to see it as though it were out of its time or place. It creates a more defined barrier between viewer and viewed. "Vignette" as a term is mutable, crossing media from photography, in both unintended distortion and intended framing in portraiture, to architecture, for example in the shape of a cameo window. The framing device, often overlooked for the comparatively straightforward examination of the content within that frame, might reveal more complex understandings of the problems of vision and legibility addressed in our encounters with different kinds of liminal spaces. This I understand to be one example of how the unobserved grows bold—in Benjamin's example of the nineteenth century, of the anonymous attaining significance through a lack of any perceiving eye, rather than the opposite.[11]

A graphic example of ambiguous vignetting is found in EJ Bellocq's photographs of women and their surroundings in New Orleans brothels.[12] Perhaps the photos were intended for frames that would provide the sitter with an oval surround—in some, the lady's face and shoulders appear against a white sheet, a sheet that doesn't extend across the whole of the frame, giving a glimpse of the pins that hold up the backdrop and the walls behind. In some cases the negative has deteriorated inwards from the edges, creating a frayed border to the image detail,

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[10] Joseph Paxton, *What is to become of the Crystal Palace?* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1851), 13.
[11] Benjamin, 154.
[12] E. J. Bellocq, John Szarkowski, and Lee Friedlander, *Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville, the Red Light district of New Orleans* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996).

encroaching on the sitter. In still others, the faces of some women have been mysteriously scratched out, leaving a roughly oval blank in the centre that, in its negative space, strangely echoes the disintegrating edges. It is important to consider these kinds of multiply-seen, ambiguous forms of vignette where the form is translated into writing.

Rather than pure anecdote, I intend for this project's series of written vignettes to act as a shape for short prose forms, a way of linking these passages of failure and mechanism to counterpoint our periodic return to considerations of airports. In a sense these vignettes are portraits of spaces or jointures between my researches into failed mechanisms, and are meant to invoke the formality and focussed images seen in both the intended and unintended photographic applications.

The vignette I'm using here is also a form of cross-reference. Due to the intermixed nature of the disciplines within this project, drawing out one single element becomes a challenge not to thereby lose the context for its relation to others. By joining themes in vignette between the biographies of failed mechanisms, I hope to further narrate how one might come to address larger concerns of the interrelation of self and vision in the creation of spatial meaning.

Discard and Panorama: the example of the spiral escalator

The world's first spiral escalator was originally constructed in 1906 within the Holloway Road tube station, in a circular bore adjacent to the lift works, to a design by an inventor named Jesse Reno.[13] The space as it appears today is largely occupied by an emergency staircase and visible only by peering through a grille.[14] The escalator was designed to minimize the linear space required to move passengers between platform and surface, and details of its original working structure remain somewhat obscure. Accounts vary as to whether it ever saw passenger service. Reno, an American who first constructed a linear moving walkway as a late-19th century Coney Island, NY amusement park ride, returned to the US after the failure of this escalator and achieved more tangible return with designs closer to his original conveyance. He eventually sold his patents to the Otis company, that of elevator fame.[15]

When I first heard about this escalator, its form was described to me as a double-helix, and I imagined this in appearance like the DNA model—one strand carrying people up and one down in stacks. I then found rumors that the problem of turning the asymmetrical steps over at the end of each cycle proved to be the escalator's undoing. The original construction may have been more like a conveyor belt with attached slats that functioned as treads, and which could then flip over at the top and bottom. It could have had parallel ascending and descending tracks, as opposed to the layered helix. The actual mechanism seems to fall somewhere between the two designs—one spiral within the other, each of only one person's width, with flooring material made of wedge-shaped wooden slats. What remains of the escalator is now housed at the Transport for London Museum Depot, and is most likely only a portion of the total mechanism.

The Depot is in a large climate-controlled warehouse in Acton, opened infrequently for guided tours, and once I tell the archivists what I've come there to see, they attempt to let me down gently and tell me that it's not restored yet, that they don't in fact know how to put it together, or even which parts they may be missing.[16]

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[13] G. C. Barney, ed., D. A. Cooper, and J. Inglis, *Elevator and Escalator Micropedia*, 2nd ed. (Cumbria: International Association of Elevator Engineers, 1997), ix.
[14] Hywel Williams, "Underground History: Disused Sections of Open Stations," http://underground-history.co.uk/hiddenbits.php (accessed December 23, 2007).
[15] Barney, Cooper, Inglis, viii.
[16] London Transport Museum, Photo and description of the spiral escalator in situ at Holloway Road Station, http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/photo/photo.html?_IXSR_=BniLxIHflUS&_IXMAXHITS_=1&IXinv=1998/84439&IXsummary=results/results&IXsearch=spiral&_IXFIRST_=1 (accessed November 20, 2007). Since my visit, the Transport Museum has added this photo and description about the escalator to their searchable photo library.

It rests in several discolored piles on top of wooden skids, accompanied by a laminated sign that the guide sets up as a joke: "To Be Re-Assembled." It's unlikely that in its present state this will ever happen, since after the escalator was dismantled it was left in the bottom of what became the sump area of the lift shaft, and bears rusty evidence of this. Most parts are covered in flaking ochre stains. Several long curving pieces of metal link the row of piled arced wooden tracks and rust-clogged gears.

Contemporary spiral escalator forms are more akin to sweeping arcs interspersed with landings, compared to the tighter continuous spiral that would have been allotted space within the tube station. These current incarnations usually carry passengers around a shopping center, to better display a panorama of consumption. In the words of Mitsubishi, manufacturer of today's curved models:

> The spiral escalator creates entirely new possibilities for large-scale public space design. It's fun to ride, too, with its expansive, continuously changing vistas.... Its existence, like that of our ultra-fast elevators with artificial intelligence, represents the company's single-minded approach to the development of more comfortable, safer and even inspiring escalator, elevator and moving walkway design and application.[17]

Further to this idea of "more enjoyable point-to-point transport experiences for all," Mitsubishi also presents the closest kin to Reno's arrangement in a "Multiple Plan, [which] creates fantastic and graceful space:

> By its arrangement of spiral escalators in a continuously rising pattern, it achieves a panoramic view never before attainable. And with a spiral escalator standing at each floor like a spectacular art object, this plan is ideal for office buildings and hotels with tenants on the lower floors.[18]

This text is also presented on the website alongside a photograph taken looking down into the escalator-defined well of a shopping mall atrium, a well created by the gradually unfolding spiral escalator system. The plan of installation would here seem to provide a panoramic view primarily of the escalator itself, adorned by passengers and backed by consumer goods in the landings and gaps between rises. Reno's utilitarian transport idea of contained minimum linear space for maximum use has given way to an unfolding, constantly shifting panorama, a slow viewfinder for consumers: a work of art.

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[17] Mitsubishi Electric, http://global.mitsubishielectric.com/bu/elevators/index_b.html (accessed March 15, 2004).
[18] Ibid., http://www.mitsubishi-elevator.com/design/spiral/spiral/spiral_typ_6.htm (accessed March 15, 2004).

Described by Benjamin in the Panorama convolute of the *Arcades Project*, the 19th century "view from a raised platform, surrounded by a balustrade, of objects lying round about and beneath,"[19] while the painting moves on a surrounding cylindrical wall, has here shifted. The motion is taken up not by the panoramic painting, but by the passenger, made into mobile viewer by the spiralling escalator. Reno's escalator, undisguised, looked upon itself. It failed to sustain its disguised function, while this contemporary atrium-scene of Mitsubishi's invention disguises itself with the surroundings of consumer space and becomes a "spectacular art object" to its manufacturers and marketers.

Could this be another "manifestation of the total work of art"? Another kind of panopticon, which in Benjamin's Panorama context provided that space where, "not only does one see everything, but one sees it in all ways"?[20] The action is the mechanism, the passengers attempting integration into the escalator's spatial relation to itself, within the contemporary space of the shopping mall atrium. In contrast, the only known photo of the Reno escalator was apparently taken during a phase of installation. It reveals a likely positioning of passengers—they would have faced the same direction, those ascending and descending never catching each other's eyes as so often happens to the population of linear transport escalators. The passengers are pushed to the outer orbit of the cylindrical chamber. The outer wall is unfinished, similar to emergency stair walls, yet it contains a kind of handrail. The inner spiral has regular handgrips, but no contiguous handrail. The upper edge of the photo darkens into shadow, and it is impossible to tell for certain how far up the spirals actually ran. This escalator does not display itself, but turns in upon itself, as if its threads were incompatible. Arguably, its vision of itself becomes a greater one due to this insularity. The escalator's structure dictates a mechanism poised exactly to examine itself.

[19] Benjamin, 528.
[20] Ibid., 531.

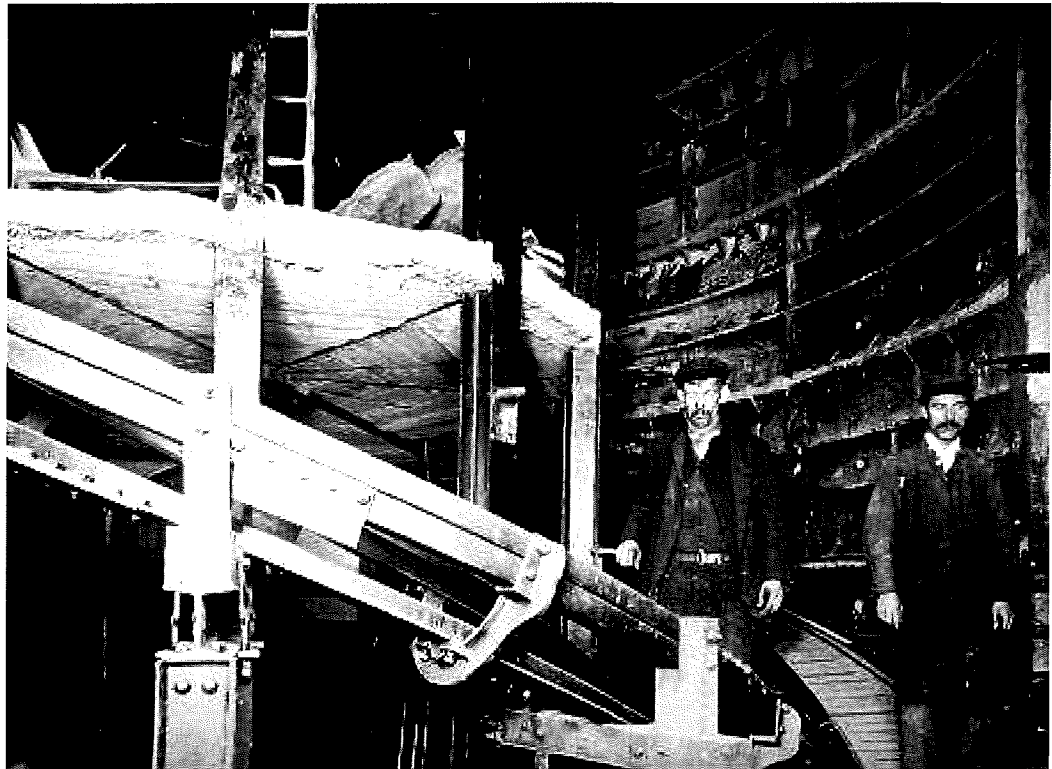

Figure 1: Jesse Reno's spiral escalator during construction. Photographer unknown, c. 1902. Courtesy London Transport Museum.

I am attempting here to use the absent to define an axis of theory—a space dedicated within the perceiving mind to the forms discarded along the passage of the twentieth century. The example of the spiral escalator revises the concept of Panorama within the *Arcades Project*. These escalators are aspects of public space, but what might they elaborate about the role of individual vision? If the Reno escalator failed, has the vision of space granted by that mechanism also been discarded along with it? Within both of the escalator-defined spaces I have here described, as in the Panoramas, the presence of the individual is fleeting, the journey and the vision interdependent. I argue that the mechanism as imagined here, the mechanism as it might see itself, and the first-person viewpoint that perceives and considers this mechanism spatially, contrive together to demarcate a failure of vision.

Failure here is not illustrative of a lack of success, but of the persistence of discard as an element of vision and spatial perception, a problem essential to the question of what it might mean to approach the *Arcades Project* after the intervening 20th century. A once-discarded form reappears in an inauguration of consumption, public space, and "spectacular object." The Reno escalator, as built and imagined in 1906, persists in related (though not necessarily evolved) form in Mitsubishi's design. It persists in the piles of decaying wood and metal in the climate-

controlled museum depot—not housed in a museum as such, but not filed out of sight (and use-perception) either. It persists in the incompleteness and ambiguous vision of the single extant photograph, and the presence of the parallel workers that stand among the metal they could be either putting together or taking apart.

How is the spiral escalator like an airport?

To begin answering the question of how the escalator is like an airport, it's useful to keep the image above in mind. These workers we recognize as workers, but the impenetrability of their actions (putting together or taking apart?) and their conscious pose inside the half-built or half–unbuilt escalator are telling aspects which have parallels with scenes from airport spaces.

In airports we encounter numerous types of people going about their individual jobs in airport space,[21] and specifically we are able to view those on the apron (in a space explicitly near the airplanes) doing things whose movement we may recognize, but not fully understand, nor are we expected to as travellers passing through airport space. Yet the image of those workers on the ground is offered to us through the framing device of the plate-glass window. In both cases we see these people and see evidence of them, but with only partial (or assumed) comprehension. Their movements are coded, and follow a protocol we are not expected to recognize.

In terms of the spatial construct offered by the spiral escalator, how might this also be found in airport spaces? Like a prescription for efficient movement in tightly-controlled spaces, it can be applied to the large and small-scale shifting of people and airplanes in and out of airports. Coming in to land on the runway, airplanes in a holding pattern near the airport trace a gradual downward spiral to their final approach, one lining up behind another, with 1.5—2 minutes in between them. On the same or nearby runways, other planes are being directed to take off and bank away from the airport. The planes are occupying a prescribed movement into and out of two different spaces of transportation much as the passengers on the escalator would have. Each takeoff and landing describes one half rising, one half descending, neither really acknowledging the other visually (at least for the passenger—it becomes disconcerting to say the least to encounter other planes close by when actually up in the air), much in the same way users of Reno's escalator would not have faced each other directly. On a human scale, we can look to the different levels designated as "arrivals" and "departures" to see an oblique kind of personal

[21] *Airport*, BBC TV series, broadcast on the UKTV Documentaries channel (ongoing dates). In this television series, set at Heathrow, we are able to follow along with various airport workers during their shifts, including those in public-facing roles and those who work almost exclusively behind the scenes, and whom we are unlikely to encounter during routine travel.

exchange taking place in a similarly stacked arrangement, though more fluid and subject to whim and crossed pathways. As some ascend to check in, others descend to collect baggage and depart, curving outward on highways and exit ramps via ground-based modes of transportation.

Failure of vision, as demarcated by the spiral escalator, is enacted and re-enacted on a first-person level with each use of airport space by an individual. Indeed this failure of vision, of seeing and understanding all of the spatial exchanges constantly (and simultaneously) taking place in airports, is central to the experience of them, as is a kind of knowledge of this failure as it happens, and of its persistence. As travellers, we are always blind to some of what the space is moving us through, into, and out of. This is the built-in function of airport space. The spiral here is designed for an inward-looking examination. Spatially it serves to prompt self-policing by those within it, as they are unable to confront the full relation to the other flows of traffic that are simultaneously at work in transit through the airport. This element, like the panopticon's prompting of self-surveillance, has been integrated into the airport's mechanisms for the processing of crowds, even down to such details as the routine questions asked by passport control staff. We have some time, while standing in line waiting for an interview, to anticipate what questions will come. Thus we also begin to question ourselves as we move through the airport's system. The spiral shape focuses this self-regard, by orchestrating our movement in relation to others, and by controlling what we see, controlling how we see ourselves within the airport's spaces.

Vignette: Cabinet Portraiture

In the antique emporia of New England, we find dealers' stalls of a motley disposition. Rarely is a specialty declared—we find a mix of furniture, memorabilia, and quilt pieces, the items whose lives are historical yet still potential, among the picturesque useless. Down in the smaller tiers, above the box of doorknobs in a colour my mother calls "oxblood" and below the row of glass insulators, sits a shelved box made of cardboard, containing photographs printed on the same material. We find vintage postcards and strangers' loose album photos, and in among these, plastic-bagged, the cabinet portraits and cartes-de-visite, each with a pencilled price in the upper right corner.

A carte-de-visite measures approximately 3 ½ x 2 ¼ inches, while the larger cabinet portraits, also designed for filing in hinged, heavily padded albums, measure 5 ½ x 4 inches.[22] The latter form provided more chance for group portraits though the sitters are usually singular, or if not singular, then joined according to captions by familial bond.[23] Composite photos, wherein multiple faces of family members shape an oval around one central figure (a patriarch, a queen) resemble planets in orbit—a familial diagram.

These individual vignettes make their sitters into playing cards—no longer the painted portrait miniature to be kept hidden in a locket or framed in an elaborate surround, their vignette is provided by the cardboard of the printed surface—people made into cards, easily shuffled. Each still sitter, alone, head held in place with a metal bracket to reduce movement (and thus ensure against an image blur) during the long exposure times then needed, gazes fixedly out and past the photographer, past the viewer, into a private space. Perhaps this is the cabinet they are contained within—a space in which an image, shuffled among boxes and bins as if no more than the material it's printed on, may become a display of vision. They placed themselves formally onto cards, these cards left as official announcements or keepsakes, each a presence now revealing something lost, only delineated otherwise by the dealer's pencilled price. It was not exactly a self-portrait, but close enough as a vision of self within a cabinet idea. It was a sighting of self within a new technology—a record created in newly available media.

[22] Oliver Mathews, *The Album of Carte-de-Visite and Cabinet Portrait Photographs 1854-1914*, (London: Reedminster Publications Ltd., 1974), 30.
[23] Ibid., 32.

Hemisphere of Distortion: the Robin Hill fisheye lens

Figure 2: Self-portrait by Robin Hill, n.d. Courtesy Cambridge University Library.

The first time I held one of Robin Hill's fisheye prints, I saw a ghost of him at the edge of the circular image: a face looking down into the eye of the camera, clouds over his shoulder in contrast to the sky, his face in backlit silhouette and sepia-muddied with age. I looked at the ghost of a man, an atmosphere, and an invention. The camera was placed on the ground to produce this image, and treetops sway all around the circular edge of the print—surrounding what must be the grassy space in the center of which was placed the camera, its lens cap removed by the photographer to expose the plate inside.

In the course of researching the technicalities of camera function, I encountered mention of this, the first true "fisheye" camera, whose lens was diagrammed in a technical explanation of wide-angle lenses and the physical designs by which they distort an image.[24] I first became interested in wide-angle lenses' employment as a means for placing a spectator inside the action, a sense that the viewer is also surrounded by the space of the photograph, after finding mention

[24] This research informed an appendix to my MA dissertation in Twentieth-Century Literature at King's College London, which looked at perception and documentation of urban space in Iain Sinclair's writing on London.

of their use in early skateboard photography,[25] and had a hunch this particular camera's distortion might provide a means into a discussion of spatial perception and the participatory form of the city. This was one of the tangents whose associations led to the current preoccupation of this project with changes wrought by and to space.

Further research turned up short blurbs about the camera, listing it as "rare and historically important" and providing reproductions of the types of images the camera took, as well as a picture of the thing itself, known variously as "Hill's Cloud Camera" and the "Whole Sky Lens": a square, flat wooden box with a single, metal-rimmed eye, far different in appearance from the upright, lens-heavy cases many other cameras resemble.[26] After enquiries at a specialist in rare cameras, I failed to turn up even a production figure that listed how many were manufactured in total, though the only reference the dealer found noted that it had failed to reach the closest auction estimate of 8,000 pounds sterling at least ten years previously.

The best source for information about the camera turned out to be at Cambridge University Library, where Hill's archives have been stored in the manuscript and rare books room since his death. Though by no means the largest or most scientifically significant part of the collection, the camera has its own subsections comprising a large number of Hill's own prints and notebooks documenting his experiments, eventual patenting of the design, and publication of the camera's images. I spent time in Cambridge sorting through all the images and other ephemera collected in the files, many of which (at least where they concern the camera) were only partly catalogued. Evidence of Hill's wide breadth of research into biology and chemistry soon became clear, along with such personal artefacts as notes to himself, ads for the camera, and theatre tickets, still creased perhaps from their place in a tuxedo pocket. Sometimes the small square prints literally dropped out from between other unrelated documents—the experience of exploring the archives recalled a psychogeographic dérive,[27] via the guide of one man's invention.

Robert Hill (known to friends and colleagues as Robin), a Cambridge-based biochemist, invented and patented the lens in the early part of the 20th century. He conducted his own experiments with it as a tool to render a print of 180 degrees, specifically for photographing clouds. Best remembered today for his work with spectroscopy, dye chemistry (including madder dyes), and photosynthesis, he was also keenly interested in meteorology. He developed and patented the lens and camera design as a tool for measuring the height of clouds by triangulating

[25] Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
[26] Paul Henry van Hasbroeck, *150 Classic Cameras: 1839-1989* (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1989).
[27] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001), 98-99.The dérive, or drift, is a Situationist method of encountering city space as an "open, contingent, and shifting" narrative, a drifting path allowing "the flowerings of consciousness, the sudden 'comings together' of space and architecture, knowledge and social interaction."

two separate images taken by the camera. There are a few small side-by-side prints of clouds included in the collection, this stereoscopic arrangement allowing for better examination of their movement and dimensions.

The first entry in the notebooks is dated September 11, 1922, and records what may be among the first images to be taken with the camera and in which Hill's face appears at the edge of the circular print. At this stage he noted aspects of the filters and exposure time, as well as particulars about the camera's developing construction. There are contemporary images of a house (Hill's perhaps) that appears in the edge of the earliest print I found, and pictures taken with the camera held upright, facing the horizon, so that the ends of sky and street bow into one another. On these Hill has marked off the degrees of the horizon on either side of a zero point directly centered in the frame. The camera was eventually patented in 1923 and production began by R.J. Beck of London in 1924.[28]

On request, Hill later published a series of photographs taken inside Ely cathedral. The whole of the cathedral's interior could appear on a single round print, light visibly angling across the interior stone, the distortion rendering the internal architecture into a kind of configuration like a cat's pupil, with a dark strip (the ceiling) running down the centre of the circular image. The effect of seeing these photographs for the first time was almost one of vertigo.

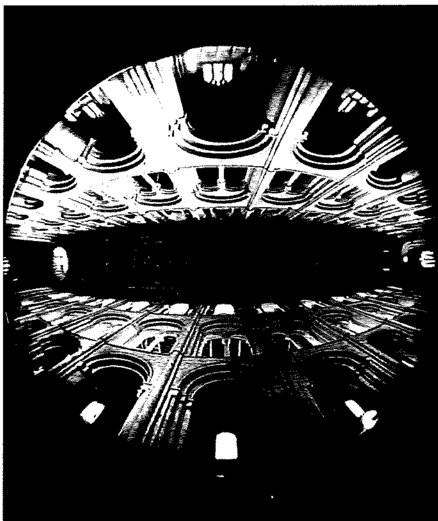

Figure 3: Ely Cathedral by Robin Hill, n.d. Courtesy Cambridge University Library

The archives contain much ephemera about Hill's life, interests, travels, and the manufacture of the camera, yet during my research I did not determine that the camera's use ever really contributed to meteorological science, despite attempts at its marketing. Although

[28] Hasbroeck, 34.

one source claims that it "was widely used later in architectural photography and specialist applications" most texts about photographic developments fail to note it, and I failed to find any evidence indicating widespread use. The archive is remarkable for containing so many extant prints and evidence of this unique camera's design and designer, but perhaps mostly for being an apparently undiscovered resource.

The vision made possible by this camera has several important features. First, there is the obvious fisheye distortion. Hill describes it first in the notes as a "fishes view camara [sic]" and postulates that a fish looking up at the sky through the lens-like ocean's surface would see a similarly distinct hemisphere. This distortion I read as a form of failure—a breakdown of vision's usual parameters. The rules that make the human eye similar to a camera and vice versa are bent by the fisheye lens beyond ordinary capacity, and often beyond ordinary recognition. The familiar conception of exterior and interior spaces becomes strange, with both the photographic frame and the peripheral optical perception no longer applicable as they are usually understood.

The outer edge or horizon line of each image, while as detailed as the centre, loses depth. I realized that it is impossible to tell at a glance how much linear ground surface (or air space in the case of the upright-facing photos) stretches between the camera and the horizon line. Thus, the size and proximity of objects around the edge become disguised. The edges are crowded with detail that circles completely around the hemisphere, giving some rendition of what it might be like for a total human awareness of peripheral vision—an overload of fine, redundant detail.

Occasionally prints surfaced from among the archive with uneven scissored edges, trimmed by Hill perhaps to transfer into and more easily measured format. The circular cloud pictures, particularly those he's cut out, look like eyes with cataracts. The glass edges of the negatives themselves seem rougher than I would have guessed them to be. The prints have a silvery sheen on the blackest parts, looking almost purple with age. The oldest prints are sepia-toned, though I'm unsure whether this is from glue that Hill used to paste them into his composition books or from some aging chemical in the paper.

Lastly there is the vignette effect of the prints, each image floating in a crisply defined circle in a black field on the square paper, or floating in the blank glass edges of the negative. Like the greater awareness of physical distance possible when looking telescopically at magnified constellations, this collapses the camera's vision into an image at a removal from the viewer. The fisheye pictures are as though the lens attempts to take a picture of itself, or turns a view of the sky into its own human lens equivalent—a cataract-covered disk bending light to its own shape. The sky and clouds, the open space pictured seems to put everything in focus at the edges—they

seem overcrowded even in the pictures taken straight on. The exterior zeros in on detail, giving a more intense focus on space and spatial structure through the extreme distortion, of self as being able to see all by gathering perimeter or horizon details. But the interiors allow no horizon—it's all form, Ely cathedral's nave forming a cat's pupil, light in a 180 degree view striking as if by a circular flash around the room.

This camera at first appears to be an exception in form to a classification as a discarded mechanism, since it does not physically bear people through urban public space like the other topics of this chapter. However, it collapses 180 degrees of space into a single viewable piece—setting the viewer apart from the space observed by nature of its operation. It provides a means of seeing more all at once than would be possible when physically occupying a space, as in the example of the Ely cathedral interior. The closer the objects are brought to the perceiving eye via the fisheye view, the greater the awareness of the true distance in time and space. I want to suggest that in a sense the camera can be described, like the spiral escalator, as aware of itself, in so much as it collapses space for the viewer via an extreme framing, and picture of its own lens-shape in the form of the printed image.

How is the fisheye lens camera like an airport?

From the moment a traveller enters airport space, his or her presence is recorded both implicitly and explicitly, and necessarily in the case of the check-in process. The population of an airport, in human and mechanical and material terms, inhabits a space that also functions as a frame for the experience of being inside it. In parallel to the way that the prints of the fisheye lens describe an image, and so a presence, of the lens and camera itself—a self-consciousness of the mechanism's mode of seeing—so the airport's awareness of its own presence acts upon those viewing it, describing an airport-shaped rendition of the world. I'd like at this point to dissect the camera and this argument further since the fisheye camera offers several means of thinking about space, and to use it to question airport space requires a separation of component parts of each's mode of vision and image-recording.

What records does the airport keep of itself—does it stare out at a hemisphere, or into its own spaces, with a similar eye to that of Hill's 180 degree lens? Comparing the camera and the airport as physical structures: they are both containers that focus images of their own shapes and parameters onto their contents. The structure of each, as a mechanism, is inscribed upon that mechanisms content: photographic paper and the airport's population each record and remember the shape and function of the mechanisms they occupy. The airport focuses its airportness onto

travellers, making them abide by its spatial rules—we will look more closely at an example of this function and deconstruct it in the subsequent chapter, with respect to sleeping in airports.

The airport has a well-defined and recognizable means of gazing out into a literal hemisphere of space, in the form of the air traffic control tower and radar. The hemispherical scanner inside the tower occupies one (if not the only) of the highest points in any airport's physical structure. Sometimes there is a mechanism visibly spinning atop its stalk:

Figure 4: Boston Logan, view from Terminal B, July 2007. Photo by author.

This isn't directly analogous to the Hill camera however, in that each functions differently with respect to what each can see at any given time. The camera takes a single image, permanent and fixed, while the radar cannot gaze outwards completely all at once—planes inch incrementally across its field of vision with each sweep of the dial, moving in jumps or leaps that, however tiny, are still present as small pauses to the radar's perception. In one of these pauses, it is possible for a plane to disappear. When air traffic controllers speak about losing a flight on their watch, there is a common element to their description of shock: "the plane just disappeared from my screen."[29] The small symbol with its signifying name and numbers is there one instant, its movement documented, and then absent the next—a mystery opened or a disaster foretold. In that pause lies an unknown, and in that pause is revealed the failure of the radar to completely see and to record the space upon which it looks. The radar, though accounting for movement over time to the best of its ability, sees less and understands less of what it looks upon. There is no comparable distortion—the hemisphere is visible in layers of airspace (cruising altitudes, or the long spiral of the holding patterns, for example) and in precise miles, yet like the camera, the point of vision itself is at the centre. The airport's air traffic controllers don't have the problem of

[29] *Air Crash Investigation*, "Deadly Crossroads (Mid-Air Collision)," Season 2, episode 4, and "Racing The Storm," Season 1, episode 1, broadcast on the Discovery Channel, UK.

vision and legibility presented by the camera's crowded and detailed edges, but rather they have the problem of the small pauses (and the unknowns possible in those tiny lost gaps of time) that must fall in between the sweeps of the space. The radar's eye is unblinking, always open, but in constant motion: it cannot look upon the whole space in one instant, as Hill's camera is able.

Vignette: Paris Las Vegas

There is an arcade over the main gaming floor of the Paris Las Vegas Hotel and Casino, where a painted plaster sky hooks around the feet of the Eiffel Tower. The Tower itself continues on the other side of the ceiling, outside the hotel and next to the swimming pool—all that's visible from the arcaded interior below are the roots of the structure. Peripheral vision is crowded, the furnishings and people gathered around the felt-covered tables, the gears and wheels inside the slot machines busily spinning out musical tones, the quarters fed to them leaving a dust of metallic residue cast from their serrated edges to gather where their surfaces touch. All is set to a soundtrack of major key tones and blings. This sonic brightness permeates the interior like the smell of cigarette smoke rising from the patrons. Paris Las Vegas, like other casinos on the Strip, offers a grouping of recreated or simulated environments and landmarks lifted from elsewhere and re-staged as a series of juxtaposed images—shills for the casino machinery within them, but also a series of images and quotes that are, to an extent, recognizable.

Farther south on the Strip, the Luxor Hotel atrium is so large that I feel, standing inside it and watching its levels recede, that it is bigger than the architectural idea of an atrium. Through its status as the largest of its kind it has ceased to be perceptible as such. The space encountered inside is like some super-atrium, so large that it becomes a backdrop and not a structure to the person wandering on ground level and following the lines of perspective upwards. It is still full of plants and the sounds and sights of fountains, like the interior of a suburban American mall, but it occupies a different stratum of spatial organization. Its sheer scale demotes every other inside we encounter into a mere container.

Paris, Egypt, and finally Venice: at the Venetian Hotel and Casino I ride on a series of three moving sidewalks up and over a cover version of the Rialto Bridge. My sense of space moves into and out of focus. Sometimes the series of spatial images I encounter is such that when it refocuses again I am displaced into a different theatre, time, and place entirely than when I last felt truly oriented. I read the experience of Las Vegas as many separate moments that are probably meant to coalesce as one thing, but instead keep separating into vivid images, swimming around in memories marked instead by consumption of food or encounters with the mechanisms of gambling.

After approximately 36 hours spent in the city, I feel as though I've passed an event horizon. I begin to genuinely get lost on the gaming floors despite the conscious fight to maintain spatial awareness, and am absorbed into the city's pattern of manufactured spaces, moving

sidewalks and constant incremental monetary transactions. Las Vegas has replaced my internal map with screen-fronted surfaces—the longer I stay there, the more disoriented I become. There is no lasting orientation possible among shape and light when scale is this malleable, limited perhaps only by physical law. A table comes to mean a felt-covered surface for touching with a fingertip, a delicate wooden pick or paddle. The clarifying potential of parallax has been left purposefully out of the environment. As I get lost I wonder what it is like to work here—perhaps the cleaners know the spaces better than anyone, or perhaps the security cameras (and those who monitor them) have the best functioning perception. I come to think of the city not as a place as such, but instead a series of chambers in the disguise of a city. Kevin Lynch's city experiments[30] would perhaps yield interesting (if anomalous) results when tested on the residents, casino workers, and tourists of the space, taking into account both the scale of the casinos themselves and the city as a whole. In this place, water takes form and becomes taller than buildings, light points and drips off of itself, and somewhere beyond the Strip an unseen suburban edge dissolves into the desert. Eye inflated, I drift around the riveted base of the Eiffel Tower, itself so big that it doesn't seem like a model or imitation to someone who has never encountered the real thing in person. Artificial night falls, then pales into dawn several times an hour inside these environments.

On the airplane and flying a few miles out, I found I had already lost the experience when all my neon-lit film spilled out into daylight, in postscript unspooling all the pieces of the city I had picked to hold on film. Because of this accident, I have no photographs of Las Vegas, which makes its impossible spaces permanently inscribed as such on my memory as a series of colliding images. There's no chance to look at what the camera saw, to check whether it verifies what was recorded in my memory through a perception manipulated at every turn by the city's spaces. Touching down and taking off, the Strip is only visible as a whole entity from the air—this was the only time in my interaction with Las Vegas that I was able to see its potential shape and scope.

[30] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

The Paternoster Lift and Multiple Infinities

The typical image of the lift or elevator encountered in everyday passenger use might locate it in a lobby, with a door sliding sideways to open onto an enclosed chamber. This chamber may be programmed by the passenger to rise and fall within a narrowly defined shaft of space possessing certain end points at top and bottom: a finite, linear structure of platforms moving in two (relative) dimensions, up and down.

The idea of the "Paternoster lift," or cyclic elevator, was first developed at the beginning of the 20th century, but was not applied to building construction at nearly the same scale as the conventional, non-cyclic elevator described above—the one that most people are familiar with. This cyclic elevator was revived and put into limited use approximately fifty years later, "more handsome than but no different in basic principle from its poor relation of the early 1900s."[31] The Paternoster Lift presents us with a mystery of space, a mystery which lies in the several simultaneous infinities made possible to imagine in the elevator's version of liminal space.

The "paternoster" name may have derived from the design of rosary beads and would seem only to superficially indicate the chainlike arrangement of the individual elevator cars; however, there is a degree of removal and obscurity implied by the name's religious source that is notable for taking precedence over the more directly descriptive "cyclic" designation. In technical terms, a Paternoster lift is defined as a "Form of lift machine, available in Europe but now obsolete, where a low speed (0.4 m/s) loop of continuously moving horizontal platforms, running in a dual hoistway, allow agile passengers to enter and leave the cars through open entrances."[32]

[31] Dartford Town Archive, "Dartford Technology: Escalators and Lifts," http://www.dartfordarchive.org.uk/technology/engin_hall_lifts.shtml, (accessed January 2, 2008).
[32] Barney, Cooper, and Inglis, ix.

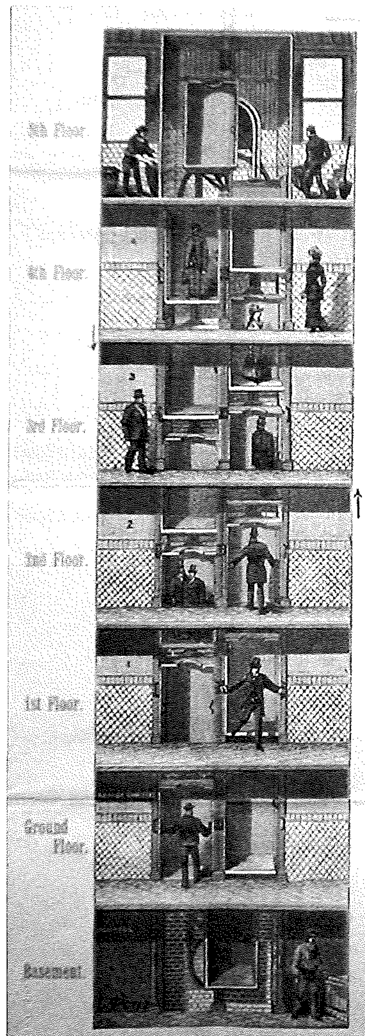

Figure 5: Illustration of the Paternoster lift from the Dartford Museum Archives.

The problem of researching the Paternoster lift design rests on the dearth of printed sources regarding the actual invention and use of the mechanism, and the simultaneous abundance of online sources that mention encounters with or locations of the extant Paternosters. Most evidence is therefore primarily anecdotal, but nonetheless provides a spectrum of firsthand passenger reactions, running the gamut from intrigue to alarm, and a means of approaching the mechanism's possibilities for spatial perception.

All photos I have located to date are straightforward views of the cars from a central floor, often in use by one or several passengers, and with one or more car floors positioned to show the entire lack of doors. It is clear from these that the elevator's chambers are permanently lacking a sixth side to their geometry. Passenger legs and feet are sometimes in the process of disappearing, or their heads and shoulders are nearly level with the building's floor. It is not recommended that more than 2 people ride inside a Paternoster car—possibly due to the

openness of the construction and the potential for entrapment of limbs among multiple moving planes. The mechanism itself has its structure stripped as bare as possible, its form following function: the lack of doors is necessary to allow the able-bodied to efficiently access the passing cars. And they are constantly in the process of passing—handles provided both inside the cars and outside on the doorframe aid passengers in the cross between stationary and mobile surfaces.

It is impossible to conceive an accurate static view of the Paternoster lift system from a viewpoint inside the machine. The design's idiosyncrasy and openness can only be illustrated from the outside. Perception of the elevator's idea of space here depends on slowed motion, the open doors forcing face-to-face confrontation between those riding and those waiting or passing. Above and below it all rest the threats of the top and bottom unknowns. The cars seem to infinitely rise and infinitely descend.

The choice the passenger must make between cars is first a choice of up or down, effectively a decision made by destination—constrained by space before time. One car will always be rising while another will always be descending. The closed loop of the elevator is also infinite, containing the potential for a perpetual circuit of vision. This elevator's encounters with space are repeated exactly, unlike other elevators which are directed from both outside and inside on command of the passenger. This lift inscribes its own clockwork time and unvarying pace upon those inside it.

The Paternoster lift is a kind of constant interrelation of façades. Compared to Benjamin's description of the passerby on a Berlin street:

> The domestic interior moves outside. It is as though the bourgeois were so sure of his prosperity that he is careless of façade, and can exclaim: My house, no matter where you choose to cut into it, is façade. Such facades, especially on the Berlin houses dating back to the middle of the previous century: an alcove does not jut out, but—as niche—tucks in. The street becomes room and the room becomes street. The passerby who stops to look at the house stands, as it were, in the alcove.[33]

Because of its open construct, any passer-by who stops to look becomes a participant in the space of the elevator. Stopping to look here becomes participation in the space's relation to itself, one front facing another, the Paternoster lift enacting a slow slide-show of space to space. The lack of doors mean that the interior has become outside. A museum-piece on display, yet also serving to display its human contents, this is a new kind of alcove, a different mechanism that relates infinity to intimacy. The lift lacks an interior, except, most importantly, at top and bottom, where it is inaccessible to the passengers, and where riding it would prove redundant. (It

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[33] Benjamin, 406.

is not recommended that anyone ride the elevator around these turnings.) The passenger or passer-by who has stopped to look continually observes passing rooms which have become mobile portions of the floor—a type of street in motion.

We envision the elevator more clearly in its true function in this way: as rooms of transport. Like streets, they are surfaces we use to relocate—but in an anti-architectural nature. It is possible, through the construct of the sliding doors on most elevators, to believe oneself enclosed in a room which then opens onto a different space upon our command—we have re-organized the space ourselves. But the Paternoster, for its built-in system of movable facades, forcing a confrontation with those floors which are not our desired destination, as well as ceasing to pause for our egress, and also threatening to continue either up or down into a potentially infinite but certainly obscured spatial unknown, organizes the space for itself and for us: it acts explicitly upon the passenger in this way.

How is the Paternoster lift like an airport?

I will explore in the next chapter the spaces and mechanisms by which airports also act upon their passengers in multiple ways. To begin examining this with respect to the physical, mechanized form of the Paternoster, I'd like to return to this idea of inside and outside, and the lift's forced confrontation with conventional ideas of what an elevator experience is like.

In everyday life it is easy to take the elevator for granted in terms of how it acts upon its users and what kind of space it offers. We have learned by and large to ignore how we are when we are inside the elevator. Does it offer a chance for a pause, perhaps? We have just seen how the Paternoster subverts this through its lack of a door, forcing passengers to remain on display and to confront the floors and other faces sliding past on their journey. Even in "wall-climber" types of elevators, those glass-walled contraptions that offer shoppers a rising or descending journey through shopping malls for example, one is always walled in; even if able to see out, there is a barrier in place nonetheless. For the Paternoster there is a visible way out while in motion. How does an airport organize its spaces in a similar or dissimilar way?

Let's take a literal example first: elevators in airports. This may seem overly obvious, but it has struck me how often, in making trips through multiple airports, the elevators therein are likely to have one particular feature in common: doors that could potentially open on multiple sides, with no clear indicator as to which is the way out.[34]

[34] Lifts on the London Underground also sometimes have this multiple-door capacity, and indicate the exit point with a sign and beeping signal.

The potential for this to happen highlights a common feature of elevators that only have one opening: everyone tends to stand facing the door if there is a group inside the space. In the airport, towing luggage between car park and departure or arrivals hall, the elevators must act as thresholds capable of addressing changes in spatial organization of differing horizontal levels. The way out is then not guaranteed to be the same as the way in. In their function as a liminal airport mechanism, the element of uncertainty increases for passengers, who must reposition luggage and orientation upon exiting, sometimes making the journey between floors without knowing the length of time and space travelled or the point at which they will be able to exit the elevator enclosure. Much like the journey inside the airplane itself, they are committed to remaining enclosed in the elevator, luggage in tow, the distance and travel time distorted (or potentially so in the uncertain world of airline delays) by the mechanics of the jet age and the need to get from one point to another in the most efficient way possible, while simultaneously being uncertain of their exact means of exit from the space.

How does the airport also offer a system of movable facades, addressing one another like the Paternoster's relation to its building? Is there a corresponding movement through airport space by a similar set or chain or system of rooms/spaces like the Paternoster's cars? I can see this most obviously in the movement of the airplanes themselves—each a chamber arriving and departing from points along the terminal, although we as passengers are not made to leap on and off them while they're in motion, and the connection of the airplane façade to the airport façade is accomplished through intermediary spaces—there is no direct, slide-show to slide-show-like address as described with the Paternoster. Neither does the airport as a whole allow for passengers to enter and leave its spaces "through open entrances" as does the lift.

But the airport is in a kind of perpetual motion—its various parts moving infinitely in set directions, to or away from each of us as passengers. We participate in it (as we might step onto the Paternoster platform) for a seemingly set duration in order to reach a place whose goal we are able to clearly envision (and witness on passing through other spaces—i.e. past other floors as with the Paternoster), sometimes to disquieting effect. There is also the potential to occupy the space infinitely in terms of time or direction.[35]

In the Paternoster, it would not be possible for a single car to fall out of service—it could not be left behind in this way as separate elevators in their own discrete shafts might. At that point, the Paternoster would cease to be a lift and become only a chain of alcoves—it would

[35] An example of an extended, indefinite occupation of airport space will be examined later in this chapter in the example of Merhan Nasseri, a man now well-known for living in Paris Charles de Gaulle airport for years, and whose life story was used as the basis for the Steven Spielberg film, *The Terminal*.

retreat into the role of architecture, and not transport. Similarly, these parts of the airport, moving infinitely in set directions, are not necessarily in physical motion. Rather, their function as part of the airport mechanism continues and persists in itself, which in turn serves to fulfil the function of the airport as a whole.

