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The second major inspiration is connected to the theoretical basis for this thesis. How important and fascinating spatial concerns are for the analysis of fictional texts, yet not exclusively for imagined worlds, I also learned at the university, which I am quite thankful for. These spatial theories feel like a significant issue, as place and its construction seem to shape the way a fictional cosmos as well as our real world are perceived.

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Source: http://www.broadwayplaypubl.com/distance%20from%20here.htm. (12Juine 2012)

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Source: http://jacketupload.macmillanusa.com/jackets/high_res/jpgs/9780571211104.jpg. (20 June 2012)

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"Cover image of Stephens, Simon. Wastwater and T5. London: Methuen Drama, 2011."

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1. Introduction

1.1. Depicting the contemporary world: non-places and their narrative potential

Sitting in front of the computer screen, working on a thesis on a somewhat strange creature called 'supermodernity' and its portrayal in drama, a striking thought shapes itself: The parallel to one scene in Patrick Marber's play *Closer*, which is to be one of the key primary texts, is undeniable. The male protagonists of that piece, Dan and Larry, each are seated in front of a computer as well (Marber, *Closer* 25), probably in a similar position, hands on the keyboard, eyes fixed on the screen. They are immersed in a certain, albeit extraordinary place that appears, plainly put, rather placeless, namely the virtual world of instant technology and the World Wide Web. This locale without a concrete location can be read as an epitome of what Marc Augé termed 'non-place'. In the text, Dan and Larry employ the internet for their private entertainment, and, slightly understated, flirting online. Despite the dissimilar motivations for usage, the connection between the diegetic world of the play and the 'real' world is still there. This analogy is the first clue to what the titular concepts of this thesis – 'supermodernity' and 'non-place' – actually mean. They are both linked to our surroundings, our everyday experiences. They are rooted in the contemporary age and are part of daily life, of which "[a]n ever-increasing proportion [...] is spent in supermarkets, airports and hotels, on motorways or in front of TVs, computers and cash machines."(Augé blurb). In other words, this thesis focuses on plays that are concerned with contemporary life and portray it by means of selecting such "curious spaces which are both everywhere and nowhere [...] [and] their far-reaching effects on public and private experience" (Patrick Wright quoted on Augé blurb) as key elements of the settings.

A keen interest in the contemporary age as defined by extraordinary venues dominated by the quality of non-place – 'supermodernity – and its fictional treatment in drama, is the outset of this thesis. Revisiting Marc Augé in order to reach firm theoretical ground may be the motto of the first step. As far as the selection of primary texts is concerned, the plan appears as simple and straightforward. The main criterion for choosing particular pieces is evident: there has to be at least one scene in the play that is set in, or entirely deals with, one particular, typical non-place. This minimum requirement created a major problem, however, which raises an actually significant issue. Fuelled by the knowledge that there are innumerable fictional

accounts of locales like airports, holiday resorts, cars, shopping malls and the virtual world, an initial fear was to find too many plays to include into the thesis. The first results of research did not live up to that expectation, though, and it took quite a long time to complete the selection. The fallacy behind the primary supposition is based on the prominence and popularity of movies and novels incorporating numerous non-places. A mental inventory of cinematographic encounters with such locales, supported by a quick internet search that led to various charts and articles, shows a fairly large list of movies set in or dealing with airports or planes, the London Underground, shopping malls or the internet. There are similar results with regard to novels and short stories. As much as that fact is entertaining, it is as noteworthy with regard to fiction and the representation of the 'real' world. Therefore, copious examples shall prove this significant point. More than half of the titles among "Ewan Morrison's top 10 books about shopping malls" are novels (i.e. *What was lost* by Catherine O'Flynn in the top position, *The Cave* by José Saramago, the horror novel *The Mall* by SL Grey and *Kingdom Come* by JG Ballard, etc.).(cf. Morrison) The entries for movies of various genres – from satirical comedies, action flicks up to straightforward horror stories – portraying the same general location are probably even more well-known: *Dawn of the Dead*, *Jackie Brown*, *Mallrats*, *Chopping Mall*, *Back to the Future*, *Bad Santa*, *The Blues Brothers* or *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.(cf. Contario; Rivers; Tschorn) With regard to novels, a striking (albeit fictional) quote illustrates the proliferation of airports and planes in the narrative genres of fiction:

> Some junk novels were all about airports. Some junk novels were even called things like Airport. Why, then you might ask, was there no airport called Junk Novel? …Junk novels have been around for at least as long as non-junk novels, and airports haven't been around for very long at all. But they both really took off at the same time. Readers of junk novels and people in airports wanted the same thing: escape, and quick transfer from one junk novel to another junk novel and from one airport to another airport." (Amis, Martin *The Information* quoted in Brooker 5)

This (polemical) statement captures the quintessence of air travel by comparing it to pulp fiction: the speed of consummation and the escapist appeal, which are both key factors connected to non-places in general. Moving into the cinematographic domain shows similar results. Film connoisseurs and amateur cineastes will quite possibly come up with a relatively large list of movies set in airports or planes. Repurposing those venues as living spaces, for instance, is in the centre of two productions with

Hollywood stars Tom Hanks respectively George Clooney: *The Terminal* and *Up in the Air*. The theme of hijacking planes is fairly prominent in action movies (i.e. *Air Force One*, *Flightplan,* etc.). Plane crashes, isolated islands and sheer survival play an equally important role in popular culture, as the success of movies like *Cast Away* and the six seasons of the Golden Globe winning TV series *Lost* shows. The advent of another category of non-place, namely that of instant technology, in the domain of narrative fiction is clearly traceable as well. A classic example is the adaptation and reinvention of the novel of letters as the novel of emails (i.e. *Gut gegen Nordwind* (=*Love Virtually*) by Daniel Glattauer).[1] Several action- and suspense-packed novels centering on new technologies have made it into Jeffrey Deaver's top 10: *The Venus Fix* by MJ Rose, H*ome before Dark* by Charles Maclean, *Death Match* by Lincoln Child or *A Maze of Death* by Philip K Dick.(cf. Deaver) A glimpse at the world of movies proves that themes such as cyber crimes and identity theft are dealt with in films too, for instance in the fairly early *The Net* from 1995. Hackers as well as prominent software designers receive their fictional portrayals (e.g. *Hackers*; *Startup (OT:Anti-Trust)* that features a protagonist reminiscent of Bill Gates*,* the recent Mark-Zuckerberg-vehicle *The Social Network*, etc.). The horror genre also seems to incorporate machines and the internet frequently in the guise of websites that can kill (*FearDotCom*) or computer ghosts that prey for its users (*Pulse* and its two sequels). Quite logically, thrillers, action movies and crime fiction rely on trendy high-tech gadgets to an ever greater extent. (Imagine Sherlock Holmes with a smart phone, a crime scene investigation via a webcam and Dr Watson writing a blog! That scenario is (fictional) 'reality' in the British TV series *Sherlock*, which transfers Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective stories into the 21st century). All these examples and the ones that were not mentioned due to space constraints[2] affirm that non-places are proliferating in narrative fiction as well as movies and TV series; this does not seem to be the case in drama (yet). Thus, a very general question arises: In how

[1] It is probably an involuntary literary counterpart to the famous romantic comedy *You've got mail* from 1998 starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, which dealt with communication and flirting via email as well.

[2] Several articles and user comments propose more examples for each category and the theme of the representation of the underground has not been addressed yet at all. Nick Cooper created a homepage, on which he lists movies, TV episodes and music videos according to their setting in the London Underground stations. He has come up with a fairly extensive list. The details can be found on http://www.nickcooper.org.uk/subterra/lu/lufilmtv/lufandtv.htm

far has drama actually been activated as a medium for the representation of supermodernity at all and why is there a difference to other fictional types?

1.2. Selection of texts

A more careful search was necessary to find theatrical texts dealing at least partly with non-places. Adding some minor criteria for the selection such as some variety of authors from different backgrounds and the focus on established dramatists, a set of six primary texts emerged. The imminent task now is to introduce these plays that have been chosen for this thesis. This will be done in chronological order for clarity's sake. The earliest piece, and probably the most notorious one, is Patrick Marber's *Closer*, which premiered in May 1997. The *Sunday Times* deemed it "[o]ne of the best plays of sexual politics in the language" (Marber blurb), for instance. The blurb of the published text provides another, similar chorus of praise issued by the *Financial Times*: "On the surface, *Closer* is brisk, urbane, witty, obscene, modern, quotable, slick; beneath the skin, it is deeply felt, painful, sad, and wise … It is about sexual jealousy and sexual desire; and it is keenly alert to human isolation even within intense relationships…". As the appetizers from various reviews insinuate, *Closer* focuses on relationships in a contemporary, playful and slightly cynical way, as different couplings and constellations among the four protagonists – two men and two women – are explored. Present-day London in general and several locations connected to various forms of non-place in particular serve as a setting for the pursuit of love and intimacies in the big city. Marber's play features an entire scene set in the virtual world, an account of cybersex, which, naturally enough, received considerable attention. Another aspect of its fame is the adaptation for the big screen released in cinemas in December 2004 in the US and a few weeks later in Europe. At the very least, the Hollywood-A-list cast made it known to a (world-)wide audience. Marber and director Mike Nichols engaged Clive Owen (– who performed a different role in the original London theatre production), Natalie Portman, Jude Law and Julia Roberts for the movie adaptation; numerous nominations and awards, among them the Golden Globe for both Portman and Owen for their supporting roles as Alice and Larry, boosted it as well.

The 21st century is the background of the other five selected plays. Two pieces by Neil LaBute follow Marber's. The American playwright's (and occasional film

director's) earlier contribution *The Distance from here* premiered in May 2002. The blurb of the book, published in the following year, promotes it as "[the playwright's] most riveting play yet, an intense look at the dark side of American suburbia" (LaBute blurb). John Lahr, renowned theatre critic of the *The New Yorker*, to whom the author dedicated the play, stresses related aspects in the conclusion of his review: "LaBute, in his most ambitious and best play to date, gets inside the emptiness of American culture, the masquerade and the evil of neglect. *The Distance from Here*, it seems to me, is a new title to be added to the short list of important contemporary plays" (par. 5). The play portrays the life of three underprivileged teenagers, who are unable to find support and meaning both in their family homes and their community in general, many of which are linked to various forms of non-place. The climactic scene of the piece is what quite possibly makes it stand out and attracts attention: The ungraspable violence against a baby emulates the atmosphere in Edward Bond's *Saved* (cf. Lahr par.2). An alleged epitome of American culture and at the same time representative type of non-place is in the centre of LaBute's short-play cycle *autobahn*: judging from its title, unsurprisingly, the car. Its outstanding setting, the inside of an automobile, makes the piece invaluable for this thesis, even though *autobahn* is not a standard full-length play, but a cycle consisting of seven vignettes. Each of them tells part of the story of two characters' lives, who are on a crucial journey, both physically and mentally. "The result is", as the book's blurb promises, "an unsettling montage that gradually reveals the scabrous force of words left unsaid while illuminating the delicate interplay between intention and morality, capturing the essence of Middle America and the myriad paths that cross its surface."(LaBute *autobahn*) *Autobahn* was first performed "as a staged reading of five one-acts […] at the Little Shubert Theater in New York on March 8, 2004" with a cast full of famous Hollywood stars like Susan Sarandon, Kevin Bacon, Brian Dennehy, Peter Dinklage, Kyra Sedgwick, Kieran Culkin, Christopher Meloni, Paul Rudd, Amanda Peet and Philip Seymour Hoffman (3); the book was published in 2005.

The playwright of the fourth play chosen for this thesis is again from Great Britain: Tanika Gupta, who is considered as a main representative of "the second wave of dramatists from the Asian subcontinent and Caribbean", as Peter Billingham phrases it in his analytical essay on Gupta's works (226). The dramatist's play *Sugar Mummies* was first produced by London's Royal Court Theatre on 5th August 2006; the book was released in the same year. *Sugar Mummies* takes the readers/ the

audience to an outwardly blissful setting, a picture-perfect holiday resort in Jamaica that features sun, sea and sand. However, there are also more controversial goods that are provided there for the tourists: Young locals offer their bodies in exchange for money to the predominantly white visitors. In other words, "*Sugar Mummies* is a funny, provocative and revealing study of the pleasures and pitfalls of female sex tourism" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* blurb), a fairly brutal aspect of consumer culture and thereby linked to Marc Augé's concept of non-places.

The last two plays selected for this thesis are *Wastwater* and *T5*. Both were written by the same author, the British playwright Simon Stephens, and published in one volume in 2011. They share their general setting, London, with Patrick Marber's *Closer*. *Wastwater*, which premiered only in March 2011 at the Royal Court Theatre and as part of the Wiener Festwochen of the same year, is about "three different couples who make a choice that will define the fallout of their future" (Stephens, Wastwater blurb). Those three episodes are connected by their relation to Heathrow Airport, which dominates the setting on various levels. The first scene shows Harry, his preparations for his flight and a reluctant goodbye. The young man intends to leave his foster mother, Frieda, in order to live on his own in Canada. Lisa and Mark, the protagonists of the second part, find themselves in an airport hotel room. They are about to take their adulterous affair to a more intimate and, above all, physical stage. The third and last snapshot focuses on Jonathan and Sian, who delivers a new family member from the Philippines in exchange for a considerable sum of money – a very controversial business deal. The other piece by Simon Stephens, *T5*, is more experimental in form than *Wastwater*. It is a monologue, spoken by a female protagonist. Its production history is quite remarkable as well. As early as in July 2008 it was read for the DryDance night at Camden Roundhouse; in 2010, Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre took the piece up for their festival project 'Impossible Things for Breakfast'. *T5* was one of five plays that were performed in a morning show that "includ[ed] bacon rolls and coffee" (McMillan par. 2). Furthermore, the whole theatre project co-operated with HiBrow. The innovative form of production included rehearsed readings which were captured on camera, interviews with director Dominic Hill and the actress Meg Fraser, which can be watched online; above all, there was "a live transmission [in the evening] of all five plays to cinemas across the UK" (par. 1). This festival experiment extended the dramatic performance into the realms of the cinema and the internet, which in itself may be read as appropriating

non-places for the theatre. It is not only the manner of production and distribution, though, which is linked to the main spatial concept of this thesis. The content, moreover, the piece's setting(s) are closely connected to non-place. Joyce McMillan's short review provides a valuable summary, capturing the main aspects:

> By far the strongest play is Simon Stephens's haunting monologue T5, performed by Meg Fraser with a truly heart-stopping brilliance. The speaker is an ordinary wife and mother, living in London, whose life becomes derailed after she witnesses the murder of a young boy by a gang of thugs on waste ground near her home. Her marriage is rocky, her world seems meaningless; and one afternoon she simply leaves her life, and heads for Terminal 5 at Heathrow. After a while, the story becomes surreal; but never in a way that breaches its fundamental integrity, as a vision of a woman whose mind can simply no longer bear the denial and the lies - political, personal, moral - on which her apparently "normal" life is based. (par. 3)

Once again, Heathrow Airport is at the heart of a Stephens play. The reason for that will be revealed later, in a detailed analysis of paratextual material.

A brief overview of the scholarly discussion of the chosen texts shows that Marber's play and the movie adaptation have received a rather large amount of academic attention so far, at least compared to the other plays. LaBute's pieces and the playwright himself have also been introduced from various angles, as have Tanika Gupta and her play *Sugar Mummies*. However, spatial issues are only dealt with marginally. As far as Stephens' two texts are concerned, there is only little academic material on them in the narrow sense – *Wastwater* is probably too recent and *T5* too little known. Portraits of the dramatist and several reviews offer insight into the main themes, though. Even though several scholars have dealt with the majority of the chosen plays, a theoretical approach based on Augé's theory of non-place may be considered as a new perspective on all of the selected works.

1.3. Methods and outline

As for the working methods, a first step is to present the concept of 'supermodernity', this strange creature, in greater depth, and thereby turning it into something familiar. The initial chapter focuses on the characteristics of contemporary life and experience as a meaningful object of scientific scrutiny, comprised under a slightly mysterious, yet fitting term. The second chapter shall be dedicated to supermodernity's titular companion, namely 'non-place(s)', a term with an overtly spatial emphasis. It is intended to serve as a theoretical basis for the analysis of the

selected plays, or, to be more precise, of the portrait of their broad settings. That chapter traces the genesis of Augé's concept, probable predecessors and, above all, introduces its meaning in quite a detailed way in order to activate its potential for investigating literary texts. Thus, the focus is on the way such locales work and their impact on people interacting with them. This factor entails rules and mechanisms of the various types of non-places as well as possibilities and situations that might be felt as liberating, which are inherently offered by these extraordinary facilities. After having established the theoretical basis, the plays shall be examined with regard to various types of non-places subsumed under three general domains: non-places of mobility, non-places of consumer culture and non-places of communication/ broadcasting. Each group shall have its own chapter, in which further specialisation is due. In other words, chapters three to five will be dedicated to the actual literary analysis of the chosen texts and their depiction of spatial constellations. Close reading and a sometimes fairly structuralist approach to the plays based on Augé's theories will be applied in an attempt to answer several significant questions. The starting point is to present the actual representation of the particular non-places on various textual levels. First, the paratext has to be analysed in order to affirm the settings' general importance and the authors' (or directors') attitude towards the portrayed non-places, and quite often, their intentions, inspirations and motivations. The second level of analysis is, naturally enough, the secondary text, because the stage directions offer important clues about a play's setting. This is the level on which much of the representation is done in the literary form of drama, as it shows both the diegetic surroundings as well as the characters' actions; furthermore, it provides the basis for the equipment and outlook of the actual stage production. Even the amount of such stage directions may be significant with regard to the setting and its role in a textual interpretation. A later step is to trace references and/or expressions linked to a particular non-place in the text proper, in the dialogue. Two issues shall be focused on at each level: what is actually represented and how this is done. The latter question is closely linked to another layer of meaning, namely the influence the setting has on the protagonists and their attitudes towards it. One might ask in how far the non-places shape the characters, their actions, relationships and/or 'feelings'. Is the spatial portrait related to the characteristics Augé postulated, is it close to our everyday experiences of them in 'real life'? Another crucial aspect is the extent of awareness with which characters use the particular non-places and in how far

knowledge or ignorance of the code of conduct influences the manner of interaction. A related question deals with voluntary and involuntary actions that deviate from the standard usage. In other words, the subject of immersion or rejection of and emancipation from the non-places also plays a major role. The extensive analysis of the mentioned issues is meant to point out the significance of non-places for the depiction of the contemporary world.

A brief concluding note has to be made. The focus of the textual analyses will be on the written versions of the chosen plays, as this textual form may be considered as something fixed. Actual stage productions may vary, not only from country to country, as Michael Raab points out in his comparison of the performances of *Closer* in London and Munich (cf. 141ff), but also from theatre company to theatre company. There will only be occasional quotes from reviews related to a specific performance.