These parts of the airport may have individually dysfunctional elements, but must always in some way keep moving forward in order for the airport to remain functioning as an airport and not only a building in a landscape. Planes must arrive and depart. Passengers must arrive and depart. Support services must continue to function for both of these elements. We see that in this way the airport has certain essential functions, analogous to the Paternoster cars, that make it more than architecture: a liminal, built juncture of designed space and transport, which together functions as one mechanism: understood to the individual as a single element through use of a shorthand term. "Airport" means something that we define based upon our experiences of it—but it also defines itself through its own mechanistic structures.

Remove the arriving and departing planes, and the airport no longer is. That potential to keep going infinitely must mean something here...as passengers our journeys begin and end somewhere—the infinity we face is only truly possible for the mechanism, but it's the threat of its possibility for us that is both a fascinating and fearful part of our participation in these spaces.

Vignette: The Ring of Saturn

> Thus, while in great things heroic efforts were expended on precedent-setting, groundbreaking achievements, in little matters there was often—strange to say—something motley. It is as though people, and 'artists' in particular, did not quite dare to acknowledge this new material, with all its possibilities.
> --Walter Benjamin, extract from "The Ring of Saturn or Some Remarks on Iron Construction"[36]

What is curious to me about the initial development of iron construction was the mimicry involved, wherein iron was first made to resemble wood via patina. At first this was dominant, the products human-scaled and scattered around the home. Commonplace objects and materials were quietly replaced by the new, in disguise as the familiar. Automobiles appeared, looking half each of chariot and wind-up toy, while struts and rooftop supports unfolded, with tensile supports lifting their glass skins like one giant lily pad leaf. The fear entered upon thoughts of the folding and re-folding necessary to create such pieces for construction, the malleability, the many steps in manufacture. The element of iron was a kind of alien, due to the shape-shifting required, the removal and translation from the planet's interior into the outer sphere of the human environment.

One could not, after all, speak of a tree-mine like one spoke of an iron-mine. A Palace out of this new material, holding mechanisms and products of other worlds, was perfectly appropriate. And after the exhibition there were those who re-cast the structure, re-assembled and augmented it into a loop, and held it over the city, hoping that one day it would all drop right into place, a neat event, a cinch around the centre that would draw in common elements into a new kind of city space. Iron construction and its potential drove forward this vision of the possibilities of a city that could use this new technology to create a new structure on a grand scale—a kind never before seen or experienced. How would it have been to encounter that glass and iron ring?

The little matter of the surfaces of iron and glass recedes when we see what the whole may once have been—there was nothing like it on the planet—it seems an unreadable as the rings of Saturn, so it may have been made to resemble something else entirely: a way in and out—nothing so much as a door, but a superstructure of a door.

[36] Benjamin, 886.

The Great Victorian Way and the Ring of Saturn

Originally filed between Convolutes F and G ("Iron Construction" and "Exhibitions, Advertising, Grandville") in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* notes, is a short essay composed in 1928 or 1929, perhaps intended as a radio broadcast, but "more likely to have been a newspaper or magazine article that was never published."[37] "The Ring of Saturn or Some Remarks on Iron Construction" reflects on the development and imagination of iron construction technology using an image notable for its form in physical space and possibilities in associative spatial imagination:

> ...we would like to focus some scattered reflections on a small vignette which has been extracted from the middle of the century...and which indicates, although in grotesque style, what limitless possibilities were seen revealed by construction in iron. The picture comes from a work of 1844—Grandville's *Another World*—and illustrates the adventures of a fantastic little hobgoblin who is trying to find his way around outer space: 'A bridge—its two ends could not be embraced at a single glance and its piers were resting on planets—led from one world to another by a causeway of wonderfully smooth asphalt. The three-hundred-thirty-three-thousandth pier rested on Saturn. There our goblin noticed that the ring around this planet was nothing other than a circular balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn strolled in the evening to get a breath of fresh air.'[38]

Here, the ring of Saturn as a balcony and the idea of the ring as symbol are important to the conception of a circulating (and circled) city centre. Saturn, with its unique shape and ring structure, may be the embodiment of circular reiteration (a shifted echo of form in orbit) in the human concept of the solar system—surely it is significant that iron construction is here linked so closely with bridges and circular balconies in this concept of fantastical new spaces.

Joseph Paxton (1803- 1865), designer of the Crystal Palace, first proposed the idea of an enclosed circular Way that would provide "...more direct lines of communication between several points..." in approximately 1851, when the Crystal Palace's status as London exhibition hall was fast running out.[39] This he envisioned would provide a transport link between the major London areas and an efficient commuting route between the East and West Ends. The path around the activity of central London and the visual barrier it provides when considering the mapped version allude to similar present-day incarnations and realized attempts to circle the city: beltways like the M25, the Circle line, and other orbital means of city transportation. Paxton's "Great Victorian Way," with a design that incorporates mechanical elements integrated with

[37] Gretel Adorno quoted in Benjamin, 885.
[38] Benjamin, 885.
[39] Chadwick, 207.

architecture and large-scale (and highly radical, revisionist) city planning, is a mechanism for visualization of movement within the city on a different scale.

From 1854-1864 Paxton was directly involved in Parliament, acting as MP for four of those years. During this time he helped finish the Embankment and put forth the proposal for the Great Victorian Way.[40] "Communications were always important to Paxton, with his ventures in railways and his interest in shipbuilding, and his many journeyings in Europe, and it is significant that he should turn his attention to the traffic problem of London."[41] Conveniently, his solution to the traffic problem built upon the Crystal Palace (grew outwards from it, perhaps), integrating it into the fabric of the city in a different way from its function as an exhibition hall. Rather than a showcase on a grand scale, the Palace would have changed in function into a part of the city's transport and commerce mechanism. Paxton proposed that "...the Building, I would suggest, should be allowed to remain standing on account of its peculiar fitness to supply a great public want, which London, with its two and a half million inhabitants, stands most essentially in need of—namely a *Winter Park and Garden* under glass."[42] This evolves into his plan for the Great Victorian Way, which eventually stagnated in Parliament despite some show of support and advocacy by several well-connected friends. It exists now only as works on paper.

In many ways this design anticipated the twentieth-century's integrated modernist transportation and city design, evoking Le Corbusier's city planning of apartment blocks with related parks and motorways, and his re-conception of the house as a "machine for living in," and is significant as an idea that grew out of the technology in the Crystal Palace design and construction.[43] No longer a vessel for display, but a space of transition—its architectural technology would have been amplified into a new form, many functions integrated together within it.[44] The " 'magnificent promenade' would traverse all districts of London and would change its character appropriately."[45] The arcaded plan included designated spaces for omnibus, passenger vehicles, pneumatic railways, shops and apartments. It involved the creation of an artificial environment, down to the ventilation system that would bring in "country air" and regulate the temperature constantly. "For the architect, the advantages of the plan were clear: it would be convenient and healthy, and would enhance the value of the property through which it

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[40] Ibid., 202, 206.
[41] Ibid., 206.
[42] Joseph Paxton, *What is to become of the Crystal Palace?* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1851), 4. Emphasis Paxton's own.
[43] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2000).
[44] See also Antonio Sant'Elia, Designs for "Citta Nuova," ca. 1914. These futurist designs illustrate integrated systems for commerce, living, working and transport.
[45] Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 28.

passed."[46] How it would meet, be integrated with, or rub up against those properties is unknown—it was imagined as though it were a crown settling on a skull, descending on the city from above rather than sprouting like a rhizome in girders and glazing from the ground up. "[Paxton] pointed out that most of the traffic of London flowed from east to west, and as it was desirable to 'unite all the railways' a 'girdle' should be added to the existing communications, in plan having a longer axis east-west than north-south."[47] Arguably, as a tellingly Victorian innovation, "Paxton's glass boulevard is an exercise in the ultimate control and segregation of urban space.

> It separated goods and people on the street, it segregates the elite social classes from their inferiors and it even filters the impurities from the air. Whether by means of ventilation or pneumatic railway, the arcade is in a state of constant circulation. [...It is] 'protected openness', an environment that privileges visibility, while ensuring isolation.[48]

However, there is a "point of transparency; the moment where it ends and the rest of the surrounding city begins."[49] Works mentioning the Great Victorian Way fail to further consider its edges' importance for twentieth century spatial imagination. The element of designed space as communication, a constant flow, is difficult to reconcile spatially with the edges the structure would have possessed. The potential for constrictiveness of the enclosed city area would be exacerbated by the varying degrees of rapid movement layered in the structure itself. Even granted the semi-transparency of Crystal Palace-like iron and glass construction, the density of the thing would render it impermeable in conceptual terms, almost as if it were acting as a fence or moat—navigable, but unable to escape its own physical presence as obstacle for those crossing directly between inner and outer. This constrictiveness is hinted at in descriptions of the concept, particularly with the vocabulary choice of "girdle" hinting at unnatural reshaping:

> The line of the girdle, afterwards called the Great Victorian Way, had been carefully chosen so as not to go parallel with any important street, nor to knock down valuable property. It was to form a ready means of communication both to the districts inside the girdle and those outside, and thus it was to comprise both a street and a

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[46] Nead, 28.

[47] Chadwick, 208. It may also be interesting to note a current plan of rail station links I first learned about while touring the London Transport Museum depot, a plan revived again by Ken Livingstone after numerous previous attempts to link train stations with direct express service—the train prototype for the latest, "Crossrail," is stored in the Acton warehouse, complete with pamphlets for the latest publicity push.

[48] Nead, 28. See also Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The design and social life of cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990): 108. "Fully apprehending the outside from within, yet feeling neither cold nor wind nor moisture, is a modern sensation, a modern sensation of protected openness in very big buildings."

[49] Ibid.

> railway, so that the distance between any two points furthest away from each other on the route could be covered in a quarter of an hour. The girdle was to take the form of an arcade, so that the atmosphere inside should be clean and freed from the smoke of the city by ventilation; on either side of the arcade, at upper levels, were to be the railways: eight lines in all. The railways could be directly connected with all the termini if need be, but as Paxton's intention was to use the 'atmospheric principle' there was no value in these connections except, perhaps, at night, when the day-time passenger traffic might give place to goods traffic.[50]

Judging by cross-sectional views in the plans, I imagine the organized arcaded form and the layered use and interaction of railways and other transport would have been visible to a pedestrian to some degree from within the central road and walkway. The dual use as street and railway may be compared to extant early twentieth century vintage elevated lines that run along streets in New York and Chicago, wherein the auto and pedestrian traffic takes place on a shaded street-level, the rail lines operating on a kind of mezzanine-level—not a floor, not a roof, not a building, but a structure existing within and without the surrounding physical spaces and relations, tracks creating a shady in-between aspect in the street below.

Paxton's rail elevations were also on upper tiers, above pedestrians but still within the iron and glass structure, the fastest as highest. The perpendicular street planning is of note; the way was not parallel to major streets, but presumably after barrelling through the less "valuable" property whenever it needed, the eventual form was to be unavoidably shaped into an asymmetrical circumference. Considered now, the mapped design seems to cut a swathe through boroughs of all types—wealthy neighborhoods, parkland, shopping district, city and finance, historical sites of immigrant settlements, council estates, national monuments, with one jabbing spear pointing up across the river to Piccadilly, the only exception to the circle.

Joseph Paxton's own pamphlet for the promotion of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park into a permanent Winter Garden includes a plan for continued use as a public space, and a vision of the building's importance for the senses:

> The Exhibited articles will all be removed, and many of them will be looked upon as previous relics, connected with an event, the greatest of our times, and they will be cherished more and more as they become separated further from the day of their great triumph, whilst the Building (I hope I may say without vanity)—the great feature of the Exhibition—must, if removed, be either transported to another country, or be rent asunder and dispersed in fragments to perform a variety of inferior offices.[51]

[50] Chadwick, 208.
[51] Paxton, 3-4.

Compare with the Euston arch, the eagles on the old Pennsylvania Station in New York City, the Chicago Stock Exchange arch—all relocations of parts of buildings to different sites, they now appear as architectural gestures divorced from their original contexts—works of sculpture passed by rather than through or under. They are no longer part of a liminal space or mechanism, and exist only as a footnote to its original function—more than an ornament but lacking the full context.

To return to the Ring of Saturn, the limitless possibilities of iron construction in the conceptualisation of such a concept articulates a parallel to Paxton's envisioning of the Great Victorian Way. An improbable, ultimately unrealised idea for the re-conceptualisation of transportation and communication within the metropolis, the Way would have been much like the "three-hundred-thirty-three-thousandth pier" in the bridge between worlds. Were the Great Victorian Way to have been applied, the potential of a dominant conception of London as planetary, echoed in the commonly used terminology of "orbital," "ring road," and other areas as "satellites" etc, seems spatially possible.

The Great Victorian Way was in this way a dialectical response to the technology of iron construction:

> For the rest, people were accustomed to seeing gas in conjunction with cast iron at those elegant establishments that were just then starting to appear: the arcades. The leading fancy-goods stores, the chic restaurants, the best confectioners, and so on found it necessary to secure a place in these galleries in order to preserve their reputations. Out of these galleries emerged, a little later on, the great department stores, of which the pioneering model, Au Bon Marché, was designed by the builder of the Eiffel Tower.
>
> Iron construction began with winter gardens and arcades—that is, with genuine luxury establishments. Very quickly, however, it found its true range of technical and industrial application. What resulted were constructions that had no precedent and that were occasioned by wholly new needs: covered markets, railroad stations, exhibition halls.[52]

The beginnings were luxurious and exclusive, then quickly following were more accessible public spaces of use and exhibition, the Way itself synthesizing the two into spatial form that would have revised London and how every citizen perceived the city. In having as forerunners "genuine luxury establishments," the concept of the Great Victorian Way was born out of a commodities display, permitting degrees of luxury to lie circularly among and around and within London. Compare to the still-breathing (or sleeping?) relic that is the Burlington Arcade—its gentle rise from Piccadilly, to a farther threshold where the pedestrian passes onto a

[52] Benjamin, 886.

street leading to Savile Row and the (surprisingly neutral) shop-fronts of its legendary tailors. The Burlington Arcade is a kind of footnote to the area including the Royal Academy and (as tourists learn) the Queen's supermarket at Fortnum and Mason. It disguises its museum-status by the availability of the products inside its window displays, but what ultimately gives it away are the fully uniformed beadles who walk the length of the Arcade, preventing spitting and other public indecencies in between posing for photos with visitors from out of town. In this arcade it is exclusively luxury goods retailers that occupy the space: handmade shoes, heirloom linen, chocolate, fine jewellery, all framed in the crisply outlined divided lights of restored bow-window shop fronts. Ring for entry.

Surely the Great Victorian Way would never have survived the twentieth century in an identical state—if it had been built, would evolution away from controlled luxury be inherent? Perhaps it does exist, but only as a dimly felt conception to most, a mental work of iron and glass. The idea that everyone encountering the twentieth-century city has delineated their own inner and outer zones of comfort, avenues of communication, and preferred means of journey and understanding between points was first articulated in Kevin Lynch's studies of city perception.[53] That Paxton's envisioning is not quite so far-fetched in light of an individual system for negotiating his or her city, and is in fact related in most physical ways to twentieth-century city perception, is harder to reconcile.

The image of the ring of Saturn exists to the imagination as much like an iron balcony when seen through a telescope, as the Great Victorian Way exists as a way to imagine the map for one's individual city. Thus it is that we see the imagination of a space becoming or transforming into a kind of space. Even though Paxton's Way through London was never actually constructed, the paradigm it represents anticipated architectural modernism in form as well as thought.

[53] See also Lynch.

How is the Great Victorian Way like an airport?

How does our imagination of airport space itself become a kind of space? As a proposed re-envisioning of the city that never materialized, the Great Victorian Way's significance with respect to the airport, and the concerns of my investigation as a whole, lie in the evidence it provides that our imagination of a space itself becomes a kind of space. This is an idea that I will explore from a different angle in my discussion of the systems of writing in Chapter 3, but which is relevant to locate here in the presence of the airport.

To use Lynch's terms from *The Image of the City*, the airport functions for the airplanes as a node.[54] It would not seem as apparent as an edge however—the idea of defining an airport as the edge of anything at first seems physically inaccurate and slightly absurd. Edges must have clear boundaries where one thing physically ends, and by implication another begins. The ends and beginnings of airport space are not so neatly definable as a wall pierced by a doorway, for example. (This is an example whose elaboration and deconstruction we will see shortly, but I mention it here as an image and leave aside further implications for the moment, including the function of the immigration hall as a national border.)

The airport-as-edge is similar to the Great Victorian Way as edge. Both conceptions of space combine multiple layers of transport, commerce, and communication in a frontier between disparate and otherwise unconnected elements of their populations. Ventilation of both is controlled. When emerging from an airport into the outside air nearer the planes, the intrusion of jet fuel into the senses is usually a marked change from the doctored air inside the terminal. I imagine it would have been so for anyone exiting the "country air" in the semi-permeable iron and glass membrane of the Great Victorian Way and back into the smoke of the city. We imagine the space of the airport and navigate it like we might navigate a city, but on a smaller, enclosed scale. We enter its system knowing that it is a space on the way to another destination. As passengers, we can pick and choose what to make use of from among the available options.

In contrast to the ring shape and the clearly defined edges that the Way would have offered to the Victorian navigator of London, the traveller through airport space is tasked with embodying the edge. The airport acts as an edge, but not of the form normally encountered. It diffuses our usual understanding of an edge in its requirement that each traveller must move through a chain of actions and areas in order to get from outside to inside the airplane and back

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[54] Lynch, 47.

again, in another location. The individual making a passage through airport space becomes the only physical embodiment of that edge.

It is not so much walking a line or border between two different spaces as it is actually becoming that border for the duration of the time spent in air travel. The hypothetical user of the Great Victorian Way would have been able to walk along and around the city inside the structure itself, much as today one can board London Underground's circle line. It is a physical, set path in the way that the airport is not. The airport's demand that the traveller through its space become this kind of edge is a kind of prescription upon the occupants of the liminal space. That the airport prescribes onto its users certain behaviours and characteristics, even in this interpretation going as far as to inscribe an edge status onto each person within its space, is important to keep in mind when approaching the remaining mechanism in this chapter, and the subsequent closer look at the physical and imaginative world of the airport itself. It has become important for the airport to assert this line for those entering the country from an international flight, though the line itself is no more spatially real than a nylon tape, it's become a branded identity asserted in large letters for those snaking through the barriers on their way to the immigration interview.

Vignette: Always open, always closed

In Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part 1*, the heads of the other New York crime families meet their various ends in a famous sequence wherein the killings are intercut with Michael Corleone's participation in his niece's christening, his sanctioned swearing-in as Godfather.[55] Aside from the noteworthiness of the sequence as a directorial milestone, the methods of death bear witness in their mise-en-scene to the vulnerability inherent in certain transitional spaces.

I do not mean here to re-cast these visceral scenes of assassination and power struggle as dry analysis, but rather to draw out the sense of uneasiness quashed during our ordinary interactions with such spaces, specifically the revolving door. This sense of uneasiness, the potential, is exploited in these scenes. As one of the targets enters the door, the assassin follows him closely and quickly locks the door in position with a single bolt at the top before gunning him down as he flails behind the glass panels that keep him neither in nor out, that fix him in place. Before the sequence finishes, we see this scene once again, like a still photo, the body locked inside the door, blood on the inside of the glass.

The choice of revolving door becomes even more significant in its function as one of several scenarios for distinguishing the killings of the crime bosses from each other. By staging the assassinations in various spaces of transit (also including an elevator and a long series of outdoor entry steps), not only are we as audience able to distinguish between similarly-dressed men who we may have seen briefly only one other time in the film, but the transitional space of the mise-en-scene becomes defined as a space for death. It is a kind of middle territory, the revolving door especially acting as separator of the target from bodyguards. We are able to more easily count the destruction and understand the effort taken, and toll exacted, in the eradication of the "five families." Doors feature subtly in and around the film's other most dramatic scenes, marking exits and entrances to increase the dramatic tension, in particular during Michael's meeting with McCluskey and Sollozzo. After retrieving his planted gun from the toilet, and before emerging to shoot the two men, he pauses between several sets of low, swinging doors, hands to head, back to the camera. It is at this point that he could turn back, and does not.

This space between doors, the space for potential divergence, becomes a kind of no-man's-land. The revolving door contains potential for death alongside reversal of fortune; neither in nor out, it could lead either way. It is this potential for choice, mistake, entrapment, and the

[55] Francis Ford Coppola, *The Godfather Part 1*, DVD (Paramount Pictures, 1972).

resulting uneasiness inspired by the door's use that make it an intriguing means of thinking about human perception of and interaction with space. The door contains states of being that go beyond (and question ideas of) "open and shut," since it is always actually both.

The Revolving Door

The revolving door has a much greater presence as a metaphor in contemporary thought than as a mechanism for practical use. Seeking information about the door's design and placement means encountering many more uses of "revolving door" in reference to social or economic studies than to entrances. Whereas it is only one among many types of door that could be built and used for the transition between outside and inside space, when used as a metaphor it applies itself nimbly in varying contexts as a precise idea that has no comparable alternate. The few documentary sources available focus on the corporations that hold revolving door patents and continue to manufacture the doors today. The author of one acknowledges the difficulty of his own research with the following explanation:

> One of the limiting factors of a study of the forms involved with the making of revolving doors is the amount of evidence that has survived. Many firms came and went without trace; notwithstanding losses in manpower and premises caused by wars, there were the usual losses of records by fire, bankruptcy, business take-overs and philistinism.[56]

The definitive history and compendium of revolving door technology, a record of the invention as patent and craft, is itself published by a manufacturer, Boon Edam: "the first name in entrance technology," according to their company slogan.[57]

In reviewing the history of revolving door technology, and some of the metaphorical applications of the doors as concept, I seek to define a perceptual middle ground between them: the revolving door as ambiguous embodiment of spatial idea. Between its two extremes, of apparatus designed for draft-proof ingress and egress, and its application as evocative situational shorthand like "revolving-door governmental policy" etc, there is the unexplored territory of the door-in-itself. What does it mean to use one, really?

The precursor to the revolving door was first patented in 1881 by H. Bockhacker of Germany, and consisted of a single C-shaped mobile panel that could be swung around between "arcuate" walls.[58] In this case there was no central column around which the user stepped, but the entrance was effected by a walled-in twist of the door itself, the panel rotating around the human within to reveal the inside or outside of the building while not admitting drafts. With the panel in the middle of its swing, the effect for the user must have been of existing briefly inside a cylinder.

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[56] Beardmore, 13.
[57] Ibid., 6.
[58] Ibid., 48. Berlin, German Patent 18349. Arcuate, meaning curved like a bow, arc-shaped, arched, is described by the Oxford English Dictionary as usually having a scientific application.

The revolving door as we know it was patented in 1888 by Theophilus Van Kannel, a Swiss-American living in Philadelphia, a career inventor who patented approximately 75 inventions over his lifetime.[59] It consisted of three radial wings, suspended from the ceiling, that swung around a central column and were bound at the sides by arcuate walls, creating three chambers that rotated anti-clockwise[60] according to pressure applied by the hands of any persons wishing to enter or exit.[61]

Van Kannel first designed the door with protection from the elements in mind. Such a door would allow a person to pass into and out of a building without the drafts that occurred with a normal door or shallow vestibule construction, and thus maximized the usable floor space within. In addition, "it is noiseless in operation and effectually prevents the ingress of wind, snow, rain or dust either when it is stationary or when persons are passing through it."[62] This would cut down on energy costs and benefit the health of those working inside. Another significant benefit of the doors was quickly realized during the concurrent skyscraper boom.[63] The doors were found to allow easy passage into and out of tall buildings whose ordinary doors were often difficult to open or shut, due to the physics of the urban down-draft and the equilibrium they maintained: "the assembly cannot be rotated or blown open by wind or urban down-draught because the pressure is equal on both sides of the centre of motion; and the wings can be rotated at all times without notable resistance since no springs or weights are required to restore them to a closed position."[64] The revolving door found its niche in the new vertical structures made possible by developments in iron construction. Rather than growing around London in a girdle shape, the city structures were sprouting vertically in America like a forest, thanks to the joining of iron and glass pioneered by buildings like Paxton's Crystal Palace. The revolving door rooted these new forms at street level with person-sized points of entry, piercing their edges. As we'll see shortly in discussions of Bruno Latour's study of the process at work

[59] Ibid., 29. Swiss-American mechanical engineer. Also patented between 1862 & 1918, among other things: a machine for stoning cherries, cider mill, variable-leverage door spring, ticket case, water hydrants, shipping tags, curtain cord tightener, reversible-hinge slate, and "amusement apparatus."

[60] Ibid., 9. "The accepted custom throughout the world is for revolving doors to rotate anti-clockwise, and a reason for this is put forward by makers TB Colman and Sons that in most cases the right hand would be used to give the initial push to the door wing, but an alternative reason might be that the custom was merely following the role of right-hand traffic flow prevalent in the Unites States and continental Europe."

[61] Ibid., 50-51. US patent 387,571.

[62] Ibid., 9.

[63] Ibid., 11. "All tall buildings have a suction tendency, owing to temperature differentials, which adds to the ambient wind velocity to cause 'stack' effect, as experienced in chimneys."

[64] Ibid., 9, 11.

behind any door, the revolving door has a uniquely important method of solving what Latour calls the "hole-wall" necessary for any door to confront by its very concept.[65]

The original three-compartment Van Kannel door and two-compartment variations became less useful than four-compartment versions, since the latter proved optimal for an entrance subjected to heavy traffic, allowing "simultaneous streams" of people to pass into and out of a building, while reducing the possibility of a collision. Due to potentially heavy traffic, the doors were often equipped with speed controlling devices on manually operated assemblies, to prevent the rotational speed from exceeding 8 revolutions per minute.[66] Two- and three-section doors have largely conceded predominance to the four-chamber model, barring a few notable exceptions. One specialist application of the two-chamber model is seen at the curbside passenger drop-off at Heathrow, where a large two-compartment door, revolving automatically, allows for the defined passage of a single passenger with bulky luggage. A similar setup can be found in hospital entryways, such as that at Chelsea and Westminster, where a printed sign instructs users on the door's awareness of them, and so demands their equal awareness of the door:

Figure 6: Inside the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital revolving door. Text reads, "The detector which stops this revolving door is just above you on this panel. Please move away from this panel. Thank you". June 3, 2007. Photo by author.

Van Kannel soon received accolades for his contribution to architecture, among them the John Scott medal from the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, and a 1939 article described his invention as "what may well be called a wonder of the modern world—a doorless door that is

[65] Bruno Latour, "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer," *Social Problems*, 35, No. 3 (June 1988): 298-310.
[66] Beardmore, 9.

always open, yet always closed..."[67] He also received thanks from customers, such as the treasurer of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, who articulated, "Another great advantage—there is no slamming."[68] The doors became a symbol of a structure's prestige and luxury—Van Kannel doors were installed on the Titanic and in the Cunard headquarters, for example, among other symbols of the economic shift contemporary with their invention.[69]

Ambiguity: Paranoia, Repetition, and Paradox in the Revolving Door

The aspect of the doors being "always open, always closed," a phrase also appearing in the Van Kannel company's logo,[70] is a means to begin considering the doors as ambiguous spatial idea. The revolving door's potential as a mechanism for different imaginings of transitional space is obscured by its frequent employment as a descriptive shorthand for too-rapid cycles into and out of a given state of being (the phrase "revolving-door policies" being a common example).

In the brittle pages of a 1970's-vintage pulp novel about a Russian defector, moving to London ostensibly due to woman trouble, I found the following interpretation of one singular effect of revolving doors:

> [Dmitri] noticed that, as in Moscow, each building was equipped with a revolving door. These doors had been invented, a friend had once remarked to him, to teach the lesson that if you pushed too hard to get out, you found yourself inside again. Dmitri thought that the lesson was more universal: that it was no use either pursuing anyone or running away from anyone. The person in front of you was also the person behind you.[71]

This duplicity that Dmitri articulates, womanising spy cliché though the character may be, nonetheless evokes the paranoia inherently possible in the way this particular mechanism arranges spaces. The possibility for the person in front also being the person behind points to a real disorientation risked when moving through the door itself. There is also the threat that if you push too hard for one thing you get the opposite: try or want too much, and be your own downfall—the mechanism betraying you.

'Hellmanisms'

[67] Ibid., 28. Reproduction of "Humanity's Hall of Fame: Nominating the man who made doors spin," article from *This Week*, Feb. 12, 1939.
[68] Ibid., 29. From letter to Theophilus Van Kannel from John E. Daley, Treasurer of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce on their door, Oct. 31, 1888. Early customer testimonial.
[69] Ibid., 13, and pictured throughout.
[70] Ibid., 104.
[71] Mervyn Jones, *The Revolving Door* (London: Quartet Books, 1973): np.

The revolving door seen from above
Is not a metaphor for love
If you don't seize it there and then
You'll find your chance comes round again[72]

These lines appeared arranged into a concrete poem following the footprint of the main parts of a revolving door: the four wings and two arcuate walls, like an X within parentheses. In terms of repetition, the door is important for illustrating the potential of repeated chance. Does the exact same chance ever really come around again? Probably not, but the door sustains the illusion that it does. If there are repeated chances, if you can enter whenever, if the door is always open, then why enter at all? Then again, if the door is always shut, why assume it will admit you? You have a choice to wait—active or passive doesn't seem to make a difference. How does this paradox get suppressed (or not) in the door's actual use?

Revolving doors now seem to be exclusively used within a public or semi-public environment, and the only mention (anecdotal or otherwise) of their potential use within a private residential context I located was in Van Kannel's own publicity of 1888, wherein multiple "classes" of revolving door are described: the Store Door (characterized by hinged wings), the Bank Door (strong, harmonious in design), Assembly Door (allowing ease of collapse in case of mass panic), All-Year Door (replaceable windows, frosted glass to change with the seasons), and the Residence Door (removable, can't be held open) described as follows:

> It also puts a veto on the caller who takes special delight, on leaving, in holding the door open for several long minutes, while recapitulating the last hour's conversation, filling the hallways with cold air. This Door cannot be held open. It is provided with a self-acting lock and a conversation slide-window to allow the occupant of the house to see and converse with a caller before admitting him. This Door will prove a welcome friend to suburban residences.[73]

The distinct impression here is that Van Kannel's domestic hallways had been filled with unwelcome cold air and recapitulated conversations with overstayed guests on multiple occasions. Or perhaps the extra descriptive effort here given to the domestic application of revolving doors attempted to compensate for their very lack of suitability for the home—this was

[72] Beardmore, 510. Reproduction of a page by Louis Hellman in *Building Design Magazine*, London, nd.
[73] Ibid., 50-51.

an anecdote concocted to expand the market, to convince suburban dwellers that a revolving door was not only practical but desirable, even aspirational, a potential sign of social standing.[74]

Associated with public spaces as they have become over the 20th century, the idea of a revolving door as entrance to a private home strikes me as weird. Faced with a revolving door (at least during business hours), unless a sign is hung upon it to state that the door is broken, it would seem deceptively available for entry to whoever happened by. The revolving door needs no invitation to its attempted use. Installing one as the entry to a residence would create a disjunction between any visitor's expectations of public and private. Would the visitor then also assume that no ordinary domestic space lies beyond such a door?

Revolving doors, like escalators, are a technology that has only a public service. Compared to another technology whose public use has flourished during the twentieth century, that of plate-glass windows, the revolving door's use relates most visibly to large-volume buildings or skyscrapers. In the article, "From Glass Architecture to Big Brother: Scenes from a Cultural History of Transparency," Scott McQuire argues that the "altered spatial relations produced by modern transportation and communication technologies" play out in both national and highly personalized contexts.[75] "Shifts in the balance between public and private space inevitably raise demands for new regimes of surveillance..." and that in the case of the Big Brother show, the surveillance uses a screen that has evolved via the path of modernist horizontal picture-windows, allowing exposure in unplanned degrees of ambiguity, and redefining (and re-embedding) the sense of public and private.[76]

The ambiguity of the revolving door is comparable to this analysis of the transparency of glass when addressed in terms of personal space. Despite exceptions, the glass house does not exist for most people in everyday life; of the examples inhabited, some concealing screen is always present somewhere—the house is never fully transparent, although most importantly, "every home [has]...the potential to become a glass house."[77] The glass no longer performs the primary function of windows: to let in light and air. Instead it seals skyscrapers in a semi-

[74] I wonder in particular at Van Kannel's use of the term suburban—before Levittown and commuter belts this would have been a basic descriptor for a community specifically plotted for housing, rather than industry or mixed use. I have heard these referred to as "bedroom communities" that bloomed, to use one example, in Denver, CO in the 1880's, where the first major, self-defined groups of Victorian homes were planned and constructed. The people living in them would of necessity have had a journey into the city proper, although in no modern sense was the community an orbital one.

[75] Scott McQuire, "From Glass Architecture to Big Brother: Scenes from a Cultural History of Transparency," *Cultural Studies Review*, 9, No. 1 (May 2003): 120.

[76] Ibid., 119.

[77] Ibid., 107.

transparent, practically impermeable skin, all the while providing a frame to define the exterior as image.[78]

The plate-glass window erases the dividing line between the self and the outside world, simultaneously freeing and threatening the viewer.[79] By contrast the revolving door provides a clear structural delineation of personal space in its wedge-shaped slices of atmosphere, yet also sets the boundaries for a potential invasion of that personal space. If a second person were to intrude upon one already inside the compartment of a standard revolving door, they would be effectively pinned together until the semi-rotation was complete. In practice, the door "*dices* a group into individuals,"[80] thereby reducing a public mass into its smallest, human-sized unit to permit entrance or exit. This is significant for occurring at the point of entry and exit from public or semi-private (and corporate) spaces, since it emphasizes the individual's ultimate powerlessness, and conceals an implicit threat. Whether or not admission will be granted into and out of such spaces is up for debate due to the door's own ambiguous mechanism.

What if you can get in but can't get out again, or can't exit when and where you'd like? Or what if, instead of participating in the apparatus, you are watching this happen to someone else? All the while perhaps thinking, that would never happen to me, I know how to use this piece of technology. The door is thus also a source of potential comedic mistake or trick. One early example of this is the Charlie Chaplin short film, "The Cure," in two reels dated 1917.[81] Chaplin's character, "the inebriate," arrives at a sanatorium in a wheelchair. He staggers to his feet, obviously drunk, before being guided to the building's main entrance: a revolving door. His guide pushes him into it, where he keeps rotating until emerging where he began, even dizzier. We can see all the action that follows as a "man with the gout" tries to exit while Chaplin's head is stuck against the outer wall. At one point the inebriate pins two people inside the door, laughing as they yell and struggle behind the glass panels. A foot and cane also get stuck before Chaplin makes it inside. Once through, the momentum carries him all the way up a flight of stairs, spinning and staggering throughout the whole sanatorium until he reaches his room.

[78] Ibid., 110.
[79] Ibid., 109.
[80] Kevin Murray, "The Case Against Doors," *Transition*, 39 (1992): 60.
[81] *The Chaplin Mutuals* Vol. 1, "The Cure," 1917, DVD (Lone Star Corporation, 2004).

Figure 7: Inebriate Charlie wedges his cane in the revolving door, trapping the bellhop and the man with the gout Eric Campbell. Image courtesy Roy Export Company Establishment, http://chaplin.bfi.org.uk/resources/bfi/filmog/film_large.php?fid=59407&enlargement=bfi-00n-jim.jpg&resource=Stills, (accessed November 18, 2007).

In these scenes we lay the blame on the inebriate for failing to use the door as intended, but how might the revolving door itself be complicit in its own failure? There is one way in which a revolving door can become in a sense permanently open: during a panic from a crowd pushing to go through the door from both clockwise and anti-clockwise directions, the doors are constructed to collapse and allow free passage either side of the central pivot, given that the right pressure is applied from the inside. Another reason for the rearrangement of the interior wings into parallel formation occurs when the doors are the only means of delivery to a building, and need to be propped open for handsfree use. When the door is thus truly open—in that it would be impossible to shut it while effectively maintaining the same form—it is no longer itself, no longer a revolving door by definition: it has become an opening that can't be refigured to shut in the same way. Its form diagrammed from above appears like a closed book, wings drawn together like leaves along the spine of the central pivot point, or shuffled altogether to one side of the arcuate wall's curve. The door becomes hallway.

It has failed in its doorness, and has become a hole, not the "hole-wall" it was designed to be, to take the term again from Latour's essay "Mixing Humans and Non-humans Together: the Sociology of the Door-Closer."[82] Yet this failure to be a door is inherent to the revolving door's planning and safety—the reason it's still in use. In his article, Latour focuses on the self-closing door hinge in particular, to point out and then unpack the complexity of human and nonhuman interaction involved in the entrance or exit from any structure:

> So, to size up the work done by hinges, you simply have to imagine that every time you want to get in or out of the building you have to do the same work as a prisoner trying to escape or a gangster trying to rob a bank, plus the work of those who rebuild either the prison's or the bank's walls.[83]

Both the revolving door's genius and its failure as an idea lie in the placement of the hinge as central, the humans orbiting around it. Latour's central observation about the "door-closer" is that there is only one human to discipline should a door-closer be employed, rather than disciplining each user of the door. In comparison, the speed limitations and degrees of automation given to revolving doors' rotations exercise discipline upon each individual door-user. This can happen one by one, or in the case of a manually-powered, four-chamber door, to two or three partly- or wholly-compartmentalized users simultaneously, users who do not interact except via the mediation of the door.

Latour refers to "the behavior imposed back onto the human by nonhuman delegates" with the term *prescription*:

> How can these prescriptions be brought out? By replacing them by strings of sentences (usually in the imperative) that are uttered (silently and continuously) by the mechanisms for the benefit of those who are mechanized: do this, do that, behave this way, don't go that way. Such sentences look very much like a programming language.[84]

In the case of the first revolving doors, designed to rotate counter clockwise, it was necessary to place a sign instructing users which door panel to push. This prescription is no longer needed in the case of doors relying on a motor for automatic rotation, since the door will rotate without physical effort from the user. But it is important to examine the partial automation involved in a manually rotated door, since the almost parasitic function of the mechanism depends upon the human/non-human mix. Latour, describing the hydraulic door-closing hinge,

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[82] Latour, 298.
[83] Ibid., 299.
[84] Ibid., 301.

could also have been speaking about the partly automatic nature of the manually operated revolving door: "...no matter what you feel, think, or do, you have to leave a bit of your energy, literally, at the door. This is as clever as a toll booth."[85]

The door's paradoxical function presupposes human complicity: automation is the necessary human element of the nonhuman's function. The revolving door thus uses the human participant in order to fulfil its complete function. Automating the door for your tenure within it is therefore prescribed behaviour: it is the human element that creates and is simultaneously trapped within the paradox of "always open, always closed." A revolving door, as a thing-in-itself, is a non-binary mechanism in a binary idea frame. Existing to take you inside or out, the door also provides options that are neither, in the case of Chaplin, or both at once, in the case of a panicked mob.

The revolving door prescribes back onto humans a chopping of groups into individuals. Latour concludes, "...in our societies, there are thousands of such lieutenants to which we have delegated competencies," and therefore social relations, largely "prescribed back to us by nonhumans," would be impossible to study without them.[86] As seen in the example of the revolving door, studying spatial relations, whether (as in this project) of self vs. architectural space, or self vs. metaphorical (social or literary) space, is impossible without unpacking such accompanying mechanisms and their play upon the mind and body of the individual.

How is the airport like a revolving door?

Or, to ask this question slightly differently than in the other sections of this chapter, what does the airport prescribe upon its users in the same way that a revolving door does?

Like a revolving door separating a crowd into individual members upon their entrance or exit from a structure, an airport dices a group into individual itineraries through the check-in process. Even if we enter the process as part of a group travelling together, we will still be issued with an individual ticket and seat—the airplane space dictates this organization with its inescapable built-in need for seat assignments.

The security screening process also requires us to step across the threshold of the body scanner one at a time. Though we queue in long lines together, we must cross that threshold alone, our carry-ons undergoing their equivalent examination inside the curtained chamber of the x-ray machine. This aspect of airports separates us from much of what otherwise accompanies us

[85] Ibid., 302.
[86] Ibid., 310.

through the flight itself—we cross through the magnetometer divorced of bags, metallic objects, shoes, coats—left standing in stocking feet, holding our identification documents.

The airport prescribes onto travellers the distinction of being reduced into the smallest possible unit of one. We are required by the airport to experience its spaces foremost as an individual, footnoted by our luggage. This sits uneasily within much of the airport's architecture which, following the check-in and security screening process, then throws us back together in the enclosed public spaces of shops, restaurants, and departure lounges, as well as all the interstitial spaces between and orbital to these: the hallways, restrooms, banks of pay telephones, moving sidewalks.

As a larger concept the airport is itself a kind of revolving door between the inside and outside of an airplane—we must be diced into individual itineraries in order to enter planespace. As we will see in Chapter 2's example of Merhan Nasseri, there is the remote (but distinct) possibility that we may be either trapped inside the space for an indefinite amount of time, or rejected from it entirely. This possibility may at many times be closer than we perceive, in the case of delayed or cancelled flights. One of the disconcerting possible scenarios would be the act of departing from the airport in the same way we entered it, rather than on our designated flight. Assigned an individual itinerary, the mechanism has then spit us back out to where we started.

The airport is, in these large- and smaller-scale ways, very much like a revolving door in the prescriptions it makes upon those within, entering, and departing its structure and spaces. But how is the revolving door as mechanism and concept different from the other mechanisms (and the approach to them) discussed in the rest of my investigation so far? In the example of the revolving door, we can see clearly the interaction between the human and non-human, and the spatial idea that this interaction creates. The revolving door is in this sense (and in an everyday sense also) not a failed or discarded mechanism, as the others might be classified. However, it is still redundant when compared to potentially more efficient door designs, and many (if not most) revolving doors now have regular doors installed as safety measures on either side. This lends the revolving sections a ceremonial entrance and exit status. Their highlighted redundancy becomes a kind of status symbol for the building.

The other mechanisms in the chapter might also be superficially said to be examples of black boxes—but as obsolete or unrealised designs, this is not actually the case. We can take them apart, visualize and understand them, and occupy their spaces imaginatively, even where parts of their function remain obscured. The lingering opacity of the mechanism is not a black box concern, since the black box is not an impediment to our understanding of their liminal

spaces in the same way that the airport can be said to be a black box, itself composed of many others which, individually and collectively together act upon each of its occupants.

We pass through the airport, as we pass through the revolving door, but do not pass through the fisheye lens, the spiral escalator, the Paternoster lift, or the Great Victorian Way. Placing these investigative historiographies of objects in proximity to one another, and collecting them in a similar fashion to Benjamin's *Arcades Project* research, draws out from them and defines one of the main subjects of this thesis: a mechanism's existence as such relies upon that mechanism's built-in containment of its potential to fail. The revolving door still contains this active potential. It still offers a space of possibility to each person using it, and that is what keeps it acting upon us—prescribing a non-human idea of space onto the human.

Conclusion: the Black Box

In drawing this chapter to a close, and looking back on this collection of mechanisms, I want to turn again to the black box, and to Latour's use of it as a verb, with respect to the ideas and objects discussed in this chapter. In his elaboration of the terms "black box" and "blackboxing" as they relate to his research, Latour acknowledges the aerospace context from which they were lifted. However, this does not continue to affect his discussion of the properties of the black box as it relates to unpacking of the ordinarily hidden mechanical meanings involved in so many everyday human and human/nonhuman interactions. Looking ahead in my investigation into airport space, I would like to re-introduce the black box to the airport, placing it in context of its role in defining the liminal.

What does the black box, as an object, look like? Black boxes are actually bright orange. This facilitates their recovery from a crash site, and is often one of the first statements of known fact common to any news report on the investigation of a downed flight. If not the first, then it is the second statement, following the one telling us that most planes have two black boxes, one (the "flight data recorder") responsible for recording the functioning of the plane's mechanical systems, and the other (the "cockpit voice recorder" or CVR) recording a continuous loop of the ambient sound from the flight deck. Until its function is arrested in a plane crash, at all times throughout the plane's operation the black box continues to record over itself, in anticipation of failure, when its contents would be called upon to provide an objective record of the last moments before catastrophe. These black boxes are displayed, sometimes dented or scorched but nonetheless resilient, as part of the report of an ongoing investigation, even though most black boxes would look like nothing more than what they are: a reinforced metal container with handles—resembling a safe deposit box and giving no indication as to the significance of the records contained within.