2. Supermodernity – a period of overabundance and obsessions

There is a strong inclination towards naming (new) phenomena in academic discourse. A recent development that is of particular interest to scholars is the change of the physical and mental landscapes in the contemporary world, and the adaptation of people's lifestyles. In the humanities the terms 'postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' seem to be favoured to describe this new epoch. Marc Augé tries to establish a slightly different term to grasp the essence of the alterations experienced in the world of the late 20th and the 21st century, though. He does not focus on an after of the period of modernity, but stresses the fact that this era is more than the modern one. The term he coined is "supermodernity"(Augé), whose etymology supports the notion of something beyond the previous epoch or an addition to it.(Etymology dictionary)

Supermodernity is a term that, arguably, is less known in academic circles than its counterparts (i.e. postmodernity). It shall be introduced with regard to its position within scientific discourse and its main features in order to show its merits and propose it as a frame of interpretation.

As postmodernity and supermodernity refer to the same period, Augé retains a link to the more prominent and widespread conception of the former episteme. He claims that "we could say of supermodernity that it is the face of a coin whose obverse represents postmodernity: the positive of a negative" (25). This explanation implies an amelioration, which is evoked on the semantic level as well.

The introduction of the term supermodernity seems to be an attempt to propose a new concept for describing the contemporary world adequately that is less likely to polarise due to its desired positive nature. This goal might be achieved by the lexeme itself, because its denotation implies something exceptional. Above all, Augé intends to position supermodernity as the positive equivalent of postmodernity. This fact is also acknowledged by reviewer Samuel Collins:

> Rather than the slippage of meaning and signification associated with [that concept],'supermodernity' refers to their abundance. That is, supermodernity does not signal the negation of narrative and identity, but to their histrionic multiplication in a deluge of space, time, and event.(par. 8)

Supermodernity is presented as an era that is not devoid of meaning. On the contrary, it offers a vast amount of possibilities that may serve as a frame of interpretation, as a means of making sense of the world.

Returning to Collins' remark, one expression stands out and needs further explanation: the 'deluge of space, time and event'. Collins alludes to several excesses, which Marc Augé states as characteristic of supermodernity. He focuses on three categories, in which there is an overabundance in the contemporary world. Those parameters are time, space and ego.

As for the factor 'time', one important aspect is an increasing doubt in the idea of progress among intellectuals due to horrific historical developments such as wars and the prevalence of totalitarian regimes, which distinguishes the new era from the former modernity.(Augé 20) Those incidents have undermined the belief in time and evolution (in a broad sense) as categories that convey meaning. (Augé 20) Augé, however, pleads for employing a different perspective on time to explain supermodernity. He does not focus on the loss of believe in progress, but turns to the increasing amount of historical events that characterise this period. He describes the situation in which "the recent past – 'the sixties', 'the seventies', [...] 'the eighties, ['the nineties', '9/11', 'the war on terror', etc.] – becomes history as soon as it has been lived" (Augé 22) as an overabundance of time. Interestingly enough, the factor of speed plays an important role in this development. The accumulation of events and therefore time is due to "an acceleration of history [:] [...] History is on our heels, following us like our shadows, like death" (Auge 22). This quote is quite an apt illustration of the first figure of superabundance in supermodernity, "the excess of time" (Augé 24). Such a surplus is often felt as an intangible threat (– mostly, but probably not exclusively, by historians), as the vast amount of sometimes unpredictable and incongruous occurrences makes it difficult to keep track of them and make a relevant interpretation more difficult.(Augé 23) Augé acknowledges this problem, but instead of only regretting a supposed loss of meaning as a consequence of the excess of time, he claims "that we seem to feel an explicit and intense daily need to give [...] meaning to world" (24). The overabundance of events, which is one feature of supermodernity connected to the category of time, makes the need to understand them more prominent, it does not make interpretations impossible. In that sense, Augé's concept of supermodernity presents a more positive outlook on the contemporary world than its counterpart postmodernity.

Space is a central element of supermodernity as well. In analogy to time, there is also a "spatial overabundance" (Augé 27) that defines the period. It allows for curious situations and challenges the meaning of categories like distance and scale. This

second type of excess, the “excess of space” (Augé 25), is strongly connected to an almost obsessive quest for outer space, traffic innovations, instant communication tools and a proliferation of images in mass media. (Augé 26) Distances between locales seem to become smaller due to rapid transportation or are virtually erased in the World Wide Web. Explorations of remote spots are becoming easier and faster – especially via TV programmes and daily soaps, which are often our first source of information. (Augé 26) In plain words, we can discover the world from our living rooms. Furthermore, stardom and iconicity in sports, the arts, music and film are often created by immense media coverage. When we see a famous place or face on the screen, “we may not know them personally, but we recogni[s]e them” (Augé 26). Such a form of recognition seems to become the most important type of mental accomplishment, superseding or, at least, marginalising first-hand knowledge and personal contacts. To conclude, supermodernity is characterised by mediated images of the world, with which it seems possible to overcome physical distance, to be in several places at the same time and be in contact with the other side of the globe. It is an overabundance of space which is controlled and shaped by entities distributing these pictures, often with different agendas.(Augé 26,27)

The third factor of importance with regard to supermodernity is the ego. The focus in this period is on the individual: “In Western societies, at least, the individual wants to be a world in him [- or her]self; he [/she] intends to interpret the [delivered] information [...] by him[- / herself] and for him [- / her]self”(Augé 30). This obsession with the singular and personal is encouraged by the advertising techniques of consumer industry and the popular political jargon: Both stress individual freedom, self-fulfilment and one’s own value. (Augé 31) Their messages are, for example: ‘You can do it’ and ‘You are worth it’; the use of the personal pronoun implies that oneself is in the centre of interest. These mottoes are reiterated and thereby perpetuated in the political sphere as well as in advertising space. A consequence of such constant preaching of individuality is a rather remarkable situation: “[W]e put ourselves and considerations of our own interests first, safely believing that in doing so, we are acting in the way society expects us to. [...] [There appears to be] a common law: ‘do as others do to be yourself’” (Buchanan 396). The collective focus on the individual is a feature characteristic of supermodernity. Therefore, this fixation on the self can be interpreted as the third aspect of this period’s superabundance, as an excess of the ego, which leads to an “individuali[s]ation of references” (Augé 32).

A concluding reminder is due at this point. The key notions of supermodernity are three figures of excess: surfeit of events, overabundance of space and an almost disproportionate obsession with the individual.

Furthermore, several phenomena that dominate the supermodern world are to be addressed as well: (late) capitalism, consumption, globalisation and addictive mobility. Those have a major influence on space and place both in the real world and in the fictional portrayals in the chosen plays.

3. Marc Augé and his concept of non-places

The quintessential notions of space and place – in their basic denotation – are rooted in the domain of geography. In that sense their usage is rather limited to creating topographic models of our concrete world.

The scientific discussion of space has been enriched by ideas and hypotheses promoted by scholars from other disciplines though. This argument also proves true with regard to non-places. The concept was introduced by a well-known French expert: Marc Augé. The scholar is an important representative of anthropology. Furthermore, both editions of his renowned book *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* were classified as core texts in the demesne of cultural studies by his publishers.

According to Marc Augé, the period he terms ‘supermodernity‘ is characterised by an unparalleled proliferation of certain, albeit ‘strange’ types of places. These are, as their denomination ‘non-places’ suggests, the opposite of places. Hence, the first step of introducing this notable spatial concept is to try to establish a definition of place.

3.1. Historical overview: origin and antecedents

3.1.1. Non-places: Genesis of the concept

Before a detailed discussion of non-places can ensue, it might be interesting to look at the concept’s genesis. Marc Augé himself felt that there was unrest within the field of anthropology. He believed that there was a lack of appropriate methods and unease about the domain’s object of observation, which both stem from the fact that the contemporary world is largely influenced by phenomena like globalisation, consumption and urbanisation. Consequently, Augé tried to find new perspectives on anthropology. His intention was to shift the focus of research within the discipline to the new ways of perceiving and experiencing our world, a world that has been changed by the massive extension of so-called non-places.[3] An exhaustive presentation of that spatial concept is Augé’s starting point for this endeavour.

[3] This sketch that presents Augé’s motivations to introduce the concept of non-places is based on the chapter “The Near and the Elsewhere” in Augé 7-33.

The book associated with this current perspective on anthropology is *Non-Lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. The French original version was published in 1992. In the following years it was translated into numerous other languages. A German edition (*Orte und Nicht-Orte: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Ethnologie der Einsamkeit*) was published in 1994, for instance. The English translation came out one year later, in 1995. The title of this edition is closer to the French original than the German one and stresses the rootedness in anthropology, which is significant. More than a decade later, a second edition of *Non-places* was published: Augé wrote an elaborate introduction for this reissue of one of his key works. It is safe to say that, by now, both the book and the concept of non-places have appealed to a fairly large (academic) audience. Therefore, the conception can be considered as an established tool of analysis.

3.1.2. The merits and limitations of Augé's predecessors

Marc Augé was not the first scholar who stressed the peculiarities of contemporary landscapes. There are (at least) two prior and almost as significant conceptions that are similar to Augé's notion of non-place, or even touch upon issues central to his theory. Quite an early discussion of the (scholar's own) contemporary world, which centres on a supposed focus on counterfeit event-character, goes back to Daniel J. Boorstin. He introduced the concept of 'pseudo-events' in his book *The image, or, what happened to the American dream* in the 1960ies. In this publication, he implicitly describes the creation of 'pseudo-places' within the context of travelling and tourism. The second spatial concept dates back to the early 1970ies. Edward Relph wrote about the notions of *Place and Placelessness*; both terms function as the book's title. The concept of 'placelessness' entails a number of aspects that are similar to Boorstin's. Relph adds several significant elements that anticipate part of what Augé postulated more than two decades later. Both those spatial theories shall be sketched briefly.[4]

Daniel J. Boorstin wrote his observations on his contemporary surroundings in the 1960ies; as the title *The image, or what happened to the American Dream* suggests,

[4] Neither concept can be described in detail in this thesis due to space constraints. Only the most important aspects with regard to Augé's later concept of non-place will be presented in a simplified way.

from an American point of view. He developed his theories by examining the landscape of the US in its broad sense: He takes socio-cultural as well as economic and geographical factors into account. His theories centre on incidents flooding people's lives that are, so to say, staged; they function as a nucleus of his explanations. These performances have a veritable, albeit minor aspect at their core, which is taken up, boasted and staged in order to be considered spectacular and, therefore, newsworthy.(Boorstin 21,22) Boorstin calls such occurrences "pseudo-events"(21). Based on both his observations and the linguistic connotations, a more general description of pseudo-events can be proposed. First, they are more often than not "planned, planted, or incited"(22) with "the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced"(22). Furthermore, their relation to reality is ambiguous: the question of whether something really happened gains dominance over the one of what actually happened (23). Boorstin argues that pseudo-events "are intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy" (23): By reporting that something is famous it is made famous, for instance. The pseudo-concept is not limited to events and may be applied to place and space as well. Boorstin does exactly that by outlining the history of travel, or rather the replacement of great voyages by touristy packaged tours. He stresses the fact that in earlier centuries the journey was at least as important as the destination: A voyage, especially when travelling abroad, was "an adventure", an often discomforting, laborious, and costly experience, which allowed for valid contact with foreign people and cultures.(89,92) The figure of the active traveller began to be replaced, however, by the passive tourist in the late nineteenth century due to the improvements of roads and other means of transport; "[i]nstead of an athletic exercise, travel became a spectator sport".(93) And a spectator expects a spectacle. Boorstin argues that, consequently, "[t]he modern American tourist now fills his experience with pseudo-events"(88), which transform the destination into what might be considered as a pseudo-place. Another remarkable aspect of the visitors' expectations of a holiday trip is their insistence on "both more strangeness [or exoticism] and more familiarity"(88); the latter especially refers to comforts and luxuries one is used to at home. Both these factors may not be originally part of the holiday destination and therefore have to be constructed and performed exclusively for the masses of (foreign) tourists. Boorstin elaborates on his thesis by sketching the boom of travel agencies and package holidays, either for large groups or the individual holidaymaker. Those neatly organised and well-planned all-inclusive tours

embody the desires and expectations of the modern tourist: Such manufactured trips are promoted as offering “a lifetime of adventure in two weeks, and all the thrills of risking [one’s] life without any real risk at all” as Boorstin (88) puts it. In other words, travelling has become a commodity, a good to purchase, and “[b]y buying a tour you could oblige somebody else to make pleasant and interesting things happen to you”(94), that means that someone will stage pseudo-events and spectacles for you as a tourist. An additional factor that distinguishes the modern holiday experience from that of the past is that the actual journey moves into the background. Travelling has not only become considerably faster, but cheaper, easier and, above all, safer; that new form of mobility leads to an intriguing situation in which “the traveller is isolated from the landscape he traverses”(102). This isolation and loss of contact with authentic geographical as well as social surroundings is not limited to going abroad though. Boorstin has observed similar developments within the United States, which reduce the active role of the voyager to a passive one: “Even here at home we are little more than tourists” (117). This transformation of the travel experience is due to improvements of transportation, a homogenisation of American culture and, above all, a staging and marketing of regional peculiarities that bestow an ‘event’ feel on a specific spot.(116,117) Boorstin’s whole account is quite comprehensive, albeit rather descriptive. The actual difference between places and pseudo-places was outlined much later by Justine Lloyd. She draws attention to the fact that Boorstin’s explanation of spatial arrangements focuses “on a division between daily life in the heterogeneous, spontaneous space of the urban cent[re] and the homogenous, managed familiarity of the motel as a place apart from daily life” (Lloyd 97). Places belong into the sphere of daily life; pseudo-places are linked to standardising travel facilities and the staging of spectacles, which is typical of the holiday experience.

The second spatial theory that might be considered as a predecessor of Augé’s non-places was proposed by Edward Relph in 1973. He postulates the notion of ‘placelessness’, which is based on localities associated with the homogeneity and “inauthenticity” of consumer culture (Relph 80,82) and those linked to “technique”(81), a concept he borrowed from Jacques Ellul, and “impersonal planning”(81). As the term suggests, placelessness is the opposite of a sense of place. Relph deduced a basic definition of place from Fred Lukermann:

> Places [are understood] as complex integrations of nature and culture that have developed and are developing in particular locations, and which are linked

> by flows of people and goods to other places. A place is not just the 'where' of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integral and meaningful phenomenon.(3)

This description incorporates geographical location, the influence of culture, the connection to other places, historical qualities, the theme of change, and the meaning(s) people ascribe to it.(3) Furthermore, places are distinct and unique entities (3). They enable various degrees of involvement and allow people to be insiders: "To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place" (49). However, there are locales that impede identification and attachment. That lack of qualities that support associations and relations is termed 'placelessness' by Relph. According to him (and other scholars like C.W. Moore or Gordon Cullen), uniqueness and diversity are substituted by physical and cultural uniformity and the reign of the commonplace and mediocre in placeless environments.(79). Relph stresses what he refers to as 'inauthenticity' as the main quality of such spaces.(80) Inauthenticity may be a consequence of the "adoption of fashionable mass attitudes and actions" (80), which centres on dominant "values [,] [...] mediocrity and superficiality that have been borrowed or handed down from some external source" (80,81), presumably as conventions of society at large. This type of inauthenticity is especially predominant in consumer culture and tourism – it is strongly associated with concepts like 'kitsch' (cf. 82) and an artificial construction of a sense of home (cf. 83). The second type of inauthenticity is the one based on "technique", which is promoted as being applied "for the public interest"(81). It can be defined as "an overriding concern with functional efficiency, objective organisation, and manipulative planning"(81). Such a concentration on purpose and effectiveness often leads to a homogenised style of building. The consequences are a lack of distinctiveness and a resulting difficulty of commitment and involvement with the locale, which is typical of a placeless area.(81) Relph also stresses the impact of the media, the construction of a mass culture, global businesses, the economic system and central authority on the development and expansion of placelessness.(cf. ch.3) To complete the discussion of this specific spatial concept, a few concrete examples should be mentioned. Placelessness as a consequence of standardisation is connected to roads, airports, to the uniform layout of suburbs, international styles and business centres.(118). Another significant theme is "other-directedness" in places; that includes "landscape made for tourists,

entertainment districts, commercial strips, disneyfied places, museumised places [and] futurist places" (118). The last three types are linked to preserving and perpetrating fantasies. 'Disneyfication' is a humorous reference to the recreation of a fantastical dreamland without problems based on Disney's cartoons; it is often represented by theme and amusement parks.(cf. 95-100) The fantasy of reconstructing and reviving the past as it was can be subsumed under the term 'museumisation'. (cf. 101-103) The incorporation of the fantasy of a modern and progressed future is captured in the idea of 'futurisation'.(cf. 103-105) Apart from these concepts, placelessness can also be connected to place destruction, formlessness/lack of human scale and order and the instability of places.(119).

The range of both earlier concepts – pseudo-places and placelessness – seems to be more limited and area-specific than Augé's perspective. As was already mentioned, with regard to place and space, Boorstin remains in the field of travelling and tourism. Furthermore, his account is written, as he often claims himself, from an exclusively American point of view - (i.e. "The self-conscious effort to provide local atmosphere is itself thoroughly American" 106, 107), which appears to be a rather patronising and hegemonic position. Although Boorstin's descriptions of pseudo-events are quite valid and probably accurate, its limitation to America seems to be a very narrow perspective. Therefore, an application of his theories in a not specifically American context might not be in the scholar's interest. Edward Relph capitalises on geography stylised due to principles of efficiency or laws of consumer culture, which can be applied worldwide. The only factor in Relph's concept of placelessness that alludes to the question of how space and place influence people and their lifestyles is the degree of involvement in the landscape. Above all, both Boorstin's pseudo-places and Relph's placeslessness date back to modernity; they could only anticipate the epoch of supermodernity.

Augé uses a broader approach for his theory of non-places as his precursors; he takes numerous fields into account and stresses the non-place as an actually significant way of experience. Furthermore, he highlights the mechanisms behind those locales and alludes to their impact on people's lives, which will be elaborated on in the following sub-chapters. In other words, Augé's perspective on the contemporary world is more comprehensive than that of his precursors, probably because he has witnessed the invention and proliferation of even more advanced technologies and machines. Therefore, his conceptions seem to be more suitable for

an analysis of locales belonging to entirely different sectors and cultural spheres, as the authors and their plays chosen for this this are not exclusively rooted in America or Europe. Above all, Augé's theories are more apt to describe supermodernity, as they are rooted in this age.

3.2. Into the core of non-place – definition, characteristics and implications

3.2.1. The nature of non-places – an attempt at a definition

Marc Augé seems to have created his concept of non-places based on a thorough observation of the contemporary world. For him the supermodern cosmos is

> a world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral […]. (Augé 63)

This quote illustrates how such diverse locales as motorways, motels and malls, or even reception centres determine both the landscape and people's interaction with it. It also shows that however different these are, they have something in common, a set of core factors, which supports a classification of these venues as non-places. To determine what such non-places actually are in theory, one has to turn to the shared qualities of the facilities mentioned in the quote (and many more similar edifices).

Before that, a reference point has to be chosen from which to distinguish non-places: Marc Augé selected a term that suggests that they are the opposite of something, namely of places. He does not utilise a solely geographical notion of place, but centres on anthropological place. In an ethnologist's words (with a certain literary quality to them), place is

> the one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance, but who also detect in it the traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography (Augé 35).

The concept of anthropological place deals with the area within certain guarded borders that serves as a habitat for a community. Furthermore, that specific ground retains close connections to its past and spiritual realms, which serve as a justification for claiming the land. It is a definition that takes geographical factors as

well as culture, history, social life and religion into account.[5] It is similar to the definition of place Relph used, as it comprises basically the same qualities.

> Two further principles apply to Augé's conception of anthropological place. First, anthropological place [...][is the] concrete and symbolic construction of space [with its routes, crossroads, centres and monuments], which could not of itself allow for the vicissitudes and contradictions of social life, but which serves as a reference for all those it assigns to a position, however humble and modest. (Augé 42)

This point highlights the influence of the spatial system on roles and status due to its symbolic and social qualities, which is an aspect that is hardly touched upon by Relph. It is, however, only a convenient construction, which might serve as a frame of reference. The second principle is as fragile a creation as the first one: Places as anthropological places "want to be – people want them to be – places of identity, of relations and of history" (Augé 43). This claim suggests that there is a strong connection between space, time, self and interpersonal contacts.

Marc Augé sums up his descriptions and principles of anthropological place in order to find a definition for non-places. In essence, anthropological place is "a place that can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity" (Augé 63). It is this exact concept of place that Augé uses to derive his conception of non-places from.[6] The consequence is an admittedly fairly abstract definition: "A space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 63). The lack of personal connections and the absence of reflexion on the self as well as isolation from the past are, fundamentally, the distinctive qualities of non-places.

3.2.2. Contract of solitary familiarity or the feeling of home in a strange (non-)place

Marc Augé links non-places to supermodernity and thereby to recent phenomena like globalisation, consumption, mass communication, an increase in mobility and an obsession with speed. In these areas non-places are extremely frequent because of

[5] On the one hand, it is a very comprehensive explanation of place. On the other hand, it presupposes an ideal, homogeneous and isolated spot as its object. Therefore, it is a construction for the observer's sake. Augé draws attention to that fact several times in his publication. Collins (par. 6) and Buchanan stress that aspect as well: „[P]lace is an anthropologist's tool, the property of its inventor, not the social group said to inhabit it" (Buchanan 394).

[6] Augé himself points out that his definition of place is different from Michel de Certeau's, although he considers the scholar as an important predecessor in the demesne of spatial theory. De Certeau restricts his definition of place to geographical position and opposes it to space. Place can only change into space by people's movements in it. Non-place in de Certeau's sense has only the negative association of absence. Augé intends his concept to be less bleak. (cf. Augé 64)

their functions. That is only one aspect of their character though: “Non-places [actually] serve two complementary, but distinct purposes: one, as a means to certain ends (eg, transportation, transit, commerce, leisure); two, as conduits to connect different types of spaces and hence to facilitate individuals’ interaction with the space.”(Arefi 108) Due to the acknowledgement of both those purposes, Augé’s theory is more comprehensive than Relph’s, which remains in the sphere of geography, or rather, the lack of a distinct geography associated with placelessness.

Another significant factor that distinguishes non-places from anthropological place is their link to function. According to Augé, “non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality” (76).

Such a contractuality between people and space is produced by a medium not unfamiliar to literary studies. Non-places provide instructions for their usage, a short manual, so to speak. These directives are expressed with the help of signs and words, which govern the interaction with non-places.(Augé 76,77) The texts can, on the one hand, evoke certain images, when we read the name of an exotic island in a travel brochure or that of a site on a sign next to the motorway, for instance. On the other hand, they ought to guide us on our journeys through space like direction signs, safety instructions or price tags.(Augé 76,77) The texts are the same for everybody who encounters them. The authors of those are rarely known; the messages are often issued on behalf of certain institutions or companies.(Augé 78) There is indeed no direct contact between these responsible parties and persons who move through non-places. It cannot be stressed too often that communication is carried out almost exclusively via texts and actions according to their instructions in such venues.

The contract between a certain non-place and its users is of a curious character. Each person entering the non-place ‘signs’ his or her personal covenant, hence it is a singular action. Nevertheless, the agreement is based on the same criteria for everyone and transmitted via the same texts; (these peculiar criteria will be presented in the following sub-chapter). Therefore, it can be considered an almost homogeneous experience of numerous people, even regardless of time. For the nature of non-places this simultaneity of the singular and the mass experience is of great importance. It has a profound influence on a person who moves in such a locale. According to Marc Augé “non-place creates the shared identity of passengers,

customers or Sunday drivers" (81). Such a temporary identity allows for a certain degree of anonymity, "the individual [...] is [so] divested of responsibility" (Hill David 2483). This may be perceived as a liberation.(Augé 81) An individual becomes one of many and, often quite literally, disappears into the crowd. What such an immersion into a mass entails has been pointed out by Augé in a very illuminating way:

> [A] person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He [or she] becomes no more than what he [or she] does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. Perhaps he [or she] is still weighed down by [...] worries [...] [and] concerns; but he [or she] is distanced from them temporarily by the environment of the moment. Subjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he [or she] surrenders him[- or her]self with more or less talent and conviction, he [or she] tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing.(83)

Non-places allow people to retreat from themselves, as they only require users to act according to the role assigned to them by commerce, communication or circulation. They might keep to themselves and remain unknown to the others, to their fellows who move through the same space, probably almost in synchrony. For the time of their transactions, sojourns, flights or drives they can even play someone else, if they choose to do so, or relish their solitude. However, it is an ephemeral timeout, as the relative anonymity and the liberation are dependent on the duration of one's stay in a non-place. It is only a fleeting opportunity of the moment, which does not last forever.

Another important aspect with regard to mass experience is the association of non-places with generic space.[7] Generic space encompasses localities that are quite prominent in our contemporary, globalised world, for instance shopping malls, airports, holiday resorts or motorways. These are exactly the venues "we feel we know even though we have never been there before, and whether they are cross-town or overseas" (Buchanan 393). We are capable of interacting with them in an appropriate way on the first visit of a specific spot, as we probably have acquired necessary competences before due to our experiences with facilities fulfilling the same purpose. Furthermore, the layout of edifices belonging to generic space is often adapted to their function, which facilitates orientation. A future passenger, for example, will always find a check-in counter at an airport and later make him- or herself comfortable in the duty-free area, whether he or she is in London, Los Angeles, Barcelona or Vienna. A similar feeling of familiarity might be evoked through

[7] This idea might be traced in Augé's publication *Non-Places*. Nevertheless, it is addressed more clearly by other scholars discussing his theories and concepts; i.e. Di Stefano 41; Buchanan 393.

encountering products of a famous international brand in a supermarket in a foreign country. In other words, one paradoxically may even feel at home in a strange locale, if it is a non-place that belongs to generic space.

The notion of temporariness and the dependency on the moment have already been mentioned as key features of non-places. These qualities provide further insight into the way of usage and movement in those spaces. The both elusive and instantaneous character of places lacking symbolic, social and historical relations implies a rather rapid interaction with them, an interaction that can be described as short-term. One does rarely linger or reside in a non-place, but rather pass through it.(Collins par.11) For its user the "time spent in the commuter lane [,][...][for instance,] is time (and space) *between*"(Collins par.11). Non-places are entities between anthropological places or at least places that are socially or symbolically loaded. This interim status allows for an almost figural interpretation: Non-places often function as liminal places and thresholds. (Warnaby par. 6; Lloyd 98) In the publication relations jargon one might also say they serve as "gateways" (Warnaby par.8) In more neutral terms, their capacity of moving people either from one place to another or from one status to another is at the very fore. This improves connection and advances mobility.

3.2.3. The silent regulations and the paradox of non-places

Although non-places are part of public, generic space of larger regions and therefore seem to be open to everybody, this assumption is wrong. There are rules that regulate admission. Furthermore, behaviour within these locales is influenced by these imperatives, and offences against them lead at least to warnings. (Augé 81) Violations might even be sanctioned though (admission restrictions, speeding tickets, etc.).

The silent contract that incorporates the regulations governing a non-place is 'signed' at entering. In many cases it has a very specific form; it is almost like a ritual of entrance (i.e. check-in procedures at an airport, typical steps to purchase goods, retrieving the key to one's hotel room at the reception desk, etc.). The behaviour during the stay in a non-place is bound to be as stereotypical. People tend to display certain signs like luggage or a trolley to fit into their role of customer, passenger or driver.(Augé 82) It often even involves identity checks: One can neither enter a plane

without a valid boarding pass nor get a hotel room without showing a passport or some other document that proves one's identity, for instance. (Augé 82) Augé connects these checks, which often happen at exiting as well, with the core requirement for using those locales: To 'sign' the underlying contract, "the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence"(82). That notion of impeccability is even captured in the French term 'non-lieu', as both the translator of Augé's original text and a reviewer for *Current Anthropology* point out: 'Non-lieu' has its origins in the judicial domain and means as much as "no ground for prosecution" (Ohnuki-Tierney 580; see also Augé translator's note 82)

The core rule of interaction might be formulated as follows: No anonymity without any proof of identity. (Augé 83) Only after providing evidence for one's integrity and thereby accepting the terms of the mute contract, one can fully immerse oneself into the non-place. Only then one can profit from its function (i.e. means of transport, locality providing entertainment or goods, means of communication). Only after a thorough identification, one becomes again part of the mass of, for instance, fellow passengers, internet users, hotel guests or customers. Non-places create an ironic, even paradoxical situation: Users can indulge in relative anonymousness during their stay, but have to be ready to identify themselves whenever it is prescribed by the silent contract between the space and the person using it.

3.3. Back to the beginning - non-places as a tool of analysis

With regard to scientific efforts a concluding remark has to be made. It is connected to the abstract spatial concept and affirms its status as a construction just like that of (anthropological) place. According to Augé,

> [non-place] never exists in pure form; places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it; [...]. Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities; the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten (64).

Bearing in mind that one is utilising spatial models that do not capture every layer of reality certainly seems to be more adequate for practical work. In the concrete world, one will encounter the situation that not all anthropological places possess the same amount of evocative historical, social and cultural relations. In analogy, not every non-place is as devoid of meaning and connections as the concept makes it appear

to be. Although practices and conventions in non-places are strictly regulated, there is still some room for people to wield and appropriate them for their goals. In other words, they can seek to make them mean something. Users may find or try to revive traces of its past, for instance.

The concept of non-place does not offer a description of the real world that is a hundred percent true. However, it provides considerable insight into the mechanisms governing such locales. Therefore, it seems to be a useful frame of reference for spatial analyses either of a concrete region or a fictional cosmos.

4. Non-places of connection, circulation and celerity

A vitally important area in which the non-places of supermodernity thrive is travelling and transport. There seems to be an ever increasing need to be mobile. Whether for private or for professional reasons one desires to get from one location to another in as little time as possible. Hence, one's dependency on rapid means of transport is rising as well. This need is catered to by an adaptation of infrastructure. Motorways are built for the myriads of fast cars or motorcycles. The airspace is crowded by planes connecting the hemispheres of the globe. To complete the transport network, there are older forms like buses and trains, and the more recent facility of the underground.

All those vehicles and means of transport are connected either to areas of waiting and entering or to – euphemistically put – tuning areas, which offer fuel or accessories for one's four- or two-wheeled companions. Not only are those indispensible for traffic, but they are similar in form and function all over the world, often enough relying on famous brand names.(see Arefi 110, 116) Thus, they can be considered as non-places as well.

Such non-places of connectivity and circulation are intrinsic to all the chosen contemporary plays. Both plays by Simon Stephens owe their settings to a fetish of mobility and, above all, a personal obsession of the author with Heathrow Airport (see Stephens *SkyArts 1*, 1:42-2:32). *Wastwater* captures the meetings of three different couples connected to this almost iconic institution. *T5* even alludes to its setting in the title. Heathrow's Terminal 5 is (part of) the female protagonist's destination. The first part of her journey leads her through the London Tube system. Gupta's *Sugar Mummies* is also dependent on airplanes: Tourists have to be flown in to Jamaica and the holiday resort. Planes are the commonsense connection between the cities of London and New York too, which are mentioned in Patrick Marber's play. This type of non-place is not incorporated in detail, though, in *Closer*.

The two plays by the American playwright Neil LaBute move back to the ground and onto the streets. *The Distance from here* deals with car fetishism and the vehicle's symbolic dimension in a few scenes, although it is not the central theme of the text. La Bute's other publication, however, is completely immersed in 'car culture', as all the protagonists of each short-play are sitting inside a car. This link to roads and driving is already indicated by the remarkably illustrative title *autobahn* (– at least

by a German speaking audience or by people with a certain level of education). That fact that 'autobahn' is the German version of the highway is disclosed in the final scene of the play, to clarify and, primarily, to reaffirm the title and its subtle allusion to people's speed craze:

> WOMAN. Maybe the Germans have it right, after all. [...] I certainly don't agree with their, you know, politics ... but the car thing, that autobahn they've got there, maybe that's not a bad idea, actually. Perhaps that's the way it should be... all of us speeding by one another, too quick to stop, too fast to care… just racing along, off on our little journeys […].(LaBute *autobahn*, 92)

This quote exemplifies the theme of celerity in connection to means of transport and cars in particular not only by its content, but also by the choice of words. The verbs 'to speed' and 'to race' point towards velocity, as do the adjectives 'quick' and 'fast'.

Rapidity, as preliminary glimpsed in the short passage from *autobahn*, is certainly a key factor of the non-places of circulation. It is not the only significant one though. A detailed analysis of the plays' supermodern settings and their influence on the characters will provide a more comprehensive discussion of these certain types of non-place. The vehicles operating on the ground shall be presented first; then there shall be a section dedicated to airspace and its facilities. There is also the potential number of persons being transported by those as a principle to be taken into account. Consequently, the sub-chapters will treat the three non-places that can be found in the chosen plays in the following order: car (needs roads, a limited number of people find space in it) – underground (underground coaches can move innumerous passengers in a fixed system of routes) – airports and planes (can cover greater distances in a shorter time than the other two, because aeroplanes can use the air-line distance).

4.1. Four-wheeled vehicles

4.1.1. A look in the rear-view mirror: cars in the paratext

The artists of *The Distance from here* and *autobahn* do not lead (potential) readers up the garden path; they rather provide important impressions of what the texts are going to be about. The front graphics of both Neil LaBute's plays allude to spatial key themes in their visual images. For *The Distance from here*, even though cars are displayed on the front cover, the designers did not employ a blatant strategy at all, but one that subtly allows for cultural and symbolic associations (see figure 1).

The picture shows an aerial photograph of a concrete place, namely an (American) residential neighbourhood. It is marked by its many houses crowded on a relatively small stretch of land, a garage that does not provide enough space for all the family's cars and a driveway that has to be further transformed into a parking space for various additional motorised vehicles and bicycles. One can also see a garden that is literally littered with a boat, scattered garden furniture, a lawn-mower, innumerable plastic toys, a tent and a rubber boat. The overall image might be interpreted as one of the American dream gone bad, which does not seem too far-fetched: A residence is in the foreground that belongs to a family that can afford to buy status symbols like a boat, garden tools and, above all, numerous four-wheeled and two-wheeled vehicles, but cannot afford to move to a better neighbourhood and into a bigger home that provides sufficient space. The house and the chaotic array of tools and toys in the garden most probably do not appear attractive to the observer's gaze. Collecting cars and other supposed objects of value seems to be more important than creating an orderly, comfortable home with sufficient living space and a well-arranged garden. Despite the proprietors' efforts to present a respectable residence, there is none of the neatness that is strived for, let alone beauty to the space in the picture. The purely visual image of this neighbourhood will probably not be considered as appealing by the beholder, the (potential) reader. As it is the play's cover image, it strongly links the text to this illustration, implying that the characters have to cope with living in that rather repugnant area. The picture as part of the peritext raises as many questions as it answers about the play's setting. Therefore, it ought to work well to catch attention. A less subtle image is displayed on the cover of *autobahn*. It shows part of the title's specific type of street.(see figure 2) The design is made up of a small stretch of concrete of which one can see every particle and typical road markings in a yellowish orange. The latter are what seem to be dominating the image and thereby compel attention. The whole photograph looks rather old-fashioned due to its almost sepia colour-scheme. The stretch of concrete on the cover will probably evoke rather clichéd associations of the road and its promise of freedom.

The Distance from here is a textbook example of a title that alludes to the importance of space. Distance is a spatial measurement, which can work on both the physical and the psychological level; Thomas L. Bell argues that "LaBute means distance only in a social and wishful sense" (103). The concept is even aptly illustrated on the book itself (see figure 1): The cover image is inserted between the

two parts of the title; 'the distance' dominates the upper left-hand corner, 'from here' fills the bottom right-hand corner. The title of LaBute's second play is at least as emblematic with regard to space. As already discussed in the introductory passages about the non-places of means of transport, an autobahn is a special type of road that has its roots in Germany. Needless to say, the title is a clear reference to that particular space reserved for motorised vehicles for which speed limitation only exists in theory. Such allusions are not restricted to the main title though. 'Autobahn' is also used for the last short-play of the cycle. There are three more parts whose heading insinuates the world of cars and driving: The 'bench seat' can be found in the rear section of a motor-car, which is the neutral denotation. The term may even evoke associations with a popular, rather intimate form of entertainment that is typical for that exact location. 'Merge' is a common way of moving through traffic. 'Road trip' is once again a term that appears to be culturally loaded. It is a popular theme in the movie business, which has developed a whole genre that is based on the appeal of adventurous road trips – so-called road movies. One might be reminded of iconic literary texts as well, which feature notorious journeys in diverse vehicles, for instance Jack Kerouacs' piece with the emblematic title *On the road*.

Taking one step back to the books' covers, an analysis of the blurbs provides further insight into the construction of the plays' settings. Both promotional passages highlight the kind of world the pieces take place in. To make potential readers interested in *The Distance from here*, the play is advertised as "an intense look at the dark side of American suburbia" (LaBute, *Distance*), a part of which has been rather emblematically illustrated by the image on the front cover.[8] There is one more striking expression to promote the text which takes its metaphors from the non-place of the car. The blurb assures that "there is nothing to brake [the characters'] momentum as all three speed toward disaster" (LaBute, *Distance*). This promise exploits car-jargon, stressing the celerity of the play's action and its inevitability. The language of *autobahn* is similarly charged, but there are also direct references to the car as setting in its blurb:

> Be it the medium for clandestine couplings, arguments, shelter, or ultimately transportation, the automobile is perhaps the most authentically American of spaces. In *Autobahn,* Neil LaBute's provocative new collection of one-act plays

[8] The piece's blurb will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on non-places of consumption though, as it focuses on (non-)places at which the young characters use to hang out and not on fashionable four-wheeled vehicles.