Each individual negotiates a zone of uncertainty by or with the mechanisms described in this chapter, making use of a spectrum of potential responses and potential outcomes offered by those mechanisms. The black box embodies a discomfiting intersection between the individual life and the impersonal mechanism, and is all the more powerful for having documentary properties. One of the definitions therefore of the black box's potential is the possibility that the worst outcome will be the one left documented, fixed upon crashing as it records over any previous ordinary flight time. The black box in any plane is a potential vital clue, a potential last document, and the closest thing to an impartial record of airplane function available to the investigatory process. Designed to record as much as possible of the time up until a plane ceases

to function, the black box's presence monitors those humans and non-humans in the process of negotiating the liminal.

Latour uses the black box metaphorically, largely discarding its original aviation association; each of these mechanisms within this chapter, themselves black boxes, also have a life as metaphors, whether commonly applied or not. The revolving door would seem to be the most common mechanical metaphor of those discussed here. In working through the mechanisms of the chapter to reach the revolving door, we now find ourselves having reached, finally, a mechanism whose life has extended into an imagination of its own space. "Revolving door" as metaphor is a common imagination of liminal space. As a shorthand indication of such, we take it for granted. It is significant that an imagination of liminal space has come to have a spatial life of its own.

The revolving door and its ambiguities and potential point to a hidden presence in twentieth-century cultural life: the self-inscription into the potential of the liminal. As individuals, we imagine these spaces, and our imagination of them becomes a kind of dialogue with them—a dialectic between self and liminality that results in an in-between presence, a kind of black box we and the mechanism both create. This is the presence I am attempting to describe with these investigations, the black box I began this work by sending and not yet seeing.

In continuing my research into spatial perception, mechanisms, and literary experiments, the mechanical metaphor may act as an emblem to the human need to mediate the potential of a space, considered public, whose rules for individual negotiation are unknown or obscured. The non-human mechanisms of this chapter are means of research into one person's interaction with ambivalent public spaces—kinds of machines for thinking about space. Could there also then be unpackable (metaphorical) mechanisms for thinking about words on the page, their spaces as physical inscriptions? What about dissecting a space as large and complex as an airport? I will argue that in a sense each time a work of literature is read spatially, its own individual black box is opened, and it becomes a document of one reader's passage through it. I will take examples of writing that invites this process in the third chapter, but along the way, the airport as structure, composed of any number of black boxes and itself providing context for the use of black box in its original form, will function as a hub through and around which these themes will continue to intersect.

Chapter 2

Central Hub: Airports and Liminal Space

Introduction: Practical Exercises for Observing Airports

Anxiety and Airport Space

Panopticism and the Unfixed Subject

Airport as "airspace"

Airport as "non-place"

Partition and Distraction

Vocabulary of Airspace

Memory and Not Knowing: vignettes and case studies of individual airports

Anxiety, Security, Propinquity

Airports and Deconstruction

- **Subsections of liminal space within airports**
- **Departure Lounge: Touring Airport Spaces**

Vignette: Failure in the Airport—Merhan Nasseri, citizen of Charles De Gaulle airport

Conclusion

Practical Exercises for Observing Airports

> Observe the street, from time to time, with some concern for system perhaps.
> Apply yourself. Take your time. [...]
> Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on. Do you know how to see what's worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you?
> Nothing strikes you. You don't know how to see.
>
> You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless.
> --Georges Perec, extract from *Species of Spaces*, "The Street"[27]

In *Species of Spaces*, Georges Perec articulates the space of the street through practical exercises for observing its materials and form, and the spaces and feelings created by them. These are phrased in the form of directives, given and then exercised by the author. As readers, our imagination of this space participates with Perec in the exercise, and yet we can also apply this exercise as a practical formula for observing other kinds of spaces. I will address Perec's use of systems and space more fully in the following chapter, however as a means into engaging with the airport's physicality and what its spaces mean for its citizens, I will begin this central chapter of my investigation by making use of his system of writing to observe the spaces of the airport.

Like the vignettes' function in the previous chapter, these exercises can be applied to particular airport spaces as a way to begin a close observation of their overwhelming abundance of detail and function. One might assume that airports have a kind of built-in blandness or sameness to them, however this is not the case. From airport to airport, their characters might differ, but the common factors of how their spaces act upon those inside are carried through. In exploring this, it is necessary to closely examine particular examples of airports—differences and sameness will emerge by applying Perec's method, but it must first be tailored to reflect the different subject.

Therefore, I will begin by compiling a system of Practical Exercises for Observing Airports, based upon Perec's system of writing the street. In a sense here I am creating a cover version of his system—self-consciously quoting and/or rewriting or rearranging his instructions to cast the airport in the role of the street:

Observe the airport, as you approach, pass through, and exit it, with some concern for system.

Go slowly.

[27] Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed and trans John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1997), 50.

Note down its particulars: city, weather, date

Note down what itinerary has brought you there.

Note down what you can see. Many things are going on that are worthy of note. Does it not seem this way to you?

Force yourself to note things in the order that they strike you. This order could be interesting to think about. If humans are not visible going about any kind of business, then the furniture, the objects, and the surfaces of airport space are things that, in interacting with you and with each other, are goings on that are worthy of note.

The airport: try to describe it, what it's made of, how its parts interlock.

The airport buildings: what distinguishes them to your eye?

The airport shops: what is sold there? Who buys it?

The airport eateries: how many are there? Why do you choose the one that you choose?

Don't say or write "etc." Make an effort to exhaust the airport, even if it seems grotesquely impossible, or pointless, or stupid. As Perec says at this point in his instructions, "You still haven't looked at anything, you've merely picked out what you've long ago picked out.

Force yourself to see more flatly."[28]

Detect the rhythm of the airport: the airplanes' movements.

Distinguish between types of aircraft, names of airline carrier, colours and types of their surfaces.

Read what's written in the airport: signage of all sorts, warning labels, TV screens, lists of destinations and times, prices, discarded things.

Read the images on the signs: symbols for male and female toilets—what are the other images that circulate in the airport's vocabulary of signs?

Decipher a bit of the airport's city, deducing what facts about it may be apparent from your surroundings: the range of temperature and typical climate in this part of the world, or the main local industries for example.

Describe the number of operations involved in purchasing an item from a duty-free shop.

Decipher a bit of the journey that brought you inside the airport. Who and what have you left behind? Will you see them or it again? Who and what are you moving towards? Wax sentimental over the memories that surface here.

The people in the airport: where are they coming from? Who are they? Where are they going? Who works here? How do they get here?

What is actually happening here? "Nothing is happening, in fact."[29]

"Time passes. ...Wait.

[...](in spite of yourself, you're only noting the untoward, the peculiar, the wretched exceptions; the opposite is what you should be doing).

Carry on

Until the scene becomes improbable

[...] until you can no longer understand what is happening or not happening, until the whole place becomes strange"[30] and you no longer know that this space you are in is called an airport.

Imagine improbable things occurring at an improbable scale: like Godzilla in Tokyo. Is this possible in a space where the difference in sizes of the planes themselves can come to seem improbable? What if a volcano were to erupt from underneath the duty-free shops, lava streaming along the moving sidewalks? What if the airport were to be destroyed through an act of God or otherwise? Is there something in you that would wish to observe this?

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 52.

[30] Ibid., 53.

Or again: attempt to picture yourself in the airport, with all the hidden networks of conveyor belts, steps, pipes, ductwork, electrical lines, sewerage, without which no life would be possible for the airport.

What do you find underneath all of these things?

The following is an example of an initial (failed) experiment in airport note taking:

6:44 pm, 11 July 2007, Boston Logan Airport, Terminal E, awaiting a direct flight to London Heathrow

Inventory of purchases at duty-free shopping: set of "starter kit" of Burt's Bees cosmetics—probably available in London, but more expensive there, and I'll need to go straight in to work on arrival. Moisturizer I had packed was over the 3 ounce limit by 1 ounce, so was confiscated in Chicago (on the 2nd go-round through the TSA checkpoint at O'Hare—I had by then no will to protest, though it had passed inspection the first time). Also purchased: 1 Burt's Bees tinted lipbalm, which I can't get in London, 1 set of gummi lobster candy for the office, 1 Clinique facewash bottle...would have liked a different size, but I'll need to wash my face when I get in to work. The thought of travelling straight in to work upon deplaning in London is dispiriting, but provides an excuse for purchases in the short term.

It's hot in the terminal, and even hotter in the bookstore where I buy the Burt's Bees stuff. People sweat, subtly. I do what I always can't help doing in public transport places: try to guess at narratives of the surrounding people and wonder where they're going.

Last boarding calls are made. One call asks a particular man by name, and with particular vim and emphasis, to "proceed immediately to gate 3A, or you WILL be offloaded from the flight..." and you wouldn't want that, now would you. I bet they called my name yesterday when I didn't show up for this flight...

Stores include: Duty-free Americas, Hudson News, Borders (some clerks are working in there that I recognize from prior trips—wonder if they ever recognize anyone), and some kiosks or stands including a Brookstone concession and a currency exchange. I never exchange money at those now that I have ATM cards of my own, and so I associate them with my first trip overseas at the age of 17, the wearing of money belts, and a first-time traveller's heightened attention to unfamiliar systems of transaction.

The weather looks OK for now. The early evening sun hits the water on the other side of the runway and the sides of houses in the neighborhood on the hill behind the inlet. A plume of heated air rises off the plane I'll be taking, distorting the image of the view behind it.

I see only one person using the pay phones, although they look relatively new, perhaps installed after cell phones became commonplace. On second glance I notice the person is taking advantage of an electrical socket to use a laptop computer, and not using the phone at all. It's a good spot to get work done, with a seat, out of the way and blocked from view on all but one side. I also see there's a wifi hotspot nearby, though the seats immediately underneath it are occupied by people reading or holding their passports already in preparation for boarding.

I have neglected to buy any medicine that will help me sleep on the flight. I felt too cheap when it came to buying a whole bottle of Tylenol PM, though if they had been selling individual doses they would doubtless have been more expensive per pill.

I think back again to my apparent luck at check-in—they didn't ask me to pay £50 as I was told I would need to by the airline agent the previous evening, when I called to explain I'd missed my flight. I suspect that they have actually charged the credit card I used to book the flight instead, and I will have to check this when I get home. A woman near me does some stretches standing up, and then a little twist-and-shout move at the end to finish. I wonder if I should use the bathroom one last time before boarding the plane, and decide against it. Having missed this flight once already, I'm determined not to abandon my post in the departure gate area.

Thinking of the approaching boarding time brings a succession of anxious thoughts. Consciousness of the potential for myself and all of the possessions I have with me of being lost at the bottom of the sea, or drifting on the surface of the ocean. Fear at even writing the thought out. Growing sense of fatality, and analysis of life lived to date as the time for boarding draws nearer. Several groups of older people travelling together—wonder if I'll be doing that when I'm their age.

There is one woman who has been watching me write, or perhaps staring at something in her line of sight, directly behind me. Time to put away the notebook.

Figure 8: Passengers waiting in Boston Logan Terminal E Departure Lounge, July 2007. Photo by author.

In checking over these notes, made just before I boarded a six-hour-long flight, there is a notable absence of information of the kind that Perec, and I, have directed with our systems of observation. Where are the descriptions of the airport surfaces? What does the chair that I am sitting on look like? Where is the frame around the view of the runway and inlet and neighbourhood in the evening light, so visible in photos but absent in description and memory? What is the floor surface like? What steps did I take in my interaction with the TSA and airline employees? What bits of text can I read, what sounds can I hear—where is the presence of CNN, ubiquitous in large American airports? Instead, there is a theme of commodities running through the narrative: purchases and justifications for them, things I have neglected to buy.

I include the example above because, even though I make what I believe at the time to be careful notes of the airport experience, and even though I have devoted my research to investigating and attempting to understand how airport spaces act upon its citizens, its anatomy still remains invisible to me, blackboxed. Perec's system and my adaptation of it is designed to point out the existence of that black box: what functions do we see and understand only as much as we have to, and then forget about until they break down? Seeing the black box when it has not failed must be driven by constant attention and systemic effort.

Where are we? We are in an airport. However much we observe our surroundings, we will never be able to see and inhabit the whole, and this is a perceptual failure. The airport prescribes upon us behaviours that extend beyond the physical black boxes that comprise its whole. I am interested in examining how these behaviours relate to our perception of airport space, and how it may be possible to begin deconstructing the black boxes, and beginning to answer the question of what it means to be inside the airport.

I am not trying to conceal the fact that this narrative isn't an objective, detached accounting. Instead, I wish the narrative to make the point that these investigations are about potential: presenting one imagination and interpretation of airport space to explore an individual point of voice in a space designed for mass movement. Average public views and uses are also interesting, and what the airport must by design most readily accommodate and treat with greatest importance, but it is more interesting to me to look at how it breaks down for the first-person traveller. To do this from a first-person point of view, I am left relying upon myself as narrator.

It is here worth making explicit that my thinking about airports in the context of this project is from a first-person and privileged Western point of view, though within this, I will address elements common to airports on all scales: from international hubs with populations as large as cities, to regional airports with a single runway. There is a sameness, as well as notable differences between all airports: architecture, quality/breadth of shops, airline associations and identities imposed upon airport spaces (for example the United tunnel in O'Hare), which amount to individual airport personalities.

I would like to revisit the black box as a concept, and move on to Latour's use of it as a verb, with respect to the complex mechanisms of airport space. In his elaboration of the terms "black box" and "blackboxing" as they relate to his research, we have seen that Latour acknowledges the aerospace context from which they were lifted. However, Latour uses the black box as a metaphor, largely discarding its original aviation association. The lack of its aviation origins in the discussion does not continue to affect a discussion of the properties of the black box with respect to the ordinarily hidden mechanical meanings involved in so many everyday human and human/nonhuman interactions.

Latour's application of the term as metaphor does not strictly address the boxes' mechanical function as recording devices. Until its function is arrested in a plane crash, the black box continues to record over itself, in anticipation of failure, when its contents could be called upon to provide a record of the last moments before catastrophe, to illuminate the human factors which may or may not be involved. In this way, for a plane crash and for Latour's metaphor, the black box embodies a discomfiting intersection between the individual life and the impersonal mechanism, and is all the more powerful for its documentary properties: the non-human which gathers and stores limited evidence of the human. The black box in any airplane is a potential vital clue, a potential last document, and a means of communicating with the dead in the investigatory process.

The airport itself is composed of a series of these black box-like architectural mechanisms. We enter it, are converted into passengers, processed and tracked, and expected to fulfil a set range of tasks (if waiting can be called a task) according to the airport's needs. We only become fully aware of the black boxes of airport spaces when something happens to interrupt the system's flow, and calls attention to how each space functions.

Anxiety and Airport Space

> As soon as one drives into an airport car park, one finds oneself integrated into an unparalleled conglomeration of communication and control systems that refuse any dissent.[31]

My notes on Boston Logan were made just prior to boarding a flight, but what about an investigation conducted with the express purpose of finding the airport's black boxes? In going to DEN or DIA: Denver International Airport in Colorado,[32] I had the goal of conducting a case study, equipped with camera, in order to look for one of the many possible black boxes: the airport's surveillance system. The following are notes made to document that investigation:

My route to Denver International Airport is a route through a landscape that disperses itself gradually. I begin near the zero point of the city, at an intersection not far from Broadway and Ellsworth where all street numbering begins. My first choice is made when I forego the highway in favour of streets within the grid plan: Lincoln north to Sixth Avenue along residential streets full of shops in small rows or installed in adapted old houses, then East on Colfax past car dealerships and motels, all unfolding in lines of aged neon and older templates of diners and motor courts, until Colfax ducks under the I-225 Denver bypass and crests a hill through the suburb of Aurora. The road widens at the intersections, allowing a dedicated lane for cars making left turns. The left turn that I take is onto Airport Boulevard, though it will be another 10 minutes and two roads before I first see the peaks of the terminal building itself. The first sign of the airport space as physical presence arrives in the nondescript lines of slanted fencing installed in empty fields, and a gourd-shaped building I assume to be a Quonset hut, though I have no way to confirm this, slipping past as it does at 65+ mph.

One thing of note as the houses recede and the road rises: the mountain view becomes clearer the closer you are to the airport. You start to see *over* the city. The mountains appear to bracket the space, drawing a line to the west, confronting planes and passengers. This un-ignorable physical presence must be what drove DIA's architects to attempt an echo of the mountain form in the peaked white fabric roofline of the main building. Not to acknowledge the mountains would have meant sinking the airport underneath the horizon-line, an effect that would occur perceptually even if the airport itself were not really subterranean.[33]

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[31] David Pascoe, *Airspaces*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 33.
[32] Delineated as "DEN" on baggage tags, DIA is also commonly used to indicate the airport.
[33] Cf. Peter Navy, "What on earth is going on at Denver International Airport?" ttp://www.geocities.com/Baja/5692/(accessed January 2, 2008). Some have taken this as a starting point for conspiracy theories. This website contains explication of conspiracy theories surrounding DIA's design and

The security screening area at DIA is centrally located, and visible from the mezzanine floor, itself the location of concessions and offices, including a post office.
The security area occupies the place of the "lodge," the "heart" of the cameral vision Jeremy Bentham placed central to his panopticon.[34] Orbital to the airport are the many parking levels, divided into East and West lots and garage decks, garaged spaces providing multiple fenced-off corners. These restricted areas may or may not be sites for construction, since the level of concrete dust and orange markers would indicate building activity, but the total absence of workers or changes in progress at the site would argue against it. Exits and entrances to the lots mark each vehicle with time and date stamps, taking a photograph (really a still video image) of the license plate with a mobile black and white security camera upon exit, issuing a receipt with the information displayed upon it along with the charge (punishingly varied according to proximity to the airport), time and lane entered and exited, and details about the employee ringing up the cash transaction.[35]

Denver, like other airports, provides ready contrasts of materials and light in the shifts necessary for a passenger to move between such spaces as the arrivals hall and the baggage claim. These spaces exist to address and temper human and machine interactions. When taking my camera through DIA on a mission to photograph its spaces, I expected to be approached and asked what I was doing taking pictures of the roofline and the security screening area from above. This never happened, and it became apparent that since the airport is widely used as the background for videos of reunions, bon voyage records, first meetings and interactions with a city, cameras are everywhere in some form, hanging from the necks and hands of the people moving through the airport. Airport interiors have become an accepted backdrop for large-scale human transit.

The airport, long considered prop or tool for the "real" event, the flying, has emerged as significant cultural presence beyond use as passage from ground to air and back. This prominence accompanies a shift in their concept of space with respect to panopticism, connecting airports and anxiety at a fundamental level that transcends consideration of the improbable mechanics of human flight.

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construction and assert a Masonic directive at work and allusions to concealment of underground excavation and building work.

[34] Bentham, Jeremy. *Panopticon: or, The inspection-house.* (Dublin: Thomas Byrne, 1791), 189.

[35] The case studies, as approached anecdotally and methodically here, so far illustrate a deliberate choice on my part to maintain the point of view of the casual passenger's path over the span of routine air travel. To think upon the experience in this way will I hope provide a greater insight into the everydayness of the airport structures as well as their extraordinary qualities and effects.

Panopticism and the Unfixed Subject

In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* the domination of people (power) is seen to be achieved through control of space, and the field of validity of the micro-physics of power is understood to be situated between functionings and bodies themselves. In the text, Foucault defines the panopticon's relation to its inmates as an intimate one, a discipline reaching into the mind via the culpability of the subject under surveillance in his or her own discipline. "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power...he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."[36] Associated with assumed responsibility, the anxiety created by the panoptic spatial construct's placement of the individual thereby becomes an essential tool. The anxiety results from the mechanism's state of potential. This points also to the important historical shift from classical space to a space where those in power are not watched, but do the watching themselves: a shift from spectacle to surveillance.

Moving from the space of knowledge of "the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space"[37] to the space of power and implied knowledge separates Foucault's work in *The Order of Things* from *Discipline and Punish* by a gulf of perception: the individual's anxiety becomes the subtly ingrained anxiety of separation from the crowd and the placement as focus of panopticism. The airport has become a site of architectural surveillance: the location, flight paths, and terminal buildings increasingly the focus of public debate due to widespread global mobility (and global threat) and a population going farther and faster via airplanes. Airports now give a traveller the first and last impression of a place, and have become another means of symbolizing a city, region, or country, and an opportunity to interpret its identity in a grandiose, architectural gesture. What of the airport's relation to the panopticon design? The panopticon is designed to separate a population (of prisoners, workers, students) and render them largely static via the architecture: a crowd becomes segmented, individuals shelved into the panopticon's structure like the revolving door's chambers; it dices a crowd into individuals in solitary cells. An airport must accommodate a constantly shifting and replenishing population during as many as twelve "rush hour" banks per day.[38] Since its function seems to

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[36] Michel Foucault, trans Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 202-203.

[37] Michel Foucault, trans Tavistock/Routledge, *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences*, (London: Routledge, 1970), xix.

[38] Norman Ashford, H. P. Martin Stanton, and Clifton A. Moore. *Airport Operations*. 2nd Edition. (London: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1997), 56. "Hub airports have very different patterns from airports supporting long-haul flights on predominant sectors. Dallas-Fort Worth with its two-airline hub operation has 12 peaks throughout the day during

oppose that notion of separation and stasis, how might the airport then reflect what Foucault described as the major principles and effects of the panopticon?

What is looked upon is no longer able to look back. The contemporary equivalent of this dissociation of Foucault's "see/being seen dyad" is apparent in the widespread use of closed-circuit television technology. The airport security recorded me (and just as likely discarded that image after a suitable amount of time), but at Denver International Airport I failed to record its physical presence. The UK, commonly known in recent years as the CCTV capital of the world, displays cameras perched not only in stores but in libraries, schools, hospitals, universities, on traffic signals and street lamps, and somewhere in all forms of public transportation including buses, bus stops and elevators. Panels of concrete on the sidewalks are stamped with letters that indicate the supporting physical machinery of the surveillance, communicating to the pedestrian visible evidence of being seen even while in the public space of a sidewalk and with no camera in ready sight.

This seems like an evolution of the panopticon's function, a development bypassing the notion of the "spatial surplus" as necessary to surveillance and discipline. That surplus space, the gap between the panopticon's lodge and solitary confinement cells, is no longer built into the machines of surveillance—instead everyday spaces (parking lot, hallway, elevator) are recast as surplus to the surveillance device by its installation therein.

For however brief a time, people inside airports become "citizens" of it, citizens with obligations and expectations of their occupancy, and who are subject to the architectural attention of the highly codified space, a space grown out of the needs of machines:

> Every mode of transport requires infrastructure, facilities and equipment permitting the management of its vehicles. At first glance, the airport exists as the essential infrastructure of air transport, serving to receive aircraft on the ground, service them and return them to their element.[39]

Foucault's analysis of the panopticon prison design introduced the idea that those within the net of surveillance become culpable in their own discipline. The power of Foucault's use of Bentham lies in the way anxiety is interpreted as emerging directly from spatial partitioning and the consequent experience of the individuals within. What sustains the anxiety is the ambiguity over whether the human creator or the physical creation has the formative power. Is the airport

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which aircraft are on the ground providing for transfers. Aircraft therefore arrive and depart in 12 arrival and departure waves, which in FAA terminology are described as *banks*. Hub terminals in the U.S. typically have high terminal usage with peaks occurring at roughly two-hour intervals between 000 hours and 2200 hours."

[39] Pascoe, 125.

governed by the passenger's needs, or does the structure dictate those needs? Once created and brought into use, does the structure then wield an unexpected control over those it contains, even (or despite) those who designed it, so that original intent is subsumed to spatial effect?

How then do airport "citizens" as such become complicit in the anxiety created and muffled by such a space? Vagrant by nature, the population of any airport at a given time will already be thinking its way out of airspace. But when exactly do they enter it? And what, physically, is the actual space of air travel?

Airport as "airspace"

Two parts comprise the official definitions of airspace: "Positive Controlled Airspace (PCA)" or what's commonly known as cruising altitude, and "Terminal Controlled Airspace (TCA)" which rises from the ground up to a fixed atmospheric height between 3,000 and 6,000 feet, an area that includes airports and the most dangerous zones of flight—those of takeoff and landing.[40] Airports are the most physically present aspect of airspace; they are described by David Pascoe in *Airspaces* as being "at the threshold," and are "'vessels of conception' for the societies passing through them," dependent on their aesthetics as well as cultural properties.[41] They are "hubs" in the sense that many divergent aspects of the same large machinery intersect therein. Certain airports are often spoken of (particularly in media reports) as hubs for a particular airline, but each is a human hub in its own right, a hub for the individual lives in transit through it at any given time, a Venn diagram of strangers' itineraries:

> [...] Airspace provides a familiar sequence of services for travelers...as passengers 'in transit' are forced to proceed in ways that prevent them from seeing that the expanse through which they are flowing is a state within a state, a fragmentary territory nipped off from the ordinary laws of urban fabric.[42]

The terminal incorporates theoretical concerns of surveillance and control while hiding them within the sequences encountered by travellers. Airport architecture is "a mediation between flight and confinement [...] they are neither monuments to immobility, nor instruments of the mobile society, but instead, the improbable junction of both."[43] This apparent contradiction, the juncture of stasis and flux in spatial form, uses panoptic principles to control the mental and physical presence of the individual subject in a way largely unseen by airport citizens. It is this control and the experience of particular airport spaces (perhaps wholly unlike any others we must interact with) that I am interested in exploring and describing.

[40] Ibid., 9-10. See also Nicholas Faith, *Black Box: The Further Investigations*, (London: Macmillan, 1996), 5. "The vast majority of accidents studied by the Flight Safety Foundation occurred while a plane was taxiing, taking off or on its initial climb; or, at the other end of its flight, approaching the runway, landing or taxiing after touchdown."
[41] Ibid., 10-11.
[42] Pascoe, 11.
[43] Pascoe, 14.

Airport as "non-place"

Marc Augé, in his use of the airport as a primary source for critical theory, appropriates (or coins) the term "non-place" to define airports anthropologically in terms of an evolution beyond modernism into a "supermodernity:"

> Space, as frequentation of *places* rather than a place, stems in effect from a double movement: the traveller's movement, of course, but also a parallel movement of the landscapes which he catches only in partial glimpses, a series of 'snapshots' piled hurriedly into his memory and, literally, recomposed in the account he gives of them, the sequencing of slides in the commentary he imposes on his entourage when he returns. Travel [...] constructs a fictional relationship between gaze and landscape.[44]

So, human relationship to travel is mediated by airports and the spatial apparatus (reflected and evoked via language and remembered images) that surround them. The situation of airports within the machinery of travel makes them a site for this "fictional relationship." I would argue however that more than "commentary," this sequencing of slides is a narrative formed inside (and in concert with) the airport and reconstructed in an echo afterwards. Considering what Augé believes (in a term defined by negative relation) to be anthropologically a "non-place," do airports actually grow a culture? Does that "double movement" hold true across all airport experiences, varying perhaps by scale but not in essence, for the individual traveller? Augé does not consider the mechanics of the structure and its spaces: the airport and its apparatus as presence, which presence and its dialogue with its citizens is of primary importance to the black boxes operating in this liminal space.

[44] Augé, 85.

Partition and Distraction

These definitions of airports in terms of space and place lead back to Foucault and panopticism, via anxiety's function in an individual's perception of space. Such construction of public space means, in Foucault's thesis, surveillance. It is not overt in airports in the ways I expected to find at the outset of this project. The control exerted by the airport on its citizens arrives instead via means of distraction. If we assume first that we experience airport space as a traveller who holds a destination in mind, and therefore achieves passenger status inside that space, anxiety localizes itself into other aspects of airspace: the passage of time, takeoff and landing, cruising altitude, the plane's body itself, and not the building that feeds into it. Even occupying the status of an airport "citizen" only for the time it takes to pick up or drop off passengers, as one there to wait and then depart again via ground transportation, is a point of perception wherein anxiety is directed primarily away from the airport itself and towards the incoming or outgoing flight. The movement is the focus, not the built environment which has mushroomed outwards from the airplanes themselves.

The distraction camouflages the mechanisms of spatial anxiety at work, mechanisms visible in parts of the airport's built environment. Examining my photos of DIA, a few elements emerge as sinister that went unnoticed while taking the pictures: twin elevator shafts, that are prominent but not transparent as they could be and as many lobby elevators are, seem immense and incongruent with the soaring tent-line roof; also, seen from the mezzanine above, the landscaping and water fountains insert breaks in floor-space and subtly control pedestrian action so that it would be impossible for a large group of people to assemble closely at any given central point. The most open space lies in between the terminal fountain and the exit doorway for deplaned passengers, and nylon tapes demarcate this. These barriers demarcate a line beyond which those there to meet arrivals may not step or stand without instantly attracting the security guards at the entrance a few feet away. Everyone dutifully obeys this nylon line.

Photographic security is camouflaged. Looking around DIA, aiming my camera at ceilings and walls, I failed to find any visible security cameras, or evidence that someone somewhere nearby was looking at a moving image of me passing before their screen. Only later, when looking at a photo taken out one window of the terminal end, did I notice something strangely situated, and then only after looking at the picture several times did it occur to me to remark on the office-like building wedged between the terminal canopy and one of the low gate buildings where planes waited to depart. Did the half-drawn blinds hide customs and immigration

officers waiting to intercept and interview illegal aliens? Was the airport jail disguised within it? Was I looking across into the innocuous offices and break rooms of airline employees?

It is shocking to encounter the invisible in this way, to confront what is only ever imagined from a traveller's perspective. Behind the scenes, baggage handling and the mechanics of employee life are hidden. Those that are visible, the movements on the apron (the name for the paved areas linking runway to multi-functional airport interior), are strictly regulated. Lines of ground traffic are marked, signals prescribed.[45] Uniformed personnel (in all airports that I've been in they almost always wear navy or other dark colours) wave orange wands that match reflective high-visibility vests. The apron of the airport acts more like a giant tray, on which objects of planes and people shift and interact, pushing each other around.

[45] Gillian Fuller and Ross Harley, *Aviopolis: a Book About Airports* (London: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2004), 28-29.

Vocabulary of Airspace

Eye-level sights are soothing and directive. DIA is photogenic, the reflective marble floors, splashing fountains, and indoor treescapes providing a calming level of lobby-ness to the activities taking place there. These are spaces for controlling waiting as well as transition, and the lines that break up the floor into sections of differently coloured marble occupy the eye and keep the mind busy on a low level during the waiting. Display cabinets break up the space just before the entrance to security screening, giving a reason to pause before entering the black nylon tape-defined passage. The vitrines contain samples of Colorado lore or prohibited imports—a display of sideshow curiosities with a warning undertone.[46] (I will explore these displays in greater detail later in this chapter.)

The order that the spatial structures of panopticism are meant to maintain also comes with a giant machinery of writing and information behind it, and this verbal and written machinery of recording, something that lacks a space or site, I find to be the most tangible aspect of this anxiety. The paper trail each person tows through the airport system exists as a shepherding device, but also with obscured meaning beyond the forms of boarding pass, parking receipt, baggage claim ticket. These are stored within a system that generates a tangible material copy, encoded for limited legibility by both passengers and airline employees, but the original does not exist at any site. Arguably, the site is the network, and the information thus becomes its own virtual site. This intangibility of existence attaches a free-floating, constant threat, a mechanism of anxiety via the unknown and perpetually potential "permanent record."

The machinery of airport function includes particular language, those terms which have come to be owned in an associative sense by the airport and airport-related functions, or are given an instantly understood, but deviant, meaning from their original incarnation: terminal, gate, concourse. Outside of their meeting in an airport role, these words might diverge into radically different atmospheres: terminal illness, garden gate, 500-mile concourse. This language is also found in the shorthand method of the way airports are abbreviated in three capital letters that often reflect city initials (one exception being Chicago O'Hare's ORD, named for the airport's site on a former orchard). Booking tickets online allows travellers to enter the three-letter code, making it advantageous for those industry signifiers to be learned by those not required to work with them for a living. This challenges Augé's argument of airports as anthropological "non-place." Their developing culture is one that defines itself outside the usual

[46] Cf. Pascoe, 37, on Proust's "*vitrine*...simultaneously, a plate-glass window, and a show case in a museum." See also Joseph Beuys's use of vitrines to display fat, felt and other materials as part of his narrative of plane crash survival.

critical frameworks. It is a kind of "supermodernity," but one that actively struggles between the tools of the previous incarnation and the space it has built for itself as sequel. As a liminal space writ large, the airport's culture formation operates by different rules than the place that Augé has gone looking for and failed to find.

Memory and not knowing

In the case studies below I divided the airports I've passed through into binary categories of memory: Inside and Outside. These are vignettes of individual airports, and represent my search for how to describe the characteristics of them as mechanism. The Outsides function primarily as airspaces, since their influence is felt in image and architecture as an apparent whole—an aesthetic dominated by a unifying architectural feature. Those Insides foreground spatial navigation, where mental aerial maps are learned before any shape of the roofline, and where navigation causes notice of the small details that differ in the particular terminal or gate compared to the rest: what shops, what marble, the quality of the bathrooms. I don't prefer one category to another, but by beginning this chapter with an analysis of Denver's airport, I sought to go inside one of those that have a primarily outside life in my perception, and thus to enter the airport-as-threshold, and airport-as-mechanism.

There were other candidates among the airports that I've experienced for this kind of photographic focus, and as they have all contributed to my perception of airport space through an accumulation of notes about their similarities and differences, it is useful here to examine my memories of them (and photographs where extant) through the lens of Perec's adapted system. In these case studies, my attempt to observe everything must fail—as we have already seen, it is an impossible task to see all of the airport at once—but the difficulties I have with them, or their ease of use, must be a reflection upon their individual spatial constructs and mechanisms. What have their spaces inscribed and prescribed upon me?

Vignette: Other airports I have understood from the outside

DCA: Reagan (formerly known as Washington) National, Washington, DC

The main terminal building is a bright and long yellow and glass mosaic-lined structure, little referencing the original terminal, a crescent-shaped white stucco structure with its sunken passageways and small TVs attached to each padded Naugahyde chair. That old terminal now seems more carbuncular in relation to the bright new portion, though it is the original among the two. In the new terminal, double or triple-height repeated ceiling domes give a headiness to the building and a decided attitude of pleasure: DCA has its own in-house magazine, and the rows of shops face the bright runway views through plate-glass windows. The long walk to the gate is

made a promenade via landmarks of commissioned installed art.[47] DCA is also notable for being relatively centrally located in a class of sites that are usually on or beyond an orbital path around a city. From an arriving plane, the passenger sees the rough, boulder-strewn Potomac River flowing through the city past white marble monuments and broad white bridges. The river gets closer as the plane drops in for a landing, surface details of the water and marshy land on the Virginia side becoming ever clearer so that the non-aqueous nature of landing is cast firmly into doubt before a strip of rubble and weeds finally appears (quelling any panic that rose as the plane dropped), followed by the blackened end of the runway and the plane's almost immediate touchdown.

IAD: Dulles International, Virginia

Like the TWA terminal at New York's JFK, Dulles was designed by the architect Eero Saarinen. Its roof is slung like a hammock between two glass walls, a kinetic element implied in the way the center presses down to rest at a point above the check-in counters. From the approach it's possible to look directly through the terminal, one wall rising higher than the other, allowing the eye to trace a line of ascent, curve, and descent.

Like the JFK terminal, it has become outdated, outstripped by the larger jets and increase in air traffic since construction, and is now served by newer satellite buildings that seem like afterthoughts to its grand architecture. "Designed to be expandable," this potential was passed over in favour of new construction.[48] Planes no longer pull directly up to this building. Instead of the main airport space, it has become a foyer for checking in. Shuttle vehicles take passengers out across a stretch of concrete to the planes. The paths they follow are direct, and it is conceivable that the distance could be walked, were it not necessary for the planes to use the space to manoeuvre around the apron.

ORD: O'Hare, Chicago, Illinois (international terminal only)

The highway approach here curves around on a flyover, vectoring any approaching car slowly towards the international terminal, gleaming in silver-blue, a low arch rising from a long base, each defining the other in aluminium colour and lightness. The shape could reference simultaneously that of a small machine part, or that of a stellar parabola, or could describe the negative space of a bridge. This mental shift of scale becomes an active element of the building's perception.

[47] Pascoe, 234.
[48] Fuller and Harley, 68.

These outside views, so striking that I could sketch the outline of each from memory, have in common not only their architectural distinction, each evoking with their structure some aspect of flight, but also the elevated approach of the traveler by transportation other than aviation. The rooflines are visible from the highway or elevated train track, rising above green freeway exit signs and passing trucks, so that from the first sighting there functions a kind of observed, conscious arc into airport space. There's a slotting of self into the shapes made by each, though the actual interiors and modes of transit, once the passenger is embedded along a path in airport space, do not necessarily reflect the soaring rooflines of the container shell itself. The road curves in approach, the parking lot or arrival/departure lane is chosen (it's impossible not to choose), and the mechanisms of air transit (the monitors displaying gate and baggage reclaim information, the luggage and its subservient apparatus, the seating, the concessions, the security screening) then take over. Time becomes a consideration—how fast one can move with what baggage, how long the line is, where the restrooms are. There are paths and numbers and letters to designate them, zones of trespass overtly signed, "Passengers Only Beyond This Point."

Vignette: Those airports I do not understand but from an internal position

LHR: London Heathrow

How does one begin to describe the overall shape of Heathrow? Is there a name for its geometry? The runways were originally laid out in a design resembling a star of David, however a similar shape does not seem to be locatable in the arrangement of its terminals. Heathrow exteriors have been shown in the news more recently in the context of protests surrounding the fifth runway, although in a recent direct mail approach to people living in the flight path, no map or clear image of the airport was given as part of the background literature or survey.[49] I can't begin to describe Heathrow by starting with an overall outside shape—there must instead be a point from the inside by which we can begin to locate elements of the airport. Questions of where the entrance is, where the centre is, do not apply in this kind of space. Each element shifts around depending upon one's own place within the airport's mechanism.[50]

In recent press, there has been a general acknowledged awareness of the building's lack of defined form. It has been publicly critiqued by the mayor of London and highlighted as architecture in dire need of revision, unsuitable for its function as major gateway into the UK.

[49] UK Department for Transport, "Adding Capacity at Heathrow Airport," direct mailout, November 30, 2007.

[50] Cf. Lynch, 155. If we were to draw the airport, following the pattern of Kevin Lynch's city questionnaires, what would it look like? How would those five city elements be reflected in our perception of the airport?

What these critiques call to mind visually are the older areas nearer to the entrances to the airport's space, those areas with stained brick facades, low ceilings, crowded corridors, and worn floor surfaces. It is the newer areas of the airport which are easier to use as a point at which to begin describing the elements of the whole—these newer areas are more recognizable as being airport-like in their use of materials and space. The differences between these older and newer areas indirectly reveal how the airport has spread, like a rhizome, of extending hallways with moving sidewalks and sprouting multiple gates and jetways. In the plethora of views possible in Heathrow, perhaps the only meaningful view is the view out to the planes, or perhaps the view inward to the shopping possibilities.

Figure 9: The view from a moving sidewalk, Heathrow terminal 3, June 2007. Photo by author.

Let us then set the task of analysing the elements of the space between the duty-free waiting area and the gate, making use of the Perec-derived formula to look at what might otherwise be thought of as a kind of hallway, and using Terminal 3 as an example.

Particulars: London, mostly cloudy and cool, late June 2007.

Itinerary: LHR-BOS outward flight.

The first order of things that strike me is the view outside the large floor-to-ceiling picture windows that line the hallway. There is a moving walkway to one side. The ceilings are low, and under the process of repair, so that the inner worlds of pipes, ductwork and insulation are visible in places. The carpet is a dark pattern, which appears at first glance to be mostly blue. There are elements of many other colours in it, which shift across it in an approximately 4-5 foot square

pattern repeat. The carpet is thin, but durable. Walls are a pale colour—whitish-grey. There are many metal elements around, some dark as in the linings that hold the double-glazing in place, some with brushed steel finishes. There are many rubber elements too—the handrails of the moving sidewalks, for example, a surface likely to be touched in a space that does not offer up very many invitations to touch. The signage in this space uses Heathrow's yellow/black combination and serif typeface, although there is inconsistency within a single way-finding sign (as above), some text in white on grey, that further widens the context of the sign, to inform anyone who is severely lost of his or her terminal location.

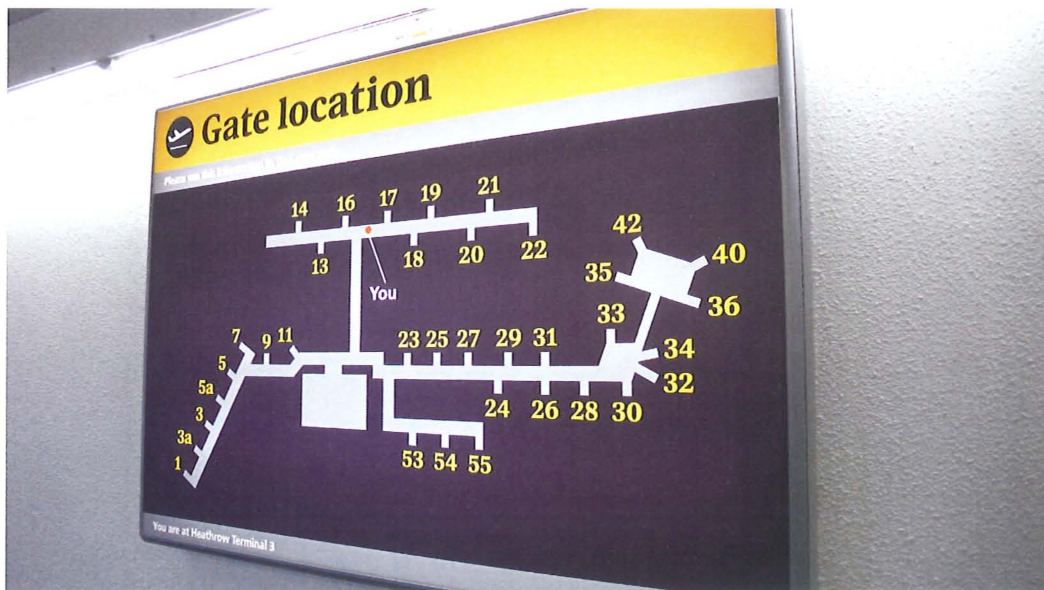

Figure 10: Gate location map, Heathrow Terminal 3, June 2007. Photo by author.

At the point at which the above photo was taken, neither the point of origin or the destination was visible. Both lounges that I was then moving between were each around corners. There was no shopping available in this particular space. Other than way-finding signs, there was a convex mirror hung above a blue and white NHS box attached to the wall, which contained emergency supplies (I imagined a defibrillator). The areas of the most colour and movement were to be found outside the window, where planes could be seen moving and refuelling, and heard taking off. Auxiliary services were also visibly in process—vehicles loaded food supplies onboard, luggage carts were towed in threes behind a small open vehicle, their bags disgorged onto a conveyor that stretched up inside a waiting jet. Palletised cargo was slowly spun on special platforms, raised, and loaded. Many other functions took place which, as a passenger, I would

have had no way of comprehending. My attention was drawn foremost to the vehicles, though people moved around and with them, coming into and out of sight.

What memories surfaced in this space? Another flight memory surfaced, when a friend was visiting, and also scheduled to fly to the US on an outbound flight an hour or two after mine and to a different city. We went to the airport together, had lunch in a café, bought puzzle books (I introduced her to sudoku while we ate overpriced bagels) and then she waited in the queue with me in what may have been this same hallway (though I can't be certain) until I passed through the passport check and into the final departure lounge. The other people in this hallway now are not necessarily headed to my flight, though I observe them and speculate about their destinations and reasons for travel. There are groups who are clearly on a holiday—they hold guidebooks, discuss the hotel where they will stay, their holiday itineraries. There are business travellers, speaking on mobile phones. There are families, corralling children who explore the airport's surfaces much more closely than their parents—climbing onto all the window frames in turn, questioning what they can see out the windows, reaching up to touch the things that most grown-ups do not touch, or sitting down where there is no prescribed seating.