> set within the confines of the front seat, the playwright employs his signature plaintive insight to great effect, investigating the inchoate apprehension that surrounds the steering wheel.(LaBute, *autobahn*)

Apart from the stereotypical praise of the book's author, the blurb is quite informative on the surface. It does not leave anything about the play's setting open: It draws the attention to the fact that all one-act pieces unfold in the confined space of a car. It also refers to its purpose as a means of transportation and addresses other possible, rather topical ways of using such a vehicle. On a deeper level, the blurb stresses the dramatic quality of a car by pointing to 'the apprehension that surrounds the steering wheel', which is a strategy of attracting the readers' attention. What is rather interesting is that the car is associated with American culture exclusively, which seems slightly stereotypical as well, but probably works as a marketing strategy. It brands the play as something typically American.

What is further noteworthy about LaBute's plays is the playwright's choice to include short mottoes in the texts. These are quotes by authors, poets and icons of popular culture. In *The Distance from here* the aphoristic comments do not deal with place and space outwardly. The first is part of a poem by W.H.Auden:

> O plunge your hands in water,
> Plunge them in up to the wrist;
> Stare, stare in the basin
> And wonder what you've missed.
> - W.H. Auden [from 'As I walked out one evening'] (LaBute, *Distance* 6)

It does not reveal anything about the setting directly. The allusion to lost opportunities is most probably one that is connected to the play's content, an assumption that is affirmed in the text proper. An indirect link to a setting that impedes progress and reduces fair chances should not be disregarded completely, nevertheless. Although the second quote does not consist of any literal reference to space or place either, it provides the reader with significant clues about it. LaBute chose a phrase from the lyrics of THE song about the contemporary youth (– at least in the 1990ies), written by grunge music's tragic hero Kurt Cobain. "Oh well, whatever, nevermind" (LaBute, *Distance* 6) is a line from the verse of 'Smells like Teen Spirit', a song that enjoys worldwide fame. That particular number from Nirvana's *Nevermind* album, released in 1991, is claimed to be "the perfect encapsulation of Generation X angst and ennui" (*Song Top 100*). Despite the quote's lack of direct geographical or broadly spatial references, it serves to evoke associations with the particular social and cultural space of such a callous youth generation. It is a space that impedes progress and

psychological movement. Interestingly enough, this potential socio-cultural load is dependent on another non-place, namely that of popular music, which is part of the entertainment industry.[9] Both mottoes in *The Distance from here* arouse the expectations of being confronted with a setting that is dominated by a lack of opportunities, a vacuum of values and a shortage of meaningful relations. These are attributes that may be associated with non-places in general as well. In other words, one might deduce from the two quotes that one will probably encounter several non-places in the play's text.[10] *Autobahn's* peritext is less subtle, but as effective. The first aphorism deals with mobility and change or rather the lack of it: "They change their climate, not their soul, who rush across the sea" (LaBute, *autobahn* vii) are the poet Horace's words. LaBute also cites the American author E.B. White, who touches upon the theme of cars:"Everything in life is somewhere else, and you get there in a car" (LaBute, *autobahn* vii). Whereas the first motto has a rather symbolic quality to it, White's comment appears to remain in the practical demesne at first glance. Nevertheless, it is a statement that glorifies the car as a means of transport. It implies that one gets to whatever destination one dreams of in this particular four-wheeled vehicle. Once again, the notions of mobility and relative freedom are stressed in the quote from the play's peritext. The mottoes in *autobahn* give the impression of almost contradicting each other: the first negates mental change through physical change, the latter promotes the seemingly infinite possibility of movement due to the invention of the car. They may leave the reader somewhat puzzled before knowing the whole play-cycle.

Another aspect of the peritext that stands out in both chosen works by LaBute is the author's introductory passages. In *The Distance from here* the playwright includs a preface, in which he discloses his intentions and his attitude towards his characters. It might be called an interpretation guidebook for the play, as LaBute points to the key themes of the text: young people without a fair chance in life, a so-called no-future generation consumed by anger and boredom and families that are out of order. (see *Preface* 7,8) This preface is also an attempt to authenticate the play's content and themes, because LaBute refers to his own past. He claims that

[9] Thomas L.Bell points out that LaBute often uses pieces of music to add meaning to the plays and movies (see 105, 106). For instance, he uses another Nirvana reference to steer the readers' expectations in *autobahn*: 'all apologies', the title of a song, is taken up as a heading for one of the short-plays.(see Bell 106)

[10] Needless to say, one's expectations will not be disappointed: There are numerous references to non-places in the text, which are discussed in the course of this thesis.

> [i]n high school [he] sat next to a bunch of boys like Darrell and Tim [...] and watched them simmer and burn and consistently pull down a solid D [...]. They knew, even at sixteen, that they had absolutely no hope in this life and they were pretty pissed about it (7).

Furthermore, the play is an attempt to cope with the ghosts of the past, especially with the myth of the boy who performed an unprofessional abortion by punching a girl in the stomach. (see 8) Above all, LaBute reflects upon the play's purpose and states that it

> is some sort of effort on [his] part, [...], to acknowledge a kind of person [he's] always known well but consciously and constantly marginalized. [He] never liked the way those kids dressed, or the music they listened to, or the way they talked, so from the beginning they were, in essence, dead to [him]. [The play] is [his] attempt at a resurrection (8).

A personal agenda is highlighted in the preface. LaBute intends to deal with his own past by giving a voice to the type of people he himself ostracised in high school.[11] Gerald C. Wood, for instance, interprets such personal acknowledgements on the part of the author as "using guilt as a means of encouraging his own responsibility and morality, reducing his own innocence" (79). Space and place are not addressed directly in the preface, but in a similar way as in the motto's quote of the Nirvana song. A certain abstract space that is socio-culturally marked as underprivileged and marginalised is a constant lurking presence in the description of the young people inhabiting and enlivening it. It is one that will be probably full of locales that hardly provide orientation and relations, namely non-places. In contrast to the preface of *The Distance from here*, the introduction to *autobahn* is directly concerned with space and the portrait of space. Under the heading of "The Pleasures of Limitation" (LaBute, *Pleasures* xi), the multi-talented author and director tells the inside story about the differences between the work for movies and that for the theatre.[12] The people behind the movie business and, above all, the film audiences expect authenticity, which is made possible due to big budgets and filming on location.(see xii) Whereas people nowadays laugh about or look down on "an obviously fake backdrop [on screen] [,] the theatre [...] was built and has flourished for centuries on that very keystone: artificiality"(xiii). Theatre is a medium with little performing space

[11] Note: One should bear in mind that the preface, even though it offers crucial insight into the play's themes, is a means of image cultivation as well. LaBute is apparently trying to stylise himself as a noble person who gives a voice to people he looked down on in high school.

[12] Sarah Heinz also regards that as significant and as crucial for the creation of the cycle *autobahn*. In her discussion of the play-cycle's structure, she quotes extensively from LaBute's introduction as well, focusing less on the spatial dimension than is done in this thesis. (cf. Heinz 191)

(in contrast to movie locations) and a production budget that does not allow for elaborate decorations and equipment on stage, which is exactly what is meant by the limitation LaBute refers to in the heading. Nevertheless, such a limitation can improve creative work (see xii). A different aspect is addressed as well by the dramatist, which leads to the actual inspiration for writing *autobahn*, a play-cycle set in cars. It is linked to the limitation of space or rather to confined space, which seems to offer endless possibilities to the writer, performers, the director and the audience.(see xi) And what else is a car than a textbook example of confined space par excellence? The first speech act in the introduction to the play is actually a confession: LaBute admits that he is "not a car person" (xi). He also tries to placate readers by claiming that contrary to likely expectations based on the title alone, *autobahn* "is not going to be a piece about American ingenuity, the power of the Industrial Revolution, and the great open spaces of the United States"(xi). In other words, the playwright intends to disprove any assumptions that the play-cycle is an encomium to cars, the freedom of seemingly infinite roads and breakneck speed. Cars are important for their creative potential though. That is an aspect that LaBute explains with the help of past experiences:

> "[S]itting in a car was where I first remember understanding how drama worked. My mother and father certainly provided enough of that. And hidden in the spacious backseat of a late-model American sedan, I realized quickly how deep the chasm or intensely claustrophobic it was [...] in your average family car. [...] Cars [...] have been used as covert love nests, battlegrounds, or places of refuge in the past. So why shouldn't we appropriate those inherently dramatic spaces for the theatre? (xiv)

Why not indeed? The quote's last question has its practical answer in the play itself – *autobahn* is a play-cycle for which that particular space inside cars is adapted as its setting. The other mentioned aspects are remarkable as well. LaBute refers to the theatrical potential of real life experiences during car rides. His family's journeys in their sedan served as a picture-perfect example of how dramatic scenes unfold in that particular confined space (and, in analogy to that, in general). Furthermore, the playwright mentions important purposes of the car that are not as straightforward as its main function of being a means of transport. Real life experiences as well as popular fictional accounts are what presumably led LaBute to the thesis that cars have served as battlefields, shelters or even abodes of love. Thereby, the link to literature and artistic topoi is established. Furthermore, the quoted passage might be interpreted as a justification of the choice of setting. At the same time LaBute

provides a quite significant preview of the key themes in the play. Deducing from the introduction, what awaits the reader/the audience is a play that employs a non-place as its setting and attributes it with different functions, which add meaning and relations to it: The central question is in what ways such a remodelling affects the non-place of the car and in how far its main principles are still active. An answer to that crucial issue can only be given by turning to the text proper in the following sub-chapter.[13]

4.1.2. Behind the steering wheel – driving in LaBute's plays

All the different elements of the paratext of *autobahn* promised that it is a piece about and, therefore, featuring cars. That vow is honoured by the playwright. Each one-act play begins with stage directions indicating that the action takes place in a car.[14] Just to mention a few, 'funny' sets out with "*A YOUNG WOMAN sitting in the front seat of a car. An OLDER WOMAN seated next to her, driving*" (LaBute, *autobahn* 7), 'merge' opens with "*A MAN and a WOMAN in an expensive car. He is driving*" (41), 'all apologies' starts with "*A MAN and a WOMAN sit in a parked car. Traffic zooms past*" (35), 'long division' features "*TWO MEN sitting in a car, driving*" (61) and 'road trip' commences with "*A MAN and a GIRL driving cross-country*" (69). The stage directions are similar in structure and lexicon. The dominating semantic field is that of cars: the 'front seat' is a part of it, 'sitting' and 'being seated' are typical positions and 'parking' and 'driving' are representative actions, for instance. As the stage directions are so similar in their characteristics, they resemble the chorus of a song. It is the jingle of a car journey that is reiterated at the beginning of each one-act play, so to speak.

References to actions that make the portrayal of a car trip more authentic are not restricted to the initial passages of each piece in the collection. The reader is reminded regularly that the characters are actually driving in a car and not only conversing; the audience ought to be as well by the actors performing the activities indicated in the stage directions in a production. The young woman from 'funny' is

[13] Note: LaBute's introduction to *autobahn* certainly yields insight into the inspirations behind the play-cycle. It is again a conscious self-portrayal. That aspect is especially significant with regard to his reserved attitude towards cars as a (male) status symbol and sign of industrial/technical progress.
[14] In the actual performances chairs are used as makeshift cars. (see LaBute, *Pleasures* xiii)

looking out her side window (see LaBute, *autobahn* 10), for example. The characters are also checking or adjusting the mirrors (see 63) and executing turns (see 66, 92).

In analogy to the conventionality of the actions described in the secondary text, there are regular references to typical issues connected to the act of driving a car and characteristic commands in the dialogue proper of the dramatic cycle *autobahn*. One might also say that characters speak in the jargon of their roles specified by the non-place. They use expressions and idioms typically uttered by drivers and passengers, who often are assistant drivers at the same time. The young woman of the first one-act play says to her mother, who is sitting behind the steering wheel: “Do it, keep on driving” (LaBute, *autobahn* 12). The woman in ‘merge’ fulfils her role as co-driver even more adequately. She gives her husband directions and sometimes advises him on how to behave in thick traffic. The list of her commands as assistant driver is fairly long. To illustrate the claim that parts of that one-act play from LaBute’s cycle *autobahn* actually resemble a schematic script of a car journey, a few examples shall be provided: “Turn here”, “Watch the road, please” *(*41), “I think Twenty-Third would be faster... fewer lights” (44); “You can just pass the Cadillac”, “We’re running parallel with Broadhurst” ,“This is Williams, at the next stop”(50) and “We can jump on the freeway right up here. We’re probably past the clog now” (55); she eventually employs the title of the one-act piece for the directions – “This lane ends. You’ll need to merge” (57). With regard to the constellation of roles, ‘long division’ offers an entertaining twist. In contrast to the rather active woman in ‘merge’, the co-driver of that piece only performs the role of a silent passenger in the beginning, even though the two men are on a crucial errand to get *his* property back from *his* ex-partner. The driver refers to the act of driving and makes suggestions such as “I can just drop you off at home, if you want to” (62) and “I am either turning up here on Division or not” (63). He is not entitled to do more though, as it is not his quest. Therefore, he tries to get his friend to be a proper assistant driver: “You have to be the one to guide me” (63) and “You decide what you wanna do about it [...] I’m gonna just keep driving until you come to some finality on the issue” (65). Almost surprisingly, the other man eventually breaks his silence and reacts as a picture-perfect co-driver: “Go down Division” (65). The pair of ‘road trip’ is discussing a stereotypical issue during the ride as well: The young girl asks the grown-up driver how much farther and longer they have to go.(see 80) It is a scene reminiscent of a family’s holiday trip by car. However, the respective roles are performed by two characters that do not share the

familial bond: they are teacher and pupil. That unorthodox pairing requires the man to drive carefully, so as not to attract attention. That implies obeying the "speed limit" and "following the rules" (80). The guy in 'bench seat' gives the "very winding road" (27) as an excuse for his serious and concentrated demeanour in order to placate his suspicious girlfriend. All the quoted commands and discussions of typical topics like speed limits, duration of the trip, routes and road quality are rooted in the fictional present of the one-act plays. The incorporation of such immediate reactions serves as a reminder for the reader/the audience of the outward action, of the movement of the car. At the same time such schematic expressions define the roles of the characters as drivers and passengers for those moments.

In contrast to *autobahn*, cars are rarely driven onstage in La Bute's *The Distance from here.* With regard to their function as conventional means of circulation and transportation, as it were, they do not play such a major role in this piece. There are only a few instances, in which typical actions, or rather sounds are indicated in the secondary text. For example, when Cammie comes home from grocery shopping, Rich and Shari hear *"[a] car door slam[...]*" (LaBute, *Distance* 122). To claim that cars are not important at all for the play would be misleading, however. LaBute incorporates them into his text regularly; he focuses on socio-cultural and symbolic factors though, which will be presented in the following sub-chapter.

4.1.3. Full throttle – cars as vehicles for gender identity

As was already hinted, cars often fulfil different purposes in *The Distance from here*. LaBute rarely reduces them to means of transport and thereby unrelational non-places. One might argue that they are interwoven into the text as an emblem of traditional masculinity. First, most references to cars are made by male characters, especially by Rich. Moreover, the playwright portrays Rich as a stereotypical macho, who is only interested in fast vehicles.[15] This supposedly male obsession with cars is underscored by certain statements like "Oh, cool, that's fucking great... you think I'm gonna watch Nova? 'S not about *cars* –" (LaBute, *Distance* 27). TV programmes that do not feature those vehicles hold no interest at all for him. Furthermore, Rich is keen on taking the others to a show that features car races. He asks Darrell, his current

[15] With regard to gender stereotypes in general, one has to add that he likes women and bossing them around as much, certainly.

girlfriend's son, to accompany him there (see 39, 40), which is an attempt to bond with the boy. Interestingly enough, cars are chosen to be the connecting link between those two characters; it is probably not a random decision. LaBute has Rich use the myth of the car as a symbol of an intact masculinity. It is a link with which he tries to stress the bond with Darrell due to their shared sex. Besides, in an attempt to affirm his own gender identity, Rich stylises himself as a perfect mechanic: "I'm gonna go pull the Chevy in the garage, take a look at it. You guys go back to your girlie shit or whatever –"(27). Rich states that he will take care of the car instead of remaining in the house and participating in the 'girlie shit'. By that, he implies that working as a mechanic is a thoroughly male activity and that he is a true man. The reiteration of gender stereotypes throughout the text may be an attempt to challenge them, as the portrayal of some of the characters approaches that in satire. What is noticeable with regard to non-places is that it is often the car that seems to make a man a man in *The Distance from here*.

LaBute incorporated similar aspects into one of the short plays of *autobahn*. In 'bench seat' the characters discuss gender stereotypes and touch upon cars as well. The female character firstly claims that "they always wanna drive, [...][,referring to g]uys" (LaBute *autobahn* 23). Secondly, the male character is portrayed as a car fanatic like Rich, who uses jargon and speaks rather fondly of his vehicle. The nameless guy is afraid that the girl, who is sitting beside him, might "ruin the bench" (28). He is intent on keeping his car unscathed, because it "is a classic [...] and a real beauty" (28). Thirdly, the car serves again as an important link in a fragile relationship with another man: it was a gift from the character's father. Deducing from the son's opinion about his father ("I got the car, and as far as I can see ... it was the only bit of him that was worth a damn" (28)), their relationship appears to be rather poor. It is again a car that is a means of male bonding, of minimally improving the father-son-relationship.

The play-cycle *autobahn* provides further crucial aspects with regard to gender identity as well, which partially differ from the topics treated in LaBute's earlier work. The first aspect to analyse is the gender constellation in the car. Each one-act play features a different pairing with a specific connection between the individuals (for instance mother and daughter, male friends, teacher and pupil, husband and wife, etc.). What all the pieces share, at least to a certain extent, are power struggles between the two occupants; "status games" (par.3) as critic Mark Fisher puts it. This

is partially done by exploiting gender stereotypes with regard to cars.[16] LaBute highlights the underlying battle playfully in several of the cycle's scenes on the basis of who is actually in charge of determining the route of the journey.

A very lively and illustrative discussion of the trip's course is portrayed in 'merge', which has already been noted (and quoted) due to the frequent use of car jargon. As a little reminder, the male character is positioned behind the steering wheel, the passenger is female, the man's wife. This constellation that recognises the man's status of driver appears rather stereotypical. However, the power that is normally attached to the position of driver is challenged and undermined quite early in the one-act play by the portrayal of a strong assistant driver. She is the one who guides her husband through the trip, even though she is not behind the steering wheel. The quite active and authoritative comments of the female co-driver have already been cited in an earlier section. Nevertheless, to illustrate the passive and weaker position of the husband, two short exchanges shall be quoted:

(1) WOMAN. We can jump on the freeway right up here. We're probably past the clog now.
MAN. All right.
WOMAN. If not, we can get back off at Meyer and out across town.
MAN. Fine. (LaBute, *autobahn* 55)

(2) WOMAN. This is Williams, at the next stop.
MAN. I know, I know... [...]
[They woman continues to tell her story for a few lines.]
WOMAN. [...] That was Williams, right there.
MAN. We'll go to Miller, then double back.
WOMAN. Whatever you want. Williams is quicker. (50)

Both quotes show that the female co-driver is giving the directions. Her husband can only acknowledge them with an 'all right' or 'fine'. The second quote depicts a mistake of the driver: Although his wife indicated the course, the driver misses the correct junction. Therefore, he quickly proposes an alternative route. Nevertheless, his wife has to have the last word. She claims that her suggestion would have been quicker.

Whereas the co-driver emancipates herself and proves to be a more apt route planner than her husband in 'merge', 'all apologies' works differently. In that one-act play, the positions of the individuals inside the parking car are not directly indicated initially. Who is seated behind the steering wheel and can actually start the car, is

[16] As this is a thesis on spatial concepts, the aspects connected to place and space shall be focused on. Due to (- semantically ironic) spatial constraints, other elements of this power struggle cannot be addressed.

only addressed towards the end of the piece: “Point being, can you just put the thing in drive and get us outta here, we’ll talk about it tonight upstairs?” (38) One of the two wants to continue the (one-sided) discussion at home, in private. That is impossible though, because that person is only sitting in the passenger seat and is not able to start the car. He or she is dependent on the driver to start the vehicle, which suggests a certain hierarchy and power distribution. In that one-act play the person behind the steering wheel is the woman. LaBute depicts her as the more powerful of the two: She refuses to grant the man his wish of driving home. That is an outstanding way of playing with gender stereotypes regarding cars in general; it also seems to be a role reversal in the piece’s intra-diegetic story.[17]

What may be considered as provocative about the piece ‘road trip’ is the fact that one of the characters abuses his position: The man behind the steering wheel is doubly marked as the more powerful character in comparison to the young girl: first by his sex and secondly by his age and profession as a teacher. The power struggle is settled before it even started due to this double advantage: The grown-up man behind the wheel is the one who can decide the route and the destination of the trip in this contribution to the cycle.

There are two more one-act plays with a male-female pairing in LaBute’s cycle; both position the man behind the steering wheel. In the book’s last piece, ‘autobahn’, it is the female character who frequently addresses the themes of mobility and driving though. She is also the one who utters the key comment on the concept of an autobahn, which seems to be an almost iconic description of the ideal non-place.

> WOMAN. Maybe the Germans have it right, after all. [...] I certainly don’t agree with their, you know, politics ... but the car thing, that autobahn they’ve got there, maybe that’s not a bad idea, actually. Perhaps that’s the way it should be... all of us speeding by one another, too quick to stop, too fast to care… just racing along, off on our little journeys and no sense of how dangerous or careless we’re being. Because we’d be safe, wouldn’t we? [...] Safe inside our bubbles of glass and steel [...] we’d be sheltered there, in these cars, as we moved along. All protected and careening about. Yes. And maybe then we wouldn’t hurt so much. Or feel so deeply when we’ve been betrayed or hurt or lost. (LaBute, *autobahn* 92,93)

The woman heartily wishes for a means of transport that would make her feel safe and relieve her from her personal baggage by granting her full anonymity and reducing emotional burdens. Such a desire for a pure non-place exposes her as a

[17] Note: The man tries to apologise for having humiliated the woman in the past, and thereby having abused his power. (see 35-38)

rather weak person in contrast to her husband, who stoically listens to her musings and keeps on driving.[18] On the outside, he seems to be the stronger character, as he is in charge of making the decisions about where to drive – his true feelings are not revealed, however.

The power struggle in 'bench seat' is not so much played out around the steering wheel. The male character is indeed the driver and has planned the trip. Nevertheless, the girl has an ace up her sleeve: an indirect, albeit fairly elaborate threat of stalking or rather terrorising the man, in case he breaks up with her (see 30, 31).

To complete the analysis of LaBute's cycle, the briefest glimpse on the remaining two pieces is due. They both feature a same sex pairing. In 'funny', threats and a blackmailing scheme are the daughter's weapons against her mother, which reduces the car's potential of distributing power. 'Long division' depicts a different struggle. A man tries to get a male friend of his to show initiative and embrace his power, which has already been touched on in the previous sub-chapter on car language.

4.1.4. Battlefields, confessionals and lover's lanes - from non-place to place

As both the blurb and the introduction to *autobahn* promised, the play-cycle introduces alternative purposes that assign meaning to the non-place of the car. First, the vehicle may function as a secular confessional. In 'funny', the young woman directly addresses that capacity: "I just need to be open with you here... here in the car where you can't run into the next room or slam the door in my face or throw yourself down on the bed and start crying, this is the place to be honest."(LaBute, *autobahn* 11) The character describes the car as a confined space, which neither communication partner can leave easily. Furthermore, it is depicted as a room that offers relative privacy for the confidantes, which enables them to be truthful. In this particular one-act play the car assumes the function of a confessional booth, so to speak: The daughter avows that her stay at the rehabilitation centre was useless and that her drug addiction is not cured at all.(see 11) She bases her blackmailing scheme on the same characteristics as her confession: the confinement and relative privacy of the car exclude further witnesses from her monologue to her mother. Later,

[18] Note: Many more of the woman's comments and worries make her appear as a rather insecure person. (see 85, 87, etc.) They are not connected to spatial aspects though.

it will be her word against her mother's. The young woman can and "will probably lie [her] ass off to everybody else if [her mother] tell[s] 'em about [their] little chat" (12). Succinctly put, the daughter blackmails her mother into giving her absolution and permission for further drug use.

Secondly, the scenes in 'merge' resemble an interrogation. A husband asks his wife about the nightly events at a business conference. He cross-questions her about the strange episode, being very perceptive and nit-picky:

> MAN. You blacked out... but the room was already dark. Right? Didn't you say that?
> WOMAN. Yes...
> MAN. So, how do you know you fainted, then, if the place was already pitch-black?
> WOMAN. I didn't say "pitch".
> MAN. Dark, then ... you said "dark".
> WOMAN. It was. Darkish.
> MAN. But how can you tell? (LaBute, *autobahn* 46)

This quote is only one of many in which the man challenges the woman's words and her story by drawing attention to its logical weaknesses. The husband adopts the role of a meticulous investigator and tries to uncover a crime committed against his wife. During the interrogation, the actual events are revealed: They appear to actually have been an alcohol-fuelled sexual escapade of the man's wife (see 41-57). The sample quote and several other passages of the dialogue in 'merge' are textbook examples of an interrogation, if not a cross-examination. The husband fulfils the role of prosecutor; his wife changes from victim into that of the defendant. Therefore, it might be argued that the car itself serves as a courtroom for a private trial in this one-act play; LaBute does not provide the reader/the audience with the final verdict, though. (The woman eludes a complete confession and impedes a solution to the couple's problems in their relationship by falling asleep (see 57).)

In a third example of the cycle, the male character in the piece 'road trip', a teacher, takes his motto "Do whatever you want, but do it in private" (74) literally. He uses, or rather abuses, the relative anonymity and privacy provided by the non-place of the car for his own benefit. It shields him from the public, enabling him to take a young girl, a pupil, to a secluded cabin and do things that are not specified in the text. He benefits from the confinement and privacy of the car, which gives him shelter and

therefore power.[19] LaBute contrasts that with a public space like the bathroom of, presumably, a service area. Such a venue is dangerous for the teacher's questionable endeavour, because it provides the girl with opportunities to draw attention to her situation by making a scene. That is why the man mentions getting mad at her for "hanging on to that bathroom door and kicking at [him] like [she] were..." (72). He describes such a situation as "embarrassing and [claims that he] just wanted to get going. Out of there. Families trying to have their *picnics* under those little canopy things and [the girl] crying and carrying on like that" (73). Within the confines of the car, the man can control the young girl though and be near her. He exploits the characteristics of the non-place. From the perspective of the girl, however, the vehicle probably resembles a cage or a prison in which she is kept locked up. To conclude, the car assumes diverse purposes in addition to that of transportation, which depend on the characters' point of view. The girl probably relates to the non-place in a different way than the man. The car's two-fold function of providing shelter for the abusive teacher and keeping the girl confined is what presumably makes that piece of LaBute's cycle so unsettling for the reader/audience – especially in light of spectacular real life kid-napping cases.

Fourthly, the scenes in 'long division' may be read as a preparation for an important mission. Even though it is quite a profane endeavour, namely retrieving the "Nintendo 64" (LaBute, *autobahn* 63) from an ex-partner, the coaching process is elaborately depicted. The driver acts as coach and partner in crime, who tries to motivate the other character to take action. He starts by giving advice, referring to his own disposition: "I'd do it. Yeah, seriously. I would. If I were you, I mean. If I were, like, in *your* shoes, I would totally do it. *Totally*. [...] It doesn't hurt anybody, and it's right, so you should do it" (61). As a second step, he explains the plan, the method of operation:

> MAN. I say go over there – you run in, she already knows you are pissed off about it so it's not like a big conversation thing you have to do ... you just go in, unhook the controllers – 'cause those are hers, right? – you untwist a couple wires and you're outta there, five minutes tops. [...] and if he's there, her new "man" or whatever, you just look at him while you're doing it. Stare him right in the face as you're [...] fiddling with it. [...] Still, do what you gotta do. That is your game system, man, you bought it. (62)

[19] The male character in 'all apologies' reacts differently to the non-place of the car. As it is parked in the neighbourhood, the provided privacy is not sufficient for him. He desires to drive home, but is denied that wish, as was already exemplified in the section on gender identity.

The man describes possible scenarios and justifies the mission by referring to his friend as the rightful owner of the game system. As a further motivation he recounts an exemplary tale about principles (see 64, 65) and preaches “stand[ing] up for what’s right” (63). The whole preparatory speech is held in the car, which might be interpreted as the headquarters of an operation squad, albeit a fairly small one, consisting only of two agents.

A further alternative way to use a car is alluded to in the short-play ‘bench seat’. A couple has driven to a “tranquil” (19) location with “a nice view” (26). It is a spot that is perfect for making out or even enjoying further intimacies (see 26) due to its isolation. One might call it a lover’s lane. The car then becomes a love nest for the couple, as it offers a certain amount of anonymity and privacy for its occupants. It is arguably the most conventional transformation of the non-place, reminiscent of portrayals of such a locale in popular culture, especially in the genre of teen movies. However, LaBute complicates the rendezvous by adding the possibility of a different purpose of the isolated spot: Its privacy not only shelters lovers’ romantic tête-à-têtes, but also facilities contrary actions such as breaking up.

A similar aspect connected to love relationships is alluded to in *The Distance from here*. Darrell takes the keys for the Impala.(see LaBute, *Distance* 81) Presumably, he wants to impress his girlfriend Jenn and take her on a jaunt. Another important type of journey is addressed by Darrell himself in his appeal to Jenn, after throwing the baby into the penguin pool: “Know what we gotta do? Get the fuck out, outta this place. Got a car, take us anywhere we want. [...] Look, even got my mom’s Visa, so ... you choose. Choose a place and I’m there. Seriously, just pick and ... I don’t care the distance from here. We’ll go, ‘kay? Just ... Jenn. Tell me a place” (117). The young boy suggests leaving the crime scene, their hometown and, above all, their lives under such bleak circumstances. This plan ought to be interpreted as a trip of escaping both the immediate problems connected to Darrell’s shocking actions and the general dullness and hostility of their lives. There is even a reference to the play’s title in this quote. Darrell does not care about the distance, as long as it is away from his hometown (cf. Fehle 163).

4.1.5. Driving in circles – mobility versus standstill

Returning to Darrell's desire to escape his life, this need to leave appears even more paramount, when Jenn decides not to accompany him. On his own, the act of driving in the non-place of the car represents the last chance of getting away to him: "Guess I'll just keep driving, you know? Go upstate, maybe, fuck if I know. Just run like rabbits. Headlights blasting, signposts whipping by, fucking squirrels and shit diving to get outta my way! Yeah, I like that. Got some plastic, might take me anywhere. And I don't give a fuck it's any place I ever even heard of – "(LaBute, *Distance* 118). This getaway plan is fuelled by many factors connected to cars: The aspect of transportation to rather far distances is mentioned, as is its celerity. Furthermore, the myth of the freedom of the road and the relative anonymity of the non-place are underlying Darrell's escape fantasy. All these elements, he presumably imagines, will provide him with the opportunity to start over new, as somebody else without the baggage of a hurtful past.[20]

These ideas, or rather phantasms, are echoed in the last one-act play of LaBute's cycle as well. In the piece called 'autobahn' the female character voices her desire of immersing herself into the ideal non-place of the car in order to escape the pain in her life and move on in a different way. It is a quote that has already been discussed in this thesis, but it shall be repeated for its significance with regard to the notion of the non-place:

> WOMAN. [B]ut the car thing, that autobahn the [Germans] got there, maybe that's not a bad idea, actually. Perhaps that's the way it should be... all of us speeding by one another, too quick to stop, too fast to care… just racing along, off on our little journeys and no sense of how dangerous or careless we're being. Because we'd be safe, wouldn't we? [...] Safe inside our bubbles of glass and steel [...] we'd be sheltered there, in these cars, as we moved along. All protected and careening about. Yes. And maybe then we wouldn't hurt so much. Or feel so deeply when we've been betrayed or hurt or lost. (LaBute, *autobahn* 92,93)

This dream of an unrelational, uncomplicated life probably stems from the woman's discontentment with her own situation, apparent in her initial acknowledgement: "We just keep doing lousy things, I guess" (85). Such a wish of change is addressed at the beginning of the piece. Change and the promise of alteration are themes, though, that are exceptionally prominent in the other vignettes of the cycle as well. Firstly, the

[20] The play has an open ending. It reveals nothing about Darrell's future and whether his fantasy of escaping into a better life comes true. As LaBute's play is not a fairy tale, a happy ending seems to be highly unlikely, though.

daughter in ‘funny’ should be clean and able to continue her life in a different way than as a drug addict after her rehabilitation programme. In ‘bench seat’ it is the status of a love relationship that is supposed to be transformed. All apologies that are mentioned in the title of the third one-act play might be considered as a means of improving a situation; they often include a promise of change. In ‘merge’ the question of how to continue a marriage after the wife’s revelations about her adulterous adventures is raised. Furthermore, a ‘road trip’ with a teacher is certainly a life-altering experience for both participants. Lastly, the future mission of retrieving a game console will not only change the amount of the man’s possessions at his home, but also his relationship to his ex-partner in ‘long division’.

A more detailed analysis shows that LaBute plays with the possibility of change through using the non-place of the car, albeit in enhanced functions, in each of the one-act plays. The playwright introduces two levels in all of the pieces: a literal, concrete one, and a symbolic one. The literal aspect is concerned with the physical movement of characters. On that concrete level, the non-place’s function of transporting people is fulfilled. Almost all the pairs are driving from one place to another during their talk. In the scenes set in a parked car, this purpose either lies in the past or the future: The couples have either driven to the place or might go somewhere afterwards. Sarah Heinz traces that literal level back to the overall structure of the cycle and that of each piece. She argues that there is “progressive movement that resembles the roads along which the characters travel” (193). She claims that this shows that there are elements of the standard form of drama with “beginning, middle and end” (Heinz 193). A further significant aspect is that each piece imitates real life talks with regard to its duration. Each one-act play exhibits the unity of time, but also a unity of place – the confines of a car –, and a unity of action; in other words, they observe the three unities introduced by Aristotle. (see Heinz’ sample case ‘funny’, 196)

The symbolic level is more remarkable due to its layered comment on the function of transportation and mobility. Sarah Heinz connects it to the non-standard structural elements. She argues that in LaBute’s cycle the “emphasis [is on] the repetitiveness and openness of the events” (Heinz 193), which “undermines the traditional notions of action, causality, coherence and closure” (Heinz 193). Only one piece insinuates the slight possibility of an actual change of the circumstances. The pep talk in ‘long division’ is successful and the male character decides to go to his ex-partner’s home

and probably retrieve his game console.(LaBute, *autobahn* see 65) In contrast, the female character's desperate wish to escape the lousiness of her life in 'autobahn' is not fulfilled. In the end, "[the man] continues to stare out into the night [and s]he returns to watching the road" (93). Despite the journey and their reflections on the past they do not seem to have come far. "[The] fresh start that is [directly] indicated [in two of the one-act plays] only to be replaced by the feeling that nothing will ever change and that even the hope for another beginning is a false one." (Heinz 202) In both 'funny' and 'bench seat' the discussions (,or rather the monologue in the former) probably do not lead towards the expected alteration. Insidious blackmailing schemes impede a change of the situation. The mother cannot help her addicted daughter and prevent another catastrophe out of fear that people are more likely to believe her daughter's lies. (The young woman threatens her mother: "[W]ho's gonna believe you, anyway? You who calls Dad at work, pulls him out of a staff meeting when the pool guys don't show up." (LaBute, *autobahn* 12)) The man in 'funny' cannot break up with his girlfriend either, although he feels no longer content in the relationship, as he fears the consequences. He is afraid of what will happen, if the girl "totally lose[s] it" (27), after listening to the anecdotes about her revenge on her ex-boyfriend. He is not able to complete his plan of ending the relationship, but has to succumb to the girl's wishes and probably endure the discontentment for a longer time. The characters' status in both one-act plays has not really changed. In these extreme cases, the non-place's function of transportation fails at the symbolic level. 'Merge' and 'all apologies' are similar cases. Both are left completely open-ended. The woman's refusal to start the car or even acknowledge the man's claim of making amends in 'all apologies' suggests that the woman is at least gaining power over the man, yet no real solution is given, the problems in the relationship are not solved. In 'merge' none of the questions that are raised during the interrogation are answered: The husband is not sure of what his wife is capable of ("You weren't up there with a bunch of, not like a whole group of ...just tell me that. [...] You didn't, did you? No, you didn't. I know you wouldn't do that again. Right? You would not... Honey?" (57)) Furthermore, both are not able to grasp what any of the woman's actions means for their marriage. There is again hardly any movement on the symbolic level. In that particular play, both levels even merge: the road ends and the couple's "new start turns into a cul-de-sac" (Heinz 200).

To conclude, the readers/the audience of *autobahn* are denied denouement, "nothing in the personal conflicts of the protagonists is resolved, nothing changes" (Heinz 204), as the symbolic level undermines the literal one of the car journeys. Sarah Heinz identifies two crucial factors implying a convergence of progress and stasis that LaBute uses quite early in the cycle. First, the setting of a car's front seat may be interpreted as a metaphor: "People sit frozen in the enclosed dramatic space of their cars while outside the landscape rushes past" (Heinz 204). Secondly, she draws attention to the two mottoes of *autobahn* – quotes of Horace and E.B. White –, which have already been incorporated into the section on the paratextual elements. Those "two epigrams [...] put the short-play cycle's two contradictory motions in a nutshell" (Heinz 204): (mental) standstill and (physical) mobility due to the non-place of the car. The information about the genre – a short-play cycle – is at least as emblematic.