If I were to carry on imagining this space until the scene becomes improbable, how would this place be made strange? What if the moving sidewalk were to suddenly undulate? But I have seen this in the form of the sidewalks at Charles de Gaulle, and the sidewalks at the Venetian in Las Vegas, that take pedestrians up and over the hotel's fake Rialto Bridge. The missing ceiling tiles reveal other possibilities: what if the ceiling ductwork and the other hidden conduits of the airport were to replicate, reproducing itself until movement through the space became physically impossible, like the apartment of the protagonist Sam Lowry in Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*?[51] The support systems of Heathrow are tiled over and normally shielded from view—if they became the main dictators of usable space, what would happen?

What meaning can be found underneath all of these things, all of the impressions that can be collected from a single spot in a hallway in Terminal 3, a spot not designed for occupation except as liminal space? As I continue with further recollections of other airports encountered from the inside, the conclusion remains elusive. The question cannot be answered without then looking to sources and references outside airport space.

DFW: Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas

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[51] Terry Gilliam, *Brazil*, DVD (20th Century Fox, 2003).

I can visualize the map of DFW, its incomplete design of colour-coded crescents,[52] but there is no way that it makes easy sense when navigating from the inside and changing gates, as it is crisscrossed by several different tram-like vehicles and built of hallways of slow (walking speed) curves or pasted-in shortcuts. My travel via DFW usually calls for the use of one or more "temporary" terminals, accessed via busride across the apron and through diesel and jet fuel fumes. Remaining waiting time is then spent inside a metal building that looks more like a shed than a departure point.

CDG: Charles De Gaulle, Paris, France

> [Airports] stage, so to speak, an engrossing image of the aspiration to break out of the element into which we are born and to move into that in which we breathe. It is not, therefore, surprising that they are often experienced as such edgy zones, places in which to experience oneiric moods, loss of agency and imprisonment within the confines of a technological system.[53]

The narrative of this particular brief stay in Paris CDG is a narrative of displacement strongly tied to a particular circumstance, my Pittsburgh-London flight in May 2002 having been rerouted via Paris due to delays and bad weather. By the time I arrived at the airport, I had already been travelling for nearly twenty-four hours, so have chosen to record the anxiety therein in present tense.

De Gaulle airport seems to be a chain of undulating moving sidewalks and curvilinear buildings that live architecturally up to their designation of "satellite."[54] Knots of people congeal around clear plastic dividers and stub out cigarettes in the dirt of potted plants, and departure gate numbers seem to change without notice. Seeing the apparently psychic movement of boarding lines, I am suddenly uneasy. Coupled with this is the lurking sensation that somewhere out there is Paris, where I have never been, and somewhere closer even than that is supposedly France, and so I approach the British Airways ticket counter, and ask the agent if she speaks English. I can tell instantly by her expression that I have just asked a profoundly stupid question, but she clears up my doubt about the gate, and the boarding of this Parisian plane is haphazardly quick.

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[52] Pascoe, 94. See also Alastair Gordon, *Naked Airport: A Cultural History of the World's Most Revolutionary Structure* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 244.
[53] Pascoe, 15.
[54] Cf. Pascoe, 12, 210.

Stuck looking out the window at the slipping tree-lined roads and power lines of a country I was probably not really in, I am left feeling most reassured by the Channel crossing, eyeing that in-between area of whitish waves as a signal that I am finally resolving a transitory state, a state that will inevitably, and reassuringly, alter into one of the familiar. The process of making the twenty-four hours of travelling legible then becomes the meaning behind all the motion, the pursuit of which allows me to articulate the intuition I've had that all this space, the continent- and ocean-crossing, must mean something even if I've lost my perception of where it begins or ends. The Channel I can see from the airplane window, the point of view itself a kind of impossible place, becomes my entrance and exit, space of what is both home and foreign.

Anxiety, Security, Propinquity

Once when boarding a plane I overheard the gate staff comparing their methods of singling out passengers for further search. One employee said that she chose people to take aside if they happened to step on a particular spot on the carpet. Another chose by the style of shoe: sandals one flight, loafer the next, I imagined. Given that there are multiple counter staff working to check tickets at any gate entrance, the possibility that there are as many potential factors that could lead one to be searched instils another level of anxiety in the passenger—what will be the thing they focus on? This anxiety is one of not knowing which detail of appearance or choice of step (or motivation behind that judgment) could mean a singling out from the crowd, and a wait alongside those passed over while the contents of carryon bags are visibly aired and swiped with security wands. The gesture of searching also functions as a warning, an example: a placement of one individual on display for the rest of those boarding. The people not chosen file past those being scrutinized, invited to wonder why they were not picked for a place at the center of attention.

This is another example of how an airport singles out an individual from the crowd. It is something that no airport user would wish to bring upon themselves, in practical terms because emerging from the crowd and the crowd's paths would encumber the efficiency of the transit onto the plane, and because anyone standing out in an airport would need to go to a consciously chosen extent to break the spatial rules the airport imposes upon those within its jurisdiction.

In airports, the individual experiences a continual merging and emerging, grouped in with strangers also in transit and each carrying an itinerary local only to themselves. This itinerary constitutes a path internalised and clung to while navigating through time and unfamiliar space. Airports redefine propinquity in terms of spatial and cultural scale—the time it takes to get that nearness in space:

> In such a space, time zones and time lags begin to assume concrete reality; the idea of 'border' loses its physicality and reveals itself to be a theoretical construction which can materialize anywhere. The airport functions as a national frontier on the outskirts of a major city in the middle of a country; that in itself should suggest the beginning of a different spatial dimension. Within airspace, indeed, there seems to be a split in the very constraints on time and place...[55]

The culture growing in airports is one of an evolved panopticism, where the machinations of viewing are camouflaged within and via the environment's surfaces of marble and

[55] Pascoe, 34.

glass. The tent-like roof at DIA is also like a suspension bridge, also like a cocoon, also (but somewhat less) like the view of the Rocky Mountains that symbolizes Denver and what it means to live there.

In airport architecture, the more common form of anxiety surrounding the fear of flying is acknowledged and tacitly accepted, while a panoptic surveillance anxiety becomes the functioning ballast for the airport environment's working life itself. The efficacy of panoptic principles no longer depends on Bentham's careful camera-like architecture, but in the airport rely on the tension between stasis and vagrancy of each citizen; the panopticism is mobile and has moving targets. Not only are the citizens subject to the camera, but also they are uncertain whether they are inside or outside it.[56] Their passage with relation to it is now documented carefully via the language of travel: tickets, claim checks, parking receipts, boarding passes. Anxiety will always be a basic factor of air travel, as we have come to rely on movement through a non-native element in which we could not survive or maintain a physical presence without the use of highly specialized technology.[57]

Airport architecture as liminal space

In his explorations of "airspace" as source and site of material culture, David Pascoe posits the extension of "airspace" as a term to include the physical spaces that connect airplane and airport, as well as the actual volume of air in which take-off and landing occur. Following from this, an important element of the population of those spaces should be taken into account, and addressed here in terms of potential.

The only permanent occupants of airspace are machines. Built in response to airplanes, airports themselves may be seen as architectural mechanisms, each having common parts and built-in redundancies designed to systematically move a human population through. In engaging with an environment dominated in these ways by mechanical systems, the isolated individual must adopt a regulated, largely mechanized means of navigating through the liminal space of the airport. This can be broken down into stages: transit, arrival, check-in, security, shopping, departure lounge, boarding, and take-off—differing thresholds that must be crossed before the complete transition into and out of Pascoe's definition of airspace, and of the larger threshold that

[56] This echoes Robin Hill's implicit or explicit appearance in his photographs that were taken when the camera is placed flat on the ground. Through his own movements combined with a long exposure time, he may have been able to disguise his presence and effectively efface it from the final print, but the self-portrait acknowledges the fact that the photographer must account or plan for his own appearance when using a camera whose eye sees an entire hemisphere at once.

[57] Cf. Faith, 6. "But there is another factor: flying remains a fundamentally unnatural act."

is the airport. These stages provide a system by which each traveller may begin to enact his or her own narrative. Afterwards, the question, "How was your trip?" prompts the recitation of it, while during the encounter with liminal airspace, this narrative remains in process, a part of and yet still separate from the individual experience.

The imagination of airspace by each temporary member of its population is an equally important factor to experiencing airports. The potential spaces contained within (orbital to, or even footnoting) each passenger equally influences each interaction with the space, enough so that the imagination of airspace becomes functionally a form of or factor working within our conception of it. Pascoe addresses the aesthetic representation of this in film and fiction, and I would here like to acknowledge the renditions of airspaces available on television and dramatized and/or documented in two main forms: that of air disaster accounts, and that of the quotidian life of the airport workers. In doing so, I address my own interest in these shows, particularly the gruesome details of air crashes, since for the most part the shows have certain sensationalistic aspects in common. These have become an aspect of airspace, in that they are an aspect of the imagination of potential consequences of air travel—a subtext of each flight is its potential to fail.

It is true on the one hand to say that I possess a morbid curiosity about the details of air disasters. This is partly because I am a nervous flier, though I wasn't always, and partly out of intellectual and dramatic interest in what happens before, during and after a crisis, both to the people handling it and to the mechanisms involved. I began flying to visit family as an unaccompanied minor at the age of 6, taking one or two domestic US flights at a time, of a length up to three hours. This was during a time (the 1980's) when the flight attendants would often take me up to the cockpit to introduce me to the pilots—one of them once offered to let me fly the plane, which I turned down since I took him seriously and we were 36,000 feet over Tennessee at the time.

I can honestly say that I was never nervous about flying until I first lived under the flight path of a major airport, Chicago O'Hare. If I looked out my apartment window, approximately every 90 seconds I could observe a plane descending for its final approach. I have a similar view out my current windows in London, since my apartment is located beneath one of the several holding patterns (or "stacks") that planes are kept in until cleared for landing at Heathrow. When they pass my house they are emerging from the bottom of the stack, and I can often see them lowering landing gear, although I no longer notice the sound.[58]

[58] Regular Concorde flights, now consigned to history, were the exception. Each day at approximately 4:45 pm one would roar overhead, and as its gear would descend, it would take on a mosquito-like silhouette against the setting sun.

After moving to Chicago, I suddenly began to get nervous on flights for no apparent reason. I traced it back to the fact that the noise of the airplanes in the flight path was somehow getting to me without my direct awareness. It was one of the aspects of being in a new place that I noticed on the first day I moved in, and which my mind then shifted to the background as I became used to my surroundings. I had at that point been flying regularly and confidently for over 15 years.[59]

My theory at the time was that the noise was getting to me—tuning me to some kind of frequency where I became newly sensitised to flying as an unnatural state of being. What I was previously able to accept without question suddenly became an area of life in which all my senses were newly awoken to every aspect. I realize now that this discomfort arose because hearing and seeing these airplanes had integrated me into airspace, and it was acting upon me.

Even though contemplating air travel now explicitly invites me to contemplate death, my concerns for myself are not usually those of safety, but rather of perception. For example, I'm much more comfortable flying with earplugs in, even though no doubt the miscellaneous clunks and creaks during takeoff and landing would be the same. This may be the equivalent to blindfolding myself and pretending like no one can see me, for despite my conscientious use of earplugs on every flight I take now, it's only a method of relaxing, of mediating my anxiety, and has no actual effect on my safety.

I use the earplugs despite my interest in researching these issues of anxiety and airport space, even though this might be seen as a method of limiting or blocking out data. The airplane environment itself is one in which the senses are restricted or mediated on multiple fronts. Thinking about what we can hear, see, taste, smell and touch while buckled into a airplane seat brings with it the consciousness that we are occupying a manufactured environment wherein any sensory data reaching us is tightly controlled, from the entertainment on the small seatback screens, to the reheated food trays, to the recycled air,[60] to the polyester and plastic surfaces and the window shades. Through all this there runs, in the background, the white noise of air travel. This is normally a steady sound in flight, but during take-off and landing, individual aircraft may reveal their own personality quirks through different sounds that still reach passengers, cocooned though we may be inside layers of plastic and metal. As an air traveller, blocking this data out serves to alleviate the anxiety I might feel at acknowledging the lack of control I have during the

[59] Having been introduced to flying when young, I had never really contemplated what it meant, in terms of theoretical meaning or physical danger, though I was just as aware as anyone else about the latest air disasters. One of my earliest memories is of seeing news coverage of the crash of Air Florida flight 90, which crashed into a bridge upon takeoff during a snowstorm in Washington, DC (my home at the time).

[60] It's an often-quoted fact that it's less fresh now that smoking flights, and thus greater air circulation, have been phased out.

plane's most stressful times—take-off and landing, when all mechanisms are functioning at maximum capacity. As a researcher, plugging my ears at this point acknowledges that I am observing this system from within—I cannot pretend impartiality, as I've admitted elsewhere in this project, in my own first-person narrative of airspace.

In practical terms, I know that the neuroses I've developed since I became anxious about flying must be stifled constructively, so that my sense of fear still retains its power to help me survive should I ever be in a situation where I'll need to call upon the same instincts that try and keep me on the ground in the first place. Similar to my earplugs, airport space must mediate the potential for anxiety among its temporarily captive citizens, while still maintaining their awareness that emergency situations may occur.

A significant number of anecdotal airspace stories now exists, accessible to anyone with access to an internet search, collected and written by a network of travelers who share knowledge on a range of flying experiences, from how to get the seats with the most legroom and best views[61] to which airports have the best facilities for people stranded overnight.[62] This information largely relies upon the premise that an airline traveler is first and foremost a customer. In the process of making recommendations, individual narratives of spatial navigation inevitably emerge, and this anecdotal exchange of information becomes one of the footnotes to airspace, a collective pool of knowledge available for anyone looking to maximize their experience of the navigation that must be undertaken and the rules that must be followed in order to move around the planet on a grand scale. These anecdotes create the illusion of a shared experience of air travel, an experience which may ultimately be dissected into each individual's confrontation with an unnatural state of being, and thus a confrontation, however indirectly assessed, with mortality.

Contrary to what I initially expected when I began watching a lot of air crash documentaries and reading Cockpit Voice Recorder transcripts (many of which are readily available online, either separately or as the appendix to the complete reports from NTSB investigations), I am not substantially more nervous about flying now. As one FAA official said during an interview, "aircraft accidents are horrible, but we learn from them."[63] This implies a detachment necessary for the air crash investigator to uncover the narrative, or chain of intersecting narratives, that resulted in the mechanism of air travel failing. By examining the

[61] Skytrax Research, "The world's largest global community for airline and airport reviews," http://www.airlinequality.com/index.htm, (accessed April 9, 2007).
[62] Donna McSherry, ed., "The Budget Traveller's Guide to Sleeping in Airports," http://www.sleepinginairports.net, (accessed April 9, 2007).
[63] "The Crash of Flight 191," Episode broadcast on the History Channel UK, August 25, 2006.

mechanical breakdown, by looking at the air crash event as a type of failed mechanism, this becomes an example of a link between mechanism, failure, and narrative, echoing the first chapter's investigations.

There is a literally sensational aspect to airports, in particular the unique smell of jet fuel, a smell familiar enough that we recognize it readily and yet it is exclusively and directly associated with airspace, and not a smell that most people frequently encounter. Witnesses describing a crash's aftermath often invoke the overpowering smell of jet fuel (or its absence in some cases).[64] The jet fuel smell is in this sense one of the uncanny aspects of airspace—uncanny in the *unheimlich* use of the word[65]—it is familiar and alien all at once, a reminder that we are at home and yet very much not at home in the airport environment.

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[64] Cf. *Air Crash Investigation*, "Wounded Bird," Season 2, episode 2 and "Deadly Delay," Season 2, episode 6.
[65] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 6.

Airports and Deconstruction

Discussions of deconstruction and architecture take into account this sense of the uncanny, particularly as experienced by the individual body moving through the space. The isolation, alienation, and estrangement of the individual, particularly in the context of city dwellers and the city space that developed during the nineteenth century,[66] has led to an existence in liminal spaces as a necessary condition of post-19th-century life.

This liminal existence is the reason for this project's focus upon the individual point of view, as expressed explicitly through first-person narrative and autobiography, and its less apparent (though pervasive) influence upon the imagination of mechanical redundancies as in Chapter 1, and in the relation of the individual to air travel and airspace. The estranged individual's occupation of liminal spaces, and the failures inherent therein, provide a field of perception within which to search for the potential inherent in these redundant forms, and to test that spatial awareness for patterns.

In tracing the connections between these subjects, the task of looking at language becomes that of looking at spatial articulation(s), in other words, interdisciplinary. This interdisciplinary approach is what I alluded to in this project's introduction as an inevitable consequence of my reading of any given text spatially—to understand and describe that understanding foremost through the use of spatial terms and the imagination of space. These connections across disciplines are not equivalencies, but a form of Derrida's "undecidable." Each acknowledges the other's presence within itself, while maintaining a separate existence in terms of genre.

The acknowledgement is an aesthetic acknowledgement, a search for meaning using a vision centred upon the aesthetics of space. The task also becomes an architectural one, of mapping limits and testing boundaries, or becomes the task of a plastic artist, looking for relations among line, form, shades of meaning: "...the structural resemblance between linguistic and visual or architectural models is reinforced, for the hierarchical relation between speech and writing that deconstruction analyzes and seeks to displace is traditionally described in terms of that *between an inside and an outside.*"[67]

Writing of Tschumi's project of architectural follies installed in La Villette park, Anthony Vidler states that,

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[66] Ibid., 4.

[67] Peter Brunette and David Wills, eds., *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3. Emphasis mine.

> . . .analogically, the folly stands for a body already conditioned to the terms of dissemination, fragmentation, and interior collapse. Implied in every one of his notations of a space or an object is a body in a state of self-acknowledged dispersion, without a center and unable to respond to any prosthetic center fabricated artificially by architecture.[68]

Similarly, the individual moving through the airport is a body without a centre, both under threat and in process of dispersing, unable to respond to the architecture of the airport without resort to the uncanny. Whereas in another environment, the *unheimlich* might become *heimlich* for the traveller through repeated exposure, in the airport the uncanny never ceases to maintain its uncanniness—it is self-sustaining because of the unnaturalness of the activity which is the reason for all airport mechanisms (metaphorical and actual) to gather in the architecture. "The necessity of repetition for the statement of difference has been argued in philosophical terms by Derrida,"[69] and in the airport we see this continual demonstration of difference in action upon the body of the traveller.

Yet the airport is itself a body without a centre, and in this way the uncanny is made personal, in that one may find oneself present in the airport as mechanism, and vice versa—part of and simultaneously separate from the airport. Vidler goes on to describe a relation of body to space in Tschumi's La Villette follies that could apply in part to airports as well:

> For while inhabitation of some kind of another is expressed in every element, ramp, stair, or balcony, the potentially occupying body receives no comforting organic referent but is every moment experienced through antibodily states, such as vertigo, sudden vertical and sideways movements, and even potential dissection. The functional analogies of modernism theorized the building as a 'machine for living in,' with the implication that a smoothly running machine, tailored to the body's needs, was modernity's answer to the proportional and spatial analogies of humanism.[70]

A fan of airplane design as ultimate mobilization of imagination with reason,[71] Le Corbusier, describing the house as a "machine for living in," defined modernity's theoretical approach to domestic space. Airports, in contrast to the airplanes they were built to serve, are postmodern in

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[68] Vidler, 111.
[69] Ibid., 110.
[70] Ibid., 112.
[71] See Le Corbusier, 109, "The airplane is indubitably one of the products of the most intense selection in the range of modern industry. . . .We may then affirm that the airplane mobilized invention, intelligence and daring: *imagination* and *cold reason*." 113, "The airplane shows us that a problem well stated finds its solution. [. . .] To invent a flying machine having in mind nothing alien to pure mechanics, that is to say, to search for a means of suspension in the air and a means of propulsion, was to put the problem properly: in less than ten years the whole world could fly." 127, "Machinery includes economy as an essential factor leading to minute selection. There is a moral sentiment in the feeling for mechanics.

The man who is intelligent, cold and calm has grown wings to himself."

their approach to liminal space. We are most closely threatened with antibodily states in the portion of airspace defined by Pascoe as located at take-off and landing. This is the time when the aircraft itself is most likely to operate to its maximum mechanical capacity, and when the antibodily state of rising rapidly from the earth and then approaching it rapidly, with all the potential for disaster contained therein, is applied to individual bodies.

The airport as a concept is an undecidable—airports exist as spaces which simultaneously attempt to understand air travel, while also seeking to deny its fundamental unnaturalness.[72] Airports demonstrate in multiple ways the division and simultaneous presence of inside and outside within each other. They work to break down and reinforce the hierarchy that deconstruction analyses in terms of speech and writing. The aesthetic experience of airports is in a continual state of breaking down, and ultimately the airport must continually try and continually fail its attempts to understand airspace. Yet the airport is an undecidable that can be entered and interacted with, broken down into its various components. Does this make it any less of an undecidable? Or perhaps a new kind of undecidability is presented in the form of the airport?

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[72] Christopher Menke-Eggers, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida,* trans Neil Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 27.

6 subsections of liminal space within airports: "The unerring certainty of mechanism"

- Quote attributed to Charles Babbage, inventor of the "difference engine"

So far in this chapter I have discussed airports generally, as comprising one unit of space more or less—that is to say I have treated the idea of "airport" as a single thing. However, this is only one aspect of how people interact with them. Going to the airport involves moving through its spaces in choreographed steps or stages, each with attendant rules and forms of interaction, and spatial and redundant means of managing these.

As with Perec's account of the street's elements and construct as a whole, my earlier reconstruction of the system for observing airports is also a set of instructions for a reader to follow, and for myself (as writer and observer) to then test—both testing through the writing-out of instructions, and testing through each reader's interpretation and potentially contrasting or common perception of these airport spaces.

The mechanism that is the airport, and each of its individual, ordinary, common and obvious (and yet extraordinary) parts functions with a certainty that belies the state of those who travel through it. Weather lacks certainty; each passenger can be said to embody an unknown quantity; plane parts can malfunction and time taken to repair them may delay the crew beyond their duty time; in this way, nothing is certain in an airport but the airport itself. And yet, it functions as an in-between space: a liminal, undecidable field that acts upon the human elements within it. Few physical places offer so interesting a construct, or inscribe themselves upon their occupants so readily as the airport. What are the parts that make up the whole of our idea and reality of the airport today?

I will begin breaking down public airport spaces into the following substructures:

1. Entrance: through the airport's threshold—from the individual's exit from the mode of transport used to get to the airport, up through the entrance of the airport's outside doors. Perhaps this should be thought of as outside/in, since these spaces encompass opposing functions in both enplaning and deplaning approaches to airports.

2. Identity: check-in and baggage drop, to security. This includes finding the right check-in desk, saying goodbye to any family or friends who have accompanied you thus far, also retrieving baggage from claims and saying hello, meeting people, going through customs after baggage retrieval.
1. Security: baggage scan, body scan, then customs interviews at other end (if international).
2. Wait/consume: duty-free, airport shopping and eating, journey to the gate and waiting, sometimes with a view to your plane.
3. Enplaning/deplaning: last threshold area next to the aircraft—what abuts the plane itself.
4. Planespace: location of self inside the plane. It acts as the fulcrum of the airport experience in the context of the spaces described above, and is the ultimate re-conceptualization of personal space in the fitting of an individual into an assigned seat.

I will use the example of the airport in this way to illustrate how a larger space made of multiple component parts, and in that sense functioning as a mechanism on a grand scale—a black box—may be addressed as a singularity in itself, with the potential to be broken down into smaller portions which are then engaged with separately. The airport, as undecidable, becomes setting for this project's experiment in opening the black box and viewing the contents through dissection of a spatial experience.

But then the question of context and scale must be discussed—for if the whole (airport) is more than the sum of its parts, why then does its importance potentially take up as much theoretical space as one of its smallest components, like the jetway? How does the part come to magnify until it swamps the whole through its own explanation? Perhaps this is a condition of addressing postmodernism: the breakdown of a larger system into its smallest components renders the idea of scale (and of our place within it) distorted and uncanny. In this way the airport functions as the hub of this project. It may be diagrammed in several ways—none of which equate to the linear conception of chapter organization with which I began. With Perec's approach in mind, I may begin to list and describe the elements that make up these six substructures:

1. Entrance: through the airport's threshold—from the individual's exit from the mode of transport used to get to the airport, up through the entrance of the airport's outside doors—outside/in.

Passengers are ferried into airport space via a mode of transport like the shuttle bus, car or train. Airports have gathered specific structures around themselves to accommodate our transitions from transport space into airport space. Our first entrance into (or exit from) airport space is thus often made inside a garage, a train station, a bus station—a concrete platform sheltered from the elements by another concrete platform, a space where we heave our suitcases along behind us and through one of the airport's official (automatic, glass-doored) entrances.

Airports seem to grow from the planes outward,[73] and since the structures of adjoining transport by road and train are often the outermost public elements of an airport, it would follow that they do not hold an individual's spatial orientation with the airport at a high priority in their integrated design. Curving lanes of asphalt approach the airport, sluicing traffic off by terminal name, airline, or pickup and dropoff. Train stations act as terminus without necessarily clarifying how they may relate to the airport itself as anything other than applied structural graft. Upstairs, down an escalator, over a skybridge, the conjoined systems of air and ground transport are held together by spliced corridors and changes in level with which we must perforce adjust, and if carrying baggage of any weight, these changes are underscored by the additional physical bulk. In the changes of level, we must physically acknowledge the commencement of a journey, and navigate indirect routes with a larger-than-normal and awkward self: the self plus luggage.

2. Identity: check-in and baggage drop, to security. This includes finding the right check-in desk, saying goodbye to any family or friends who have accompanied you thus far, also retrieving baggage from claims and saying hello, meeting people, going through customs after baggage retrieval.

Upon entering through the automated airport doors, we pause to locate our airline's bank of check-in desks, and where we must do our first waiting inside airport space. Monitors display flight information, travellers pause to stare up at them. A list of locales, exotic because only one of them is reachable by any given person at any one time, unrolls before us. Ranked by time of departure or arrival, the lack of alphabetisation of the place names lends a poetic charge to their juxtaposition: Dakar, Hong Kong, Boston, Cape Town, Cairo, Kuala Lumpur, Athens, Toronto. Potential journeys exist to each of those places—a particular one has nonetheless been chosen, and at this point I wonder how differently I would be thinking were I to be on a different path to one of those other airports in those other cities.

[73] Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. "Reagan National Airport." http://www.mwaa.com/reagan/about_reagan_national/history_3 (accessed January 2, 2008).One example of this is found in the history of DCA. Overhead views of the terminals reveal how the bodies of the airplanes dictated the arrangements of buildings and paths.

Figure 11: Heathrow Terminal 3 Departure Board, June 2007. Photo by author.

This space is a chance for the architecture to make a grand, light-filled impact upon anyone moving through it. Examples of this can be traced from Dulles Airport's original terminal and Eero Saarinen's TWA terminal at JFK, to later high-ceilinged forms of the light-and-glass structure and like Cesar Pelli's newer terminal building at DCA. The floors in this section of the airport tend to be smooth and hardwearing—stone, tile, or innocuous and replaceable synthetic—to survive the millions of feet and luggage wheels that will pass over them. Any families and friends, those not flying and thus prohibited (post-9/11) from passing through security, wait in the few chairs that are set up, often along the walls, their backs to the windows looking out on the concrete spaces just exited. The smooth floor is not meant as a space to pause—people move past, it's a through route, and the chairs are a poor nod to what is meant as a transient space in which to deposit luggage and prove identity—to declare your intention to occupy your seat on the flight.

Here we meet the nylon-tape-demarcated lines of the check-in desk. These have always made me think of rats in the mazes of a scientific experiment, crawling along between white walls with a Plexiglas ceiling screwed on for observation. It is as though we are being tested to see whether we can find our way to the end, even though the boundaries of the maze aren't walls but nylon strung from movable poles, and with a leap and charge we could be through them on a "line of flight."[74] Almost by default we must honour the tapes and imaginary walls with our

[74] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 116. "The line of flight is like a tangent to the circles of signifiance and the center of the

luggage, forced to walk on hairpin turns until we reach the check-in counter itself, where we are unburdened of our larger bags and are free to meander with no fixed path through the rest of airport space and towards the ultimate destination of the open airplane door. In reality our path through airport space will then be much more rigidly defined than with the nylon tape, as certain areas are off-limits past "security." The restrictions are there, and much more firmly so, but we wander between them scarcely aware of their pressing on us from all sides. Plenty of paths and doors are now locked to us, but rarely if ever do we come directly up against them.

Returning to the moment when we reach the front of the line, and are called up to the check-in desk: we have reached the end of the nylon pathway, and now must prove identity. Rote security questions are asked, variations of: "Did you pack these bags yourself? Have they been out of your possession at any time since? Did anyone ask you to carry anything today?" Sometimes the airline will have an agent stationed in the line itself, examining ticket and passport/ID, questioning passengers and then affixing a sticker to the passport as proof of their having heard correct answers. Nonetheless the same questions may be duplicated upon reaching the check-in desk.

Set free from all baggage barring the carryon, the time approaches to say goodbye to any friends or family who have waited around on those chairs, granted that the passenger was accompanied and not dropped off by car or journeyed alone by bus or train. Goodbyes are said in this public space, as other passengers shift and eddy around as well, heading in different directions. Pictures are taken here. Signifiers of the city you are about to depart are sometimes found in the background, marking the last photo of you actually in that given city.

3. Security: baggage scan, body scan (several common and potential scans possible including methods under testing), then customs interviews at other end (if international).

In between check-in and the departure lounge, one must pass through security screening. This becomes the next threshold, and it has its fraternal twin in the customs and immigration hall on arrival from an international flight. I'd like to focus on the different stages of security screening which together make up this third section of airport liminal space.

Entrance into the mechanistic structure of the security area is through another snaking line, demarcated as well by nylon tapes or more permanent plastic and metal barriers, funnelling travellers towards one of several screening gates marked by the arch of the metal detector gantries. Separated of luggage, outerwear, belts, pocket contents and sometimes shoes, we pad

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signifier." See also 121. "In the first place, a sign or packet of signs detaches from the irradiating circular network and sets to work on its own account, starts running a straight line, as though swept into a narrow, open passage."

through the detectors, listening for the telltale beep that would signal the waiting attendant to take us aside and wave a wand over us looking for whatever caused the beep.

I was fortunate enough to be taken aside once to participate in testing of a new full-body scan at a security gate.[75] I say fortunate, because as soon as I saw (from far back in the line) signs about the device being tested and warnings that people would be chosen randomly to participate, I had hoped they'd pick me so that I could satisfy my curiosity as to what the procedure entailed, screened as it was by a high opaque barrier. There was no real question whether the full-body scan was optional for those asked to participate—I guess that expressing a desire to opt out of it would probably only have aroused significant suspicion. The extra long lines for security created a subtle incentive to participate, since grey-attired employees with clipboards wandered through all of the lines, bringing the chosen few forward and cutting at least 10 minutes off of their waiting time.

Once behind the grey, seven- or eight-foot-high barriers, the woman who plucked me from the line directed me to place my feet on Arthur Murray-style outlines. "Go like this," she said, raising her arms and striking a pose that was half cheerleader, half matador. This was one of several poses I duly struck while a vertical machine (whose all-seeing eye was effectively camouflaged—it just looked like a post) scanned me for contraband. Everyone undergoing the scan, myself included, began giggling at the absurd awkwardness of the incongruous, robotic version of enthusiasm conveyed by our arms-aloft gestures and switches between poses. Although my time in the line was cut much shorter, the scan itself took far longer to complete than the usual stroll through the metal detector. My luggage was perforce ferried along by an airport employee out of my sight, rather than being visible to me during the whole time I participated in the screening.

There is a certain ignominy to the emergence from screening, whether regular or under test. Carryon luggage emerges through a split curtain from the x-ray machine (where sometimes passengers can catch sight of the multicoloured scans of their belongings) and rolls towards its waiting owners, who search for belts, shoes, laptops, coats, and pocket contents, re-assembling their outerwear, in a routine that is usually private but here made public. The screeners are either done with you by now, in which case you have crossed the threshold of their concern and been replaced by another suspect, or they are very much attending to you and your luggage as they conduct a hand search of your baggage, spreading its contents out on a table that serves as the last line of demarcation between security and the hallways leading to duty-free shops or terminal

[75] Flight from London Heathrow to Vienna, February 2006.

pathways. Bags of non-searched passengers are often gathered in a space immediately adjacent to any searches taking place from your particular screening line, which underlines the distinction that there but for the grace of machines and their readers might you be waiting now.

In August 2006, a fresh wave of terrorism scares meant that new rules were introduced whereby passengers must surrender all liquid and gel items. This was later revised to cover only any liquids and gels over a certain size or amount. This new step in the chain, the divestiture of liquids was set up to take place as passengers approach the security screening.

Figure 12: Approach to Heathrow Terminal 3 Security Screening, June 2007. Photo by author.

Abandoned, discarded liquids sit there on tables next to piles of new clear plastic bags or overflowing trash cans, each station sometimes manned by an attendant who remonstrates with those ignorant of the policy or its changing rules. This provides a messy transition between sections 2 and 3, a haphazard accent to the funnelling lines directing you and your carry-ons towards the x-ray machines, and a reminder that everything in this environment tows a malignant potential like a shadow behind it, as though these objects, bottles of contact lens solution, tubes of lip gloss, would all lie dormant until some awful transformative awakening in an airplane lavatory at 30,000 feet.

4. Wait/consume: duty-free, airport shopping and eating, journey to the gate and waiting.

After security comes shopping. Offering travellers a respite from taxation, the duty-free shops of international terminals are laid out with potential purchases grouped by commodity type, though paying for them requires standing in line at a centralized cash register and producing

a boarding pass. At this point identity and legitimate travel must be proved again at the checkout counter to enable the passenger to fulfil the role of a consumer.

Here begins the bulk of the waiting. With advisable pre-flight arrival times stretching into hours, passengers are left sitting and waiting for either gate information to be displayed, or boarding to commence. Food is consumed (often fast, often cheap) and territory is staked among the ranks of pleather seating. In the early 1980's, the old terminal of Washington (now Reagan) National Airport used to have ranks of conjoined chairs, each seat with a small integrated TV set built into one arm. In American airports today, flatscreens suspend CNN broadcasts and flight information from the ceiling of the waiting areas, and many people within earshot assume a raised-eye posture of disinterested, slouching awareness of the scrolling news and information. Those wishing to ensconce themselves with an individual entertainment device now have the ability (and means) to have something portable, and not to rely solely on the airport space and furnishings to provide individual diversions, like the Washington airport TVs. In that example we have taken over the role of those chairs in DCA, and perform part of their function. The airport has prescribed the responsibility for our own entertainment back onto us.

For now, we'll linger in the departure lounge, in this hefty chunk of waiting before it's time to board the plane, in order to further contemplate what it might mean to treat the space as a destination itself, and how we might then be able to deconstruct the undecidable of the airport. Spending longer on an exploration of this space here reflects the increased proportion of time spent in the space as a passenger.

Departure Lounge: Touring Airport Spaces

I believe it is possible to enter airport spaces from any passenger perspective—whether rushing through to catch a connecting flight or spending the night in a terminal on purpose—and to be transformed by the experience, so what is it about airport space that offers a culture in which to participate or observe?

We have looked at the three-letter codes previously as one example of an aspect of airport culture that has become participatory. I would like to focus now on the departure lounge space of the airport as a kind of tourist pre-site. This section of the project will explore the intersection of tourism and airport space by examining the uneasy relationship of the contemporary tourist with the liminal space of the airport departure lounge, re-casting airports as tourist destinations in themselves. In a sense we are all tourists (non-natives) of airport space, and I am here interested in questioning how airports both exploit and mask their airportness for the transient tourist (who is governed by the idea of a destination at the end of the flight) and the tourist of airport space (for whom the airport itself becomes a kind of tourist objective).[76]

How does airport space mediate our experience of tourism? What do airports offer the tourist, accidental or otherwise? Architecture, a vision of the locale, and souvenirs all contribute to the airport's function as a gateway or portal to and from a particular place. To what extent can we approach a greater understanding of airports through examining these forms of airport tourism?

Of course not all airline passengers are tourists in the strictest sense – business travellers, or "deadheading" airline employees[77] for example might travel through airports regularly without tourism as part of their conscious agenda. However, keeping this in mind, for the scope of this investigation (and to nod to the variety of circumstances under which people now take flights) it is most useful to refer to all passengers as potential tourists of airport space, since to some degree the airport addresses each of its temporary citizens with the same tourist-based approach. Airport space must somehow buffer its captive passengers from their own situation, and does this by using some elements of a tourist experience as means to mediate control within the confines of the departure lounge. Local cultural sights and souvenirs attempt to reinforce the airport's association with a distinct place, rather than its potential function as a culture in and of itself.

[76] For purposes of this project's observation, I am here examining the passenger's perspective as airport citizen, and not that of the airport workers. (This does not rule out acknowledging the former's curiosity about the latter, however.)

[77] "Deadheading" is the airline industry term for those staff who are not on shift but nonetheless traveling by airplane for work-related reasons.

We start at a point where the passenger has arrived at the airport, checked in, and proceeded through security screening. All that awaits him or her now is to board the plane. People inhabiting the space of an airport departure lounge, who are there for the purpose of travel and not employment as airport staff, I will therefore refer to as passengers. If we were to build a narrative around this space of departure lounges, what would it be like? A narrative of waiting, punctuated by consuming, bookended before and after by the activity of queuing at the thresholds of the security scan and the jetway onto the plane itself.

In the opening passages of *Non-places*, Augé uses a narrative device to introduce the reader to a (seemingly generic) passenger's experience of contemporary airspace and air travel. While his Pierre Dupont (our protagonist) is in the airport, waiting for the "sequence of events" after his check-in and before his flight, he meditates upon the time and space of the departure lounge, thinking of himself situated inside the airport as, "just the two of us!

> ...these days, surely, it was in these crowded places where thousands of individual itineraries converged for a moment, unaware of one another, that there survived something of the uncertain charm of the waste lands, the yards and building sites, the station platforms and waiting rooms where travellers break step, of all the chance meeting places where fugitive feelings occur of the possibility of continuing adventure, the feeling that all there is to do is to 'see what happens'.[78]

This description occupies a relatively small space in Augé's narrative prologue, however it is the space that typifies his term "non-place." It is this "non-place," the departure lounge and its environs, which I argue has a transformative effect upon travellers. What Augé calls a non-place is actually weighted with a culture of the liminal – a transitory, transitional space writ large for passengers, surrounding them and yet usually invisible and unavoidable in contemporary air travel.

In recent work on the culture of US airport screening, Lisa Parks concludes, through her observation of the particulars of close examination involved in post-September 11th TSA screening, that the airport is no longer a "non-place," but rather has become "the place:" a discursive space wherein the elements of the TSA orchestrate and reproduce a set of protocols on freedom of movement, "a charged and volatile domain punctuated by shifting regimes of biopower."[79] The supermodernity encountered by Augé's Pierre Dupont is in actuality a cultural

[78] Augé, 3.

[79] Lisa Parks, "Points of Departure: The Culture of US Airport Screening," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 6, no.2 (2007): 186.

function of airport space as "*the* place" where security, technology, and globalisation now collide.[80]

Having passed through the space occupied by the culture of airport screening, passengers must then await boarding. This is seemingly a necessarily empty time to be filled with what the airport lounge itself might offer in the way of culture, that is to say commodities: CNN on ceiling-mounted screens, fast food consumed on modular seating, perhaps with a view of the runway or apron where ground staff move between parked planes and airport vehicles. As Parks describes, the airport users, the jetset, wield the tickets and the economic power inside this space.

Upon clearing security, shopping presents itself as the next most likely activity, particularly if you have had to abandon any liquids or gels outside the secure area. "Duty Free" shopping also offers a chance to purchase non-necessities: perfume, designer brands of makeup, large containers of candy. The branding of a duty free shop creates a safe, neutral space in which to consume luxury items that may be inaccessible outside the airport, due to price or perceived exclusivity. The fact that they are tax-free acts as an incentive: you're getting a bargain, but not really a bargain—money is still being handed over for luxury commodities. These commodities are on display but are often not the only things set up specifically as displays. Airports also make use of exhibitions in order to influence passengers in the departure lounge. These may take several forms, and I will address them here together under the umbrella of airport exhibits, though they are not all exhibits in the museum sense.

In the first instance, the airplanes and outside activity of the apron may act as de facto exhibits. Through picture windows, passengers can watch their own plane being prepared for flight, baggage being loaded or offloaded, flights taking off and landing, and glimpse the complex and inaccessible working life of the airport "behind the scenes."

[80] Ibid., 185.

Figure 13: Heathrow Apron, December 2006. Photo by author.

More conventional types of exhibition displays are also encountered in these spaces, including artistic or didactic objects relating to the airport's locale, or most interestingly, to passenger security and safety. For example, wall art and showcased displays may act as means of diverting attention and slowing passenger progress down a hallway, while they invite consideration of their contents: local art or artefacts, perhaps seized contraband objects. It is this latter example that I wish to explore further, and by its means re-apply Latour's use of the term "black box" to airport spaces.

To return to the article "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer," Latour focuses on the self-closing door hinge in particular, as an example of what he terms a "black box," in order to point out and then unpack the complexity of human and nonhuman interaction involved in the entrance or exit from any structure: "you simply have to imagine that every time you want to get in or out of the building you have to do the same work as a prisoner trying to escape or a gangster trying to rob a bank, plus the work of those who rebuild either the prison's or the bank's walls."[81] The black box is a mechanism or system whose workings go unnoticed until it breaks down, at which point we recognize it as existing, important, yet necessarily obscure. Latour's central observation about the "door-closer" is that there is only one human to discipline should a door-closer be employed, rather than disciplining each user of the door, and that making the door-closer into a mechanical function then

[81] Latour, 299.

"blackboxes" the theoretically arduous process of passing through a door (or "hole-wall") that he details in the quote above. I reiterate this here in order to make the point that, as the mechanism of the door-closer has blackboxed that process, so airports have in turn blackboxed the contemporary passenger's transformation into the tourist.

Figure 14 (left): Prohibited Items on Display in Salt Lake City Airport. Photo by Rick Segal, http://ricksegal.typepad.com/pmv/2005/week31/index.html, (accessed April 9, 2007).

Figure 15 (right): Kansai Airport Customs Display, http://www.flickr.com/photos/27607620@N00/368871125/(accessed April 9, 2007).

All forms of the airport displays mentioned here are a means of interaction between the human (traveller/passenger/tourist) and the non-human mechanisms of airport space, a means for the airport space to discipline passengers. Museum-like displays of seized contraband invite passengers to view one of the airport's black boxes, but for a specific, deterrent, purpose – such that the airport mechanism in this way uses one of its own black box tools as a means of control over humans by non-humans, while leaving other black boxes in airport space intact and for the most part, invisible.

To revisit, Latour refers to this kind of "behavior imposed back onto the human by nonhuman delegates" with the term *prescription*:

> How can these prescriptions be brought out? By replacing them by strings of sentences (usually in the imperative) that are uttered (silently and continuously) by the mechanisms

> for the benefit of those who are mechanized: do this, do that, behave this way, don't go that way. Such sentences look very much like a programming language.[82]

What is therefore prescribed by the space of the departure lounge?

Wait

Consume

Comply

Know (and ignore) that you are being watched

This is a space where pictograms replace words, numbers of gates may appear out of scale and gigantic, and distances may be measured in projected travel-time.

Held in the waiting game of the departure lounge, passengers find themselves complying with the parameters of this particular black box, in Latour's metaphorical sense. The mechanistic metaphor of the black box, as we see here (re)made physical in airport spaces, may act as an architectural example of the human need to mediate the potential of a group space, in this case the departure lounge, whose rules for individual inhabitation are strict yet opaque. When might the departure lounge break down, and call its own black box status into question? Is sleeping in an airport perhaps a way to deconstruct and inhabit the black box?

Reading through the anecdotes and recommendations on such sites as sleepinginairports.net provides insight into aspects of the departure lounge that tend to recede into the background of a passenger's awareness during the "busier" waiting times, and which become glaringly apparent when sleeping in an airport (recasting the waiting area), such that it becomes urgent to find a way to deal with them. These include the standard security announcements over the PA, and the disturbance caused by the sweeps made by cleaning crew or other airport staff.[83] These also occur during normal daylight waiting times, as portions of the airport routine that integrate almost seamlessly with the sensory stimulation accompanying the departure lounge as consumer environment. But when the stores are all shut and the ranks of seats are largely empty, these repetitions in the pattern of airport space emerge – we notice them because they prevent sleep. Similarly, interactions with the airport's employees are thrown into greater relief.