4.2. Mass transport on the underground

4.2.1. T5 and the London Tube – an unrevealing paratext

Simon Stephens' *T5* is not an ordinary full-length play; it rather is a short monologue that can be read or performed. Therefore, the text of less than ten pages is not published separately, but in an edition together with *Wastwater*. This fact has a major influence on certain features of the paratext. First, a strong link is created to the other play, with which it shares part of its broad setting, namely Heathrow Airport. Therefore, this venue is probably much more prominent in the minds of the readers. This hypothesis is supported by the title of the play: Even though Terminal 5 is a station on the Piccadilly Line, it is much better-known as part of the airport. Furthermore, the text does not have a cover image of its own, which could introduce the play.[21] The only feature of the paratext that also alludes to the setting of the London Tube is the brief blurb on the back of the book:

> This volume also contains the monologue *T5*. It portrays a road trip *below the heart of London* [my emphasis] and follows a darkly magical flight out to the edges of the 21st Century. (Stephens, Wastwater/T5, back)

[21] The front page of the book is almost certainly associated with *Wastwater*, as it shows ripples in a lake and no impressions of London's airport or its underground system whatsoever. See fig.3.

4.2.2. T5 on the underground system and being a 'robot' on the London Tube

Within the text of *T5* there is another factor beside the paratext that is significantly underused as a means of presenting the setting. There are hardly any stage directions. The secondary text is reduced to one single sentence, in which the protagonist is introduced: "*The monologue should be read by a woman in her thirties*" (Stephens, *T5* 68). By not commenting on the setting at all, the author leaves room for the imagination of the reader and that of directors staging a production.

What Stephens cannot show in detail in the paratext about the monologue's setting and refuses to reveal in the secondary text is discussed in detail in the text proper. There are several instances in which the underground is incorporated into the protagonist's reflections. Furthermore, the whole short-play is deeply rooted in London as its overall setting. To meticulously reconstruct the relevant parts of the city in the mind of the reader, the author has opted for dropping names of representative places and buildings of its real life geography. The vicinity of "Canary Wharf [and] the HSBC Towers"(Stephens *T5*, 69) serves as a starting point for the journey, which temporarily ends at Terminal 5 of Heathrow Airport (see 73). In her inner reflections on the trip, the protagonist mentions various other, sometimes even symbolic, places:

> I close my eyes as the train moves west cutting under the ground of the bomb site of Aldgate and through the ancient hearts of the Tower and the Temple. Skirting past the river by Embankment its movement starts to flow. And somebody told me one time that between Westminster and St James the train runs directly beneath the Houses of Parliament. Is that right? [...] They said if you took a bomb on a train beneath St James and Westminster – Can that – ? (70)

The woman does not visit those sights of London in person, but is driven under them, as they are only tube stations on her way to the aerodrome. They are not present in her sight field. Nevertheless, an image of them is most probably in her mind as well as in that of readers/the audience. The mental process of imagining the city is evident in the speaker's thoughts above the exact position of the Houses of Parliament. She wonders if the edifice is really directly about the underground tracks and what that might imply in case of a bomb attack, but cannot prove this thesis during her ride.[22] The whole trip below the heart of London presents the reader (and the protagonist) with an essentially paradoxical situation: The places that are

[22] The reflections with regard to a bomb attack add a symbolic layer of meaning to the passage. It is most probably an allusion to the bomb attacks in the London Underground on the 7th of July 2005, in which 52 people were killed and more than 700 injured. (see BBC London Blasts: 4.4.2012.http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/what_happened/html/).

mentioned are present and absent at the same time. There are no concrete buildings and places to see, but the names evoke mental images.

Such a spatial paradox is typical of non-places. The mediation between those and the places of a city is carried out via signs. The names and directions on these signboards allow for associations and mental pictures, but cannot incorporate the real locations. In the case of an underground ride like in *T5*, those signposts are possibly the plates in each station that name the current stop or overall maps of the London Tube, which provide users with a comprehensive plan of lines. Stephens has drawn a remarkably minute portrait of the underground routes he sent the play's protagonist on, which is to be illustrated by the short quote above. The early passage from the monologue includes the tube stations Aldgate, Tower (Hill), Temple, Embankment, Westminster and St James Park. As a Londoner one might know for what people who are not used to going by the London Underground have to rely on their intuition and reaffirm that hunch by consulting a standard tube map. All the mentioned places are stations on one of London's underground lines. To be precise, they are all part of the District Line, which is marked with a green colour on the model. The female protagonist of the play uses another line as well. It is the dark blue Piccadilly Line, which she enters at "Hammersmith" (Stephens, *T5* 71). Although this journey is not as meticulously traced as the ride on the District Line, there are two other stations mentioned: "Acton Town" and the terminal stop "Heathrow"[23]. On the whole, the reader/the audience can follow the protagonist's entire trip on the map. Such an accurate tracking of a journey is quite outstanding, as it is close to a real ride on the London Underground, and therefore quite plausible. In *T5* it stands out for another reason: The linearity and smoothness of the woman's ride – her stay in a non-place – is contrasted with her incoherent chain of thoughts. There are several jumps from the present into different points in the past and into an imagined future.[24]

Many passages entwined with the fictional present are concerned with the ride on the London Underground. The detailed reflections on the routes have already been

[23] Both p 71. Note: Most of the other stations on this line are less well-known than those on the District Line. They are by no means representative sights of London and might not evoke as many associations like the Houses of Parliament or the Tower. That may be the reason why Stephens did not include more stops on the Piccadilly Line.

[24] Dominic Hill, the director of the production at the Traverse, attached great importance to marking those jumps. During the rehearsal, he told Meg Fraser, the actress reading the part of the woman, to get the audience's attention, fetch them in the imagined present and take them back to the events in the past. See *T5* rehearsal video, roughly 04:20-04:45. Fraser is to accentuate the observations of her surroundings in order to create a feeling of immediacy and instantaneousness. See T5 rehearsal video 05:05-05:22.

addressed. Furthermore, there are observations of the surroundings and an investigation of the protagonist's feelings. The woman looks at the world around her and at herself with an almost "forensic" – as Dominic Hill puts it – and detached attitude (See Boyd, *T5* rehearsal video 01:00-01-50): "Every single part every single muscle feels dangerous and endangered at exactly the same time as I head past the kiosk and ignore the Polish immigrants there trying to thrust vacuous free newspapers into my hand"(Stephens, *T5* 69). The short extract is a close investigation of the speaker's sensations. With regard to non-places the second part of the sentence is more important. The protagonist provides the reader/the audience with a description of a typical underground station with its newspaper stands and people intending to distribute free brochures and papers. It probably serves as a fragmentary portrait of this type of non-place, as it presents typical features and introduces a particular group of people who enliven the space.

There is also a significant passage in *T5* which discusses the feeling of being a passenger in an actual underground train: "This afternoon the tube is full of robots. This afternoon the tube is full of newspaper. I can't sit down. I can't move my eyes. I can't move my hands. I can't move my chest to breathe because every time I try there are three hundred robots here sat stuffed up in newspapers watching me" (Stephens, *T5* 70). The protagonist compares the passengers to robots. That metaphor implies that they resemble each other in their actions, which they carry out almost mechanically. It alludes to the behaviour of people who seem pre-programmed due to being familiar with their surroundings. They can move around without a conscious effort, as they already know the code of conduct and the rules that are in effect. They do not have to think about the regulations governing their ride. In other words, they are aware of the particularities of the non-place of transport. That the protagonist is actually one of those 'insiders' can be deduced from the following extract: "I swipe my card and turn on my heels and head to the right to the westward bound" (70). She knows her way around in the London Underground, but adopts the disengaged position of an observer. The image of the robot, which she uses in her description, has a negative connotation, though. The notion of unease linked to the idea of automated and homogenising behaviour is affirmed and increased by the sequel of the first observation that the tube is full of robots and newspaper. The protagonist finds herself in an uncomfortable position. She is one of innumerable passengers and does not find a place to sit down. Duly conceded, her

perturbed mental state has a considerable influence on her sensations, but a small part of her negative feelings ought to be linked to her spatial surroundings. The underground train is crowded and almost does not leave the speaker sufficient space to breathe. Every little movement brings her closer to her fellow passengers. Some of the 300 robots, as she says in the text, enter, unbidden, into her private sphere. The protagonist perceives her surroundings as possessing a stifling atmosphere. This fear of suffocating, probably aggravated by personal worries, is conveyed in a lively and comprehensible manner to the reader/the audience in the quoted passage by the reference to a felt inability to move and breathe. In addition, the protagonist's impression of people staring at her might not entirely be a figment of a paranoid mind, but a possible description of the situation: Observing other passengers or staring into space is not a form of behaviour that is punished by the non-place. In fact it is believed to be a rather typical way of passing time in an underground train. Most probably, she herself might display a rather vacant look, when she is lost in her own thoughts, and appears to the others in a similar way as they do to her. Even though the protagonist may feel different inside, she is outwardly one of them. She is one of the many passengers in the underground – one of the many users of the non-place of transportation. The pejorative metaphor of the robot and the unpleasant feelings of a lack of (breathing) space show the negative aspects that users of a non-place might encounter. Even in the early passages of the short-play, however, the liberating factor of such 'unrelational' means of transport is alluded to in *T5*. The anonymity of the crowd and the protagonist's capability of moving appropriately in the non-place allow her to focus on herself, on her worries and reflections. She does not have to invest too much energy in finding her way around in the underground system and in changing trains at the correct station to continue her journey. Above all, she is not required to start personal interactions with other people, but can concentrate on becoming aware of herself and her relation to her surroundings.

A further interesting aspect connected to non-places that is treated in *T5* is concerned with breaking its silent rules. People who breach the clauses of the mute contract have to face penalties or at least have to cope with slight problems in their progress. In the early passages of Stephens' *T5*, the protagonist watches "the queues of bewildered tourists still figuring out the mechanics of Oyster Card renewal" (69). The tourists, who are not used to going by the London Underground, have to battle with the terms of buying valid tickets. Once they have managed to purchase

those, their trip will probably be much smoother, as they might have used the underground or tramways in a different city and know how to get on and off the public transport. It is this small particularity of acquiring tickets for the London Tube that provides the non-place with a relation and links it to the concrete city of London – an Oyster Card is probably different to the possible travelling options in the Viennese system of public transport or, for that matter, any other big city in Europe or overseas. That does not necessarily mean that the non-place ceases to be valid though. This portrayal affirms Augé's thesis that non-places do not exist in a pure form.

To conclude, in Stephens' short-play *T5* the London Tube is portrayed in a way reminiscent of Augé's definition of non-place. It serves only as a means of transport (– arguably, as the first step to a more abstract, almost metaphysical journey of the speaker). Furthermore, it relies on certain regulations and conventions of usage such as buying a valid ticket, changing trains and getting off at one's desired destination. People who are aware of the code of conduct can use the underground system without much conscious effort. Therefore, their behaviour is quite homogeneous and appears almost automated to an unengaged observer; they seem to disappear behind their role of passenger. Stephens has the female protagonist use the image of the robot to refer to her fellow users. The reader/the audience might extend that term to the outward appearance of the woman as well.

4.2 3. The protagonist's attempt to reclaim her identity

The portrait of the ride in the London Tube in *T5* is quite typical of the usage of a non-place. Most people fulfil their role as passengers perfectly; so does the protagonist of the short-play in the beginning. Nevertheless, she tries to retrieve, or rather rediscover, her own identity as a person by certain unconventional actions.

The first attempt to set an individual act is set at Hammersmith, where the protagonist has to change trains.

> It seems to take several weeks for a Piccadilly Line train to Heathrow to arrive. When it does arrive though, I surprise all of the people gathered on the platform There by carelessly throwing my phone under the oncoming wheels of the train. The driver blinks and glances in my direction with a look of distracted panic. He stops the train to let us all on as normal. (Stephens, *T5* 71)

This extract is quite remarkable, because the actual emancipating deed is framed by typical actions; the non-place and its implications are therefore hardly disrupted at all. The initial thought transmits that the woman is impatiently waiting for the next train to arrive, which can only be interpreted as an understandable and quite common reaction. Despite his shock at the woman's action, the driver of that train eventually reassumes his work – therefore remains in his role determined by the non-place –, and lets the passengers on at the end of this passage. The deed, with which the protagonist startles the others, is throwing her mobile phone under the train's wheels. In the context of the short-play it is most probably a symbolic act of leaving her normal life and all her responsibilities, epitomised by several voice mails and text messages, behind. She even has it destroyed. Therefore, it might be interpreted as a sign of a break with her old identity and the beginning of the search for a new one. With regard to the code of conduct in the non-place of the underground it is certainly a deviation from appropriate behaviour. That break with conventions allows the woman to step out of the obscuring anonymity of the mass and present herself as a person. She stands out till the underground train stops and lets her and the others on, swallowing her up again into the crowd of passengers to a certain extent.

The phone - incident is just a minor act of giving a temporary meaning to the non-place and relating to it, if only symbolically. A further, more important instance of adopting a personal identity instead of a functional one as only a passenger of the underground is present throughout the whole short-play. This theme was already grazed in an earlier section on *T5*. It is connected to possessing and also presenting a personalised identity, which is closer to a relational (anthropological) place than to a non-descript non-place. The significant aspect with regard to this idea is, however, that it is only part of certain levels of communication. It is central in the protagonist's reflections. They serve as a kind of inner soliloquy for the woman, in which she tries to find out who she was in the past and will be in the future. The search for a personal identity is also transmitted to the reader/the audience, who is addressed and provoked to listen to the protagonist's thoughts in the first sentences: "Watch me. Watch me. Watch this. Here" (Stephens, *T5* 69) The only ones not privy to the majority of this direct and indirect self-characterisation carried out in the monologue are the fellow passengers, the bewildered tourists, the ticket sellers and the driver of the underground train. They do not know about the woman's inner reflections or rather her mental battle and only interact with her in their roles dictated by the non-

place. The driver, for instance, does not ask her why she threw her mobile phone under the wheels, but continues to let passengers on the train, as if nothing happened. She remains anonymous to him and the other people on it.

Nevertheless, it is the anonymity that facilitates the retreat in oneself. As was already discussed, in locales where the regulations and conventions of non-place prevail, a person is able to hide behind the functional role. The protagonist in Stephens' *T5* does exactly that, on the one hand. On the other hand, the woman tries to constitute herself as a particular individual in her thoughts, both to herself and to the reader/the audience. It might be argued that she enjoys the positive aspect of the non-place and breaks with the homogenising quality of it inwardly.

4.3. Airtravel

4.3.1. Stephens' paratextual hommage to Heathrow Airport

It is an airport that holds the three parts of *Wastwater's* triptych together and also serves as the protagonist's destination in *T5*. Nevertheless, it is not an average aerodrome. It is Heathrow Airport, London's most famous and, arguably, iconic edifice, that connects the city to the whole globe. That particular setting is pointed towards in the promotional text for *Wastwater*. It states that the play is "[s]et on the edges of Heathrow Airport" (*Promotional text Amazon*). It is a phrase that is also used in the blurb on the back cover of the book. Potential readers can rarely miss it. The paratext connected to the physical text of *T5* works differently, however at least as effectively. The airport is not highlighted by the blurb, but by a much more prominent feature: The title *T5* is an abbreviation for Terminal 5. It thereby draws attention to this particular building.

There are instances of addressing the London setting in the broad paratext though, which are more remarkable by far. Those are linked to the Royal Court Theatre's production of *Wastwater*. The institution's promotional campaign namely consisted of a fairly detailed webpage, podcast programmes and several video clips connected to the play thanks to a co-operation with SkyArts.(see *Royal Court Theatre*) There is even an official YouTube-Channel of the playhouse, which released a few clips about Stephens' piece.[25] With regard to the setting in a non-

[25] See http://www.youtube.com/user/royalcourttheatre, acccessed on 7 April 2012. It offers a teaser and a clip that shows audience reactions. There are a few more *Wastwater*-clips on YouTube, posted

place both the podcasts and the SkyArt clips are more important though. They intend to introduce the play by an extensive talk with its author Simon Stephens and the director Katie Mitchell. The playwright's remarks reveal his obsession with Heathrow Airport, which was certainly an inspiration for *T5*, *Wastwater* and the play *Lullaby Burn*. The latter two are actually classified as Stephens' "Heathrow plays" (Innes 446) by many scholars. The author explains his infatuation with London's most famous airport as follows:

> "I spent an unusual amount of time in Heathrow Airport. [*Chuckles*] I love it, really, especially Terminal 5. There is a contradiction at the heart of Terminal 5 [...]. It's one of the best buildings, I think, built in my lifetime in terms of its combination of aesthetic beauty and functional success; and at the same time, every time I'm there I'm kind of aware that lurking underneath all this is the inexorable fact that we can't continue like this, that the extent to which we travel, the extent to which we fly is unsustainable; we simply don't have the resources. This luxury is built on a kind of eroding world. And there is something in that contradiction I found quite creative. (Stephens, *Sky Arts 1* 1:46-2:32)

Stephens affirms his praise and adoration in the broadcast session. He finds Terminal 5 "incredibly elegant" (Stephens *Podcast* 2:30-2:32), his enthusiastic tone underscoring his admiration for the grace of the building and the efficiency of travel in it. Furthermore, he claims:

> ["Heathrow Airport] is always charged with the exotic possibility of travel, which excites me. And at the same time there's [an] [...] awareness that our need to travel, our need to move, our need to fly, the extent to which we become a kind of, you know, we become more, it's almost like we've returned to being nomads again – the extent to which that need to move will bring about or will acerbate ecological catastrophe." (Stephens *Podcast* 2:56-3:25)

Both quotes reveal certain key ideas: The playwright Simon Stephens indentifies creative potential especially in the paradoxes and contradictions of Heathrow Airport. Its combination of an elegant form with its function of smoothly processing travellers' needs is what fascinates him. He attributes an exotic quality to travelling, on the one hand, which is epitomised by the airport and flying as a fast means of transport to faraway places. On the other hand, Stephens stresses the contemporary obsession with speed and mobility that is embodied by the boom of air travel. He marks it as a mental drive and describes people who feel the need to travel constantly as ('neo'-) nomads. At the same time he draws attention to the current ecological situation: The environment is exploited by the excessive use of the non-place of flying. In the two

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by private users. The internet presence can therefore be classified as an important marketing tool for this particular play.

quotes Stephens shows an appreciation for both the beauty and the lurking dangers of a sublime place like Heathrow Airport, and declares it as an inspiration for the play *Wastwater*. Simon Stephens interprets it as an icon of both trendy architecture and the contemporary mobility craze. On the whole, Stephens stylises Heathrow Airport as a symbol of our time, or, more precisely, of supermodernity. This situatuedness in the current period, which roughly contains the recent past, the present and an unknown part of the future, is clearly highlighted by the regular use of the (collective) pronouns 'we' (four times in the first quote, three times in the second quote) and 'our' (three times in the second quote). Stephens presents the airport as a non-place that caters to certain people's needs without acknowledging the consequences for the environment. It is an argument that alludes to a slightly censorious viewpoint.
Such a sceptical attitude is echoed and amplified in comments by Katie Mitchell, the director of the Royal Court's production of *Wastwater*. She starts the discussion of the setting by an admission in a rather serious, almost confessional, tone: "Personally, play aside, I hate airports and I hate flying and I hate travelling like that."(Mitchell *Sky Arts* 3:10-3:16) Mitchell's voice filled with perfect contempt provides a humorous contrast to Stephens' almost child-like rapture, palpable in his discourse about Terminal 5. This rather funny note aside, Mitchell draws attention to the current ecological predicament with regard to air travel as well by predicting the future: "In about 40 years' time we'll look back [at Heathrow, Terminal 5] and we will see it as this awful atrocity, a celebration of our addiction to travel and corruption of our environment, that will now be made obsolete by the horrendous events that are coming our way."(3:20-3:40) There is no fondness whatsoever for the building in the director's statement. A significant parallel to Stephens' comments can be grasped, however, in her pointing to the contemporary 'addiction to travel'. It is also an instance of linking *Wastwater* to the period of supermodernity, a time that is dominated by an obsession with rapidity and movement.

To sum up, the paratextual material on *Wastwater* is quite remarkable due to both its content and its amount: Many of the clips and podcasts that feature the play can be easily accessed on the internet. They offer a thorough discussion of the setting by the individuals behind the text/the production. Such comments by the play's author and its director will probably influence the way in which the audience sees a production or reads a play. It will probably arouse certain expectations with regard to the personal opinion of the playwright. There is the question whether and how the

author will creatively process his both critical and ardent perspective on Terminal 5. Theatregoers might also wonder how much of Mitchell's contempt of airports or her fear for the environment will be shown in a production of the play.

All the interviews with Simon Stephens and Katie Mitchell affirm the importance of the setting. Nevertheless, for a comprehensive spatial analysis one should not be too dazzled by Stephens glorifying of Heathrow Airport or irritated by Katie Mitchell's wagging finger, but adopt a more general approach. Heathrow is a unique airport with a particular geographical location, but at the same time shares the majority of its features with countless other such functional buildings connected to the non-place of flying. Furthermore, it is a facility with both positive and negative features.

4.3.2. Background noises or the airport as a constant presence

Some titles reveal crucial information about a text. That is the case with the play *T5*, because its second part takes the audience/the reader to Terminal 5. The female protagonist conveys the typical facilities of an airport and people moving through that space from her vantage point. The description is even more detailed than that of the underground stations and therefore appears quite lively and authentic. "I can see behind the car rental counters and the counters for local hotel information. I can see the tops of people's luggage. I can see what the check-in staff at the fast-track baggage drop are having for their lunch." (Stephens, *T5* 74) This rather short passage is full of clear signs of the non-place of air travel. 'Luggage' is mentioned as well as the 'check-in counter' and the 'fast-track baggage drop'. Those are all technical terms connected to the airport. 'Car rental counters' and 'counters for hotel information' are quite common in such a building as well. The woman monitors the area further:

> I can fly above the border control and fly above the areas that mark out the differences between arrivals and departures. I can see all the exotic spiced sandwich-makers from here [...]. I can see the Passport Control staff and the people handling out clear plastic bags for toiletries below a hundred millilitres and the people making coffee and the people selling newspapers and the flight engineers and the baggage carriers and the cabin crew and the businessmen removing their laptops and [...] the policemen on bicycles and the ambulance men on bicycles and the people travelling home for a wedding [...] and the children who have flown north to spend time with their grandparents [...] and the CCTV cameramen and the men peering through two-way mirrors at Immigration Control and the people exchanging sterling for euros [...]. (75)

The quoted passage could be used as an archetypical description of airport life. It is pervaded by facilities and people representative of this non-place both in its content and its vocabulary. Verisimilitude of a real-life aerodrome is created by the use of technical and semi-technical terms like 'border control', 'arrival', 'departure', 'Passport Control staff', 'cabin crew', 'flight engineers' and 'Immigration Control'. Apart from sections that have to be necessarily passed to board the plane or leave the airport, there are additional venues that are intended to make the stay at an airport pleasant (see Lloyd 94). The female protagonist notices shops, probably small bistros and cafés or concession stands, in which 'exotic sandwiches' and coffee are sold. In addition to those food parlours, every airport has to provide intellectual nourishment for the long flight or the holidays. The quote only refers to 'people selling newspapers' – the airport bookstore was probably not in the woman's field of vision. Furthermore, there are two broad categories of people present at the non-place of air travel, whom the protagonist watches closely. The first group consists of various staff members and shop assistants, who attend to the future passengers' every need, and people in charge of security like 'policemen' and 'ambulance men'. The second group might be labelled 'passengers'. This one is a veritably variegated category. The female protagonist – supposedly – identifies people flying to attend weddings, children who spend time with their grandparents, tourists who want to visit the city and businessmen with their quintessential laptops. A typical act is addressed as well at the end of the quote: the change of money. It is connected to the notion of travelling into foreign and exotic countries with different currencies, which one often does by plane. To sum that up, the protagonist's description of Terminal 5 is so detailed and emblematic that the audience/the readers will have an almost adequate picture in their minds, even if they have never been at that location in real life. A significant part of the relative easiness of conveying this image is the familiarity with the non-place of the airport.

Stephens' other play, *Wastwater*, provides some clues as to its setting in its secondary text. There are several stage directions, which shape the scenes. Many of these are connected to the non-place of air travel and keep it present throughout the whole play. There are regular references to the actual means of transport: "*An aeroplane flies overhead.*"(Stephens, *Wastwater* 5), "*Another plane flies overhead*." (9), "*Another plane passes*."(19) and "*A plane lands nearby*." (45,48). Such stage directions are not absent in the second part of the triptych either. The simple samples

of the initial and the closing part seem to be sufficient though. However, there are more elaborate stage directions, which subtly provide an evaluation of the non-place. "*A plane lands near to their window. It is audible, even in the soundproofed room. It stops them*." (24) Stephens sets the scene by addressing the noise of the aircraft. It is so loud that the soundproofed windows cannot block it out completely. The couple is even interrupted in their dialogue by it. A similar stage comment is made in the initial part of the play, in which the aircraft and its noise are contrasted to the silence and loveliness of the garden near Heathrow Airport: "*An aeroplane flies overhead. It is tremendously loud. It's odd against the beauty of the garden. They wait for it to pass*"(5). The plane's noise is portrayed as interference in the conversation, as the characters resume their dialogue only after it has disappeared again. Another aspect that highlights the high sound intensity is the use of the adjective 'tremendously', which might evoke the association with tremors due to the awful noise. Hence, a rather negative attitude towards the planes is displayed in these passages from the stage directions. This position is emphasised by contrasting it to the beauty of nature embodied by the garden with its harmonious tones – the plane is an oddity there. Both examples from the secondary text seem to almost mirror each other. They treat similar aspects and convey a slightly negative attitude towards the non-place of air travel. They are to some extent reminiscent of Stephens' mindful comments on Heathrow Airport, in which he addresses the exploitation of nature for the sake of flying. What is also quite curious is the fact that these stage directions are only available in that exact form to the readers of the written play. Theatre audiences will probably hear the loud noises and may feel them as disturbing, but they do not know for sure that the windows of the airport hotel are actually soundproofed and should keep the sounds out, for instance. Moreover, one might doubt that it is possible to adequately stage the comment 'It's odd against the beauty of the garden'. In other words, the quoted stage directions provide the reader with additional information, which clarifies (and simplifies) the conveyance of the negative influence of air travel on the surroundings, especially on nature.

The airport and travelling by plane are not only highlighted in the stage directions. Characters often discuss them in the dialogue as well. Some instances are entwined with the fictional present of the play and are reactions to the surroundings. Jonathan, who is very nervous, does not know how to interpret the sound he is hearing in part three:

JONATHAN. What was that?
SIAN. What?
JONATHAN. That noise.
SIAN. It was a plane, Jonathan, what do you think it was?
(Stephens, *Wastwater* 45)

In this passage, a slightly tense atmosphere is created. Jonathan appears to be a trifle scared, as he is unable to locate the source of the noise at first; Sian mocks him. In contrast to playing with the terrifying aspect of an aeroplane's high sound intensity, the characters' attitude to them can be full of awe. In part one, Harry and his foster mother Frieda discuss their (metal-)bird watching:

HARRY. It's a completely clear sky now.
FRIEDA. Yes, it is rather, isn't it?
HARRY. No turbulence at all.
FRIEDA. It's a bit boring really.
HARRY. You should have seen them earlier.
FRIEDA. I watched some of them from the kitchen.
HARRY. One of them must have dropped about two hundred feet.
FRIEDA. I love it when that happens.(5)

Harry and Frieda can watch the planes' departure and arrival from their house. They are rather fascinated by their manoeuvres, especially when the weather is turbulent and the aeroplanes seem to drop hundreds of feet. It is a sight for them, something worth watching. A rather funny contrast to that position of the observer is related by one of Jonathan's comments in part three. As an actual passenger he feels different: "I don't like turbulence. It didn't used to bother me. Now I find it horrible. When the plane just drops like that."(55)

The quoted passages alluded to air travel's ability to both mesmerise and terrify people – an argument that echoes Simon Stephens' remarks on the contradictions of Terminal 5. However, there are passages in *Wastwater* that describe the interaction with the non-place in more neutral terms. In these, reference is made to the code of conduct, appropriate behaviour and the process of usage of the airport. Many of those show similarities to Augé's theoretical explanations of non-places. In part one Harry and Frieda converse about Harry's flight that will take place shortly after the scene's end in the fictional world. Hence, the preparations are in the focus. Frieda, fulfilling her role as caring and worrying foster mother, wants to make sure that Harry is ready for his journey to Canada. The following quotes shall provide an illustration of the issues Frieda addresses: "If your plane's at twenty past twelve you need to be at the airport at half past ten"(Stephens, *Wastwater* 3), "Are you all packed? [...],

Have you got your passport? [...], And your phone? [...], Have you got your debit card?"(6). She reminds Harry to be at the airport in time in order to be able to complete the check-in process and catch the plane. She also makes sure that he did not forget to take his passport, a document of identification without which he will not be entitled to board the plane. She asks about his phone and his debit card as well, without which his stay in the foreign country would be very difficult. A debit card is a global means of payment; the phone connects Harry to the whole world and thereby to his home. Frieda even gives her foster child an envelope with Canadian dollars, so that Harry can immediately start a bank account. (see 18) It is an allusion to a typical theme connected to the non-place of air travel. Changing money is once again presented as a requirement for travelling to foreign countries. In contrast to part one of *Wastwater*, the process of arriving is delineated in the play's third part:

> JONATHAN. Where is she?
> SIAN. Heathrow. Terminal 5. She'll be cleared by now. She'll have gone through arrivals. Or she'll be waiting to get through an interview at Passport Control. In one of those rooms with the two-way mirrors [...] She'll get through it very easily because she 'll have been very prepared. (Stephens, *Wastwater* 51)

Stephens has Sian mention the airport's sections people might have to pass. She uses the appropriate technical terms 'arrivals' and 'Passport Control'. Sian provides a step by step description of the arrival process, which seems quite accurate.

A concluding remark about the text regards *Wastwater's* structure. Kirsty Wark, host of BBC 2's *The Review Show*, drew attention to the fact that the play is modelled on the cornerstones of a plane journey. Each part can be interpreted as representing one step in the trip: The play starts with "departure", builds up with "waiting" and concludes with "arrival". (See Wark 5:00-5:05) This analogy of phases is a rather remarkable connection to the play's setting. It points towards its importance, which is underscored by the room that is given to the theme of aerodromes and planes. The various awe-inspiring aspects and potential dangers of the non-place of air travel are discussed in detail in the paratext as well as in the secondary text of *Wastwater*. The actual text is also full of references to travelling by plane. Both plays by Simon Stephens – *T5* and *Wastwater* – offer descriptions of the typical facilities and people at an airport, striving for verisimilitude. The actions that are mentioned in both texts are also based on the standard form of behaviour. In those passages, the non-place is apparent as a generic space that creates

familiarity. Furthermore, those extracts are reminiscent of Augé's theoretical explanations.

4.3.3. Non-places as a vague chance – gateways to a new beginning

In *Wastwater's* first part the focus is on the themes of wanting to escape one's past and of starting a new life away from home. These topoi are embodied by the character of Harry. He has a desire to leave his foster home in Sipson and move to Canada. There are several references to that drive to get away and change one's location. Just to mention two similarly expressed instances, Harry claims: "There's no way on earth I could possibly stay. I'd feel sick"(Stephens, *Wastwater* 12) and, later, "I can't possibly stay here" (15). Such a fervent need to move away physically might be satisfied by turning to non-places of transport. To cover the vast distance to Canada, Stephens sends the play's character on a plane trip, whose outcome is not presented anymore in the play. As a consequence of the desire to leave the past behind Harry has adopted a purely positive attitude towards going away. He fits the description in his own remark, similar to the author's comment on our time: "It's like we've become nomadic again."(14)

Jonathan, from *Wastwater's* part three, is going to start a new life as well. He is not moving away though, but waiting for his purchase to be delivered from the airport. This new arrival is "*a nine-year-old Filipino girl*"(63), who is going to live with Jonathan's family as an adopted child. For the girl it is both a physical and a mental change of location. Jonathan remains in his familiar surroundings, which will probably be altered by Delisay's advent nevertheless. (The new family's future is left open in the play, however.) Stephens focuses on the deal, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on non-places of consumption. An important part of the transaction is also strongly connected to the non-place of transportation though: The child had to be imported to Great Britain and was brought there by plane. Without air travel, the transaction could not have taken place and initiate a change in the characters' lives.

"I might change my name when I get there"(7), says Harry in *Wastwater*, referring to his journey to Canada; it might be an allusion to the symbolic power of non-places as well. The trip on a plane ought to be interpreted as the first step of such a change of identity, quite possibly of Harry's coming-of-age. The relative anonymity of a non-

place allows for experiments with one's personality. It might be read as a playful foreshadowing of a clean break with one's identity and the possibility of a fresh start, free from whatever burdens of the past. In that sense the flight is as much a physical journey as a mental one.

The theme of searching for a new identity is also dealt with in *T5*. The allure of hiding behind a mask based on the role of passenger has already been addressed in the section on the London Underground. This theme of being concealed by relative anonymity is carried further to a certain extent. In contrast to the characters in *Wastwater*, the female protagonist of the short-play eventually breaks with the non-place and ceases to use it in her quest of finding an identity for herself. It is a beautifully orchestrated passage of reflections, which starts the protagonist's ultimate split from the physical world around her:

> Excuse me, madam? Can I help you, madam? Have you come to the right place? Are you looking to purchase a ticket, madam?
> The woman on the other side of the counter is making a series of noises to me that I don't understand. (Stephens, *T5* 73)

The speaker has completely retreated into her own mind. She is not able to grasp the airport staff's polite and script-like request to purchase a valid ticket anymore. This small scene is, probably unconsciously, modelled on Augé's theory of non-place. The mediation is carried out through signs; those signs are typical customer service phrases uttered by the woman behind the counter. Fulfilling her role, she asks the potential passenger whether she needs any help and whether she wants to buy a ticket; she does that on behalf of the airport's proprietors. The protagonist does not act according to her role as client/passenger anymore; she does neither decline the offer of aid nor does she purchase a ticket. She remains where she is outwardly, lost on her trip down memory lane and in her musings about the future. Stephens displays considerable knowledge of the intricacies of airport life. He has his protagonist describe the scene in the following way:

> I find to my astonishment that after a while people stop looking at me. I find to my astonishment that after a while people move around me as though I'm not really there. I find to my further astonishment that after a while my feet start to lift from the ground. (Stephens, *T5* 74)

The initial part of that perception is still linked to the code of conduct in the non-place of the airport. As the protagonist does not behave as she is expected to, her presence is no longer acknowledged by staff members. Furthermore, she is an obstacle for her fellow passengers, who may eye her curiously at first, but then start

to ignore her to be able to continue their own journeys. The protagonist loses her connection to the concrete (fictional) world and concludes her trip high above ground, which is probably a symbol of her mental detachment. The non-places of the underground and the airport were only temporary gateways, which eventually failed to take the female speaker to her destination: a new identity with which she can feel content.

It might be concluded that many of the characters in Stephens' plays profit from the non-place of air travel. Harry looks forward to the start of his role-playing and the desired personal change, which coincides with the beginning of his plane journey. The relative anonymity facilitates the break with the past as well as the unconventional transaction of *Wastwater's* part three, which brings about change in the characters' lives. It influences the nameless female protagonist of *T5* in a similar way, but only for a short time; her journey continues into what might be termed fantastic realm. In the fictional portraits of the supermodern world, escaping the past and starting a new life often have their starting point in a non-place of transportation. In Stephens' plays planes in particular function as gateways to other places both in the physical and in the mental sense. What those places are like is left open by the playwright.

4.3.4. (Ab)using space for a non-place or the idea of 'erasing an entire village'

Non-places require space, which is often space that functions as a place, as a home for people. Simon Stephens incorporates a real project that scheduled the construction of an additional runway for Heathrow Airport in his play *Wastwater*. In an article the BBC referred to the implications of that project:

> [It] was envisaged in the government's 2003 aviation White Paper and the green light was given by the then Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon in January 2009 despite the fact that the village of Sipson would effectively have disappeared during the construction project. (Heathrow BBC)

This quote, which reports the scheme's death, expresses the dramatic impact of a further runway on the airport's vicinity. A whole village would 'effectively disappear'; the inhabitants would have to be moved away. They would have to be forcefully dislodged from their homes. Stephens clearly refers to the official end of the scheme, providing different perspectives and attitudes towards it. Harry guesses that "Sheila [...] is very relieved about the runway repeal" (Stephens, *Wastwater* 5). She is one

representative of probably many people from Sipson, who do not want to leave their hometown and roots. Harry also muses about Frieda's lost chance of moving away, though. He confronts his foster mother: "I bet you're slightly disappointed. I bet you probably wanted to move now, didn't you?"(5) The construction of an additional runway would indeed have required Frieda to search for a new home and thereby change her life, which may have been a positive alteration.

Frieda, however, only reluctantly acknowledges that she probably wanted to move ("No. A bit I did [want to leave.]"(Stephens, *Wastwater* 5)). It is an admission given with the certain knowledge that the (fictional) reality does not force her to leave; she still has the choice to stay. Returning to the subject, Frieda dreamily ponders places she could go to: "Somewhere mountainous. With proper mountains, not just hills. Mountains with snow on. [...] Or I might come with you [to Canada]. [...] I might trace orcas. I could keep a record of whale sightings. I could do that easily."(11) In the play, Harry realises that these ideas are half-hearted attempts to cover her inability to let go. Frieda will never move, if it is not absolutely necessary. As much as she feels connected to her home she does to her foster children. She does not want Harry to go to Canada.(see 11) The threat of change posed by the planned construction of a new runway has already evaporated. The threat of losing her foster son is imminent though, as the plane is to take him into a different country.