Sleepinginairports.net includes testimonials from travellers with differing reasons for attempting to sleep there: those who miss a flight connection, plan a long layover overnight and

[82] Latour, 301.

[83] Paul Bingham, comment on Chicago O'Hare in Donna McSherry, ed., "The Budget Traveller's Guide to Sleeping in Airports," comment posted July 1999, sleepinginairports.net, (accessed April 9, 2007). "There are cops that don't bother sleepers, but the cleaning crews roll through between 2:00 am and 5:00 am and have very noisy machines."

elect to remain in the airport to avoid paying for a short stay in a hotel, or perhaps have an early-morning flight and decide to arrive late the previous evening in order to comply with the suggested 3-hour-early check-in time. Finding themselves there either by choice or accident, reviewers on the site are generally practical about the benefits and drawbacks of sleeping in particular airports. Toilets, lounge-seating configurations, climate control, even floor surfaces are reviewed and taken to task for their utility in these overnight situations.

In addition, many of the anecdotes reflect a concern for the availability of consumer goods at unsociable hours. Reviewers on the site express distress at their inability to consume – for example in describing how no food stalls were open between the hours of midnight and 5:30 am so they were not able to buy anything to eat, and no shops were open overnight either, so they were not able to purchase anything to distract them from the passing hours.

Equally, reviewers are pleased when noting those services that are accessible overnight, for example the all-night book kiosk, however minimal, that remains open to display the staples of the airport literary market. This is one example of the non-human airport space's prescription upon the human which comes starkly to light once the prescription cannot be fulfilled. In those situations, the passenger is not able to fulfil the role of that now-absent TV chair from DCA.

In terms of the overnight population of airport space, the preference seems to be for cleaning staff to be present, but not too present – thus acting as a security feature alongside any guards employed for that purpose.[84] Probably the most useful tip I have gotten from this site is to search out the chapel when looking for a place to sleep in an airport. It will normally be shielded from the PA system and be located in an enclosed space not lit by overhead fluorescent lights.

As individual descriptions, these reviews do not have a place in the usual spectrum of tourist literature. Taken together however, the site offers a new perspective on the unique liminal space that is the airport: it offers a tourist guide to global airport space, and implicitly treats airports as destinations. It provides insight, advice, and a sense that there is a fellow human out there who has gone before you, and lived to tell the tale of its coded restrictive spaces and even perhaps gotten something useful (if only a few hours' nap) out of an unusual spatial and cultural experience. It describes one of Latour's metaphorical black boxes in physical terms of human utility and comfort, and in this way allows the stranded passenger to actively inhabit a mechanism in which we are only expected to passively participate.

What do these examples reveal, through their spectacle or concealment, about the cultural politics of airport spaces and airports' relation with tourism? These are the spaces of

[84] Anonymous comment on Chicago O'Hare, in Ibid., (accessed April 9, 2007). "The cleaning staff was unobtrusive, and I felt better that there was someone around."

waiting – in the airport we wait to attain the status of tourists, we are already on our holiday and yet not at our destination. We have paid to become passengers, and so we are paying to wait and to follow the prescriptions of the departure lounge, and become frustrated when this arrangement breaks down. The airport is both an integral part of tourism and not a part of the pre-conceived tourist experience. The departure lounge is a liminal time and space, where we as tourists are maintained as part of a larger machine, moving and waiting, spending and complying as needed.

The strategic play of hide and reveal achieved by airport displays is acting upon human passengers in order to entertain and distract them during their time spent waiting in the departure lounge, while also serving, through displaying contraband items, to reinforce an imposed restriction of objects not allowed onboard. The strategic reveal here is the display contents, while what remains hidden is the black box function: the control thus implied upon passengers under the guise of providing them insight into the black box that is the airport.

Departure lounges reproduce a fantasy of air travel and tourism, and a stratified, consumer-driven economy, yet one where the consumer is controlled and passively participatory inside a largely invisible and distinctively cultured mechanism. The departure lounge holds its passengers precisely within the very particular space of the airport, while simultaneously promoting fantasies of imminent flight. It presents us with mediated spectacles of itself in the forms of displayed commodities, exhibits, or airplane activities, yet remains essentially inaccessible.

5: The jetway

After the waiting time in the departure lounge, an announcement is made to all the passengers to inaugurate the shift into planespace. People begin to sit up straighter and gather their things together, and begin to listen for their appointed boarding order. Here, people are marked out according to a set of priorities, ranked into a hierarchy either set by the passengers, the airline policy, or the luck of the assigned seating. Entrance into the jetway is controlled by airline and airport staff, and here identity and itinerary must be matched and confirmed once more. Sometimes these are checked by the same people who worked at the check-in counter, who may be looking over the same information yet again. Behind the scenes, staff compare their own lists.

The jetway becomes the next space of transition encountered by passengers, and as the narrowest part of the funnel of humans into planespace, interprets the idea of "hallway" and is the last physical contact with the airport itself that a passenger will have. In this sense the jetways are the extremities of airport architecture. They possess certain distinct physical features, among these their mobility. As telescopically-functioning hallways, they can be braced at the airport on one end, and mounted on large wheels planeside, with a control panel and window for an operator—a drivable building. The changeability of the structure recalls Constant's Situationist "New Babylon," a city incorporating movable, malleable spaces.[85] The jetway becomes, for the passenger, a door that grows into a hallway.

Along this hallway the passenger may encounter carpeted floors, changes in level, width, and ceiling height (though the ceilings are of necessity low ones), and advertisements often repeating the same thing.[86] The jetway is a hallway without a surrounding building—more akin to a pier. As the chain of passengers makes its way onto the plane, the floor of the jetway shifts underneath with the weight—a first indication of the uncertain movements yet to come. The narrowness and lack of appeal in these telescoping hallways help drive the passengers forward onto the plane, and stay focused on the journey ahead. (Any standing and waiting necessitated while on the jetway has always seemed to me to be accompanied by far more impatient huffing and sighing than almost any other queues in airport space, rivalled only by the security queues.) It is an unappealing space in this sense—it acts to move passengers forward, without presenting the possibility of retreat—it is a space in which passengers may perceive that they no longer have a

[85] Sadler, 132.
[86] I recall here Heathrow and Gatwick's jetways, placarded inside and festooned outside with advertisements for HSBC, "the world's local bank."

choice as to their movement. It can be a relief to get settled into the assigned seat on the plane, establishing a set personal space once more and escaping an overtly liminal zone.

It is at the end of the jetway that passengers have their first physical contact with the airplane itself—rows of rivets, individual paint surfaces, and the thickness of the airplane's structure are all laid bare to view at this point. The accordion-pleated material at the end of the jetway attempts to conform to the curve of the airplane's body, but inevitably outside air enters—the jetway is not a sealed space. Smells and sounds of the apron and runway enter passengers' perception, forcing the realization that these have been dampened while they were inside the airport. Since the entrance into airport space, it is the only environment encountered that is not heavily climate-controlled. After emerging from a flight onto a jetway in a new city, the local climate (and its potential contrast to that left behind) is first appreciated here. The passenger might first here begin to actively sense the difference in the two points of his or her journey.

6: Planespace itself

Inside planespace, and having settled in to a seat, each passenger must re-conceptualize his or her personal space. The placement of the self inside an assigned seat is the fulfilment of the itinerary, all of the security checks and identity proofs offered; it is the point at which the entirety of the transition through airport space has aimed. As such, it becomes the least important space to think about inhabiting in terms of the airport as liminal space. I am placing the least importance on the practical properties of this space, as it is an endpoint, a kind of fulcrum, rather than a liminal mechanism of airport architecture.

It does however have elements that echo the airport's use of space. The airplane space is full of distractions that act upon passengers at the same time that warnings and their instilled sense of danger serve to control passenger behavior. The distractions include: the seatback entertainment; the view out the windows; the inflight magazine with its articles, puzzles, and information about the destination; food and beverage services (both the act of being served and the food itself); other passengers; and finally, turbulence and any other trouble encountered along the route, including in-flight delays.

The visible surfaces of the airplane include many highly-manufactured materials—multiple forms of plastic and machined metal make up airplane interiors. Seams appear where there may not need to be seams, a characteristic that helps disguise where the actual stress points of the aircraft may be. There is a personal set of signs over each seat, though they are replicated

multiple times in the same row of adjacent seats. This helps reinforce the distinction that the seat itself and the space of air above it that reaches to the bottom of the overhead luggage bin is a space meant only for its assigned passenger. There are limited environmental controls meant for this seat as well, including the window shade (if one is in a window seat), the seatback adjustments, the air vent, and the reading light. All of these reinforcements highlight any transgression of this temporarily-rebordered and occupied personal space.

Discussing the circumstances of planespace itself would be incomplete without acknowledging the black box that is the cockpit. Although passengers towards the front of the plane may catch a glimpse inside this room, it remains a space insulated from understanding by those whose existence up in the air are dependent upon the humans, machines, and systems working together therein. The airplane's actual black boxes, the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder (especially the latter) are the only way for outsiders to access and dissect what goes on inside this space, and then only due to a reveal of the cockpit's black box function through failure.

Vignette: Failure in the airport – Merhan Nasseri, citizen of Charles de Gaulle

Around the time Steven Spielberg's film *The Terminal* was released, news articles proliferated about the man whose story formed the basis of the film's plot: a traveller, rendered stateless en route through airspace, becomes trapped in the border zone of the airport, unable to either leave or officially enter the country, and ends up living his life entirely within the airport's confines.[87] Far from urban myth, a refugee named Merhan Karimi Nasseri lived in Charles de Gaulle airport for upwards of 16 years following a chain of events that left him without papers while travelling between countries in Europe.[88] Originally from Iran, although he also claims British ancestry, Nasseri has also adopted the name Sir Alfred. The facts of his existence and how he came to be stranded inside the airport vary somewhat between news reports of his life, as his own retelling of his story has shifted during his years inside Charles de Gaulle. Accounts of Nasseri's more recent life from those helping him (doctors and lawyers among them) suggest that, by remaining in a place designed for temporary occupation, he has become mentally ill, his life story and origins now grown so distorted by years spent in the airport that no one can be certain what the truth is. Trapped for so long "in a lost dimension of absurd bureaucratic entanglement," even after he received his papers he no longer wished to leave the airport.[89]

Paul Berczeller, a journalist who spent an extended amount of time with Nasseri interviewing and filming him, describes how the rhythms of airport life became Nasseri's own—the sight of regular waves of activity passing his red bench in Terminal 1 at the same times each day brought, for example, Japanese arriving in the mornings and Africans in the evenings.[90] Berczeller's research into Nasseri's past also seemed to definitively reveal that he had "arrived sane at the airport."[91] Blaming this on bureaucracy, I wonder instead if those rhythms of airport life, of Nasseri's confinement and existence in a suspended liminal state should not instead take primary credit for the transformation. Finding himself with no proof of identity, he has existed without one for so long that the potential for again attaining an identity, and leaving the airport, is now unthinkable as it would destroy the airport-induced state he occupies. Perhaps through this long occupation of the airport, and his final rejection of the chance to depart, a failure has here been enacted in the person of one man—one life wasted in suspension. Attuned to and integrated within the airspace, Nasseri has come to embody the liminal; a complete occupation of

[87] Steven Spielberg, *The Terminal*, DVD (Dreamworks Home Entertainment, 2005).
[88] Barbara Mikkelson, "Stranded at the Airport," Urban Legends Reference Pages, last updated December 17, 2005, http://www.snopes.com/travel/airline/airport.asp (accessed January 1, 2007).
[89] Paul Berczeller, "The Man Who Lost His Past," *The Guardian* (London), September 6, 2004.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

airport space has brought with it a fundamental failure of self-perception. Merhan Nasseri is no longer a tourist of the airport departure lounge, but as Berczeller describes his attraction for reporters and film crews, he has become a tourist sight.

It is interesting to compare Nasseri's liminal existence with Chris Marker's film *La Jetée*. Like the "sequencing of slides" Augé refers to,[92] this short film is narrated in a series of still images. Pivotal images of the film occur at Orly airport on the viewing platform, where our narrator recalls seeing a woman's face reacting to a man falling to his death from above. This moment is both start and endpoint for the narrative, told in voiceover and flashback. The narrative is not quite circular in its autobiographical shape, though the return to the physical space of the airport pier as simultaneous endpoint and beginning would seem to indicate this.[93] Instead the film's narrative thread has something akin to a spiral shape—a potentially infinite first-person spiral. Though potentially infinite, it nonetheless has a point at which it began—like an algorithm, or an Oulipian "machine for writing."[94]

The film foregrounds the importance of a mental image as a means to access restricted areas, in this case areas of differing spacetime. Our narrator is the subject of experiments conducted in underground caves in a dystopian future. The experiments concentrate "on men with very strong mental images," and the main character was "selected because he was glued to an image of his past," the image of this woman on Orly's viewing pier. When the man, travelling through time, meets the woman again in a museum "of ageless animals," it is a "bulls-eye. Thrown at the right moment, he may stay there, and move without trouble."[95] This recalls Walter Benjamin's work on museums in the *Arcades Project*, wherein "this thirst for the past forms something like the principal object of my analysis – in light of which the inside of the museum appears as an interior magnified on a giant scale."[96] Memory of the jetty at Orly is a memory of the outside, accessed from inside the mind, inside another time.[97]

This idea of the magnified interior connects both *La Jetée*'s focus on a spiral return to an image of Orly pier, and Nasseri's existence inside CDG. Airport interiors themselves appear magnified, distorted or with the threat of distortion always a potential aspect of our passage through them. The magnified interior for *La Jetée*'s narrator is a mental image, carried with him so strongly that he is selected for time-travel experiments because of it, and ultimately it reveals to him the moment of his own death, a death set in airspace. The pier on Orly airport, built for

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[92] Augé, 85.
[93] Cf. Eli Friedlander, "*La Jetée*: Regarding the Gaze," *boundary 2*, 28, no. 1 (2001): 82.
[94] See Mathews and Brotchie, 179.
[95] Chris Marker, *La Jetée/Sans Soleil*, DVD (Nouveaux Pictures, 2003).
[96] Benjamin, 407.
[97] Cf. Friedlander, 88.

plane watching, becomes the site of a spiralled return to self at the moment of death. The setting is within liminal airspace—a space of passage through—and becomes a site for failure.

Merhan Nasseri's existence in CDG has become entirely interiorised, and his story evokes a sense of the true potential for failure hidden within the banal areas of airspace. His failure to leave the airport, physically and subsequently mentally from "an interior magnified on a grand scale," brings home the disjunction possible then an individual is forced to continually exist within a space meant for mass transit.

This sense of failure's inscription within the airport, embodied here in the person of Nasseri, is an aspect of this project as a whole that I would like to draw out in connection with the failed mechanisms of chapter 1, and foreshadowing the potential for mistake, inbuilt or otherwise, in the systems of autobiography explored in the chapter to come.

Conclusion

Now that we have funnelled ourselves into the airplane through this investigation, passing through the airport and its processes along the way with the help of Perec's approach to the materials of a Parisian street, and acknowledging failure's role as well, I would like to end with an image of air travel provided by an informant to whom I spoke only briefly about my research.[98] Shortly after I was introduced to him as someone researching and writing about airports, he described his idea of the space of air travel as "a long tunnel." He envisioned air travel as guiding him to the space of actual transit inside the plane, which he saw as a tunnel of space no wider than the airplane itself. This tunnel stretched out ahead to the destination and behind to his origin. He described himself as a nervous flier and the inevitability of always facing forward in this tunnel he found to be a characteristic of his impulse to fear it.

Several things are interesting to me about this conception of the space of air travel. It is interesting in its disregard for the outside areas of the plane as nonexistent for this spatial concept of travelling. The views seen out the window may as well be on TV screens in this tunnel idea—the space outside the plane is not acknowledged as a space as such that the plane (and hence passenger) must move through. What defines the travel is the sense of moving rapidly along a tunnel, forward. The walls of the plane become the important boundaries. It is also interesting that the idea of a tunnel relates directly to the space of the jetway. There is virtually no way left but forward while making that last approach to planespace—it is at the jetway perhaps that my informant's tunnel might be said to begin.

The tunnel as an idea in relation to airport space is intriguing with respect to the liminal's possibilities in architecture. For example, the infinite tower of Hugh Ferriss's illustration of the New York City building code's defined maximum parameters offer an idea extended only in the mind, unbound by the laws of physics:[99]

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[98] Informal conversation, 29 June, 2007. Though consenting to this conversation's use in my dissertation, this informant wished to remain anonymous.

[99] See also Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: a Retrospective Manifesto for Manhattan* (London: Academy Editions, 1978).

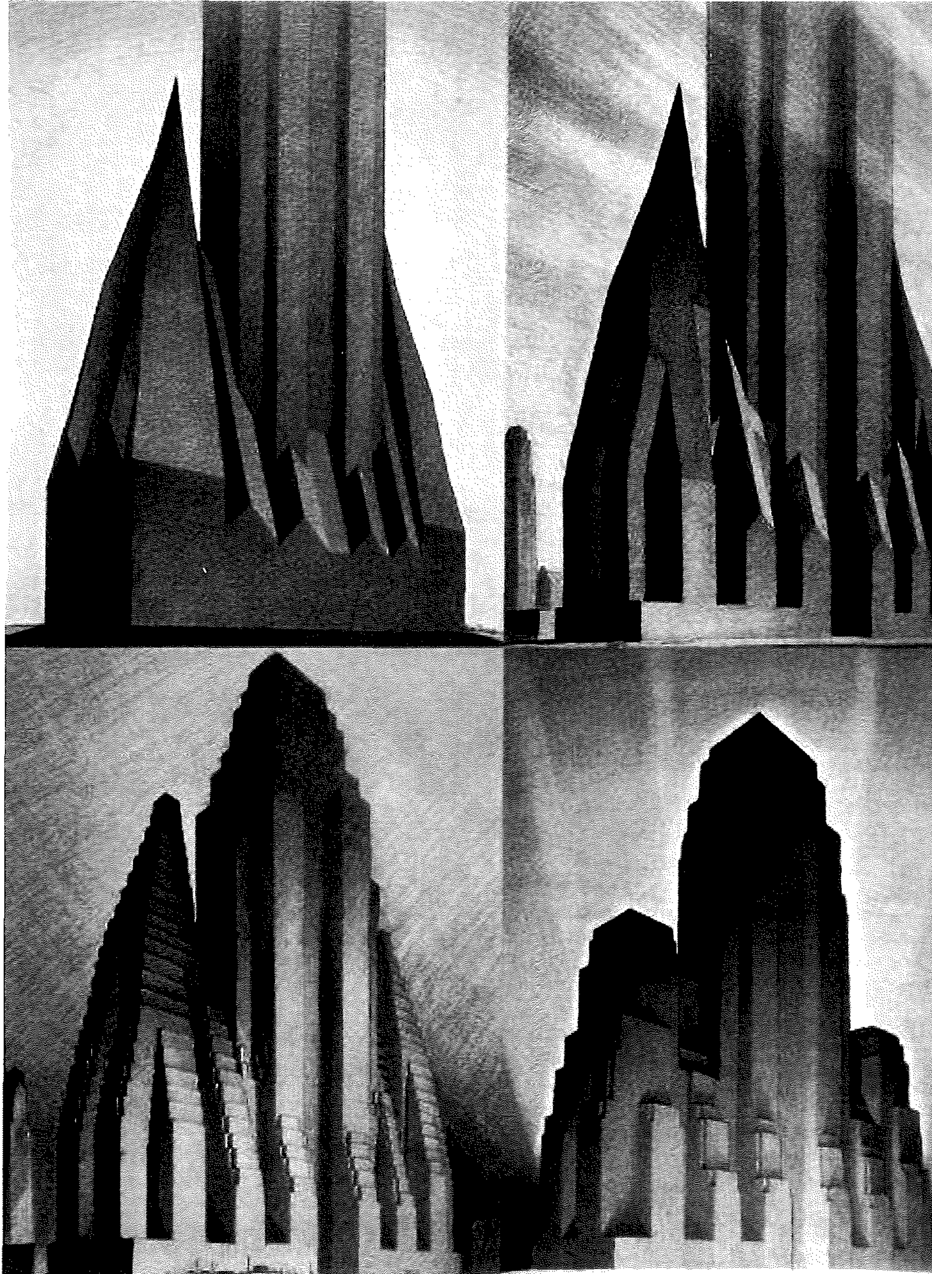

Figure 16: The New York City Zoning Law, illustrations by Hugh Ferriss, 1916. Image sourced from http://www.arch.tu-dresden.de/ibad/Baugeschichte/Vorlesung_Die_Stadt_New_York.html (accessed 9 December 2007).

Is the network of airports and air traffic itself a kind of infinite idea of space, able to be dipped into in parts by travellers, but never physically experienced or envisioned though nonetheless it does exist? Taken to the extreme, the networks of air spaces that we can access at points inside airports form a kind of tunnel that continues infinitely. We write a version of it with each of our itineraries, and embody it in the time during which we participate in the mechanisms of air

travel, though we are physically restricted from fulfilling it entirely—there are too many potential outcomes.

It is this first-person expression of potential outcomes of a system that I will explore further in the next chapter, when addressing the Oulipo, systems of writing and autobiography. My use of one part of *Species of Spaces* has foreshadowed this in terms of content, by asking whether airport spaces can be observed using a method based upon Perec's. His system guides us into examining what we have gotten into the habit of no longer noticing. Using airports has become habitual, and this is demonstrated when a new security measure is implemented, as with the restrictions on transporting liquids and gels. In the US, travellers are now being prescribed to habituate themselves to this restriction through signs which offer "3-1-1" as a type of mnemonic device for easy recall of the number of fluid ounces per sealed plastic bag allowed per passenger. 3-1-1 is a means of managing failure.

Through this chapter's dissections of particular airspaces, I have explored how they function as a whole liminal architectural concept, as mechanisms, and as a series of liminal spaces, and acknowledged the persistence of failure as an aspect of these. The airport and its subsections of liminal spaces each function as black boxes, prescribing behaviour onto us, and exerting control through a panoptic sensibility. In exploring the potential offered by sleeping in airports, I have examined one way in which airport space can be deconstructed by those coming up against its black boxes, through the circumstance of spending the night in an airport. Those who sleep in airports engage in a dialogue with the space and its black boxes to a much greater degree than those more transient occupants. It is this dialogue with the system, embodied in a first-person spatial experience, which will also be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 3

Systems of Writing, Autobiography, and the Public Space of the Airport

Introduction

Between reader and writer

On interaction between reader and text

Vignette: the Airport as You Like It

Systems of Autobiography: the Oulipo and choice of texts

On silent reading

Inscription and Prescription

Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*

Vignette: 30 Shops, Bars, and Restaurants Inside

Michel Leiris, "...'Reusement!" and *Rules of the Game*

Vignette: Larding in the Airport

Georges Perec's *W or The Memory of Childhood*

Georges Perec's *Species of Spaces*

Conclusion: an autobiography of airports

Introduction

This chapter will look more closely at "the public sphere-to-be, the space generated by print."[100] Taking as examples autobiographical writing produced by Oulipian systems, this chapter will draw out ideas of space in and of literature, then describe how these texts make use of space, and interrogate how each in turn speaks to ideas of airport space and vice versa. More specifically, how is the experience and significance of reading these like an experience of passing through airport space?

In considering the space of language, it becomes necessary to define two separate (but not binary) concerns: these may be articulated as the space *within* literature and the space *of* it. The space *within* it being the local characteristics of any named places within a given work, even relatively anonymous designations such as "house," "street," etc.—in other words the space projected (imagined) within the mind of the reader, where objects have a relation to one another and within which the story moves. The space *of* a work I understand to be a separate but interactive and mutable function of the language within a prose form. I will address this within the context of the liminal spaces of this project: just how does the language used react with the space of itself?

The spatial assumptions that accompany each genre of writing exist below the radar of usual perception—in this sense they are black boxes that are accepted and then recede due to their genre designation. They are accepted on their own terms without being called into question as such, or if so, only the space *within*, not *of*, might be of concern. This latter space, the space *of*, is what I can't avoid noticing when reading, and leads me to look more closely at genre classification and what makes "experimental" writing experimental.

I hypothesize that certain kinds of prose writing manipulate this latter space in a way that complements considerations of first-person interaction with spaces in everyday life, outside of literature. An author's use of language forces turns of the reader's mind throughout the assemblage of meaning from an unconventional storytelling method, whose process and result is ultimately a refiguring of reading itself based upon spatially manipulated language.

Since I began writing about writing, thinking first about the space of and in fiction and other prose forms has been my default approach to literature. Approaching reading through a foregrounding of imagination of spaces is the clearest path for my own critical understanding of any given work. This kind of approach threatens to become problematic, narrowing the focus

[100] Julian Yates, *Error, Misuse, Failure: Object Lessons from the English Renaissance* (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press: 2003), 65.

through tunnel vision rather than conscious decision. By looking for and linking that spatial awareness across disciplines, objects, and modes of thought about space, examining reading in the context of these works will find a creative link between diverse subjects, illuminating each more on its own than it would be under a compartmentalized analysis, and finding concrete reasons that support my intuition for a spatial reading of literature—turning an instinct into a choice.

I began this project with the intuition that if (for example) each individual's trip through the city involves a unique, personal map of the city, each literary text takes this spatial perception one step further; we come to understand a text through an imagined space, and an accompanying memory of that imagination as created through the act of reading. With respect to the project as a whole, this is an example of the first-person being necessary to the approach—for the purposes of my study, it is impossible to think and read as a crowd. A text, like a revolving door, dices a group into individuals.

The questions informing this line of inquiry include: How do we encounter space upon the page? Is it possible to say there was a particular time when the importance of space to written language first became distinct? What shifts in perception occur when reading a text spatially? How might looking at literature, particularly experimental prose, complement a study of an individual's perception and memory formation within a space engineered for public movement? Is there a greater link to be found between the creation of an individual space-memory—the airport in my example—and an individual reading of a text? What does each tell us about the other? How might considering autobiographical works inform these?

I understand the textual space itself to have qualities most akin to an imagination of architectural spaces. It's necessary in writing about writing to separate these as dual concerns that function within a text, but are not opposed to one another. In particular I have chosen to consider prose works by writers who make use of systems of writing as a form of language game. Examining space in these terms allows it to be placed more clearly in the context of a reader's personal dialogue with the text. To further refine the field of inquiry, I've chosen autobiographical works, including texts that make explicit use of autobiography as one of the systemic constraints, for the way they engage with the self as isolated body and sole repository for the memories of one life.[101] Through these, I will trace the concerns raised by this project's examinations of liminal mechanisms and airport spaces. If, as Marc Blanchard writes of the autobiographical work of Michel Leiris, "the autobiographer's goal is not to isolate the truth but to illuminate the mechanisms (very much a Leirisian word) through which the one becomes its contrary, the self, its other and the domestic, the foreign..." then how does this happen, and where might we find the threshold?[102]

[101] Georges Perec, *W or The Memory of Childhood*, trans David Bellos (Boston: David R. Godine, 1988), author's preface, n.p.
[102] Marc Blanchard, "Michel Leiris' Memory," *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate*, 13, no. 1 (January-March 1990): 56.

Between reader and writer

Italo Calvino's essay on "the narrative form as a combinative process" explicitly addresses ways in which conceptions of architectural space and narrative interact:

> In two cultures that have reached a similar stage of development, we generally find that narrative operations show roughly the same characteristics in both, like the basic rules of arithmetic. But these basic operations can produce a vast superstructure of unlimited combinations, permutations and transformations.[103]

In Calvino's terms, the idea of a superstructure is granted by the basic operations of narrative—the possibilities for language are here rendered in an architectural metaphor on a grand scale. The options for use may be theoretically infinite, but are still governed by a spatially-defined structure. What's more, it is governed by basic rules able to contract into simple or "unlimited combinations."

It also describes a shift in thought from the linear or discrete visualized idea, to fractured arrays:

> [...] a series of discontinuous states, of inter-relating impulses over a huge but nevertheless finite chain of mechanisms for sensory perception and control. We no longer have inside our heads the former nebulous mass of alternately condensing and dispersing material. Whilst it was changing we used to try to explain its shifts in terms of intangible psychological states and twilight landscapes of the soul. Nowadays we feel merely the rapid transmission of signals along the intricate circuits linking the relays, the diodes, the transistors which crowd our brain.[104]

Calvino's idea of the "huge but...finite chain of mechanisms" is significant. He describes a shift from a linear paradigm (visualized in "images like the running of a stream or the unwinding of thread") into a postmodern, fragmented and dispersed—yet finite—mode of thought and idea-structures that are connected within spaces defined by recognizable forms.

The process of an individual's movement through the everyday architecture of public transportation involves games of movement through space, adoption of particular vocabulary and subsequent adaptation to these specialized forms of language games. Therefore it is useful to consider where they differ and overlap; the public space of the airport and literature are not directly analogous nor metaphors for one another, but means for the creation of meaning on a personal level of dialogue with each. Is the airport a kind of language game, a system of writing?

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[103] Italo Calvino, "Notes towards a definition of the narrative form as a combinative process," *Twentieth Century Studies*, 3 (May 1970): 94.
[104] Ibid.

Does the language of airport architecture dissolve into a language game, resulting in fragmentation embraced by those inside it?[105]

Why the primacy of space over time? I'm choosing to address space rather than time in this project, given that "any system of representation, in fact, is a spatialization of sorts which automatically freezes the flow of experience and in so doing distorts what it strives to represent." [106] It is this distortion that interests me, and the possibility that author and reader may both be wrongly ascribed.[107]

Calvino's terminology implies a form that has been complicated somewhere and somehow. No longer a stream of elements blending seamlessly (like water or thread) but instead a "chain of mechanisms," each in itself composed of smaller mechanical parts, each of which may run on its own, separate from the whole, yet be reduced into further parts as I have described in airport spaces. Each of these may then function as a black box. Suddenly the potential failure of one of these becomes significant, draws out the part from the whole and presents it for disassembly as a means into accessing the function of the fragmented, self-obscuring, opaque whole. This disassembly resembles my attempt to examine here a specific, self-referential twentieth-century prose form. By zooming in on this literary moment, I hope to better understand an individual creation of meaning through the often opaque or inchoate thoughts of the space moved through in everyday life.

Reducing this to the individual or personal is deliberate as a choice to examine meaning of the self foremost, or self subtracted spatially from the group, in the larger context of spaces usually defined as social. Calvino's essay defines meaning at the level of the personal, since the personal possesses a uniquely joined consciousness. In terms of the meaning of the redundancies created by combinative games in literature, it is here assigned to the individual to create meaning when it comes to the writing/machine. For the writer, the unexpected occurs during the process of combinatory writing itself; meaning appears sliding from another level, and the crossing of levels becomes the space for the creation of personal meaning.

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[105] Cf. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 82. "Paying attention to the needs of the 'heterogeneity of urban villagers and taste cultures,' however, takes architecture away from the ideal of some unified meta-language and breaks it down into highly differentiated discourses. [...] the language of architecture dissolves into highly specialized language games, each appropriate in its own way to a quite different interpretative community.
The result is fragmentation, often consciously embraced."

[106] Ibid., 206.

[107] Cf. Latour, 306. "I will call *prescription* whatever a scene presupposes from its *transcribed* actors and authors (this is very much like the 'role expectation' in sociology, except that it may be inscribed or encoded in the machine). For instance, a Renaissance Italian painting is designed to be viewed from a specific angle of view prescribed by the vanishing lines, exactly like a traffic light expects that its users will watch it from the street and not sideways. [...]
This inscription of author and users in the scene is very much the same as that of a text."

Following from this, a dialogue of personal meaning, one not addressed by Calvino's essay, occurs between the writer and reader, whether or not the combinations are wholly visible, or the same sliding across levels happens for each. This is a kind of introversion, a development into a "private event," yet also an opened "path to freedom." Literature is seen as a code or key, a cipher for unlocking the unconscious via combinative play, and a means of transmission of a "private event" to the "thought of a whole society":

> Literature reaches this goal, I would add, as soon as it can afford to indulge a playful attitude; a form of combinative play which is capable of suddenly being charged with pre-conscious matter and can at last give it expression. This path to freedom has been opened by literature...[108]

My choice of experimental forms of autobiography as subject (itself having author as subject) can thus be defined in terms of Calvino's essay. I extrapolate from his definition of the inter-reaction between writer (whether human or machine) and reader to describe here a conception of dialogue in time and space, and of the time and space of one life's written form, as perceived by another's reading. In this way, the interaction of the individual reader with the text constructs a form of dialogue. The process of (or potential for) dialogue in experimental forms of autobiography uses space to make this more accessible. Similarly, redundant or failed structures allow for an increased creativity and room for involvement of the individual with space. Centrifugal and centripetal forces act within these exchanges—each pulls on the other and together they exist fully, holding each other in a stable frame of reference.[109]

To consider this, it is useful to think at this point of Bakhtin's use of the term "dialogue." Whether oral or written, the basic unit of language for Bakhtin is the utterance:

> These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects—thematic content, style, and compositional structure—are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is

[108] Calvino, 10.

[109] Mark Dressman, "Dewey and Bakhtin in Dialogue: From Rosenblatt to a Pedagogy of Literature as Social, Aesthetic Practice," in Ball, Arnetha F. and Sarah Warshauer Freedman, eds., *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language, Literacy, and Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 45. See also Michael Holquist, "Bakhtin and Beautiful Science: the paradox of cultural relativity revisited," in Michael Macovski, ed., *Dialogue and Critical Discourse: Language, Culture, Critical Theory* (New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), editor's introduction, np.

> used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*.[110]

All literary genres are thus some among many, including everyday narration and contradictory categories. The decision to write about the self through systems is a way of accessing and directing what would otherwise remain as a field of overwhelming potential. The limitations are a possible mental relief from the infinite unwritten. In this the system functions metaphorically like a horizon.[111] Through its structure, the system has already evoked a feeling of space and spatial potential.

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[110] Bakhtin in Emerson and Holquist, 60.

[111] Cf. Calvino, 97. "Literature reaches on from the farthest edge of the expressible. It is the summons of that which is outside the dictionary which stimulates literature."

Vignette: The airport as you like it

Queneau's narrative, "A Story as You Like It,"[112] offers us three possible choices of subject in an arrangement later recalled in the form of choose-your-own-adventure books. There is also a fourth subject possible, which offers the shortest narrative of all, a rejection by the reader of any of the subjects. If choosing this last option, the reader is directed to the last line, and the story thus built consists of four lines. The others may be of varying lengths depending upon the choices made by the reader. All the while the reader can see evidence of those paths not taken, unlike in the hypertext rendering of the story,[113] which is far less interesting to me for the reason that it only offers two possible options visible at a time, without the reader being able to glimpse the possible alternate paths. The graphic rendering of "A Story as You Like It"[114] recalls Heathrow's diagram of terminal 3, whose photo I included earlier, although that is more like a "bifurcating arborescence"[115] than Queneau's structure, whose only endpoint is 20:

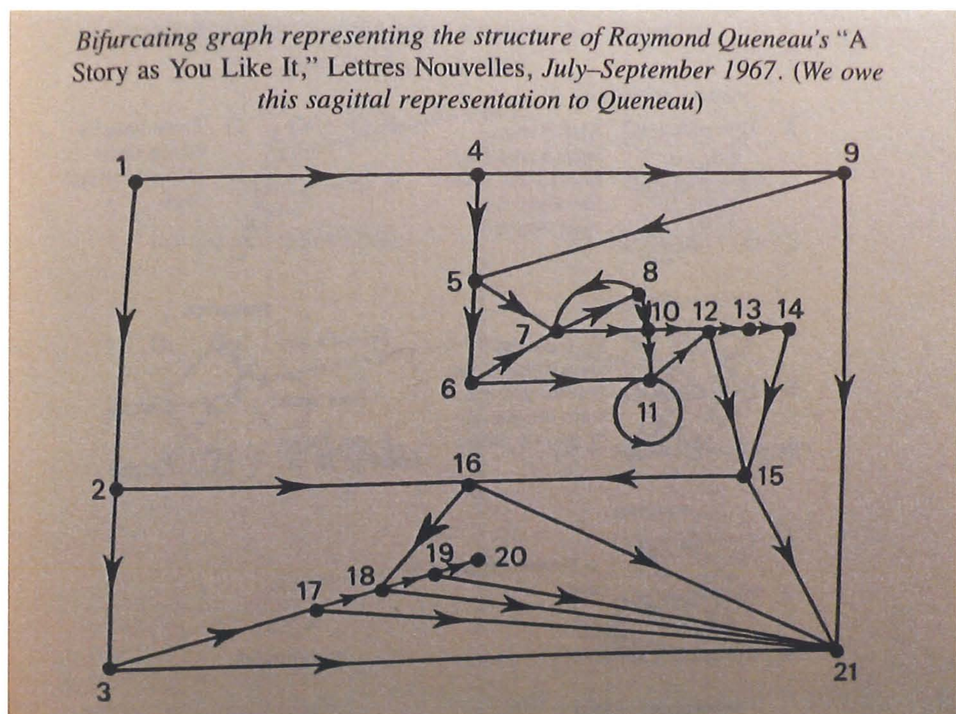

Figure 17: Bifurcating graph representing the structure of Raymond Queneau's "A Story As you Like It," reproduced in Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 121.

By recreating this kind of formula using elements of transit through airport space as subject, I will offer a rendering of the passenger's and reader's interaction with the environment

[112] Warren F. Motte Jr., *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986),156-158.

[113] See also the hypertext of "A Story As You Like It" at http://www.thing.de/projekte/7:9%23/queneau_1.html (accessed October 5, 2007).

[114] Motte, 121.

[115] Ibid., 124.

offered by airport systems. This literary form makes visible the skeleton of a series of choices confronted by the transient citizen of airport space, a framework of decision-making that exists and yet goes unacknowledged even as we string together narratives of consistent elements in our retelling of our time spent in the architecture of air transit, prompted in response to the query, "how was your flight?"

1 Do you wish to spend time shopping? If yes, go to 4. If no, go to 2.
2 Would you prefer instead to proceed directly to the gate for boarding? If yes, go to 20. If no, go to 3.
3 Would you prefer not to fly at all today? If yes, go to 21. If no, go to 1.
4 There are many things here to purchase. Stepping slowly around with your carryon baggage, you notice the durable floor surfaces installed in this area. There are seats at a central point should your feet get tired. If you want to sit down, go to 10. If you want to keep shopping, go to 18.
5 You spot the captain of the plane doing his "walkaround" on the tarmac. He is in his shirtsleeves, and carries a flashlight that he uses to see up into the well of the landing gear. Vehicles move along painted lines, and you notice that baggage is being loaded into the belly of the plane. You think you can see your own checked luggage moving up the conveyor belt towards the cargo door, which is comforting, as you now are reassured that you will eventually be reunited with it and the objects it contains. If you get bored and want to walk around instead, go to 14. If you become anxious at how long the captain seems to be spending examining the wheel wells of the landing gear, go to 3.
6 If you are innocent of any crime, go to 8. If you are guilty of attempting to board the flight with the wrong identity for purposes unknown, go to 11.
7 As you eat your sandwich, you think about what awaits you at the other end of the airplane journey. You imagine the walk out of the plane (a relief, terra firma!) and down a series of long hallways to a low-ceilinged customs hall. Standing in a line for the native passport holders, you'll breeze through the identity check and towards the baggage carousel, all documents in order. If you are finished with your sandwich and want to sit down at your gate, go to 10. If you want to walk around some more because goodness knows you'll be sitting for hours at a time on the plane, go to 14.
8 The employees swiftly take you aside, although you are aware one of them has picked up a phone and now speaks into it, facing the other way. This is easily explained—after all the ticket agent was able to check you and your luggage in, why should there now be a delay? You suddenly

begin to feel paranoid, even though you have not done anything wrong—it is simply an administrative error on the part of the airline, which is soon cleared up. You begin to feel self-righteous once the employees admit the mistake is on their side, and decide to craft a calmly-worded letter after your trip is over, making strategic use of the phrase "gesture of goodwill," and you think you'll probably get some free air miles out of this misunderstanding. If clearing this up has taken so long that your baggage has been offloaded and the plane has left without you, in order not to miss its take-off slot, go to 3. If the plane has been waiting for you and you're now even more impatient to get onto it, go to 21.

9 A row of eateries sits along one wall, each giving off a different sort of food smell. You place an order for a sandwich, and watch its rapid assembly by the man behind the counter. Smiling as you thank him and hand over your money, as you receive the tightly-wrapped sandwich and your change in return you think to yourself how you will soon be spending a different currency. If it is your home currency that the clerk hands you, go to 12. If it is a currency that you don't spend when you're at home, go to 7.

10 The rows of seating in the central area of the terminal are constructed with a combination of steel and padded Naugahyde. They are divided by armrests into individual seats, hooked to one another in long chains. About half are occupied with waiting fellow-passengers. You join them, choosing a seat where you are able to see out to your waiting airplane. This large picture window also reveals the runway in the distance, and you can see a slice of sky where airplanes take off and land. There is a news broadcast showing on a TV screen suspended from the ceiling. To pay attention to the activity on the airport apron, go to 5. To pay attention to the news, go to 15.

11 The employees swiftly take you aside, although you are aware one of them has picked up a phone and now speaks into it intently. You inwardly reproach yourself for picking up the incriminating passport, the wrong false identity document, from inside your carryon. How could you be so stupid? You know you will attempt to talk yourself out of it, but can feel the current of airport security sweeping you away already and sense that a sequence of events has now been set in motion. If you manage to talk yourself out of it, go to 20. If you don't, go to 21.

12 As you eat your sandwich, you fantasize about the trip to come. You'll land on foreign soil, and have the pleasure of familiarizing yourself with the customs, systems of transport, and currency exchanged there. You think about the photos that you'll take, and the people you will see there, people whom you're unlikely ever to see again. If you are done with your sandwich and want to take a walk, go to 14. If you want to have a look at the book you've just bought, go to 13.

13 Your new book is a mass-market paperback, and as you run your thumb across the right edge of its crisp, putty-coloured pages, the pages themselves separate and clump again into evenly spaced bunches, the signatures formed when the book was printed and bound. You know that reading this, turning each page one by one, will destroy this small visible remnant of the book's manufacture. There is gold lettering on the cover, which comes off slightly on your hand wherever you touch it. You are too distracted by the imminent flight to read after all, so you put your book away. If you want to stand up for awhile, go to 14. If you don't want to leave your seat just now because the terminal has become quite crowded and you may not get another if the flight is delayed, go to 16.

14 You decide to stroll up and down the terminal hallway. It is lined with gates and waiting passengers about to embark for destinations around the world: Hong Kong, San Francisco, Vancouver, Amsterdam. It is not as easy as you might think to determine which passenger is going to which destination just by their outward appearance. You pass by a disused shoe shining station: two chairs on a dais, with integrated supports for the feet and a platform for the shoe shiner to sit on. You recall in your childhood seeing these platforms in use at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, and wonder how much they are used now. Is it still worth it, monetarily speaking, for the airport to give over that block of space for a business so little used? When we travel, how often do we think about the shininess of our shoes? Not as many people wear dark leather shoes to travel in these days. Suddenly you feel old. If you're tired and want to sit down, go to 10. If an announcement of your flight's last call pierces through your meditations on your childhood and how much the world has changed since then, go to 20.

15 The newscaster is talking about a volatile situation in a distant part of the world. You furrow your brow, and listen as the story is summarized in three sentences before a break arrives, detailing the forecast for the region you are currently in, including a reading of the weather conditions at the airport where you now sit. This is immediately followed by a human-interest story. You sigh as the brief reportage on the volatile situation recurs again. To read your book, go to 13. To notice the people around you, go to 17.

16 You sit, alert, listening for the announcements that will permit you to rise and stand with your boarding group. It is more efficient to board in groups starting with those at the rear of the aircraft, but you have requested a seat near the front of the plane, so you have a little longer to wait. You remain seated, watching until most of the groups have been called and there are only a few people left waiting to have their tickets checked. You rise and step forwards. The jetway beckons behind the open gate door. If you hesitate here, feeling a churning doubt deep in the pit

of your stomach about crossing the final threshold onto the plane, go to 20. If you cannot feel the doubt, or choose to repress it, go to 21.

17 You wonder where they will each be sitting on the plane, and imagine their seat assignments hovering above their heads like cartoon thought balloons. Lone travellers have insulated themselves with books or headphones, and slouch within their seats. A few work on laptops. Some small tour groups chat to one another and share food and water. Several families are seated in the area around you, one with a very small crying child. You notice uniformed employees of the airline gathering behind the podium next to the jetway. They talk and joke with one another and seem relaxed. One of them steps forward and lifts up a telephone from a wall console. You hear her make your flight's first boarding announcement, and sit up straighter, starting to gather your things in preparation for boarding. If you are flying first class, go to 19. If you are flying economy, go to 16.

18 Crowds of people filter through the aisles of the newsstand, browsing the variety of newspapers, magazines, and novels on offer. The surfaces of these objects all seem very new—they reflect the fluorescent lights overhead, and the smell of paper and ink rises from the shelves. You flip through a best-selling novel and decide to purchase it. If you want to head to your gate now, go to 20. If you want to get something to eat, go to 9.

19 You stride through the crowd of passengers now forming near the podium. You have a specially issued card within your wallet, which you proffer in order to further prove your status. As a frequent flier, you are about to enter the rarefied, more comfortable air of the first class cabin, and you know you will arrive at your destination more refreshed than all those sitting in the rows on the other side of the cabin dividers behind you. If your ticket and passport match, go to 21. If your ticket and passport do not match, go to 6.

20 You are almost too late to catch your plane. If you want to risk missing it, go to 1. If you want to take up your assigned seat, go to 21.

21 In this case, your time in airport space is finished.

The inaccuracy in this narrative of airport space lies in the transition from 11 to 21. As demonstrated by the earlier example of Merhan Nasseri, your time within airport space is not necessarily finished if apprehended at a large international airport for a mistaken or unproven identity, however guilty or innocent your motives. There will more than likely be a dedicated space within it to hold you, and this airport jail would still be part of airport space, whether it is a jail onsite for criminals, or the confines of the stateless terminal building itself as in Nasseri's case.

What this choose-your-own airport adventure illustrates is that there is ultimately only one choice to be made: get on the plane or don't get on the plane. Either way, the airport space is transitory, with levels of distraction and participation open to the citizen of its spaces on a scale dependent upon each individual's choices while inside the space. Writing and reading this vignette demonstrates the choices on offer in each traveller's own version of the airport: the potential for turning and returning to shopping or the gate area, the potential for anxiety, mistake, doubt, and failure. There are spaces within these states for meditative thought and observation, but the situations described within the narrative possibilities I have outlined above reinforce the single fundamental choice: are you going to get on the plane or not? Checking in would seem to imply this, but checking in is not a matter of entering into a state of inevitability, despite the mechanisms of airport space that would seem to prescribe this feeling of inevitability onto us. These feelings are prescribed so much so that when a flight is delayed or cancelled, we feel cheated, as though the airport has failed to live up to its side of the bargain, all the while not acknowledging that by acting as passengers within it, we are fulfilling its prescription upon us. This literary form has made it apparent that while inside airport space, we continually hold up our side of the bargain with it, and comply with its liminal mechanisms through our occupation of them.

Systems of Autobiography: the Oulipo and choice of texts

In autobiographies composed according to systems of writing, the author's presence is a constraint working in two directions: towards the work itself and towards the reader. This links to concerns elsewhere within this project, regarding in particular first person narration and the use of self as primary reference point within space articulated as public. It is a method of laying claim: I will rewrite this formula as my own, rewrite the city space as mine, rewrite this writing system with my life.

In context of more recent examples, such as Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*,[116] I've chosen to begin by focusing on writers associated with the Oulipo. Writing concurrently with the aging and change of industrially created landscapes and cityscapes, I see them as developing a relationship to ways of thinking spatially that emerge in the twentieth century along with the literary postmodern. There is an important aspect to this advocacy of formal constraint by an organised group, and practice by diverse authors from multiple nationalities and native languages—widely translatable in that sense, although often literarily problematic.

In light of a writing system's potential for use by both reader and author for their own ends, can that system ever truly exist as a space either might inhabit in this way? By this means, how might a system of writing come to function as public space? The sequence of page turning is one of the most ingrained conventions of what we think of when we consider the book as such. The Oulipo works in the conceptual stage arguably have no pages, only as yet existing in the form of a system for conceptual writing, and thus directly criticizing the relationship of the text to linearity. The "choose your own adventure" paperbacks I remember reading as a kid were frustrating simply because I knew that alternatives were in there somewhere, and cheating was easy. Hypertext fiction today echoes the attempts of these books, hampered as they were by the codex format; yet to succeed, they would have had to fail at being books. And that doesn't entirely remove the problem—hypertext fiction, even with cloaked links, couldn't survive a decoding, and the cross-referencing need that prompted the form of the first codices still survives as a means of sustaining a self-referential form and not bowing to potential (stubborn) dominion of the reader.

Does non-spatial writing exist? Is there a tension between the first person singular and the first person plural in the envisioning of public space? What then of "experimental" fiction? To use Julian Yates' example of the "object lesson," the "opening to an order of space different from that of the zone of transfer" is in this case the system of writing. This is a sort of quiddity, in that

[116] Lyn Hejinian, *My Life* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Books, 1998).

experimental forms of autobiography more explicitly acknowledge the thingness of the work upon the page, making possible the rendering of a person as a still life, and the reveal of the object lesson that is the book form.[117]

Does this constitute a kind of failed autobiography? Or as a form is it rather only prone to failure—not prose that disingenuously attempts autobiography yet loses the essential conceit in the guise of experiment? By manipulating our experience as readers of representational and textual space, the author's use of language directs a reading that confounds a reliance on conventional prose forms of autobiography.

On Oulipo and choice of texts

Formed out of the Collège de Pataphysique in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and Francois Le Lionnais, the Oulipo group came into being out of a shared interest in the creative potential located at the intersection of mathematics and literary composition.[118] The group's name is derived from the syllables beginning each word in the full French title: Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle, or workshop for potential literature, and has also extended tangentially to workshops for other potentials, indicated by the shorthand Ou-x-po.[119] Unlike Andre Breton's Surrealist group, against which Queneau was partly reacting, Queneau and Le Lionnais decided that membership in the Oulipo was permanent and could not be rescinded except in exceptional circumstances: "the most that should be allowed would be 'excused absences' for those who passed away." The only exception to this rule would be for the member to commit suicide, "in front of an attested clerk of the French courts before whom one must swear that one is committing suicide solely for the reason of separating oneself from Oulipo for all eternity."[120] The group still meets regularly, any absences (even those due to a member's death) noted in the

[117] Cf. Yates, xvi. Concerning an image in a Medieval Latin text: "There is a kind of melancholy here, an invitation to remain with things, with men becoming things, inhabiting the relations between fire and ship, ship and water, as their world collapses. Melancholy, yes, but it would be wrong to think that there is anything lacking or missing from this scene. The blank horizon and the empty faces are not exactly negative images. They constitute instead an opening to an order of space different from that of the zone of transfer. The faces of the stricken may read as absence, but what they advertise is the white space of the page itself, the 'thingness' of the book, its materiality as the device that permits the lesson, and the strangeness of holding a book: a sea-fight, here in these pages, but no weather, no one really dying, instead, the *thing* peeping through in the figure of the human, waving.

This is the power of these skeletal still lifes, these after-images called 'object lessons.'"

[118] Mathews and Brotchie, 205.

[119] Jacques Roubaud, "Perecquian OULIPO," trans Jean-Jacques Poucel, Yale French Studies, 105, (2004): 100. "...'x' being any activity worthy of potentializing, like painting, music, comics, psychology, archery, cooking, mathematics, etc." Roubaud's essay is remarkable for making visible within the text on the page the structure of its own logic and thought in the form of its numerically and typographically-keyed outline.

[120] Leland de la Durantaye, "The Cratylic Impulse: Constraint and Work in the Works and Constraints of *OuLiPo*," *Literary Imagination*, 7, no. 1 (Winter, 2005) 121-122.

minutes.[121] In this way the Oulipo has sustained remarkable longevity in comparison with other artistic and literary movements—the nature of the group's remit as a workshop helping to provide a field for the exchange of ideas without the threat of implosion from one dominant ego.[122]

The importance of potential for the group means that once a constraint is created and workshopped, it must be capable of at least one written demonstration: "...unless a particular constraint can produce at least one text, one set of words satisfying its parameters, then its potential remained unproven."[123] The potential itself must be brought into existence and proven in order for the constraint to be accepted. Queneau's combinatory *Cent Mille Milliards de Poemes*, "the prototype of the Oulipian text,"[124] in which a 10-line poem was published so that each line could be rearranged by the reader to form 100,000,000,000,000 different poems, was created before the group's formation, and remains an example of the combinatory potential to be found when intersecting literature and mathematics.[125] Georges Perec's *La Disparition* (translated into English as *A Void*)[126] is arguably the most famous Oulipian text, being composed under the constraint of a lipogram, entirely without the letter e.

In this way the constraints act as tools for discovery, and for the Oulipo to conduct research via systems of writing—the purpose of Oulipo (though contradictions exist in criticism about the goal of Oulipian works) is "not to produce texts, but rather to discover empty forms:"[127]

> Oulipo research is based on the notion that every literary text creates its own relation to the necessary constraints of language and genre, such as the recurrence of characters in novels or the rules of versification for poetry. The purpose of Oulipo is twofold: to discover and make explicit the operating principles of existing works and, more importantly, to discover new, unused possibilities or forms. The element of language (phonology, morphology, lexicology and syntax) provide the principal tools of their experiments.[128]

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[121] Mathews and Brotchie, 183.
[122] Peter Consenstein, *Literary Memory, Consciousness, and the group Oulipo*, (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2002),118.
[123] Colin Symes, "Writing by Numbers: OuLiPo and the Creativity of Constraints," *Mosaic* 32, no. 3 (September 1999): 98.
[124] Warren F. Motte Jr., "Italo Calvino and the Oulipo," *Romance Notes*, 39, no. 2 (1999 Winter): 185.
[125] Roubaud, 109. "The one hundred trillion are not there, in the published book, but they exist virtually. They are factored to the power of 14. They are potentially there. Their infinity, 'for all practical purposes,' is revealed and affirmed. What's left is simply actualizing choices in the proposed selection, and a new sonnet reveals itself; new, but one that was already there, waiting to be chosen."
[126] Georges Perec, *A Void*, trans Gilbert Adair (London: Harvill, 1994).
[127] Vivian Kogan, *The Flowers of Fiction: time and space in Raymond Queneau's Les Fleurs Bleues*, (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Monographs Vol. 29,1982), 19.
[128] Ibid., 17.

To discuss the Oulipo is to discuss the function of constraints in their systemic approach to writing. It is important to distinguish the role of constraints from the generic distinctions with which literature is sorted. Oulipo use of the constraint "closely resembles a prescriptive rule, while the generic convention is a regularity. Oulipian rules are explicitly formulated by an individual writer before the composition of exemplary texts (usually few in number), whereas generic conventions are inferred by critics after the fact..."[129] Beyond generic categories, constraints created by the group become generative—tools with which to locate meaning through the creation of a text. Constraints ask that the author begin writing with problems in mind, these being self-set puzzles or patterns in the case of the Oulipo, and which will then "come to determine—in a certain measure—the 'invention' and disposition of the content."[130] For Queneau, technique and inspiration were the same thing.[131] In terms of the creative process, for the author "the application of constraints is an important mechanism for reducing options" lest the whole thing explodes and collapses the system of writing.[132] The theoretical constraints and literary practice of the Oulipo might also be said to each be inscribed in the other, though each may be encountered and understood by a reader without an explicit knowledge of the other.

The Oulipo group, by emphasizing the use of formal constraints for writing as individual works of art themselves along with (and sometimes pre-empting or superseding) their potential textual products, thereby makes the system of writing itself into a kind of accessible public space. "Constraints voluntarily imposed"[133] become means of entrance into and movement through a literary experimentation: where they "represent the moment where concepts take shape, the moment before rules take hold,"[134] in other words, constraints act as a liminal function. It is this function of space within and surrounding the writing that links Oulipian writing to airport space. It is also interesting to note how the constraint can act to temper the anxiety of having nothing new, or nothing at all, left to say: "As Georges Perec and Marcel Benabou have testified, the constraint effectively screens this anxiety, keeping the writer's forebrain busy with verbal puzzles while the unconscious parts of the compositional process continue relatively undisturbed."[135] This recalls my earlier discussion of how airport space acts to both reinforce and temper the anxiety of

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[129] Chris Andrews, "Constraint and Convention: The Formalism of the Oulipo," *Neophilologus*, 87, no. 2 (April, 2003): 227.
[130] Ibid., 230.
[131] Consenstein, 125.
[132] Symes, 90.
[133] Warren F. Motte Jr., *The Poetics of Experiment: a Study of the Works of Georges Perec* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1884), 18.
[134] Consenstein, 229.
[135] Andrews, 230.

those within it. Like airport space in this sense, Oulipian systems manipulate their authors/occupants by keeping the brain busily engaged with one aspect of the environment, diverting anxiety in order to allow the occupants to fulfil the generative prescription. The publication of the constraint itself as constituting a whole work is analogous to conceptual art practice—the idea for a generative literary system potentially superseding its product. Yet counter to the analogy to conceptual art, the Oulipo works as such may be followed as a formula or function to generate multiple unique results, making them in some ways more accessible due to their use of language as medium.

It follows that any written fulfilment of Oulipian systems of writing is a form of redundancy, linking back to this project's concern with the function of failure. If the work of art may also be the constraint itself, and its attendant potential, the form of fulfilled potential taken by the written text then exists as a surplus to the work itself. It is the imagination of the constraint's fulfilment that illustrates the creative power of redundancy—anything preserved of this imagination (and it is necessary to preserve it, as the imagination of it requires a rendering into written text) will automatically be redundant to the original work, yet the work cannot exist without imaginings of its own fulfilment. Georges Perec's idea of the "clinamen" is also significant with respect to failure and the types of mechanisms and spaces examined in this project. This term was used by Perec to indicate "intentional deviations from the constraint, akin to the programming of chance."[136] This built-in form of system breakdown or failure is a means by which the writing mechanism is able to demonstrate awareness of itself through the reader's perception of that clinamen. By prescribing failure into the system, the Oulipian author ensures that the reader has access to an awareness of the system that underlies the work, even if the work may be read and understood (as in the case of Perec's *Life A User's Manual*[137]) without full awareness or comprehension of the Oulipian constraint. The clinamen, through inserting failure into the text, indicates that there is a structure at work. Like the black box, the clinamen brings self-awareness of the mechanism through an aspect of its own failure.

Regarding the inter-relation of reader/text/writer, the perception of one via another in the construction and completion of the text is often ambivalent in Oulipo works.[138] The hint at incompleteness may be one element of discomfort when encountering "experimental" forms. In order to further consider Oulipian refiguring of this inter-relationship, I would like to

[136] Symes, 103.
[137] Georges Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, trans David Bellos (London: The Harvill Press, 1988).
[138] See also Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 64.

contextualize it in terms of a significant early shift in the physical spaces between words, a shift that provoked a new concept of imagined space relative to words read on a page.

On Silent Reading

I first became aware of a historical shift in the relevance of space and spatial awareness to reading while attending a lecture on the development of the codex and early book forms in the British Isles.[139] Slides of early Coptic texts and codices followed illustrations of Roman stone-carving where each word flowed into the next, or in later examples, was separated by small, sparse punctuation perhaps at the ends of sentences or ideas. The earliest example of writing in the British Isles comes from the Roman fort at Vindolanda, and consists of records kept on "compressed wooden tablets."[140] Early texts of a more literary content were made useful and relevant by their actual performance and delivery, with out-of-work actors teaching oration (as opposed to reading as such), and no standardized punctuation. The growing need for cross-referencing acted as impetus to a new format, and brought about the change of the scroll form into the folded pages familiar today as the codex. The first codices were made of Papyrus (like the scrolls) and due to the nature of the brittle material, were composed of few pages. They easily degraded, particularly along the binding points. The advancement of page technology into the use of leather, vellum, and eventually paper brought about the book format as we know it.[141]

The presence of such works as the Stonyhurst Gospel, which survived in part from being concealed inside a coffin, inspired a community around the book as object. The people who could actually handle and read the text were few. Their interactions with and around the book developed a kind of conference-style community, including those placed in the religious order who thought about the form and content without firsthand experience of either. Those who only saw it from a distance (for example, a congregation) were inspired by its physical presence, even without knowledge of the work itself.[142] In this sense a book did not need to be opened and read, it merely needed to maintain a physical presence, or the imagination or beckoning idea of a physical presence to those who travelled in search of it, or based their worship around it. The influence of written words had shifted almost completely from words spoken into the air, to words written and unpronounced.

In this way the development of the book into an inspiring physical object, and following this, the introduction of spaces between words, signalled a profound shift in the perception of written language, a shift significant in terms of spatial perception.[143] Instead of being heard or

[139] Michelle P Brown, "Medieval Books: Their Bindings and Their Functions," lecture, The Art Workers Guild: Designer Bookbinders Tuesday Lecture Series, London, November 2, 2004.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Cf. Drogin.

spoken out loud, words were silent in their primary function—the spaces left between words enabled silent reading, an imagined voice individual to each reader. Internalized silent reading eventually became standard, superseding the oracular tradition that accompanied prior written texts, as book production technology gradually expanded to bring texts outside the sphere of the church.

Silent reading is most important for my study of spatial perception as an internal method for comprehension of, and of communication from, text to and by an individual mind. The written (prose) text as we know it is not spoken out into the air for an audience (whether of the self's own ear or another person) –the words do not hang in the air as they might be said to while meaning is in the process of being understood.[144]

> In the West, the ability to read silently and rapidly is a result of the historical evolution of word separation that, beginning in the seventh century, changed the format of the written page, which had to be read orally and slowly in order to be comprehended. The onerous task of keeping the eyes ahead of the voice while accurately reading unseparated script, so familiar to the ancient Greeks and Romans, can be described as a kind of *elaborate search pattern*.[145]

The spatial dimension of silent reading, along with the shift in the predominant form of writing in the West from scroll to codex by the 10th century,[146] are today reflected in the perceiving eye in navigating a built environment. I don't mean to draw an exact analogy between reading a text today and navigating a city—however, the spatial perceptions and imaginations of space involved in each may go some way into explaining the other and how both may be said to attain meaning.

The elaborate search pattern involved in reading is physically described as the eye movement across the page in a "series of fixations and jumps called 'saccades'," also including ocular regressions to go back and recheck word separation, small turnings and returnings.[147] Although Saenger uses the term to indicate the process of searching for meaning within an unspaced text, I believe it occurs still below the surface of reading a text with conventional spaces between words. There is still searching done, but rapidly and fluently, and easily brought to the surface of perception when an environment without spaces between things is encountered.

[144] Brown, lecture 2 November 2004.
[145] Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 6. Emphasis added.
[146] Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 43.
[147] Saenger, 7.

In this way, the elaborate search pattern is akin to navigating an urban space for the first time. Finding a way through the public spaces of the city is about an imagination of space—a location (or invention) of those spaces between elements that make up the navigational points of reference. Maps, particularly of public transport systems, provide shortcuts that permit the refiguring of city spaces into manageable, comprehensible paths and relations. An example of the manipulation of space via a transport map is best seen in Harry Beck's landmark design for the London Underground map—a redrawing of the underground lines that made the relation between connecting tube stops clearer, while significantly distorting the actual relative locations of the stations. The distortion here is imagined space inserted into the clotted center of the transport network, and an artificial linearity imposed onto the lines. The space provides greater legibility within the system itself, and a potential pitfall for anyone attempting to apply the tube map to overground navigation.

When there is no map-like shortcut provided, each path through public space must be created somehow. An imagination of urban space is created via the elaborate search pattern, itself then a means of overcoming the particular variety of tunnel vision,[148] the overwhelming by detail that enfolds any individual in a newly-encountered urban public space. As the imagination of space—the filling in and creating of blanks—increases, the detail becomes commonplace and the known recedes. An internal map takes precedence, and the mind skips over in places.

[148] Saenger, 6. "The suppression of space between words causes a similarly reduced visual field, a tunnel vision, in adults."

Inscription and Prescription in Reading and Autobiography

I have so far addressed the dialogue between reader and writer and the empirical history of the spaces between words in this chapter, and by turning now to questions of the privileging of writing versus speech, am attempting to shift this discussion of silent reading further off the page and reinforce these ideas of space and reading in the context of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. It is possible to connect, not empirically, but relationally, an "internal logic" Derrida describes to the organization of exterior "notation" by insertion of spaces between words, and the process that is silent reading:

> *The Saussurian limitation does not respond, by a mere happy convenience, to the scientific exigency of the 'internal system.' That exigency is itself constituted, as the epistemological exigency in general, by the very possibility of phonetic writing and by the exteriority of the 'notation' to internal logic.*[149]

> The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa.[150]

For Derrida then, the possibility of phonetic writing means that the written is in this sense already inscribed within the spoken—the outside and inside must be acknowledged as meaning themselves but also one another. In order to begin understanding this meaning I began by imagining "writing (visible image)" and speech constantly turning around one another, recalling the form the spiral escalator may once have taken. In this sense what's going on in silent reading—a space between writing and speech and yet one wherein both are inscribed—is a performance of the deconstruction of speech and writing Derrida analyses. It maintains itself as both speech and writing, and yet is neither. Silent reading is a creation of the reader, yet also of the writer. Silent reading is a deconstructive state.[151]

The blank space physically surrounding the text on the page is difficult to consider as simply an accessory (or a superfluity) to writing. It is instead a significant element of it and of its inscription in speech/thought. (We will find evidence of this in the Oulipian texts addressed in

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[149] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 34. Emphasis author's.
[150] Ibid., 35.
[151] Cf. Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 80. "To the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or prosopopoeia) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative. [...]To the extent that, in writing, we are dependent on this language we all are, like the Dalesman in the Excursion, deaf and mute—not silent, which implies the possible manifestation of sound at our own will, but silent as a picture, that is to say eternally deprived of voice and condemned to muteness."

this chapter.) Pauses for breath's sake must of necessity be taken in speech. It was at one time necessary for orators to find, delineate, and insert these pauses if reading unspaced text aloud, the way it was then meant to be transmitted. The appearance of spaces between words granted this quality to the written language, removing that particular kind of work from the reader, thereby calling into question its own distance from the thought. The intermediary of the spoken voice was no longer necessary in order to transmit meaning from unspoken thought to silent page and back again to a different mind, now reading.

Let us return to autobiography more generally. Even before approaching autobiographies accessed via language games or systems, there is a fundamental problem of treating autobiography as a genre like any other. The work both "shades off" into other genres, and renders generic distinctions "sterile".[152] The life is what is assumed as source or generator for the writing, but as we will examine with Leiris, the reverse may also be true—to use Derrida's terms, life and writing are each inscribed upon the other.

De Man concludes that life and autobiography are not binaries, that "the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but that it is undecidable."[153] Tellingly, he goes on to call forth the revolving door as an evocation of this undecidability:

> But is it possible to remain, as Genette would have it, *within* an undecidable situation? As anyone who has ever been caught in a revolving door or on a revolving wheel can testify, it is certainly most uncomfortable, and all the more so in this case since this whirligig is capable of infinite acceleration and is, in fact, not successive but simultaneous. A system of differentiation based on two elements that, in Wordsworth's phrase, 'of these [are] neither, and [are] both at once' is not likely to be sound.[154]

The revolving door used here as a metaphor "confirms that the specular moment is...the manifestation, on the level of the referent, of a linguistic structure."[155] In this way, we come to understand through the metaphor of the revolving door that autobiography also performs the deconstruction of genre. It is not a genre per se, but "a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution."[156] The writer and reader are inscribed upon each other, nowhere more explicitly perhaps than in Oulipo works.

[152] Ibid., 68.
[153] Ibid., 70.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

In subsequently introducing the term prosopopoeia, "the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech"[157] de Man describes a fiction of mutual inscription by reader and writer, each conferring upon the other the power of speech.

Redundancy as concept

Derrida compares the prevailing Western tradition of considering writing external to speech, and thus privileging the latter, as the body is external to the soul and thus inferior:

> It is not a simple analogy: writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems—conversely—to borrow its metaphors.[158]

What if we were to consider this materially, with reference to the forms of redundancy within this project? The first port of call might be the revolving door: an illustration of the "undecidability" between inside and outside: a space that is "neither in nor out", yet also exists inside and outside, simultaneously. It delicately balances, or perhaps evades, binary categorization. It comes into being through the movement between spaces, the constant movement of the boundary between them.

Up until this point, I have addressed redundancy via the manifestation of redundant mechanical and aesthetic phenomena—all of which in their own way are objects. But what of redundancy itself? As a concept, redundancy can be explored in terms of the real and the material. The revolving door is an example of an object, a mechanism that, through its becoming (being-in-existence) performs a deconstruction of the binary oppositions of inside and outside. As an object in itself, it acts as an example of this, and also as a door, compared with the many other kinds of doors (like the automatic door-closer explored earlier in Latour's essay), which also, perhaps somewhat less literally, deconstructs the same binary. Yet in considering this multiplicity of doors as human products within the material world, so far unlike one another that, more than just a slight change in style, a change in modes of being differentiates them, we also find a multiplicity of material redundancy—an abundance and mirroring of forms.

This latter idea, of the multiple possibilities gestured at by the term "door" (when lacking qualifiers or descriptors like "revolving") is a redundancy of a concept. In the vast array of

[157] Ibid., 75.
[158] Derrida, 34-35.

material produced by people to interact with space, we seek to repeat, to re-design and re-imagine. If not innovation, then is it redundancy? Or perhaps innovation and redundancy are two more binaries that can be deconstructed? Or is redundancy as a concept another one of Derrida's "undecidables"?

To ground this interest in multiplicities in the concern of this chapter, systemic autobiographies and spatial reading, we can begin to locate in Derrida's thought ideas that address the potential of the redundant. Using a space-concerned approach to explain the subsuming of writing, and its seductive qualities that could be regarded as "aide-oublier" more than aide–memoire, Derrida writes:

> Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three. The historical usurpation and theoretical oddity that install the image within the rights of reality are determined as the forgetting of a simple origin. [...] The violence of forgetting. Writing, a mnemotechnic means, supplanting good memory, spontaneous memory, signifies forgetfulness.[159]

Perhaps "mnemotechnic" should be addressed here first: a memory mechanism—a machine for remembering. In light of Derrida's analysis, systems of writing function not only as machines for the generation of writing, but machines for repeated written difference, according to individual propinquity. If "what can look at itself is not one," the author and the autobiographical narrative together make up "an infinite reference, from one to the other." But does this then mean that autobiographical writing has no locatable source? What about the reader's place in this—does the reader come to occupy the elusive "point of origin?"

The writing of an autobiography through a systemic approach embodies the split Derrida describes, and in an author's look at the self via systems of writing, the self as source becomes a difference. "What can look at itself is not one," so the autobiography becomes a split of the author. Through the act of reading autobiographical works based on systems of writing, the point of origin for emerging autobiographical meaning is in the act of passing to the reader. The reader's interpretation of the text's system and space becomes the generator of meaning. Systems

[159] Ibid., 36.

of autobiography, through their use of these generative structures, make the territory occupied by the author and the reader a common ground, and a liminal one as well. It stands them close together in this territory of emerging meaning. In this sense, although the author is split from the text, the experience of one life is communicated more directly through the link between the reader and author and the displacement of the inherent split as Derrida describes above. The author and reader enact the "infinite reference; from one to the other."

Moreover, it is impossible to know who writes to whom: "Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address? Without any desire to surprise, and thereby to grab attention by means of obscurity, I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say finally that I do not know."[160] This unknowability is the case even though writer and reader still accompany each other—each inscribed within the other. In *The Post Card*, Derrida indicates that blank areas of each page indicate passages that have disappeared, "at the very place of their incineration, by a blank of 52 signs

and a contract insists that this stretch of destroyed surface remain forever indeterminable."[161] What disappeared may be as small as a punctuation mark or of longer length, or of length undetermined. These erasures, as we will come to see in examples of the autobiographical work of Michel Leiris, may be indeterminable (unknowable), yet persist as an essential presence in the intra-connected creation of meaning by the author and reader. And, in the repeated rewriting of memory, as will be explored in Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, one memory written down at one time may then any other time be written down with changes, differential or not.[162] This inaccuracy of repetition draws out the infinite possibilities of systems like those of Oulipian constraint. The possibility for repeated difference in generative systems through repetition and erasures illustrates the power of memory to falsify, fictionalise, and keep making the same mistakes, fruitfully, again and again. Like Derrida's interest in post cards, in the emergence of this kind of literary meaning, "one does not know what is in front or what is in back, here or there, near or far, the Plato or the Socrates, recto or verso. Nor what is the most important, the picture or the text, and in the text, the message or the caption, or the address." In

[160] Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 5.
[161] Ibid., 4.
[162] Cf. Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," in *Labyrinths*, ed Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986). See also Howard Giskin, "Borges' Revisioning of Reading in 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,' *Variaciones Borges*, 19 (January 2005): 103-123. Articles addressing the connection of Borges's story to Derrida's thought describe how the story anticipates Derrida's arguments expressed in the above quote.

the unknowing of the development of meaning from author to reader/reader to author, reversibility unleashes itself, goes mad."[163]

As I will explore in *Exercises in Style*, the essential autobiographical event only exists as a trace. Queneau's 99 exercises perform the possibility of the trace, yet never recover the event. All Oulipo texts address this impossibility of recovery, since by entering into the contract of word/speech, we are abandoning to the world of traces:

> If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy. The justification can therefore never be absolute and definitive. It corresponds to a condition of forces and translates an historical calculation.[164]

We have an idea of the trace of the original actual thing, though it remains unavailable except in a sequence of differences, 99 differences in the *Exercises in Style*. The trace is a relative to a necessary mistake. The term mistake as I am using it here should be qualified since, due to the nature of the trace, this kind of mistake is unavoidable, it is perhaps not actually a mistake—and thus necessary.

The concept of "the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present" may be a place to further explore the interrelationship of reader and writer within these systems of autobiography:

> Arche-writing, at first the possibility of the spoken word, then of the '*graphie*' in the narrow sense, the birthplace of 'usurpation,' denounced by Plato to Saussure, this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, 'spatial' and 'objective' exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the grammè, without différance as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present, without the relationship with death as the concrete structure of the living present.[165]

The nonpresence of a reader is given permission to attain presence in the other via the systemic autobiography seen in Oulipian rules. In this kind of autobiography, the reader is starting from same point as the writer, each infinitely referencing the other, rather than the two

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[163] Derrida, *The Post Card*, 13.
[164] Derrida, Of Grammatology, 70. Brackets author's.
[165] Ibid., 70-71.

approaching each other from opposite directions.[166] Each makes a spatial journey with the other, rather than meeting in some middle space between. For this reason, they are linked through this thesis's overarching concern with airport space. More specifically, this leads us back to the departure lounge, where we wait together (as authors and readers), finding ourselves reflected in the mechanisms of public transport.

[166] This is another version of my critical approach to the system of reading itself. I was also thinking of the reader's permission herein to attain presence in writer, and conversely the writer's permission to attain presence in the reader.

"A chap of his own kidney": on Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*

Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (1947) consists of 99 versions of an "insignificant story." These versions overtly take language, rather than its content, as subject.[167] Aside from anecdotal evidence that Queneau witnessed the mundane incidents described and re-described in the exercises,[168] the author's presence in the works acts as a kind of "superior witness."[169]

I think it would be useful at this point to attempt an account of the basic content of the exercises. After my first reading, my written summary of the core of the book ran as follows:

"We are on a bus. It's crowded and hot. An exchange takes place between two passengers. A third makes note of it.

Later, while on a different bus, the one taking notes notices, out the window, one of the two he'd observed earlier."

In writing this brief account I've fallen under the same system that Queneau exploits throughout the 99 exercises, and my plot summary as such is another version, becomes obviously another exercise in style. Any attempt to describe what the book is about also defaults to this, unavoidably. Queneau has created a kind of open, self-perpetuating system. All of these can be defined as "permutations which have no ultimate or 'authentic' text as their basis," and exist like the split reflection that Derrida describes and to which I have previously referred.[170]

In thinking about the book's other plays upon systematisation, it is useful to linger on the words I chose above when attempting to further articulate the reader's interaction with the text. Several spatial aspects are suggested by my own summary that, despite being particular to my perspective, are useful for examining how spatial perception intrudes upon the dialogue between writer and reader.

Beginning with the third person plural pronoun, I have cast the reader inside the bus with the author, not only adopting the perspective when the exercise is written in first-person, but coming to see the author as another character within the work—the system of collection of

[167] Kogan, 15. "In *Exercices de Style* (1947), he presents an insignificant story in ninety-nine different ways in order to draw the reader's attention to the *lexis*, the how or manner of expression, rather than the *logos*, what it says, the unifying meaning of a work. By contrasting the similarity of the events and the different possible modes of their expression in this work, Queneau invites the reader to view all of literature as a series of permutations which have no ultimate or 'authentic' text as their basis. The author claims that his intention is therapeutic rather than destructive [...]"

[168] Raymond Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, trans Barbara Wright (London: Gaberbocchus, 1958), 15.

[169] Jacques Guicharnaud, *Raymond Queneau*, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, 14 (NY and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), 24.

[170] Kogan, 15.

observances forming its own kind of characterisation, thus its own kind of autobiographical text of Queneau as "the third" passenger.

I have also separated the second of the events into a separate paragraph, a distinction in common with most of the exercises. This emphasizes the temporal lag between the two events, and the oddness of seeing one character recur unexpectedly in a different part of the city, from another (yet similar) vantage point, suggesting that the first part of the story would have been discarded from memory were it not for the unexpected encounter of one of the same elements out of context.

In my inquiry into the spatial aspects of *Exercises in Style*, some of my questions include: Is the arrangement of exercises linear or circular, or might the structure somehow fulfil both? Is it linear not left to right like reading a timeline, but more back to front: in layers? How might we describe how the language itself is spatially organized (or dissected)? With what architectural or imaginary spaces might we compare it? Is it comparable to airport space?

In composing the text, Queneau was attempting to free written French from grammatical conventions,[171] stating in a published conversation:

> 'In *les Exercices de Style*, I started from a real incident, and in the first place I told it 12 times in different ways. Then a year later I did another 12, and finally there were 99. People have tried to see it as an attempt to demolish literature—that was not at all my intention. In any case my intention was merely to produce some exercises; the finished product may possibly act as a kind of rust-remover to literature, help to rid it of some of its scabs. If I have been able to contribute a little to this, then I am very proud, especially if I have done it without boring the reader too much.'[172]

The system's goal as defined by Queneau's approach then would be primarily to renew literature through a (mostly prose-based) language game. The styles encompass many other forms of linguistic experiment, but the majority of them are composed in, depend upon, or react to a prose structure.

In his writing, Raymond Queneau separated himself from surrealism's use of writing and language[173] and acknowledged a debt to James Joyce, having a similar experimental approach to reducing language into the unit of the word.[174] The titles of each exercise function like arrows or captions. Each points the reader towards an idea of the style convention itself, an image of genre. There is a back-and-forthness inherent to reading these, whether in or out of sequence, and a

[171] Queneau, 13.
[172] Ibid. quoted in translator's preface, 15.
[173] Kogan, 13.
[174] See also Vivian Mercier, *The New Novel: from Queneau to Pinget* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 36 and 45, regarding Queneau's *Battons, Chiffres, et Lettres.*

potential self-destructive aspect. In a way the book becomes a self-effacing artwork—via recurrence, there is a mental overlap of all the styles, and certain details emerge from the story's particulars despite the focus on the language, while others recede into the changeable background. Details that come further into focus include: the young man's hatband, his overcoat lapels (solving a mystery of gesture set up in the first exercise), and the observer's notation and note-taking as a theme.

The exercises begin with "Notation" followed by "Double Entry,"[175] wherein both actions and description are doubled, suggesting layers of redundancy from the outset. The language is immediately reiterative in two senses. The notation then becomes another style by this juxtaposition, and not so much a basis for what follows. Comparing "Narrative,"[176] ostensibly the most straightforward (or familiar) rendering of events, to "Notation," calls into question the point of reference—writer, observer, first or third person—occurring in each version. Considering the lag in time then delineates the events as two distinct occurrences in different representational spaces, linked in both instances by observed and observer. The gap between paragraphs further divides two time/space events. The subcategory to the observer is his placement inside a moving (starting-stopping) bus. While on his commute, the observer... but the possibility of referring to the narrator's journey as a commute, even this attempt to summarize the story at all, makes me realize the restrictions placed upon analysis of this text by its own structure. By re-rendering, the events are paradoxically rendered more opaque, since it becomes impossible to summarise or describe the path of events accurately when so many versions exist.

The casting of those observed into roles is a function of the observer. For instance, in "Noble:"

> I noticed, with the precision and acuity of a Red Indian on the warpath, the presence of a young man whose neck was longer than that of the swift-footed giraffe, and whose felt hat was also adorned with a plait like the hero of an exercise in style.[177]

Who is the hero? The young man complaining? He is significantly not simply "the hero," but "like the hero." Whom are we to trust? We are left with no option but to question the observer's viewpoint, which comes to seem almost kaleidoscopic. The many options granted by the exercises seemingly present such an array of choice that the reader's allegiance has no option but to rely foremost on intuition to make meaning.

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[175] Queneau, 19-20.
[176] Ibid., 43-44 .
[177] Ibid., 86.

But are the central incidents really meaningless? The potential lies within the work for simultaneous significance and absurdity. Once read, the individual versions exist together all at once, muddling the accuracy of the narration by contradiction—whether in information or narrative. The styles themselves contradict each other, in that the shifts between them are sometimes abrupt, sometimes smooth. They are occasionally grouped in related styles, but nonetheless still cause a back-and-forth method to the reading. One must be left behind before another may be read, yet they still accumulate like transparent layers, perhaps revealing the only reliable details of the text: those that emerge again and again without erasure by contradiction. But is what is left out of equal significance?

The shifts between each version require shifting the frame of reference, a change in scale and focus, like changing slides in a projector. This slideshow abruptness may lead to another way of seeing the arrangement of these exercises as circular and multilayered, if it could be imagined that once one slide were projected, others following would be layered over it, and the return to the starting point would signal the creation of a simultaneously circular, but linearly accumulated, form of narrative. Perhaps the only expected thing in the mind of the reader is that the versions will eventually cease, and the text will come to an end. There is no infinite version.

Multiple functions are made possible by repetition within the system. The importance of accuracy as an idea falls away. No one version (or written exercise) of a life is the accurate one. In a way each is a kind of false start, referencing an unwritten source embodied only by the author himself. This is displayed in "Parts of Speech," a list of words within the exercise classified according to the title's parameters.[178] According to my assumption, if duplicate words appear, that is because they appear more than once in the storytelling. Dissecting a version in this way would almost be like an autopsy: examination, diagnosis, and classification according to function, divorcing the words from the context of the sentence, and reducing them instead to their basic grammatical units. It gives the impression of bulk—a kind of indexing of the work. But this is a version of which version? Like the cards in a deck or stacking of planes over Heathrow, it's left unknown whether an arrangement (or rearrangement) into sentences would produce the source text or one of many potential versions.

The styles may be defined for the most part in their foregrounding of one literary element. As in "Zoological,"[179] by separating out one type of metaphor, the version identifies the plentiful littering of narrative with conventions of vocabulary and structure that normally exist below the surfaces of most prose, and are drawn out, combined and recombined in the details of

[178] Ibid., 152.
[179] Ibid., 179.

the occurrence each version describes. Each version is a different kind of language map of the same area, our observer/author poised aerially above it.

The hidden potential of what didn't happen is read in "Antiphrasis." Reading this version in the context of the whole is akin to examining a photographic negative:

> Midnight. It's raining. The buses go by nearly empty. On the bonnet of an AI near the Bastille, an old man whose head is sunk in his shoulders and who isn't wearing a hat thanks a lady sitting a long way away from him because she is stroking his hands. Then he goes to stand on the knees of a man who is still sitting down.
>
> Two hours earlier, behind the Gare de Lyon, this old man was stopping up his ears so as not to hear a tramp who was refusing to say that he should slightly lower the bottom button of his underpants. [180]

Perhaps because of the juxtapositions possible when each detail is reversed, this exercise remains one of the sharper components of the whole when I think back upon the process of reading the book. This may be because my comparison to a photo negative, while at first seeming apt, has come to be deceptively imprecise. Though the details have been made opposite, the potential meaning has somehow not been reversed, but rather cast into some unknown territory of poetic contradictions.

When beginning the reading, even if familiar with the conceit of the book's structure, the titles of each exercise act as signposts. They direct our expectation when moving from version to version, and reassure us that the more unrecognisable styles may still be named and classified, giving an idea of genre we can cling to. Each title also redirects our attention to mode of execution rather than content: "But each style, necessarily considered in relation to the others, is thus relative: it is called into question by the others, just as it calls the others into question. This explains why the book has been accused of being an undertaking to demolish literature."[181] Yet there is something inaccurate here, in the claim that the style turns our attention away from the anecdote with each new exercise and more towards a comparison of styles. A comparison of styles would seem to be also a comparison of the differing form the contents take and thus of altered content. Indeed details of the story change or are reinforced in the repetitions. The anecdote, subsumed perhaps to the forms it takes, nonetheless exists as a kind of skeleton in the (author's and quickly, the reader's) brain for each rendering, and a means of overlap and disjunction for each comparison.
This is another complication of the function of repetition within the text.

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[180] Ibid., 161.
[181] Guicharnaud, 30.

In terms of the system of autobiography as a language game, the repetition signals a ludic element to the whole as well. Queneau explicitly states that he hopes not to be boring, to stimulate some enjoyment in the reading, not to destroy literature.[182] Laughter is prompted by repetition:

> 'This is because life which is truly alive should not repeat itself. Wherever there is repetition, complete similitude, we suspect something mechanical functioning behind the living.'
>
> The most obvious, and well-known, example of Queneau's penchant for, and mastery of, the comic possibilities of repetition is his *Exercices de Style*, in which he tells the same banal story about a man on a bus in ninety-nine different linguistic styles. In accordance with Bergson's explanation, few if any of these variations would be comic in and of themselves, but the readers' laughter increases with each successive text.[183]

But it is important to remember that the similitude of each repetition here is incomplete. This hints at a faulty machine. Isn't this then even funnier, not only that there is something mechanical behind the writing (and even reading) of the text, but that the repeating mechanism is noticeably imperfect? This is the reason for my situating *Exercises in Style* in terms of failure, redundancy, and mistake. It removes this from the binary setup of choices limited to success or failure (and the economy implied therein), instead situating Queneau's work in the context of another space, removed and with greater potential creativity for both writer and readers.

This potential is bound by an attention to the units to which language may be reduced.[184] What of this reduction into units? What does this way of chopping things up mean? It seems to say that there are no units as such, only an infinitely multipliable and divisible potential. In comparison, Bakhtin writes that:

> The least favorable conditions for reflecting individuality in language obtain in speech genres that require a standard form, for example, many kinds of business documents, military commands, verbal signals in industry, and so on. Here one can reflect only the most superficial, almost biological aspects of individuality (mainly in the oral manifestation of these standard types of utterances). In the vast majority of speech genres (except for literary-artistic ones), the individual style does not enter into the intent of the

[182] Queneau, 15. Cf. the translator's response, "That Queneau *has* done this without boring the reader *at all*, is perhaps the most amazing thing about his book. Imagine how boring it might have been—99 times the same story, and a story which has no point, anyway!"

[183] Jane Alison Hale, *The Lyric Encyclopedia of Raymond Queneau* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 66. Hale quotes Henri Bergson in her analysis of laughter's prompting by repetition.

[184] Mercier, 36. Regarding James Joyce, Mercier writes of his and Queneau's similar experiments with reduction of literature into the unit of the word.

> utterance, does not serve as its only goal, but is, as it were, an epiphenomenon of the utterance, one of its by-products.[185]

Through Queneau's use and juxtaposition of "speech genres that require a standard form," along with those dependent on rhetorical devices, word dissection and recombination, or those of "artistic literature," *Exercises in Style* articulates a loophole in Bakhtin's theory that individuality has the least room for expression in such genres. If in most speech genres besides the literary, the individual style isn't the point of the utterance, but instead is a by-product, the position of the epiphenomenon becomes of greater significance with respect to Queneau's work. In *Exercises in Style*, the by-product is written into the goal of the book. It exists therefore in its own speech genre. Its surplus creation and expression of individuality acts as a critique of the separation of an individual's expression from those genres with a more rigid form, instead granting "an approach related to that of poetry but inseparable from true fictional creation, and above all, eminently critical."[186] This seems to be a larger result of the Oulipo's work—it reveals, or perhaps endows, those types of utterances that operate under constraint as having increased their capacity for otherwise hidden expression of individuality. It gifts them with personality as a by-product, drawing them out through use of the constrictive forms they inhabit.

[185] Bakhtin, 63. See also Bakhtin, 99. "As distinct from utterances (and speech genres), the signifying units of a language—the word and the sentence—lack this quality of being directed or addressed to someone: these units belong to nobody and are addressed to nobody. Moreover, they in themselves are devoid of any kind of relation to the other's utterance, the other's word. If an individual word or sentence is directed at someone, addressed to someone, then we have a completed utterance that consists of one word or one sentence, and addressivity is inherent not in the unit of language, but in the utterance. A sentence that is surrounded by context acquires the addressivity only through the entire utterance, as a constituent part (element) of it."

[186] Guicharnaud, 31.

Vignette: 30 shops, bars & restaurants inside

This system was given to me by Venice Marco Polo airport. Wandering around the terminal before a flight in August 2007, I picked up a leaflet describing the terminal's services with the title above. It was available to pick up from its own dedicated kiosk, the kiosk itself not being marked on the map. It contains descriptive phrases for each point of service in the terminal.[187] I therefore had the idea to create 30 sentences, one based on each short description, that could be combined in whichever order or repeated and discarded as would a navigator of the terminal.

This vignette structure refers both to Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliards de Poemes* in its potential for recombination of lines, and his *Exercises in Style* through use of repetition and repeated examinations of a seemingly banal space. There is no single airport lounge system—it requires the passenger to inscribe a use upon it, while it prescribes the behaviour of waiting in general. How is this waiting played out in these 30 sentences? What are some of the combinations possible? My original source for this vignette, as provided in brochure form, is not the system. Instead it is the first product of it, and I am attempting here to continue with what is prescribed for the airport, and which the airport itself began to articulate with its spaces and passengers.

> A world to explore, the first stop in your journey, a precious break.
> Venice Airport Shopping: stores and boutiques, Italian and international fashion brands, local food and international cuisine.
> Cafés, restaurants and gourmet shops offering select food and wine, and delicacies.
> 30 different choices, 30 areas to see, feel and taste.
> 30 areas for you to relax. 30 steps to walk between elegance and comfort before taking off.
> Venice airport shopping. A must before your flight.[188]

The stores' one-line descriptors each follow the names of the boutiques and franchises, translated into English on the brochure, and keyed to the map with numbers:

1. Women's wear and accessories.
2. Men's and women's wear, accessories.
3. Shirts, knitwear, ties.

[187] The map describes only the places where things are available for purchase, and sketches in roughly the boundaries of security gates and seating on either side of the central shopping area. Where are the bathrooms? They are not marked on the map.
[188] Aeroporto Marco Polo, "Airport Shopping Guide," Produced for Aeroporto Marco Polo, Venice, Italy, www.emporioadv.it (accessed August 30, 2007).

4. Socks, underwear, fashion accessories.
5. Stationery, design items, leather goods.
6. Over-the-counter drugs, beauty and bodycare products.
7. Home and personal linen, accessories, gifts.
8. Fortuny™ lamps, interior decoration, accessories.
9. Art glassware.
10. Express pasta, crunchy pizza, salads.
11. Toys and gadgets.
12. Sports apparel and accessories.
13. Eyewear.
14. Men's and women's wear, accessories.
15. Watches.
16. Dailies, magazines, bookshop, tobacconist, gift shop.
17. Men's, women's and children's footwear.
18. Bags and leather goods.
19. Perfumes, garments, souvenirs and made-in-Italy accessories.
20. Jewellery.
21. Women's and men's wear, accessories.
22. Bureau de change.
23. Women's wear, underwear, accessories.
24. Men's wear and accessories.
25. The best food and wine from Italy and abroad.
26. Italian traditional café.
27. Select Italian wines, snacks and food.
28. Quality coffee and chocolate to taste and shop.
29. Italian traditional café.
30. Tobacconist, spirits, perfumes and last-minute items. Opening time depending on departures.[189]

Were I to compose sentences for each of these, in numerical order and using the first person, would they reflect my brief stay in the departure lounge of this airport? Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliards de Poemes* contained lines composed in an alexandrine, and each of his *Exercises in Style*

[189] Ibid.

reflected a different approach indicated by the title, so the challenge then is to demonstrate a similar system in these 30 sentences. In reading through the numbered descriptors, points of commonality emerge between the services on offer—so many of them overlap one another. Many "accessories" are available in Marco Polo airport, as are several places to purchase Italian food—to purchase the experience of authentic Italian dining for the final time before boarding the airplane. To attempt my version of a composition, I will take each sentence as a prompt to translate the airport service's tagline into a sentence describing equivalent elements of presence in the departure lounge.

1. I wore my last clean clothes, and hefted an overly heavy carryon.
2. My clothes were unremarkable, and somewhat gender-neutral, and my carryon was a plain black woven ripstopping nylon.
3. I wore a shirt, I wore a sweater, I did not wear a tie.
4. Like many others, I wore socks, and underwear, and slung an anonymous carryon over my shoulder.
5. I wrote in a notebook, listened to music on headphones, adjusted the patent leather strap of my watch.
6. I had forgotten my painkillers, left behind my shampoo, and shower gel in the hotel bathroom.
7. I longed to sleep in my own sheets again, as I slung my carryon bag over my shoulder, and clutched biscuits to take back for my work colleagues.
8. There was no room in my carryon for the heavily crafted décor that surrounded me.
9. I did not visit the island of Murano on this visit to Venice, and in fact I have never been there.
10. I can't recall if I ate anything, but I know I didn't have a meal of anything on offer at the deli.
11. I had already come equipped with enough things to amuse and distract me until time to board the plane.
12. My carryon contained within it a spare pair of comfortable shoes.
13. I wiped my glasses with a special cloth I always carry with me.
14. My clothes were unremarkable, and somewhat gender-neutral, and my carryon was plain black woven ripstopping nylon.
15. I checked my watch frequently as my fellow passengers arrived in the lounge, wondering if I would recognize any of them.

16. I don't recall the daily news, the glossy covers of the magazines, the bestselling titles, the brands of cigarettes, but I do recall that the gifts in the gift shop were uniformly tacky, made of pink and purple plastic.
17. I recall that there were very few people walking around in this departure lounge—families aimed themselves almost immediately towards seats.
18. Even toting a bag that contained my essential items, I still seemed to have objects dangling from my person: water bottle, telephone, sunglasses, camera.
19. The lounge smelled of a cleaning solution, and the trashcans were each made of three colour-coded compartments, sleekly manufactured and designated for different types of trash.
20. I wore the same jewellery that I always wear.
21. My plain black carryon contained very little clothing.
22. I could not find anything to spend my last remaining euros on, therefore I still have them, lying on my bureau drawer.
23. My carryon contained hardly any items of clothing.
24. There weren't any clothes in my carryon bag.
25. The most I could hope for was to see some interesting food packaging.
26. I didn't eat anything.
27. I had hoped to see some interesting labels on the packages of food.
28. It was difficult at first to find the café to buy some water.
29. I didn't eat anything.
30. I sat and waited on a pleather seat with a view through the door to the jetway, a long sloping hallway that seemed to be lined with windows and closed doors.

Elements of the airport lounge emerging from this exercise include the constant presence of the carryon, and the awareness of the accessories by which we equip ourselves when we fly. The repetitive content and phrasing also indicates one aspect of waiting: seeing the same things or types of things over and over again.

Next I will re-arrange the sentences, in the approximate order in which I encountered the shops. There is no sentence for the bathroom, which at first I struggled to find, nor for the kiosk where I picked up the pamphlet with the map of the departure lounge. These services for travellers are not indicated on the pamphlet either—the pamphlet fails to mark its own place within the system. These omissions are perhaps this system's Perecquian clinamen.

My sequence of encounters with these spaces would run numerically as follows: 28, 1, 3, 4, 14, 5, 6, 13, 12, 11, 10, 7, 8, 9, 26, 25, 23, 21, 22, 29, 30:

It was difficult at first to find the café to buy some water.

I wore my last clean clothes, and hefted an overly heavy carryon.

I wore a shirt, I wore a sweater, I did not wear a tie.

Like many others, I wore socks, and underwear, and slung an anonymous carryon over my shoulder.

My clothes were unremarkable, and somewhat gender-neutral, and my carryon was plain black woven ripstopping nylon.

I wrote in a notebook, listened to music on headphones, adjusted the patent leather strap of my watch.

I had forgotten my painkillers, left behind my shampoo, and shower gel in the hotel bathroom.

I wiped my glasses with a special cloth I always carry with me.

My carryon contained within it a spare pair of comfortable shoes.

I had already come equipped with enough things to amuse and distract me until time to board the plane.

I can't recall if I ate anything, but I know I didn't have a meal of anything on offer at the deli.

I longed to sleep in my own sheets again, as I slung my carryon bag over my shoulder, and clutched biscuits to take back for my work colleagues.

There was no room in my carryon for the heavily crafted décor that surrounded me.

I did not visit the island of Murano on this visit to Venice, and in fact I have never been there.

I didn't eat anything.

The most I could hope for was to see some interesting food packaging.

My carryon contained hardly any items of clothing.

My plain black carryon contained very little clothing.

I could not find anything to spend my last remaining euros on, therefore I still have them, lying on my bureau drawer.

I didn't eat anything.

I sat and waited on a pleather seat with a view through the door to the jetway, a long sloping hallway that seemed to be lined with windows and closed doors.

In this refashioning, the prominence of first-person, "I" statements emerges. This version communicates something closer to a linear narrative of my time in airport space, ending with a view to the jetway as I sat waiting. The repetition of some statements calls attention to the sequence in which they are inserted (and re-inserted, though the shops indicated were actually different places) into the narrative. The sentences can come to mean something different each time they are written and read, much as two shops with the same variety of goods on offer can evoke differing reactions in the citizen of airport space, depending on their placement within the airport structure. With this exercise, I have thus located evidence of the spatial possibilities that I argue function as constant possibilities within systems of writing.

This kind of Oulipian system, like Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliards de Poemes*, asks its practitioner to order and re-order a set number of variables. Like shuffling a deck of cards, the interest is in the combinatory process, which has a key spatial dimension to its structure and expression. This shuffling of cards also evokes the autobiographical work that I will examine next: the language in Michel Leiris's *Rules of the Game*. As we will come to see, the word-erasings ("biffures") evident in Leiris's texts, like the function of space within the Oulipo's systems of writing, "serve to criticize—and socialize—the potentially solipsistic elucubrations of the autobiographer who is busy linking and arranging his index cards recounting the past."[190]

[190] Leah D. Hewitt, "Between Movements: Leiris in Literary History," *Yale French Studies*, 81 (1992): 84.

Michel Leiris, "...'Reusement!" and *Rules of the Game*

In "Songs," one of the short pieces of *Rules of the Game*, Michel Leiris describes the synaesthetic feeling of words in the mouth, "the message, mumbled rather than articulated." He gives as example the name Blaise, a word resonating "like something profoundly sad and pale as a chalky cliff. Nothing can be associated with this Blaise, whose name, dissyllabic though it is, is endlessly drawn out, but the monotonous gesture of rocking."[191] This kind of image-met-with-vocalization, a synesthesia, is what happens for Leiris in this particular gulf between literary object as heard, and the image as perceived. I will examine this "gulf between" in particular, with reference to the function of mistakes, liminality, and Leiris's use of ethnographic approaches as a system for gaining access to autobiographical language-memory.

Michel Leiris was influenced by Surrealism in his turning to the self as subject, and *Rules of the Game*, his multi-volume autobiographical collection, is also situated in criticism within the context of anthropological discourses and his earlier work, *L'Afrique Fantome*.[192] In his interest in the possibilities of language as a generative tool his autobiographical writing is related to the Oulipo, though he was not a member of the group. Leiris has in common with the Oulipo an interest in language games and the use of systems to access meaning; for Leiris these function as the system of an ethnographical approach.[193] Leiris and the Oulipo have an interest in "language's purely pleasurable turns and twists, when words take on a life of their own instead of merely transmitting a message,"[194] an interest in writing's existence independent of the author. In works in an autobiographical genre, this would seem to be a contradiction; how can autobiographical writing come to exist independently from its author, and does the example provided by Leiris also serve to create that kind of potential independent existence in the reader that we have seen granted by Oulipian systems? The works examined in this chapter each provide examples of how this contradiction is possible through the creation and use of a linguistic liminal space, making the distance between the writer and the reader a function of the text itself.

Leiris's ethnographic method is significant for a contextualization of his work and also directly informs the structure of this thesis, for as Blanchard has written of Leiris, we come to see through his works that "individual memory works for the writer very much as it does for the

[191] Michel Leiris, *Rules of the Game*, trans Lydia Davis (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989),11.
[192] See Peter Phipps, "Michel Leiris: Master of Ethnographic Failure," 183-194, and Judith Weiss, "Boundary Confusion in Anthropology and Art: Pablo Picasso and Michel Leiris," 195-210, in *Celebrating Transgression: Method and Politics in Anthropological Studies of Culture*, eds. Ursula Rao and John Hutnyk (New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2006).
[193] Phipps, 187. "Fantome is an ethnographic variant of Leiris's interest as a writer in the problem of the excess of signification of language, exemplified by puns and language games."
[194] Hewitt, 79.

ethnographer recording in the field and reconstituting through the experience of cultural difference a world encompassing both his own references and those of the other at hand."[195] This correlates with the larger concern of my research, wherein by trying theory and practice against one another, I am creating by implication a revision of methodology.[196] For Leiris as ethnographer, moving towards autobiography "was a move towards confronting intimate truths rather than distorting or fictionalising them in his writing; and this coincided with his professional induction into ethnography and its demands of authenticity, following his first period of psychoanalysis."[197] The position of the observer conducting ethnographic work was an inhuman one for him.[198] Pretending objectivity, and set spatially apart from the observed, the ethnographer takes on a role much like that of a mechanism such as the airplane's black box, though the ethnographic role expands upon that of the black box to include the element of the search for subject. In an airplane, the black box is given its subject only for a short window of time, before new material takes its place as it records over its own memory. The subject as seen by the black box constantly erases itself.

In writing on Leiris, Emmanuel Lévinas identifies a "basic ambiguity" in the way the *bifurs*, or word-erasings, are "about pinpointing thought at the rare moment when it sideslips into something other than itself" and thus making the process of word-association possible. "Leiris deals more in word chemistry than in verbal alchemy.... It properly becomes the narrative content, being both the work of art it puts forward and a reflection on the essence of that art."[199] This is a form of failure—thought in the middle of becoming something not itself, failing at being thought, when a "basic ambiguity" reveals the function of a liminal state. This lies at the core of making meaning through word-association—a changing from one state to another that provides the generative space for language. This state of failure of thought at being thought brings forth the word-association by which Leiris constructs a narrative.

Word-erasure is an aspect of failure within the work—but failure that is still present in the remaining work's use of space. Lévinas writes of Leiris's erasure in *Rules of the Game* that:

> The process of word-association, once understood in the context of word-erasing becomes a system of thinking which stands beyond the classical categories of representation and identity. [...] The originality of word-erasing lies in its positing of

[195] Blanchard, *Rivista*, 55.
[196] Cf. ibid., 71.
[197] Thomas Wilks, *Experimentation and the Autobiographical Search for Identity in the Projects of Michel Leiris and Hubert Fichte* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 127-128.
[198] Phipps, 184.
[199] Emmanuel Lévinas, "Transcending Words: Concerning Word-Erasing," trans Didier Maleuvre, *Yale French Studies*, 81 (1992): 146.

> multiplicity as simultaneous and conscience as irreducibly ambiguous. Michel Leiris's memories such as they are narrated according to his 'rule of the game' does not give the impression—curiously enough—of a temporal scheme. Rather, the ambiguity of word-erasing creates a space.[200]

Lévinas's reference to word-erasure as a system is telling, pointing to the systems of writing operating at a substrate within Leiris's compositions, not visible or centralized for the reader in the same way as they are for Oulipian texts. The ambiguity of Leiris's system of writing creates a space—using Lévinas's analysis, the word-erasures create space within the text. What was written and erased maintains a presence within it—it is this space that I find embodied in the airplane's black box. The temporality involved does not matter so much: what is erased is erased constantly, and maintains a presence within what is left, due to the perceptible space of what evidence remains. This is a puzzling twist of perception to attempt to explain, which can perhaps be articulated more clearly using Derrida's term inscription: the presence of the black box recording is (somewhat more literally) always inscribed in the erased recordings, as the erased recordings are always inscribed within the presence of the remaining black box record. In this way we can see in Leiris's word-erasures an example of the effect of spatial perception upon the function of words on the page.

Numerous other readers of Leiris's work have also identified the significance of his texts' relation to liminal space, one describing it as "literature which falls between the cracks."[201] More than one analysis of Leiris has compared reading his work to the attempt to sit in the space between chairs.[202] This liminal interval, a kind of "double movement [...] presents and criticizes...never settling definitively on one meaning, but always oscillating between positions (the interval where we, as readers, precariously reside)."[203] Reading Leiris is an occupation of a liminal territory.

In examining Leiris, I will be focusing in particular on "the famous '...Reusement!' episode at the beginning of *Biffures*, when the little boy Michel learns that the word he says is 'heureusement' and not 'reusement'." In this episode, Leiris is corrected, and comes to understand through this mistake and correction that language is not his alone, but intimately connects him to others.[204] Why do I draw out only this one episode from the multivolume *Rules of the Game*? I chose this work, and in particular the "...Reusement!" section, for this focus on language and the encapsulation within Leiris's word of multiple ideas that are the subject of my

[200] Levinas, 147.
[201] Blanchard, 55.
[202] Hewitt, 89.
[203] Ibid.,
[204] Ibid., 84.

investigation as a whole. With this one word-meaning, and its associated images and awareness of space and self-in-space that form the memory and contribute to Leiris's shift in the fundamental understanding of himself and language,[205] it is also important to note that here we find an understanding prompted by a mistake. In Leiris's work, "the daily commonplace non-event becomes the site of intense drama and questioning."[206] We see this with the attention to the multiple versions of the events leading up to Leiris's expression of "...Reusement!" and can also trace it through the texts, mechanisms and airport spaces addressed by this project. This "commonplace non-event" is what Perec attempts to describe in *Species of Spaces*, and what Augé locates in the "non-place" of the airport. However, Perec, Leiris and Queneau have all created work that seeks to express the perceptive potential within the commonplace non-event and non-spaces, and with the reader to locate in them something remarkable. In looking closely at the "commonplace non-event," we locate the site for creation of the spatial perception revealed by the autobiographical works of the Oulipo and Leiris in the relation between the first-person perceiver and the common systems of spaces and language. In linking examples of their autobiographical works with airport space and liminal mechanisms in this project, I am recontextualising the airport by demonstrating that it also functions as an indicator for the remarkable perceptual strangeness of the gulf between reader and writer, and how each is inscribed upon the other.

Leiris possesses a particular capacity for making use of language-memory to access his own series of autobiographical works. These language-memories provide the trigger and the structure for his system of writing, though in the example I will look at here, he does not make use of Oulipian constraints to generate the text—rather, he examines particular word-memories, or word-mistakes, as source for autobiography. The sensation of a mistaken hearing of a lyric as described by Leiris, and its following associative images, triggered my own distinct memory of a mistaken language-meaning from my childhood. Rather than a corrected word, mine was a mistaken meaning: utopia. It was a white building word, of marble and morning light on green grass—a word opening spaces in the pronunciation, containing striking and separate vowel sounds. I found while reading that I could not ignore this memory, which seemed to closely parallel the language-memory Leiris describes, an example of how, "following in the steps of the writer, we are invited to lose our footing in an ongoing game whose aim would be to

[205] See also Wilks, 14. "Throughout *Biffures*, Leiris is concerned with positioning his material in an attempt to define his identity as a subject shaped by language."
[206] Hewitt, 90.

determine/proclaim the force of literature in life and of life in literature."[207] The text demands reader participation and complicity. With the subject, Leiris invites comparisons with the reader's experience, prompting the reader's creation of a parallel narrative of language-memory, and location and questioning of how mistakes in language use and memory inform the gulf between literary object and perception—in other words, how the language mistakes come to speak to the liminal space of autobiographical writing and reading.

"Between his lips and my ears, the second line changes, and what reached me, the problem I had to solve, was..."[208] In this "between," we find the space of the gulf separating what is said and what is understood. In a song it's the space between the lips of another and the ears of oneself, but this gulf "between" indicates a leap of imagination as well. Leiris here indicates that the comprehension of an unfamiliar phrase is a problem to solve—one begins to work out the meaning of language, and by extension literature, like a mysterious problem of association. The problem itself is mysterious and must be articulated. It is foremost a problem of spaces between: the metaphorical space occurring between material culture (in its broadest sense, encompassing all transmissions: the song or the writing or the image of the airport) and the self becomes a series of problems to solve.

These "phrases steeped in music" are isolated, separated by an aura or "sheen" from ordinary language. The phrases in language-memory depart from the page, and leave it behind entirely:

> A more effective treatment than commonplace typographical artifices, whatever the attraction for eye and mind of, say, italics, large type, footnotes, words marked with asterisks, or even the blank spaces poets use, which split up the sentence and consequently allow the written words to emerge – thicker and more active chemical bodies because they are just now being born – from the invisibility of the page.[209]

Leiris here acknowledges the physicality of the text itself, brought into prominence by an unwritten form of language. The words emerge for him through song, but the important aspect is the aura accompanying the isolated phrases, an aura which emerged in written language with the insertion of spaces between words. This latter invisibility is worth meditating upon—the page does recede, as our eyes jump in saccades over emergent words, and the spaces between words is a fertile invisibility. The song also recedes, as the formation of meaning (or potential for meaning) becomes pre-eminent here. Compared to the receding white space as emphasized by

[207] Hewitt, 78.
[208] Leiris, 10.
[209] Ibid., 12.

typographical artifices, music is a means of splitting up the sentence with another combination of senses (verbal+aural=song) or aesthetic terms (of music). Both remove our senses from direct consideration of the medium by which we perceive such ordinary language.

In contrast to Perec and Queneau, for Leiris the space of the writing is meshed with the musical content of spoken language. Both music and individual word-memories work to lift the text off the page, to make us read the language as a spatial form external to its physical presence on the page. The page recedes and we are steeped in a childhood memory of repetition and meaning gained through mistake. I will attempt to trace the space of my own comparable language-memory in order to test whether I can find evidence for Leiris inside it. Leiris's writing of his childhood memories does not so much immerse my reading into his memory as it does project my mind back to my own equivalent time, evoking memories of a similar feeling or atmosphere, perception-memories, but also my prior recollection of these memories as well. The repetition of these in their own memory-images means that they are collectively liable to be shuffled over in slightly different orders upon each remembering, much as in "...Reusement!" Leiris describes and re-describes events leading to his exclamation of "reusement!"[210] Each description of a lead soldier (or papier-mache, or another "dubious" material), falling from the table onto the floral carpet (or bare floor, dressed or plain), and which then does not break—each of these is "the important thing" which must be described in many possibilities, and each leads to the most important thing, the exclamation, "...reusement!" and subsequent understanding of its connection with another word, heureuse, "and the magical power of this relation suddenly inserted it into a whole sequence of precise meanings."[211] This moment leads Leiris into an understanding not only of the nature of language as a "vast instrument of communication," but a social awareness, "how articulated language, the arachnean tissue of my relations with others, went beyond me, thrusting its mysterious antennae in all directions."[212] The mistake's immediate correction brings with it meaning, and more than just meaning, the glimpse of self inside the space of language, where "the subject learns to confront the other in the corrected articulation, a play of difference which produces the very history of self-identity. So it is that reality, now in motion, is glimpsed through the gaps in these linguistic phenomena as an already existing inscription..."[213] and we see that the element of failure to be found in Leiris, in the form of his mistake in language, is directly linked to the location of meaning via the gaps and the perceptible inscription whose physical example can be seen in the black box.

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[210] Ibid., 3.
[211] Ibid., 5.
[212] Ibid., 6.
[213] Seán Hand, "The sound and the fury: language in Leiris," *Paragraph*, 7 (1986): 109.

When Queneau repeatedly rewrites mundane events in *Exercises in Style*, he conducts a demonstration of this "magical power" by means of an Oulipian system of writing. Through repetition, through mistake, through a circling re-write of an everyday event, we are led to an important sense of spatial relation and its extent. Leiris uses a similar process, through a turning and re-turning to a word carried around in memory, and I read the attempt to locate the unlocatable in a similar way, conducting a parallel search for the meaning of a single language- and space-memory. Through this and through the repetition of the search itself, the language and sense of space come into being.

Like Leiris's recall in *Rules of the Game* of growing awareness of language intertwined with distinct spatial memory, the word "utopia" has come to represent a similar mental process for me, inextricable from my reading of the text. My reading of Leiris is threaded throughout with an examination of a mistake I also made. Since childhood I have drawn an incorrect visual meaning of the word utopia, sourced from views of Washington DC's pale public buildings edging the mall, the vast lawn near the city's centre dissected and invaded by pebbled walkways. I would not describe this as an image exactly, but halfway between a memory and an idea, one that has evolved and threaded into other words and meanings, alike in their sound or memory. When I was six or seven years old, I recall seeing IM Pei's recently built wing of the National Gallery of Art edging into my view as though the building were moving and not my point of view. I recall this as though it were turning around corners and pushing aside tree leaves, its sharpest marble angle already blurred within arm's reach by the touch of tourist fingers testing the edge. Utopia to me meant the gleam of marble, the stature of public works, the height of museum ceilings and the calm and cool within their shaded interiors. Utopia was the colour of the sunlight on the marble faces of these public buildings, just next to another colour of the shadowed western and northern walls.

Years later as an adult I found utopia again in the vast wings of the Department of Agriculture building, filled with desks and hallways on an early weekend morning. There was dew on the cropped grass of the mall. The merry-go-round in front of the Smithsonian Castle, further east, was still and curtained. Utopia air was thin and somehow blank. All structures in utopia were somehow in suspension, awaiting something absent, gelled in place by the long length of view and sightlines possible up and down the national mall. These images and feelings combined to associate utopia as a word with a distinct idea of space. My attempt to recall the word and its personal meaning was a kind of spiral movement, a turning search for meaning and context for the word before I became aware of its prescribed meaning and context.

This utopia idea for me evolves over stages of my life and comes to associate in my mind with other language and spatial variations, collecting references to itself along the way. Utopia called up an idea of distinctly public space. There was a de-emphasized, dreamlike quality to the viewpoint, as though all aspects of a certain element, the greenness of the grass on the mall for example, could be understood simultaneously through one word. It emerges first as a distinct memory and idea of itself in written form while I was living in Chicago, writing about then-recent memories of Washington DC as a city. The music of the word, its vowels and marble meaning, were connected inextricably to the city. As Blaise was a word of chalky cliffs for Leiris, utopia for me was a word built of cold pale stone, in perpendicular pieces, despite its undulating vowels. The U, seeming so unusual to me as a child, indicated from the outset of the word that it was more than the sum of its letters. Its shape was one line, bent symmetrically, but also brought with it the sound of Y and O preceding, forming the first syllable of utopia into an accusation, a pointing to something distinct from myself, and actively so. The initial letter U indicated crisscrossing vocables and meanings: optical, utopia, amblyopia, wandering eye, it perfected itself outside of any awareness of proper definition. Upon my return to DC as an adult, I worked at an ophthalmology journal, and expected to recognize the city of my childhood, but largely failed in that expectation. Instead I found it overlapping in syllables of that early idea-image of utopia, now threaded to vision and vocabulary.[214]

Leiris declares that the point for a writer is, "to transmit into the head or heart of another person the concretions that have been deposited by his present or past life in the depths of his own head or heart and that have had value only for him until then..." Through a writer's release of these "concretions" into circulation, they return with a higher, more magical value. Leiris compares this to the process of exchanging shields as practised by Northwest American Indian tribes.[215] This transmission is one that creates a potential public value. In the gulf of separation between material and perception, we locate the creation of, potential for, assignation of value independent of the creator. It is this space between that allows this idea of value to enter the equation, and co-exists with it. I do not believe the value may be separated from this idea of space.

In recalling his childhood, Leiris articulates how a single object (a table for instance) is capable of summing up a room entirely—yet is not given definite form, but transported, via the memory of individual, to another point in space.[216] This mental transportation and overlay, the

[214] Cf. Lydia Davis's introduction in Leiris, x-xi.
[215] Ibid., 13-14.
[216] Ibid., 15.

wilful evocation of something else to navigate the present, recalls Situationist dérive experiments and reconfigurations of city maps.[217] In order to attempt to understand Washington DC once I no longer lived there (for the second time, imagining it after the fact), utopia and its threaded words of optics, amblyopia, and attendant images, together formed the object that summed up the feeling of the city—my idea of place, twice revised. My mistaken ideas of utopia became the map of another point in space:

> Whether it is a memory precisely located in the past, an old imaginary creation that may, for all I know, be taking shape at this very instant, or a present moment: in the end, the goal hardly matters. Because when I hunt, my efforts always take place in the present. This tense race is no doubt the only affecting element in all my strivings here, and now that it has become its own object, is probably what constitutes—both in the clenched gesture of writing and in the relaxed posture of dreaming—the strange series of sonorous vibrations whose vague perception fascinates me so.[218]

Our perception through gestures of both writing and dreaming (clenched or relaxed) is the element here I find fascinating. With respect to reading, Leiris expresses an aspect of this project's larger interest in what is vaguely, indirectly perceived. The indistinctness of the present's oscillation between writing and dreaming (or imagining) a narrative, the bridge between the two realms itself, and the persistent "race" to find memory are constant elements of a perpetual present-time. The writing of the text for Leiris, like the reading of it for the reader, is "not a calculated index to actions that took place elsewhere, long ago and off the page, but an immediate experience in its own right."[219] This constant present is a simultaneous present of writing and of reading, an aspect that both the transmission and reception share. This also helps to explain why the temporal aspect is not a concern of this thesis as a whole, and why primacy has been granted instead to space. Where these things define and separate themselves is here demonstrated, through Leiris's reasoning, as a spatial element of perception of memory or the written word. They meet in a continuous present time, but not in space.

[217] Sadler, 21, 60.
[218] Leiris, 17.
[219] John Sturrock, "Leiris and La Regle du Jeu," in George Craig and Margaret McGowan, eds. , *Moy Qui Me Voy* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 202.

Vignette: Larding in the Airport

The Oulipian constraint of "larding," or expanding a text from within, refers procedurally to "the 19th century practice of paying magazine contributors by the line—a practice that encouraged them to stretch their material to maximum length."[220] The Oulipo Compendium defines the system of writing after Duchateau's description:

> From a given text, pick two sentences. Add a new sentence between the first two; then two sentences in the new intervals that have become available; and continue to add sentences until the passage has attained the length desired. The supplementary sentences must either enrich the existing narrative or create a new narrative continuity. (It is permissible to start with more than two sentences where appropriate.)[221]

This larding method sets up the generation of text within bracketed and re-bracketed narrative. Composition becomes a process of infilling between brackets of departure and arrival points, providing a field of potential within the spaces between sentences—here the unit that defines potential reading is not the spaces between words, but the sentence. Composing a larded text of airport space is a way of indicating through the writing process how time in an airport environment can expand and contract.

My goal therefore is to take airport sentences, and stretch the space between these to enrich the narrative of the airport, or create a new continuity entirely. This may also be read as an implicit critique of the source text, as the larding functions to transform a mistake, redundancy, or failure in the original into a different narrative. As in the example of the Conan Doyle source text quoted in the Oulipo Compendium,[222] I will include all the different larded versions in sequence.

I considered several groups of potential sentences as starting points, among them:

> A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.[223]

> A few years ago, one of my friends had the idea of living for a whole month in an international airport, without ever leaving it (unless, all international airports being by definition identical, to catch a plane that would have taken him to another international airport). To my knowledge, he has never realized this project, but it's hard to see what, objectively, there might be to prevent him.[224]

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[220] Mathews and Brotchie, 163.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Bachelard, 47.
[224] Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 26.

> The interest of such an undertaking would lie above all in its exoticism: a displacement, more apparent than real, of our habits and rhythms, and minor problems of adaptation. It would quite soon become tedious no doubt.[225]

> Then he resumed his unhurried progress.
>
> He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.[226]

> Somewhat dreamily, Pierre Dupont put down his magazine. The 'Fasten seat belt' notice had gone out.[227]

I discarded the Bachelard sentences—though I could see how I might expand upon them, their aphoristic structure doesn't lend itself well to a rewriting of their continuity. I also chose not to use the examples from *Species of Spaces*, for though Perec's autobiographical voice provides the narrative form, it would be more interesting to make use of Perec's idea of minute observation, carried through from this project's earlier experiment with writing the airport space, and use it as a potential means to critique Augé's approach to narrating airport space. Perec's concluding statement, "It would quite soon become tedious no doubt," implies a dismissal of the possibilities of airport space (and of the repetitive acts and encounters therein), whose surfaces must surely provide fertile grounds for the minute observation he conducts with respect to the street and other spaces elsewhere in the work. For Perec, and his friend, the airport as a species of space must be deliberately chosen for an encounter, unlike the spaces of everyday life such as the bed, the street, the town, and would promise only a rapidly arriving sense of tedium, not the potential of spatial sequence and repetition that I am interested in with this project as a whole. Now that the airport is encountered as a matter of course in national and international travel—the shortest distance between two cities often requires the passing-through of airport space—for larding purposes, I have chosen instead to use an excerpt from Marc Augé's opening narration of Pierre Dupont's encounter with air travel, and furthermore chosen an excerpt which puts him in the airside space of the departure lounge, not the airplane itself.

The original quote again:

> Then he resumed his unhurried progress.
>
> He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted

[225] Ibid., 27.
[226] Augé, 2-3.
[227] Ibid., 6.

> out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.[228]

It is worth noting here that I have chosen a first sentence that begins with "Then…" implying that there is something that came before, as I wanted to keep the sense that we are arriving in the middle of the narrative. In this case, what immediately precedes this section of the narrative is Dupont's purchase of a book, though this is not necessary to know in order to write or read the larded versions.

Larded version 1:

Then he resumed his unhurried progress.

He stepped upon the moving sidewalk, which carried him at a slow, steady pace towards his departure gate.

He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.

Larded version 2:

Then he resumed his unhurried progress. He drifted around the spaces in between the shops, allowing his path to meander.

He stepped upon the moving sidewalk, which carried him at a slow, steady pace towards his departure gate. Others walked hurriedly, their intent visible in their posture.

He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.

Larded version 3:

Then he resumed his unhurried progress. He held in his hand a plastic bag, branded with the name of one of the airport duty-free kiosks. He drifted around the spaces in between the shops, allowing his path to meander.

He noticed the gate numbers receding down the terminal hallway. He stepped upon the moving sidewalk, which carried him at a slow, steady pace towards his departure gate. His

[228] Ibid., 2-3.

briefcase was beginning to become heavy in his hand. Others walked hurriedly, their intent visible in their posture.

What destinations did they each carry in mind? He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.

Larded version 4:

Then he resumed his unhurried progress. He took the time to check his watch in passing against the digital displays of electronics for sale. He held in his hand a plastic bag, branded with the name of one of the airport duty-free kiosks. The surroundings were filled with brightly colored plastics. He drifted around the spaces in between the shops, allowing his path to meander.

It was almost time to make his way to the gate. He noticed the gate numbers receding down the terminal hallway. Visible through the picture windows onto the apron, machines and people seemed to move in choreographed lines around the planes. He stepped upon the moving sidewalk, which carried him at a slow, steady pace towards his departure gate. A voice announced the beginning and end of this mode of conveyance. His briefcase was beginning to become heavy in his hand. Some fellow passengers rode past on beeping airport courtesy vehicles. Others walked hurriedly, their intent visible in their posture.

What did their paper trails reveal? What destinations did they each carry in mind? Like him, they had been separated from bulkier belongings, and been assigned numbers and tags. He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.

Larded version 5:

Then he resumed his unhurried progress. He had arrived with hours to spare. He took the time to check his watch in passing against the digital displays of electronics for sale. The smell of perfume drifted over from a nearby counter, stocked with many different bottles unwrapped for testing. He held in his hand a plastic bag, branded with the name of one of the airport duty-free kiosks. It would not have to undergo any further checks by airline staff. The surroundings were filled with brightly colored plastics. Music echoed from somewhere nearby. He drifted around the spaces in between the shops, allowing his path to meander.

His mind meandered briefly as well. It was almost time to make his way to the gate. He would soon board a long-haul flight. He noticed the gate numbers receding down the terminal hallway. They counted down to a point in the distance, where his airplane awaited. Visible through the picture windows onto the apron, machines and people seemed to move in choreographed lines around the planes. It was an ordinary day, with a clear weather forecast. He stepped upon the moving sidewalk, which carried him at a slow, steady pace towards his departure gate. He rested a closed fist on the rubber surface of the handrail. A voice announced the beginning and end of this mode of conveyance. He could tell that it had been digitised. His briefcase was beginning to become heavy in his hand. The contents weighed upon his mind. Some fellow passengers rode past on beeping airport courtesy vehicles. He startled at the noise it made, zipping past leisurely pedestrians. Others walked hurriedly, their intent visible in their posture.

Would any of them be sitting in an assigned seat next to his? What did their paper trails reveal? How long had they planned to fly on this particular day, at this time, and this space? What destinations did they each carry in mind? Like him, all were commencing a course of action tied to a machine whose functions, in all likelihood, none of them could explain. Like him, they had been separated from bulkier belongings, and been assigned numbers and tags. He reached for the boarding pass in his pocket, a sign that he had been accepted onto, and accepting of, a sequence of events whose action he was intimately connected with, yet powerless to control. He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.

Larded version 6:

Then he resumed his unhurried progress. His steps were slow and measured, weighted with a sense of foreboding. He had arrived with hours to spare. This spare time, as usual, was not strictly necessary, but his actions were at the convenience of the airline itself. He took the time to check his watch in passing against the digital displays of electronics for sale. They blinked and buzzed behind their price tags. The smell of perfume drifted over from a nearby counter, stocked with many different bottles unwrapped for testing. For a place of transit, the airport was remarkably filled with opportunities for intrusion upon the senses. He held in his hand a plastic bag, branded with the name of one of the airport duty-free kiosks. Inside it, the book that he hoped would distract him throughout the flight, along with a newly-purchased bottle of water. It would not have to undergo any further checks by airline staff. Every commodity in this space was permissible to take onboard. The surroundings were filled with brightly colored plastics. Stacks

of potential purchases surrounded him. Music echoed from somewhere nearby. He could no longer tell from which direction he had entered this space. He drifted around the spaces in between the shops, allowing his path to meander.

He could feel through the drift a resistance to forward motion that he sought to suppress as he moved closer to the plane. His mind meandered briefly as well. It lit on memories, arriving as vivid images from throughout his life, leading him to question why it was that, in airports, he thought of these things yet could not access them by choice while in more comfortable surroundings. It was almost time to make his way to the gate. He had a few minutes yet to spare. He would soon board a long-haul flight. Anticipating the seated, seat-belted hours ahead, he took a deep breath and sighed. He noticed the gate numbers receding down the terminal hallway. Their shapes were large in the narrow space. They counted down to a point in the distance, where his airplane awaited. Once inside that airplane, he would surrender to the mechanism, which demanded all sorts of human attention both in the air and on the ground. Visible through the picture windows onto the apron, machines and people seemed to move in choreographed lines around the planes. The control tower with its swivelling radar antenna was visible in the background. It was an ordinary day, with a clear weather forecast. He took another deep breath and walked more purposefully forward. He stepped upon the moving sidewalk, which carried him at a slow, steady pace towards his departure gate. Holding both his briefcase and his shopping bag now in his left hand, he felt himself break out into a light sweat. He rested a closed fist on the rubber surface of the handrail. His palm grew moist as he avoided touching the surface with his fingertips. A voice announced the beginning and end of this mode of conveyance. The looping and word emphasis sounded unnatural. He could tell that it had been digitised. The air he was moving through seemed to get slightly thicker. His briefcase was beginning to become heavy in his hand. It combined with the weight of the water and book in his shopping bag to pull his left arm earthwards. The contents weighed upon his mind. Why had he spent money on a book when he should have been spending time reviewing the contracts that were his whole reason for the flight? Some fellow passengers rode past on beeping airport courtesy vehicles. Their lights flashed like strobes or those on emergency vehicles. He startled at the noise it made, zipping past leisurely pedestrians. Some, in family groups, walked at the pace of the smallest child. Others walked hurriedly, their intent visible in their posture.

He watched them as he stepped off the moving sidewalk with a hitch, adjusting his pace to the carpeted floor. Would any of them be sitting in an assigned seat next to his? Were they hiding anything threatening in their carry-on luggage? What did their paper trails reveal? He wondered how they might compare to his own trail of paper. How long had they planned to fly

on this particular day, at this time, and this space? His own trip had been assembled thanks to a series of circumstances he now imagined as a kind of complexly structured arrow, pointing him at this moment in time towards the airplane. What destinations did they each carry in mind? Were these familiar places, or imaginary locales they would encounter for the first time? Like him, all were commencing a course of action tied to a machine whose functions, in all likelihood, none of them could explain. Like him, they were each composed of a chain of events that had led each of them to this point. Like him, they had been separated from bulkier belongings, and been assigned numbers and tags. He felt himself part of a human and mechanical network, incomprehensible in its reach and complexity. He reached for the boarding pass in his pocket, a sign that he had been accepted onto, and accepting of, a sequence of events whose action he was intimately connected with, yet powerless to control. He felt that his itinerary, his path through the airport, his thoughts and suspicions funnelling him towards the airplane seat, all acted to define him as an individual with a unique point of view upon the space he now moved within, but this was not an unwelcome sensation in among the stresses of his travel—it was liberating. He was enjoying the feeling of freedom imparted by having got rid of his luggage and at the same time, more intimately, by the certainty that, now that he was 'sorted out', his identity registered, his boarding pass in his pocket, he had nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events.

I have chosen to end this larding exercise with the sixth version, superficially in order to mirror the six stages of airport space elaborated in chapter 2, but also more practically to keep the larding to a manageable length. Dupont as character is encountered in this larding in a liminal space, not only of the airport but also the moving sidewalk, recalling Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*.[229] The larded sentences themselves seek to occupy liminal spaces between sentences, and the struggle to fulfil the system is partly a struggle with dividing this space further through narrative.

Writing of Pierre Dupont as the protagonist encountering airport space as "non-place" and encountering supermodernity therein, Augé attempts to construct a kind of "everyman" to encounter the airport, but skims through many details of environment and perception that Dupont would have encountered, marking his passage through the space by skimming the surface of the airport's potential. I have attempted with these six stages of larding to unlock it, to find the potential hidden in the space between the sentences describing a portion of a "typical" encounter with airport space. By choosing two sentences on either side of a paragraph break, I wanted to

[229] Nicholson Baker, *The Mezzanine*, Cambridge: Granta in association with Penguin Books, 1990. This novel's narration takes place on one man's journey on an escalator between floors.

find what Augé might be skipping over. It is significant as well that the larding ends on a note of "waiting for a sequence of events." Augé's description overlooks the fact that Dupont has already been through, and is immersed in, sequences of events within the airport space, sequences that are both within and without his determination. I have attempted to describe the passage between shopping and the gate area that is implicit in Augé's paragraph break.

The composition of this system of writing became easier with each stage of larding. Finding a midpoint of action or description between two sentences either side meant that I had to be very certain about the new sentences I created, and their function with relation to their neighbor sentences before I moved ahead with another version of the narrative. In other words, I had to be certain of the potential in the new empty spaces created by any new sentence's interposition between the two pre-existing sentences on either side. This writing within the midpoint between two sentences became a problem of intersecting spatial perception and narrative—the constraint was generative in that by addressing a problem of space between sentences, I was able to locate "hidden" narrative within. As a commentary on airport spaces, I have described a field of first-person anxiety in the process of larding between these two sentences, and I have demonstrated how it is possible to read it into airport space, despite the apparent comforts of duty-free shopping and a known "sequence of events" that lie in and around the airport's spaces.

On Georges Perec and Autobiographical Space

In their preface to the *Yale French Studies* issue devoted to Georges Perec, Warren Motte and Jean-Jacques Poucel describe the "contract" between writer and reader that Perec's attention to legibility calls forth as a "collaborative relation," the staging of literature as an "artisanal activity rather than a product of inspiration."[230] An attention to reading, and by implication to the attachment between and space separating the author and the reader, is a key aspect of the work of an author who has pursued four directions in his writing: "a concern for the everyday and its details; a tendency towards confession and autobiography; an impulse toward formal innovation; and a desire to tell engaging stories."[231] By examining these concerns with respect to the kinds of spaces I have located and described within this thesis, I will explore how examples of Perec's autobiographical writing provide a spatial connection between systems of writing, liminal spaces, and autobiography.

Reading Space in *W or the Memory of Childhood*

Georges Perec's *W or the Memory of Childhood* is constructed in parallel narratives of fantasy and autobiography. We are told at the outset that the fantasy was spun in childhood and then recalled relatively recently to the time of its writing. With this apparent promise that fantasy and autobiography will somehow intersect, any reading must keep the search for it in mind. The jumps that a reader must make between these narratives mean that a reading of the book comes to resemble the "elaborate search pattern" in its attempt to locate the intersection of the two texts.

There are multiple dualities at work within the novel; parts of its own system reflect the construction of binary interactive forms and the problematic of these forms as they became written into one another. The alternating sequence of the narratives invites an alternating reading: turning to one, then the other, each having stories that accumulate in equal amounts and, at least at the outset, are not overtly dialogic, but which begin to overlay and form parallel layers. The text is presented to the reader in two distinct parts: that Olympic fantasy of W the island, and the text of Perec's childhood, clearly designated as autobiographical in his preface.

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[230] Warren F. Motte Jr. and Jean-Jacques Poucel, "Editors' Preface: On Reading Georges Perec," *Yale French Studies*, 105 (2004), 1-3.
[231] Ibid., 2.

Expanding, correcting, and admitting mistakes in footnotes,[232] the form of the book demonstrates that the imperfectly recalled memories are just as valid to autobiography as those facts which can be verified by a site visit or another person:

> My two earliest memories are not entirely implausible, even though, obviously, the many variations and imaginary details I have added in the telling of them—in speech or in writing—have altered them greatly, if not completely distorted them.[233]

The misremembered contributes to the system of autobiography as much as the historical circumstances and certain memories. The structure of the work and its attention to space acknowledges the role memory and its mistakes play in autobiography, and incorporates them into the structure spatially, communicating their use to the reader. The contrast of the two narratives invites us to trust the autobiographical voice's (Perec's) reliability, even through mistakes in memory:

> One of these texts is entirely imaginary: it's an adventure story, an arbitrary but careful reconstruction of a childhood fantasy about a land in thrall to the Olympic ideal. The other text is an autobiography: a fragmentary tale of a wartime childhood, a tale lacking in exploits and memories, made up of scattered offments, gaps, lapses, doubts, guesses and meagre anecdotes. Next to it, the adventure story is rather grandiose, or maybe dubious. For it begins to tell one tale, and then, all of a sudden, launches into another. In this break, in this split suspending the story on an unidentifiable expectation, can be found the point of departure for the whole of this book: the *points of suspension* on which the broken threads of childhood and the web of writing are caught.[234]

The point of departure or suspension remains elusive, difficult to contemplate as a "point"—the last sentence of description by Perec seems to contradict itself. Is the interstice he describes between stories a static space, or the guiding point from which the writing springs on either parallel side—empty space or focused presence? The adventure story itself is a narrative that splits in two halfway through, as we abandon the storyline of the two Gaspard Wincklers for a detailed recounting of how Olympic ideals play out on an island where one of the Wincklers may have ended up after a shipwreck, and the other has been engaged to seek him. In the Wincklers' relationships with the island of W, we see that the island is both present and absent in its potential: a goal for one, a possible endpoint for the other, but both of which remain uncertainties for the reader.

[232] Perec, *W or The Memory of Childhood*, 19-21.
[233] Ibid., 13.
[234] Ibid., n.p. in author's preface. Emphasis Perec's.

At the halfway point in the book, Perec's two parallel narratives become further subdivided into Parts One and Two, marked by a page blank but for an ellipsis in parentheses. Upon first reading this seemed incongruous—was it inserted to mark a lapse in time? If so, it was a lapse inferable from the shift in both narratives. The W text picks up immediately, associated with the split explicitly by Perec in the preface, and in the childhood text Perec's memories mark the split on the point of his evacuation from Paris. The ellipsis in parentheses also delineates a point where each text intersects and shifts in the crossing, like x and y axes on a graph. This plain page remains explicitly intrusive, the complexity of the sections' relation to one another only becoming fully apparent as the Olympic events of Part Two resolve into horrific scenes of torture. The "points of suspension" we thus come to understand are central to the meaning of the text as a whole.[235]

The ellipsis itself is a spatial and temporal indicator, both a pause and a restricted area—it indicates things that aren't really made explicit, but that take place in both texts. This punctuation mark (or group of marks) is a means of distorting the scale of the book's events and narrative. It might indicate an unquantifiable loss, or a slip out of one narrative track and onto another, a switching-point. The ellipsis acts as an indicator for the dropping away of the W narrator's story—henceforth we are reading the adopted "cold, impassive tone of the ethnologist"[236]—and also encompasses the loss of Perec's mother and father, and the mistaken or rewritten memories of his childhood. This small symbol thus becomes the potential site and repository of the book's unspoken trauma, containing actual events significantly larger than it would first seem to indicate. It provides a cue to wonder, to imagine the gargantuan existing together with the microscopic in the same space—a space for distortion of scale and questioning of judgment—what is real among such potentially paradoxical imagination?

In the parameters of the Olympic mathematics, what begins as a game, the explanation of which forms a narrative, transforms over the course of that narrative into a system of subjugation, of imprisonment. What set Queneau's 99 narratives free to describe infinite ludic retellings of inconsequential events reveals in *W or The Memory of Childhood* its other face. Potential for freedom of written expression via language games and adoption of linguistic restrictions, and potential for confinement and expression of irreconcilable and mechanical destruction: the common denominator between the two extremes, the system itself.

[235] Paul Schwarz, "The Autobiographical Works" in *Georges Perec: traces of his passage* (Summa Publications Inc.: Birmingham, AL, 1988), 51.
[236] Perec, *W or The Memory of Childhood*, 4.

Perec has written "an autobiography ...a tale lacking ...memories:"[237]

> My childhood belongs to those things which I know I don't know much about. It is behind me; yet it is the ground on which I grew, and it once belonged to me, however obstinately I assert that it no longer does. [...] However, childhood is neither longing nor terror, neither a paradise lost nor the Golden Fleece, but maybe it is a horizon, a point of departure, a set of coordinates from which the axes of my life may draw their meaning.[238]

The metaphors of space and of axes here signify what will come to emerge over the reader's interaction with the textual space of the work as a whole, mirroring Perec's own search for meaning in the act of composition according to these forms, and his use of "a unifying substructure" upon which to build "a book of memoirs."[239] The textual space of the book herein interacts with the representational spaces described in each text. From *W*... we have: disguised location names indicated only by their first letter, Venice, Germany, the hotel bar where Gaspard Winckler hears the story of a small boat rounding Cape Horn near Tierra del Fuego (this being a kind of space-narrated-within-space), and finally the innermost spaces of W and its cinder stadiums and crowded (or echoingly empty) rooms. From the memory of childhood we are with Perec first in the recent past of Venice, then in a remembered Paris surrounded by family and in disguise at the Gare de Lyon, at boarding houses and schools near Villard-de-Lans.

Perhaps the most significant of these representations of space is the island of W itself, and the gradually-revealed nature of the structures whose intricate relations are described geometrically[240] and which act as a stage for the ruthless design slowly coming into greater focus throughout the narrative. This island is the site of a fantasy written into the book as though the innermost of a series of containers—Russian dolls or Chinese boxes. The narration of Gaspard Winckler is contained within the W text, itself sited in Perec's remembering of the basic premise of a story "about the life of a community concerned exclusively with sport, on a tiny island off Tierra del Fuego"[241] while recalling his childhood. This narrative is several times removed from the autobiographical self, associated and re-associated with isolation both textually and in representation. Reading through the layers of the construction to imagine W as a place reveal the isolation and removal to be frighteningly close, seen finally as within the mind of the author, linking the representational space back to the textual via an internal trauma of the self.

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[237] Ibid., n.p. author's preface.
[238] Ibid., 12.
[239] PSchwarz, 47.
[240] Perec, *W or The Memory of Childhood*, 71.
[241] Ibid., 7.

In writing of *W*... Michel Sirvent identifies the book as lacking a centre, without "a unity or an autobiographic totality,"[242] though akin to my argument above, for Sirvent the two texts play off of each other spatially. The subtext of each becomes clear through spatial juxtaposition with the other, organizing the space such that the book functions as the field wherein "the conflict of representations is undertaken."[243] Rather than Sirvent's reading, the central space of the book, as opposed to being entirely absent, is more akin to "ground zero" as a "point of intersection."[244] In the argument that "W is not a double text but a book that unfolds by constantly splitting up,"[245] Sirvent in analysing the text envisions it as reflecting "the writer's double face: Oulipian/Autobiographer,"[246] and does not seem to acknowledge that each is present in the other, rather than strictly alternating forces within the same work.

Sirvent argues that *W* is "not an autobiography; it is made up of various parts, only one of which is autobiographical."[247] By referring to what Perec terms "fantasy" as "fiction" instead, Sirvent removes the (italicised) story of W further from the (Roman) text of Perec's childhood narrative. Rather than envisioning the fantasy of W as another aspect of the autobiography, Sirvent views it as a composition independent of autobiography; however, this view overlooks that the fantasy/fiction retells a memory from Perec's childhood, and is therefore just as much a part of the space occupied by the author within the work as are actual (that is to say, more verifiable) memories and events. Because Perec locates the fantasy within his remembered childhood, we are able to read it as an aspect of autobiography. According to my reading, *W* is an autobiographical work. It takes Oulipian liberties with the concept of the genre of autobiography through use of the formal constraint, however as discussed earlier regarding the Oulipo, genre and constraint must be distinct from one another.

My reading of *W or the Memory of Childhood* dwells in the white space of the book, the space most explicitly gestured towards by the ellipsis. It marks the intersection between a child's life and the Holocaust, an intersection as readers we may first experience without full awareness of its scope until reflecting back upon the work as a whole. The intersection recurs each time we switch from one text to the other—as each seemingly moves farther away down its respective axis. The war ends and Perec returns to Paris, while the Olympic ideal is mathematically detailed, and fully unmasked. There is an exponentially growing horror as the mathematical

[242] Michel Sirvent, "An Auto-bio-graphy: *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* or the space of the double cover," *SITES The Journal of 20th Century Contemporary French Studies*, 1, no. 2 (1998): 461-480.
[243] Ibid., 462.
[244] Schwarz, 52.
[245] Sirvent, 464.
[246] Ibid., 468.
[247] Ibid., 473-474.

formulae for Olympic competitions are revealed as the calculations for systematized human suffering.

In the final pivots between texts we come to understand that they were never truly separate, but are one and the same thing: a schism contained within a single form. The two texts of the story finally cleave in the overlapping physical detail of bits of bread, common evidence pointing to the authorial presence, which itself also embodies the intersection. Our elaborate search pattern looks for the author's life between the texts, whose history is concealed or buried in the white space, the uneasy gap (the "or" of the title) between them.

On Perec's *Species of Spaces*

In turning to *Species of Spaces*, we can locate another form of Perec's use of this negative space of the autobiographical text. The organization of this group of first-person essays grows out from the page, through the bed, the bedroom, the apartment, the apartment building, the street, the neighborhood, the town, the countryside, the country, and finally Europe, the world, and space. We are invited to envision them relating to one another in a reverse telescopic move. Significantly, Perec follows the page with the bed and the room, expanding outward through the spaces of domesticity and beyond. The page here is the single starting space for the idea of the self. The bed provides a field, page-proportioned, where the self is physically sited. The expansion out from the page, not in, implies that the page as read is also a starting point for a system of autobiography. Written space becomes a means for Perec to use "a meticulous, willfully banal project to describe and thereby prescribe the fragile boundaries of space which frame his life."[248]

In his introduction, Perec writes that, "In short, these spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself."[249] Perec says explicitly with this passage, and with the structure of the work as a whole, that to live is to exist in a liminal state. *Species of Spaces* asks that the reader pass from one of its spaces to another, testing how they relate. Are they assembled like Russian dolls, similar to *W or the Memory of Childhood*? The reader's movement through the piece is telescoping in reverse, moving out and back to take in successive spaces, each larger than the last. Writing inhabits the sheet of paper, gives it meaning, and enables the author to travel across it. As we have seen with

[248] Schwarz, 58.
[249] Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 6.

the example of the ellipsis in *W*, the author also creates the blank spaces, the saccades on the page as well as the text, and each inscribes meaning in the other:

> I write: I inhabit my sheet of paper, I invest it, I travel across it.
> I incite blanks, spaces (jumps in the meaning: discontinuities, transitions, changes of key).[250]

Perec here acknowledges the negative space of the page and its necessity for the location of meaning. Elsewhere I have referred to this as a subtext of a reading; Perec makes it clear with *Species of Spaces* that the spaces between words are a creation as well as the inscriptions among them. The space of what is obscured is still indicated, similar to a Leirisian *biffure*, and thus present in the work. *Species of Spaces* works to articulate this space and its meaning, to find "how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page."[251] There is also a calmness in what is happening here, "space as reassurance."[252] It is not fear of the void, but creation of a kind of negative space of the self in relation to the autobiographical words on the page. "The book is designed to encourage and teach the reader to look differently at the familiar space around him or her,"[253] and I have put this into practice with the familiar spaces of the airport as subject. Adopting Perec's methodology, we can see that the airport offers a localized, individual reading of its spaces, and get closer to understanding what airportness might mean.

For this reason, it's interesting that for Perec, the contemporary airport held little room for an application of his system. In *Species of Spaces* we encounter his speculation about inhabiting airport space, in the section on the idea of living for a month inside an airport:

> The activities essential to life, and most social activities, can be carried out without any difficulty within the confines of an international airport: there are deep armchairs and bench seats that aren't too uncomfortable, and often restrooms even, in which passengers in transit can take a nap. [...]
>
> The interest of such an undertaking would lie above all in its exoticism: a displacement, more apparent than real, of our habits and rhythms, and minor problems of adaptation. It would quite soon become tedious no doubt. All told, it would be too easy and, as a consequence, not very testing. Seen in this light, and airport is no more than a sort of shopping mall, a simulated urban neighborhood. Give or take a few things, it offers the same benefits as a hotel. So we could hardly draw any practical conclusion from such an undertaking, by way of either subversion or acclimatization. At most, we

[250] Ibid., 11.
[251] Ibid., 13
[252] Ibid., 15.
[253] Schwarz, 60.

> might use it as the subject-matter for a piece of reportage, or as the point of departure for an umpteenth comic screenplay.[254]

Though the airport is a displacement of habits and myths, the exoticism is not to be found necessarily in the space itself, but in the extended occupation of that space. As we have seen with the example of sleeping in airports and challenging the prescriptions of airport space, by overstaying our welcome we may make the mundane into the exotic. Perec envisions this inhabiting of the liminal space of the airport as "subject-matter" or "point of departure," but not as a space or sequence of spaces of generative potential in the same way that a street or apartment building may be. In the case of the latter, *Life A User's Manual* presents the reader with a realized potential of a system based upon mathematical ideas and contemplation of the movement within and through, and occupation of, a Perecquian spatial construct: as though the apartment building had lost its façade, and we are able to understand the potential spatial relationships between the rooms, and by implication, their occupants.

Since 1974, when Perec initially implied their lack of potential in the passage above, airports have become much more segmented spaces, filled with a much longer chain of thresholds than was the case before the deregulation of the US airline industry in 1978 and the growth of air travel in its wake, not to mention the construction of ever-larger airplanes and the continually-evolving threat of terrorism on an international scale. The chain or gathering of spaces within an airport now bears an overall hierarchical structure more comparable to the stacks of rooms in *Life A User's Manual*'s apartment building, with its subdivided renovated living rooms and smaller "chambres de bonne" at the top. I believe it would now be possible to remove the façade (or more likely, lift the lid) of an airport and trace similar narrative movements around its spaces. The airport has evolved to meet Perec, its postmodern fragmentation and subdivision of interior spaces now a built environment able to be appropriated and mined for its creative potential through Oulipian approaches.

Though I have described these essays as telescoping out in reverse from the page, each of these species of spaces is an equivalency. Their sizes move from small to infinite, but each may also be of the same spatial concern as each other—each may encapsulate (or contain the inscription of) the other. What does it mean for considerations of scale that the physically smallest of these is the page, and the largest is space itself (outer space)? In describing the painting "St Jerome in his Study," Perec in his explanation of the meaning explains that the whole space is

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[254] Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 26-27.

organised around the open book.[255] The book is the centre of habitable space, the crux of the composition of the painting. The visually-represented world, an interior with a view to the outside, is here focused on the page, and pointing this out to the reader, Perec reinforces the idea of a space created by and of the page.

Closing on an index of the work,[256] Perec uses a scholarly "peritext" to function as a spatial inquiry into *Species of Spaces*. Less "transgressive in a work of nonfiction than in their use in experimental fiction,"[257] Perec's index is nonetheless unexpected in the context of the telescoping series of essays and observations. I was driven to check its references, somehow doubting that it would be as straightforward a list as it seemed. In doing so, I used the index as a base from which to launch repeat excursions back into the text I had just read,[258] and was surprised to realize just how many of its terms, details of image and vocabulary I had forgotten. This forgetting and reminding of the indexed terms also evokes all those words Perec has used which are not indexed, and I then questioned Perec's decision to choose some and not others to re-evoke his text. This process of index-reading was one of growing awareness of the left-out, the forgotten, the erasures or absences within my reading of the work, and which would differ from reader to reader in particulars, but not in process.

The index in *Species of Spaces* thus prompts an attempt by the reader to recall elements of the spaces that we have passed through in reading the *Species*. Listing the elements of the spaces is a way to envision the negative: Perec's implied description of what liminal space itself is like. The elements, organized in alphabetical order, present themselves in a recognised sequence we may rely on. Perec makes us aware of how many details we have already forgotten in reading, in passing from one space to another. Instead we are left with the unwritten elements of the index. By the index's evocation of what it has left out, we locate an articulation of a sense of space itself. The index, a language exercise, is the largest space of them all, and the one which returns us circularly back to the page itself. It demonstrates that the bridge between the discrepancies in scale is the text on the page.

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[255] Ibid., 82.
[256] Ibid., 93. See also Bernard Magné, "Georges Perec on the Index," trans Peter Consenstein, *Yale French Studies*, 105 (2004), 73. In other editions, this index appears before the main body of the text, however were we to reverse the order of encounter, it would still evoke the space of the work—not as a recall that Perec prompts at the end of reading, but a forecast of spaces yet to come—words yet to be read and forgotten.
[257] Magné, 74.
[258] Ibid., 77. Magné describes Perec's use of the index in works of fiction as "a sort of hypertextual tool before the term existed, one that permits a nonlinear reading..."

In the article, "The Spaced-out Subject: Bachelard and Perec," Jamie Brassett argues that the construction of a first-person subjectivity arises from a notion of space.[259] Brassett uses the idea of the house in Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and in Perec's *Life A User's Manual* to explore the spatially constructed self. While accounting for the difference in choice of text, Brassett's argument is applicable also to an examination of airport space with respect to Perec's autobiographical writing as I've discussed above. The focus here on the idea of house as "specifically, lived-in space"[260] should not rule out the airport. Though they are created to function as liminal spaces, we also go about daily life while in airports, and the more frequent travellers will carry with them an abiding sensation of what it feels like to spend (or realize one is spending) a disproportionate amount of time in airport space. Increasingly, with ever more invasive searches as detailed by Lisa Parks's investigations,[261] the airport is becoming a place where intimate activities are conducted—not just eating or sleeping, but the removal of clothing, the close sensing, and the unpacking and re-packing of luggage now might all take place within its boundaries. We are forced to attempt to make ourselves comfortable in airport space, through the advised ever-earlier arrival times and thus ever-longer waiting times, and to attempt, for however fleeting a time in comparison to our houses, to live within them. We create narratives of our time within airport space, and while within them we daydream of being elsewhere in other spaces—airports facilitate these daydreams. The living done in airports is analogous to the relation of self in space as seen in *Species of Spaces*, where "the subject, in making itself in a space, valorizes that space, but negates it insofar as it becomes a subject. Similarly with the space—it aids the constructing of a subject, it valorizes and destroys that subject."[262]

Importantly with respect to this thesis as a whole, Bachelard's strategy of "topo-analysis" in Brassett's reading comes to give primacy to space over time,[263] where "for the subject-dreamer it is easier to build itself as existing continually through space(s), than it is to do so in time. Bachelard shows that temporalization is a mere twist in the body of space; this is the importance of the topo-analytic method."[264] Topo-analysis goes on to show that in *Species of Spaces*' starting point of the page, "before any spaces can be discussed, described, even valorized, the coordinates

[259] Jamie Brassett, "The Spaced-out Subject: Bachelard and Perec," in *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present Day*, Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell, eds. (London and New York: Pinter Publications, 1991), 146.
[260] Ibid., 147.
[261] Parks, 190.
[262] Brassett, 151.
[263] Further evidence of the importance of space over time may be seen in the still photos that compose most of Chris Marker's *La Jetée,* as discussed in chapter 2; the stills reveal more of our ideas of space than a temporally more "normal" film could.
[264] Brassett, 149.

of the space upon which this is done must be given."[265] Though Brassett delineates the lived-in portion of the text as then commencing with the room, this page is also a lived-in space for Perec, for the reasons outlined above: the creation and evocation of the self within it, and the choice of the page as a starting point (and returning point, as seen in the turnings, returnings, and negative space of the index) for an autobiographical text.

[265] Brassett, 150.

Conclusion: an autobiography of airports

"How was your flight?"

This seemingly banal question asks how you as passenger fulfilled (or not) the narrative system of airport travel. It is banal in the same way that Queneau's bus journeys might be described as such, but there is potential here for hidden and exposed spatial perception; this question offers a passenger the opportunity to speak the first-person narrative of his or her navigation through airspace. The airport narratives prompted by this question relate a story of time spent in the liminal spaces of air travel, but also communicate a map of that person's path through it, and describe the liminal state after it has ended. The response to "How was your flight?" is in the past tense—by answering it, we move out of airport space. How does the airport write its own autobiography? This may seem like a farfetched question, but we have seen ways in which the airport inscribes itself upon its transient population, prescribing its behaviour while that population in turn participates in and deconstructs the airport's spaces. An airport's autobiography is composed of its transient population's occupation of its spaces.

In conclusion to this chapter, I will be searching for a way in which the airport fulfils a system of writing like the examples from Queneau, Leiris, and Perec, using each to ask how their systems and approaches to space and the reader are like and unlike airport space. This differs from this project's comparison in the first chapter of mechanisms to airport spaces, as I am questioning here the fulfilment of systems rather than their assembly and function. Through this runs the loop of the black box: the airplane's only awareness of itself, its records continuously created and erased throughout normal flight time, and finally only fixed through some form of failure.

Exercises in airport space

Each journey through the airport offers a capacity for an expression of individuality. Is each journey through an airport an exercise in that airport or itinerary's style? Every experience of the airport's liminal space has this potential, but through the creation (and telling, even if to the self) of the narrative itself, not in the action of moving through the space alone. The exception to this would be sleeping in airports—that different kind of occupation that goes against the prevailing goal of airport space by taking one of its prescribed elements, waiting, to an extreme.

We can also find the repetition of *Exercises in Style* in evidence if repeatedly encountering the same security thresholds within airport spaces, for example when circumstances align so that we have to go through the same security scanner more than once. What passed inspection the first time through (a slightly larger-than-regulation bottle of hand lotion, for instance) might not pass on the second. Or, should a passenger find him or herself needing to check in more than once for the same flight due to cancellation or delays, the repeated act draws out the differences in the re-enacting of the same system. These are notable for being prescribed as one-way systems in airport space, so a repetition of them highlights the system's demands upon the participant, and reveals a potential for a kind of paranoia—that of tracing a pattern through the banal, the mundane, the random.

Within Queneau's sequence of narratives lies this potential for heightened sensing, sensing that has a paranoiac sensibility clinging to it like a shadow. We can locate the phantom presence of the airplane's black box recorders in this paranoiac sensing. The observer in *Exercises in Style* is placed within a social environment, yet is detached from it in that he does not participate in the action any more than as a note-taker, a passive observer. Via this detachment, his placement on the other side of the bus window in the second portion of the Exercises' story arc, he provides the link between the two separate events, the physical bridge between two separate points in space and time. It is a repeated attempt to inscribe and re-inscribe the isolated self into the social interactions of the space. Similarly, the individual traveller experiencing the liminal space of the airport comes to play out the narrative of the space.

The Rules of the Airport

The challenge of tracing the intersection of Michel Leiris's writing in *The Rules of the Game* through airport spaces lies in the ambiguity and mistake at the heart of such descriptions as his childhood memory of "Reusement!" With a system that is centred upon word-erasures and their ambiguity as creative of space, they foreground mistaken perception, mistakes that nonetheless reflect the space of what is being perceived. Is this the case in airport space? Mistakes are a way of thinking about both space and language, hence the importance of an idea of failure to this project in general, and the importance of observing the places where the airport breaks down, examining the memory of a failure as a point of access into liminality. What sticks in my head about airport spaces is failure in particular—telling and re-telling makes the journey into an interesting story for one thing... that moment of "Reusement!" and its correction becomes a way of realizing the self as an aspect of spatial relations.

I also have memories of these spaces dating from a time before I made a conscious attempt to understand them, and these childhood memories of airports and flying still have a bearing on my experience of them today. I was conscious then that airport space was a transit between separate aspects of my life, and that the objects (the chairs with integrated TVs in DCA, for instance), provided signals I received then about self in space, and about the idea of travelling as an idea associated with airspaces.

Airport spaces are also continuously and sequentially occupied by others—a pause to think about this brings with it some of the jolting strangeness of the sense that we are not the only ones to inhabit the departure lounge or language (as with "...'Reusement!"), and we are able to see our state of being as individuals separated and yet connected to the group from which we have been diced by the mechanisms of airport space, from this state of believing our linguistic or airport experience is ours alone.

Here the black box of language and spatial experience as existing outside the self is simultaneously revealed and constructed. Until this moment, it was ours alone, a private world of creation and perception. In this way both Leiris's approach and airport spaces indicate the strangeness of the gulf between perceiver and perceived, between reader and writer, and how each is inscribed upon the other. Ultimately however, it is more problematic to make overt connections between Leiris's work and airport space due to the differing relation that his work has with a generative system of writing, compared with Queneau and Perec. My analysis here must fall short—though I can trace the thread of the black box through this work as well, it gestures towards a connection rather than providing an example of a clear equivalency.

Species of Airport Spaces

In the extreme, airspaces don't exist. The view out the airplane windows, as a place, does not exist like other views through architectural windows. It is unrepeatable. Airspace, that is "positive controlled airspace," or what the airplane occupies atmospherically, is not an architectural space, but is mechanically and perceptually defined. It is a new kind of space that is not self-evident—it does not exist except when a plane is moving through it. This is one way in which, via Perec's work, an airport and a system of writing can be seen to be equivalent. "Such places don't exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have

constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it."[266] We can find these shreds in Perec's description of "The surprise and disappointment of travelling. The illusion of having overcome distance, of having erased time. To be far away."[267] To be there, but by its nature it is like tomorrow, the idea of "far away." To say "to be far away" is not a description of an experience or of space, but a description of imagination of self in space. For Perec, it can never be in the present tense. The realization of this, of the illusion, is the disappointing, unexpected result of travelling. I can also find airportness in the *Species of Spaces* description of domestic spaces segregated by activities—described to an extreme in Perec's "Apartment," and examples of which we can also see bundled into discrete spaces that fit under the construct of any airport's architecture.

The airport itself, like the writing Perec uses to mark and designate the space as doubt, is how we attempt to make something of the "shreds" of airspaces. Nonexistent places make us question our narrative methods of locating the self in space, and thus question our narrative construction and perception, as we can also see happening to Winckler in *W or The Memory of Childhood*. To mark and designate them, to fix them in this way ends with the action of writing. Writing as it relates to space makes something of the "shreds" left behind in an individual's perception of this kind of non-existent space that is central to air travel. Unlike Augé's "supermodernity," this space as doubt is concerned with the individual's marking and designation, and as I have argued in this chapter, the reader's inhabiting of the system of writing. In contract with supermodernity, whose non-places "are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us,"[268] airports, like systems of writing, prescribe upon travellers their own creation of a narrative, a text going beyond (or prompted by) those aspects of space, including its words and texts. I've provided one example of this intersection in my written occupation of the Venice Marco Polo airport departure lounge.

In this chapter's examples, the reader finds and locates the self via a system-driven autobiography. If all fiction/prose form functions in two spatial dimensions (*of* or *within*) what's to be gained from this mode of interpretation? The act of reading has a boundary, even a mathematically gargantuan one (as with Queneau's *Cent Mille Milliards de Poemes*). The perception of this boundary or spatial occupation by the text then allows for the formation of meaning to commence. Compare this with the need to exit airport space in order to resolve the narrative of the transit through it, or risk potential mental breakdown, a shift or loss of identity, as is the case

[266] Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 91.
[267] Ibid., 77.
[268] Augé, 96.

for Merhan Nasseri. After crossing out of the space, re-addressing of the text must then occur, whether by re-reading (a re-visiting with prior knowledge of the spaces therein) or by "reflection"—a creation of spaces within the imagination—an imagining of the imaginary.[269] The conjoined experience of reading and creating these texts is one of pivoting between separate states—separate, but not binary. The liminal is active—in and of neither and both: in between. Reading these is a means of activating an otherwise apparently passive process. The black box has come to be occupied by the reader. This chapter's vignettes demonstrate this occupation, by locating and writing the self into both airport and literary black boxes. The airport inscribes itself into each traveller—the human creation and occupation of airport space as played out in our prescribed behaviour while in it and the narratives we construct after the fact are the airport's autobiography.

[269] Kogan, 85-86. And cf. map space from Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 206. "The existence of such a map attests to the readability of the text, to its naturalness as a supposed mirror of reality.

"Map space and the language by which it is established are manifest in the particular play between representational space and textual space: landscapes. Settings and objects, whatever their thematic functions, tend to become metaphors for the situation in the fiction and of the narrative process. As such, map space is rejected from contemporary texts. Space is now generally understood to be textual space, the spatiality of the writing...."

Conclusion

I have no memory of the first words I spoke about an airplane—I'm told they were my first intelligible words ever, strung together in the sentence, "Look, there's an airplane, flying up in the sky, over the trees." I don't recall this event as Leiris recalls so clearly his moment of the "...'Reusement!" utterance and its correction, but several aspects of this sentence are now striking to me as I conclude this project. Aside from the subject of my observation, an airplane, there is the fact that I remarked on its distance relative to my point of view, and that I was also calling another's attention to it, as well as choosing this particular intersection of subjects as my first use of language. I mention this here as evidence that the intuition at the root of this project is a fundamental one whose explanation and justification I have traced herein by making use of an unusual application of ethnography, research, and writing.

This project's ambition has been to trace the links between air travel, concepts of self-in-space, language and language-formation, image-making and perception, and systems of research. It began with an intuition that these are linked, and that these links can be articulated through use of airport space as a tool, and that this way of thinking and writing about space can inform research method.

As seen in the first chapter's example of the revolving door, studying spatial relations, whether (as in this project) of self vs. architectural space, or self vs. metaphorical (social or literary) space, is impossible without unpacking such accompanying mechanisms and their play upon the mind and body of the individual. In the spaces of public transport, faster and easier access brings forth the need for spatial mechanisms like the escalator, elevator, ring road system, etc. At the same time, an individual's definition and boundaries of privacy become subject to disruption, as these conveniences or shortcuts are of a physical necessity public.

The first chapter's investigative historiographies of objects in proximity to one another, and collecting them in a similar fashion to Benjamin's *Arcades Project* research, extracts and defines one of the main subjects of this thesis: an existence as a mechanism relies upon that mechanism's inbuilt relationship with its own potential to fail. The revolving door still contains this active potential. It still offers a space of possibility to each person using it, and that is what keeps it acting upon us—prescribing a non-human idea of space onto the human.

The revolving door and its ambiguities and potential point to a hidden presence in cultural life: the self-inscription into the potential of the liminal. As individuals, we imagine these spaces, and our imagination of them becomes a dialectic between self and liminality that results in an in-between presence, a kind of black box we and the mechanism both create. This is the

presence I am attempting to describe with these investigations, the black box I began this work by sensing and not yet seeing. Seeing the black box when it has not failed must be driven by constant attention and systemic effort.

The narrative of this project as I have structured it reinforces the point that these investigations are about potential: specifically by presenting one imagination and interpretation of airport space to explore an individual point of view in a space designed for mass movement. The airport emerges throughout the project over and above its use as passage from ground to air and back. This prominence accompanies a shift in a concept of airport space with respect to panopticism, traced herein through connections with airports and anxiety at a fundamental level, transcending consideration of the improbable mechanics of human flight.

This challenges Augé's argument of airports as anthropological "non-place." Their developing culture is one that defines itself outside the usual critical frameworks. It is a kind of "supermodernity," but one that actively struggles between the tools of the previous incarnation and the space it has built for itself as sequel. As a liminal space writ large, the airport's culture formation operates by different rules, as I've explored in chapter 2, than the place that Augé has gone looking for and failed to find.

In airport architecture, the more common form of anxiety surrounding the fear of flying is acknowledged and tacitly accepted, while a panoptic surveillance anxiety becomes the functioning ballast for the airport environment's working life itself. The efficacy of panoptic principles no longer depend on Bentham's careful camera-like architecture, but in the airport rely on the tension between stasis and vagrancy of each citizen within its series of thresholds; the panopticism is mobile and has moving targets. Echoing the placement of the photographer using Robin Hill's camera, not only are the citizens subject to the camera, but they are also uncertain whether they are inside or outside it. Our reliance on movement through a non-native element in which we could not survive or maintain a physical presence without the use of highly specialized technology means that anxiety's inscription is fundamental to the experience of airport space.

The airport as a concept is an undecidable, and demonstrates in multiple ways the division and simultaneous presence of inside and outside within each other. They work to break down and reinforce the hierarchy that deconstruction analyses in terms of speech and writing. Our aesthetic experience of airports is in a continual state of breaking down, and ultimately the airport continually tries and continually fails its attempts to understand airspace. Few physical places offer so interesting a construct, or inscribe themselves upon their occupants so readily as the airport. As an undecidable, it becomes the ideal setting and tool for this project's experiment in opening the black box and viewing the contents through dissection of a spatial experience. Set

apart from the observed and aiming at objectivity (even if admitting partiality), an ethnographer of airport space takes on a role much like that of a mechanism such as the airplane's black box, though the ethnographic role expands upon that of the black box to include the element of the search for subject. The subject as seen by the black box of an airplane constantly erases itself, and is only ever self-aware and fixed in place through its own failure.

Airport space must somehow buffer its captive passengers from their own situation, and does this by using some elements of a tourist experience as means to mediate control within the confines of the departure lounge. My exploration of the departure lounge reflects the increased proportion of time spent in the space as a passenger, and also presents an opportunity to zero in on a space both familiar and strange. It is this "non-place," the departure lounge and its environs, which I argue has a transformative effect upon travellers. It demonstrates that what Augé calls a non-place is actually weighted with a culture of the liminal – a transitory, transitional space magnified and encompassing for those within it, surrounding them and yet usually invisible and unavoidable in contemporary air travel. Compared with the mechanism of the door-closer as analysed by Bruno Latour, airports have also blackboxed the contemporary passenger's transformation into the tourist.

All forms of the airport displays mentioned in this project are a means of interaction between the human and the non-human mechanisms of airport space, a means for the airport space to discipline passengers. Museum-like displays demonstrate the airport's use of a mechanism as a black box tool, enacting control over humans by non-humans, simultaneously leaving other black boxes in airport space intact and for the most part, invisible. In the departure lounge, passengers find themselves complying with the parameters of its particular black box, in Latour's metaphorical sense. The mechanistic metaphor of the black box, (re)made physical, acts as an architectural example of the human need to mediate the potential of a group space whose rules for individual inhabitation are strict yet opaque.

Through the second chapter's dissections of particular airspaces, I have explored how they function as a whole liminal architectural concept, as mechanisms, and as a series of liminal spaces, and acknowledged the persistence of failure as an aspect of these. The airport and its subsections of liminal spaces each function as black boxes, prescribing behaviour onto us, and exerting control through a panoptic sensibility. In addition, by exploring the potential offered by sleeping in airports, I have examined one way in which airport space can be deconstructed by those coming up against its black boxes. Those who sleep in airports engage in a dialogue with the space and its black boxes to a much greater degree than those more transient occupants. It is this

form of dialogue with the system, embodied in a first-person spatial experience, which is traced through the third chapter's look at literary experiment.

The work within the final chapter demonstrates via research and practice that system-based prose writing manipulates space in a way that complements considerations of first-person interaction with spaces encountered in everyday life, using the intersection of airport and autobiography as example. The three authors I have investigated use language to turn the reader spatially throughout the assemblage of meaning from an unconventional storytelling method, whose process and result refigures reading itself based upon spatially manipulated language. In this way, the interaction of the individual reader with the text constructs a form of dialogue. The process of or potential for dialogue in experimental forms of autobiography uses space to make this construction more accessible. Similarly, redundant or failed structures allow for an increased creativity and room for involvement of the individual with space. In autobiographies written with a system of language in mind, the author's presence is a constraint working in simultaneous directions: towards the work itself and towards the reader. This links to concerns elsewhere within this project, regarding in particular first person narration and the use of self as primary reference point within space articulated as public. It is a method of laying claim. Experimental forms of autobiography more explicitly acknowledge the spatial presence of the work upon the page, making possible the rendering of a person as a still life, and the reveal of the object lesson that is the book form. By manipulating our experience as readers of representational and textual space, the author's use of language directs a reading that confounds a reliance on conventional autobiographical forms.

The Oulipo group, by emphasizing the use of formal constraints for writing as individual works of art themselves along with (and sometimes pre-empting or superseding) their potential textual products, thereby makes the system of writing itself into a kind of accessible public space. The theoretical constraints and literary practice of the Oulipo might also be said to each be inscribed in the other, though each may be encountered and understood by a reader without an explicit knowledge of the other. Constraints act as a liminal function. It is this function of space within and surrounding the writing that links Oulipian writing to airport space.

Like airport space in this sense, Oulipian systems manipulate their occupants (authors/readers) by keeping the brain busily engaged with one aspect of the environment, diverting anxiety in order to allow the occupants to fulfil the generative prescription. The publication of the constraint itself as constituting a whole work is analogous to conceptual art practice; yet counter to this, the Oulipo works as such may be followed as a formula or function to generate multiple unique results, increasing accessibility in their use of language as medium.

With the key element of the Perecquian clinamen, the built-in form of system failure is a means by which the mechanism of writing is able to demonstrate awareness of itself through the reader's perception. By inserting failure into the text, the clinamen indicates that there is a structure at work. Like the black box, the clinamen brings self-awareness to the mechanism through an aspect of its own failure.

The writing of an autobiography through a systemic approach embodies the split Derrida describes, and in an author's look at the self via systems of writing, the self as source becomes a difference. As "what can look at itself is not one," so the autobiography becomes a split of the author. Through the act of reading autobiographical works based on systems of writing, the point of origin for emerging autobiographical meaning is always in the act of passing to the reader. The reader's interpretation of the text's system and space becomes the generator of meaning. Systems of autobiography, through their use of these generative structures, make the territory occupied by the author and the reader a common ground, and a liminal one as well. It stands them close together in this territory of emerging meaning. The author and reader enact the "infinite reference; from one to the other," and the non-presence of a reader is given permission to attain presence in the other. The reader starts from same point as the writer, each referencing the other, rather than approaching from opposite directions. Each thus makes a spatial journey, and for this reason, they are linked through this thesis's overarching concern with airport space. More specifically, this leads us back to the departure lounge, where we wait together (as authors and readers), finding ourselves reflected in the mechanisms of public transport. In linking examples of these authors' autobiographical works with airport space and liminal mechanisms in this project, I am also recontextualising the airport by demonstrating that it also functions as an indicator for the remarkable perceptual strangeness of the gulf between reader and writer, and how each is inscribed upon the other.

With the linked writing exercises in chapter 3, I have located evidence of the spatial possibilities that I argue function as constant potential within Oulipian systems of writing. The exercises' composition according to Oulipian systems became a problem of intersecting spatial perception and narrative—the constraint was generative in that by addressing, for example, a problem of space between sentences in "Larding," I was able to locate hidden narrative. As a commentary on airport spaces, I have demonstrated how it is possible to read narrative into them. In this way the airport has evolved to meet Perec's critique in *Species of Spaces*, its postmodern fragmentation and subdivision now a built environment able to be appropriated and recast as a space of potential through Oulipian approaches, as demonstrated by the chapter's writing practices. We are forced to attempt to make ourselves comfortable in airport space, and

to attempt, for however fleeting a time, to live in them. We create narratives of our time in airports, and while within them we daydream of being elsewhere in other spaces—airports facilitate these daydreams, our imaginations inscribed within our interactions with their materiality, an idea that circles back to Benjamin's work in the *Arcades Project*.

As a physical site of intersection for space, bodies, theory, information, architecture, mechanisms, and emotion, airports provide a lens through which any number of ideas and material subjects may be explored. By granting primacy to the liminal, I have accessed an element of both the airport's built environment and its life within our perception and imagination—that life which forms, as I have argued herein, an inextricable aspect of interpretation of space. This project's scope is ambitious, tracing multiple motifs throughout disparate disciplines, and attempting to articulate a link between them which is largely dependent on an idea—failure—whose essence is itself slippery as subject. Conducting research in this way risked its own failure, and by examining that through the practice of systemic writing in the third chapter, and by the structure of the vignettes throughout, I have addressed this through use of a formal system that creates a kind of architecture for the project as a whole and relates failure with its companion, potential. As work that touches on many subjects, any one of which may have provided a direction for a thesis in itself, through taking an unusual approach I intended to demonstrate that the greater and unexplored interest lies in tracing their intersection.

Building upon the work in this thesis, directions for further research include works both on and off the page, including an exhibition to contextualise and display Robin Hill's photography and camera work as an innovative mechanical and theoretical means of thinking about space. A museological look at airport exhibitions would also join these ideas with a practical application to airspace use. I have also traced connections herein with links to twentieth-century visual arts, including connections with Joseph Beuys's work, though others are connected as well—Marcel Duchamp's links with the Oulipo and systems of writing may be explored through an examination of their use of space and of exchange and presence within it.
Lastly there is the exploration of the space inside the airplane itself. I have placed this in my analysis of airspace as a pivot-point for any passenger's journey, however by tying this examination to terminal-controlled airspace, it remains with feet largely planted on the ground, even if the imagination of that planespace exists concurrently with an earthbound state of being. Were these to be reversed, and the observer placed instead inside the airplane, imagining a grounded state while examining the space of travelling inside positive-controlled airspace, what other relative inversions might be possible alongside the views from 30,000 feet up in the air? The space of an airplane itself, though acting as a pivot-point here, is also so unlike an airport's

thresholds that addressing it in tandem with architectural liminality must remain a future direction—it is the imagination of that state to which I have granted greatest importance, while we are still on the ground, looking up at airplanes as they move through the atmosphere.

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