5. Non-places of consumer culture

Capitalism and a resulting consumer culture have created a vast space for the expansion of non-places. People are eager to buy material and immaterial goods. There is a tendency to not only pay for clothes, groceries, electronic products or luxury objects, but also for entertainment. As a consequence, flagship stores, big supermarkets, restaurants, bars or venues that offer amusement of the shadier kind flourish and can be found everywhere. Due to an increase in mobility, exotic places can participate in the world's pursuit of happiness and adventure as well by serving as holiday resorts for a plethora of tourists. All these facilities that cater to such desires for material and immaterial pleasures may be considered non-places, regardless of where they are located in the concrete geography of the earth. They can be just around the corner or thousands of miles away. Despite their enormous global dispersal, they resemble each other in form and, above all, in function and manner of use. Needless to say, each requires the users to sign a mute contract involving typical actions like reserving a table/room, enjoying physical consumptions and, certainly, paying for the goods and services.

Contemporary literature that is concerned with the present condition of the world is likely to incorporate such locales. This hypothesis can be applied to many of the plays that have been chosen for this thesis. Patrick Marber uses restaurants and a lap dancing club as meeting places in *Closer*. (One might even consider the London Aquarium or a museum as facilities that offer entertainment to its visitors, which makes them part of the consumerist sphere; granted, they provide amusement of a more intellectual and intelligent kind than many of the other settings of the play.) A (stereo)typical American venue is used by Neil LaBute in *The Distance from here*. The teenagers hang out at the shopping mall (and other locations that are characteristically placeless, "sparse [and] non-specific" like parking lots) (cf. Saal 325). These are a key element of the socio-cultural atmosphere in the play based on a hollow consumerist ethos - as John Lahr puts it in a review, "[i]n this threadbare universe, consuming is perceived as the only redemption" (par. 4). Simon Stephens' text *Wastwater* leads the reader/the audience even deeper into consumer culture and introduces a fairly unconventional, albeit questionable bargain in its concluding part of the triptych. Furthermore, the airport hotel in the same play may be a predecessor for edifices connected to tourism and holidays; it also points towards global corporate

business. The question of who frequents such a building is even addressed by the characters themselves in the diegetic world of the play. Mark wonders: “Who would want to stay at such a beautiful hotel so close to an airport? Do people come here on business, do you think? Is it for incredibly posh people who have to change flights on their way to Australia or something like that?” (Stephens, *Wastwater* 22) Lisa cannot offer an answer, neither can the whole text. Only Mark and Lisa are actually presented as personalised characters. They are neither on a journey to enjoy their dream holiday nor on a business trip. These two protagonists repurpose the airport hotel to suit their needs. It is an action that insinuates loading the non-place with meaning. Ultimately, the theme of mass tourism proper is in the focus of Tanika Gupta’s play. *Sugar Mummies* takes the readers/the audience to a typical holiday resort in Jamaica and presents various aspects of the local trades. That latter type of non-place of consumption that is closely connected to travelling and tourism shall be discussed in an extensive second and separate sub-chapter.

5.1. Entertainment and consumer temples

5.1.1. Paratextual clues to near and hollow amusements

Entertainment may be sought spontaneously, in one’s own vicinity. It can be found in bars, restaurants, dance clubs, supermarkets and shopping malls located predominantly in the urban space. As a consequence, that is where several characters in the plays look for some fun and diversion.

Deducing from the front cover of *The Distance from here* (see figure 1), the characters frequent locales like hypermarkets and shopping arcades to accumulate goods: The allusion to such a materialist orientation is highlighted in the picture. As was already discussed, the quintessential passion for cars is included. The other cover images do not focus on consumer goods and temples, though. They do not reveal as much about these aspects of the texts as the cover of *autobahn* and *The Distance from here* does about the car fetish, partly because these venues are only minor themes in the plays. The titles are similarly unrevealing with regard to the non-places of consumerism.

Nevertheless, the blurbs of two of the plays provide some clues as to the texts’ roles of portraying the contemporary world and its materialism. To kindle interest for the play, the third scene of *Wastwater* is promoted as follows: “Sian has a terrifying

deal for Jonathan. She isn't going to take no for an answer" (Stephens, *Wastwater*). This passage of the blurb promises the reader the story of a mysterious and probably dangerous transaction. A less subtle reference to non-places of consumption that underlie some of the plays is made in the promotional text of *The Distance from here*. The charged atmosphere that surrounds non-places like shopping malls and the image of a disinterested and underprivileged youth are clearly evoked in the blurb of LaBute's play. It presents and brands the protagonists. "With little to occupy their time other than finding a decent place to hang out – the zoo, the mall, the school parking lot – Darrell and Tim are two American teenagers who lack direction and purpose in their lives."(LaBute *Distance*) There are several references to locations that are believed to provide entertainment in the blurb; these are chosen by the friends as spots to loiter.

5.1.2. Paratext part two: adoption craze as creative inspiration

The vast amount of paratextual coverage of Stephens' *Wastwater* has already been mentioned. It also offers the readers/the audience insight into the dark aspects of the theme of consumerism and trade, which are dealt with in the third scene of the play. In some of the interviews the playwright talks about the third key element – apart from Heathrow Airport and the lake Wastwater –, which was his source of inspiration. It is linked to an immensely popular child abduction case, which made the news all around the world a few years ago. It was the case of Madeleine McCann, who disappeared from a holiday resort in Portugal in May 2007, which intrigued Stephens.(see *Sky Arts 2* 3:00-3.50; *Podcast* 0:00-2:15) It may not come as a surprise that such a tale catches the interest of a creative mind. The girl's face and her parents' were plastered all over various media, which made them stick. Furthermore, the case was and still is mysterious enough to stimulate discussion and theory building. Above all, the story is heart-wrenching and its media coverage brought about a feeling of global solidarity with the parents and outrage towards the crime. What fascinated Simon Stephens the most about it is one of the theories about what happened to the child. Asked about the starting point of *Wastwater*, Stephens explains:

> The very first initiating moment was reading the news stories [...] [especially about t]he possibility that [Madeleine McCann ha]d been taken to be sold not to people

> for sexual or nefarious purposes, but in order for somebody to adopt as their child. And there was something in that kind of horrifying paradox of that that captured my imagination and that I couldn't let go: The idea that somebody could have such an accute and crippling need to parent that it would lead them to violent, torturous, criminal activity. (*Podcast* 0:37-1:30)

The case of Madeleine McCann sparked the playwright's interest in a controversial issue concerning an extraordinary trading good. Stephens says that "the first scene written for the play was [actually] built around [...] the idea that people have started buying children; it's the kind of behaviour that Madonna and Angelina Jolie get up to" (*Podcast* 1:35-1:47). By referring to those two international superstars, he draws attention to the fact that there does not seem to be much public concern about such activities, especially when the buyer is a famous billionaire.(see *Podcast* 1:45-2:02) Trading children seems to have become not only a capitalised and commercialised form of business, but a socially accepted practice among the rich. Stephens still sees the dangers of this booming industry. It is a practice in which "the need to nurture could lead [people] to violent, criminal activities" (*Podcast* 2:00-2:10). Especially as a parent, he himself is quite shocked and horrified by the custom "of buying a child for the sake of parenting, the idea that everything has become consumable nowadays" (*Sky Arts 2* 3:42-3:50). The playwright points out the morally questionable direction the non-place of consumption has taken: everything can become a purchasable commodity, even children. Such a horror scenario is at the heart of the third part of *Wastwater*.

5.1.3. Furnishing and enlivening the non-places of consumerism

There seems to be a tendency in the stage directions of the plays to capture the visual aspects as well as the ideological ones of the venues connected to consumer culture and the entertainment industry. There is often quite a detailed description of the surroundings and the key elements of the non-place. The façade of a shopping mall is what catches the attention in LaBute's *The Distance from here*:

"THE MALL BUS STOP

Two wire benches near a great expanse of concrete retaining wall. Part of a logo sign overhead with a flickering bulb that reads INGTON GALLERIA".(28)

The shopping temple is surrounded by the grey of the road's concrete. Even more depressing seems its front with the typical light bulbs that spell the name of the

edifice: A part of these lights is out, which means that a fraction of the name is actually missing. LaBute characterises the mall setting as bleak, which alludes to the fact that it is difficult to relate to the locale. The pet store inside the mall is presented in a similar way. The stage directions again imply an evaluation of the place. Even though there is the appropriate equipment such as "*walls of fish [and] cages of cats and dogs*"(85), the atmosphere is not as welcoming, customer-friendly and light-hearted as it is supposed to be. The store is actually "*[a] bit dirty*" (85). The outlook will not be changed by the employee's cleaning work. He "*begins to half[-]heartedly sweep up*" (88), before closing the store. The adjective 'half-heartedly' serves to direct the interpretation: The employee does not clean the shop with care and fails to fulfil his role adequately; hence the room is likely to remain slightly filthy. LaBute overall portrays a run-down shopping mall, which seems to be drained of colour and individuality. It is presented as grey and dirty both inside and outside. It may be interpreted as a featureless and therefore meaningless building – a place that actually approaches the extreme form of what Augé considers as a non-place.

An allegedly glamorous establishment is introduced in Patrick Marber's *Closer*. As a little reminder of the diegetic context: Larry accidentally meets Alice in a "*[l]apdance club*" (Marber 62), as she works there. The stage directions provide several pieces of information about the location, which portray it in a rather typical way: "*They are in a private room*" (62). To be more precise, the club offers separate chambers that are intended to offer the possibility of a more intimate encounter between stripper and client. The establishment's specific atmosphere is created by playing music (62), possibly to add to the relaxing, albeit exciting feel. Its security policy regulates that the employees and their customers can be watched for their own safety by "*a two-way mirror*" (66) and "*cameras in the ceiling*" (66). The mirror is referred to in the stage directions a few times (66, 72); its purpose and the position of the surveillance cameras are explained by Alice herself in the dialogue. However, the stage directions offer crucial insight into a different factor that likens the lap dancing club to a non-place of consumption. The location's regulations apparently contain an unwritten dress code, at least for the employees – the strippers –, which is based on the customers' expectations and wishes. They are obliged to choose clothes that are enticing and spark their clients' erotic imagination. Alice's outfit, or rather her uniform, fulfils these requirements: "*She is wearing a short dress, wig and high heels. She has a garter round her thigh.*"(62). Alice adheres to the profession's dress code by

selecting fashion that only covers few parts of her body and shows a lot of skin. Furthermore, she uses quintessential ingredients of sexual fantasies and eroticism, such as the garter and high heels. Alice wears a wig, which may well serve various purposes. It helps to create the image of beauty, attraction and extraordinariness, which is important in the business, as the strippers have to attract the attention of potential potent customers. As Larry insinuates in the play, it could work almost like an aphrodisiac for both parties, something that "turns [...] on" (64). It might also be considered as an object of a vague fetish – (some) clients could be keen on the allure of the secret, the mystery connected to a hairpiece that conceals the real hair colour of their object of desire. Hiding one's head behind a wig is also linked to the theme of disguising oneself. Strippers may be likely to wear such accessories to obscure at least one part of their body, their natural hair. Larry, as Alice's client, "*is wearing a smart suit*"(62); he chose his best clothes. Whether there is an actual dress code for the visitors probably depends on the particular club – upmarket establishments like the one in the play would probably expect a certain level of formalness and neatness. Nevertheless, there may well be a tendency to select clothes that make the clients appear more distinguished, sombre and illustrious anyway – or so Larry's choice suggests. As far as the stage directions are concerned, there is one last aspect that completes the vibrant portrayal of the lap dancing club. The dialogue is interspersed by numerous little actions, which are linked to the location. They are representative of the standard – the accepted and expected – behaviour of both parties according to their respective role. As customer, Larry is obliged to pay, or rather, "tip" as the act of giving money to the dancer is called by Alice in the early passages (62). By means of bestowing £20 notes (62, 68) upon Alice the protagonist is purchasing a full-service package; he even "*puts the money in her garter*" (62) once, which is a stereotypical way in which a stripper is paid. Larry secures an intimate conversation with the dazzling woman for himself, the sight of stunning legs and naked flesh, and her obedience to a certain extent too. The focus is on the aspect of seeing, the customer is only allowed to watch and observe the dancer's strip (i.e. discussed in the dialogue on p. 65). Marber stresses this voyeuristic element by his choice of words. The stage directions describe Larry's actions in detail. The majority of these belongs to the semantic field of 'looking'. The protagonist, for example, "*glances round the room*" (63), "*[h]e stares at her*" (64), "*looks between her legs*" (65), "*looks at her*" (66, 67) and "*gazes at her*". 'Stare' and

'gaze' may even serve as a heightening of the act of watching, as their connotation is connected to duration, intensity and admiration. These qualities are probably part of the attitude that is expected of customers (or at least calculated). The role of the other party, the stripper, is as clearly defined. She, in the diegetic world Alice, is required to – often literally – fulfil the consumer's wishes by means of specific actions. They range from presenting her body in an alluring way, to displaying her gartered legs (62), "*showing [...] her behind*" (65), opening her legs (65) to talking seductively and flirtingly. Alice' behaviour at work is as stereotypical as Larry's outward actions. On a superficial level, both perform their respective roles as supplier of sexual fantasies and the eager consumer almost flawlessly.

The restaurant that serves as a classic meeting point for Anna and Larry respectively Anna and Dan in scene eight appears quite empty; literally. The stage directions only present the table, at which Dan is sitting initially (73). There is a stereotypical element, however, that is connected to the service of creature comforts: the (alcoholic) drinks (73, 80). What is rather remarkable is that the actual type is specified for Anna and Larry; the lady enjoys "*Vodka tonic*" (80), the doctor prefers "*Scotch*" (80). As Larry gets the drink for Anna, this can be an indication to how well he knows her. Furthermore, connecting a character with his/her favourite drink slightly individualises them. Nevertheless, the protagonists choose a restaurant to talk about important personal issues because of its qualities that connect it to non-places. It is neutral territory due to its public location, but still provides sufficient privacy because of its relative anonymity and the ease with which one can use it. (No other guests appear; neither does a waiter (76).[26])

Marber depicts the London Aquarium and the museum in more detail in his play. Typical signs are mentioned, such as "*a camera*" and a "*guide book*" (30; 83). Above all, the exhibits are introduced in order to portray the locations in an adequate and authentic manner. Anna (and Larry) watch "*the fish*" (30) in scene four, for example. An important attraction is presented at the beginning of scene nine. Two lines of stage directions are dedicated to the following exhibit in the museum: "*A glass cabinet containing a life-size model of a Victorian child. A girl, dressed in rags. Behind her a model of a London street circa 1880s*" (82). [27] Both characters fulfil their

[26] This fact is commented on by the characters in the play. The relevant parts will be quoted later in the thesis, because they are connected to the rules and roles of the non-place of consumption.
[27] The exhibit is only implicitly related to the play's protagonists. It represents the same historical period as the memorial in Postman's Park (112) and is thereby linked to Alice. The model of the girl is

roles as visitors by looking at it (Alice 82, Larry 83). Nevertheless, they invest more energy into their personal conversations and relationships than into the art collection. As has been hinted quite often in the thesis so far, the interaction with a locale that approaches the extreme of non-place does not require too much concentration; behaving appropriately is often done unconsciously. Hence, one's energy can be focused on personal thoughts and problems.

5.1.4. Roles in the transaction and commercial illusions in Closer

Patrick Marber makes the conjecture that the visit of a lap dancing club is like a business deal a constant presence throughout the whole scene set in such an establishment, although its direct voicing only happens towards the end of the conversation between Larry and Alice.[28] From the initial lines on, the protagonists talk about the offered service, the price and the house rules, which are all elements of the laws and regulations of the particular non-place. First, Larry wants to know more about the club, as "he finds [it] a bewildering place" (Saunders 41). Alice tells him that it has "[s]ix""Paradise Suites"(Marber 62), which are equipped exactly like the private room they are occupying. The name of these chambers implies that each is a room that offers heavenly pleasures. It is quite cheesy with its ambivalent connotation, but probably rather typical of such an establishment.[29] Then, Larry and Alice turn to earthly matters. They discuss the transaction as such. To be more precise, Larry asks whether "[he] ha[s] to pay [Alice] to talk to [him]" (62). In other words, he wants to know the price of a conversation with the striptease artist. Her answer is noteworthy, as she uses a euphemism for the act of paying. Talk is for free, customers can *tip* (!) her though.(62) After having debated the monetary issue, Larry turns to the services the stripper is allowed to provide. Alice explains the house rules to him, which strictly regulate the relationship between strippers and customers. Both parties are monitored via a two-way mirror and surveillance cameras; this

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not discussed further by the characters in the museum scene; it does not have an immediate impact. It may be an element of foreshadowing, anticipating the connection between the memorial and the alias 'Alice Ayres', though.

[28] This passage will be treated in detail in the following paragraph.

[29] Graham Saunders also highlights that the name of the room works as an ironic comment on an earlier line, on "PARADISE SHOULD BE SHOCKING" (Marber 29): "The Paradise Suite […] where the encounter between Alice and Larry takes place is anything but spontaneous or shocking" due to its homogenised furnishings and the fixed parameters of the business transaction (Saunders 40), which are discussed in greater depth in the current paragraph of this thesis.

equipment is installed to ensure that the rules are observed. Graham Saunders stresses this “constant scrutiny of Alice and Larry through technology”(41) and interprets it as a factor that “blur[s] the subject’s own sense of identity” (41). The concrete business regulations as presented in the play state that, as a stripper, Alice has permission to talk to her visitors, flirt with them (Marber 65) and show her perfect and sensual body. The only exception to sanctioned acts is a touch (65). Such a genuine sign of literal contact and intimacy is forbidden.(cf. Saunders 43) This prohibition of physical contact in the (diegetic) club is quite telling. It is an allusion to the denial of one factor, with which relations may be established. Both characters cannot use their sense of touch in the interaction – an aspect that is like the echo of an earlier scene of the play, which will be discussed later in the thesis: Larry and Dan are not able to have physical contact either, as they only meet in a chat room on the internet, a different variety of non-place.

In the strip club scene of Marber’s *Closer* one comment is bound to attract attention. The playwright has Alice put the truth about the nature of her relationship to Larry in plain words. As long as they are within the confines of the club, “[Larry is] the customer, [she is] the service”, their whole encounter is a “transaction” (Marber 71). She uses this statement as a response to one of Larry’s sharp questions. He wants to know from the stripper, whom he has met before, whether “[she] think[s that] it’s possible [that she] could perceive [him] as something other than a sad slot machine spewing out money” (71). In this enquiry he refers to her professional attitude towards him as her customer. In this position, Larry believes to be no more than a machine that dispenses money to Alice, not an actual human being. The erotic dancer does not contradict him, but stresses that her job denies her full subject status as well, as she is only ‘the service’ in ‘the transaction’. This conception is affirmed by one of Larry’s earlier comments. In an agitated state, he construes Alice and the other striptease artists in a demeaning way: “All the girls in this hellhole; the pneumatic robots, the coked-up baby dolls – and you’re no different – you all use ‘stage names’ to con yourselves you’re someone else so you don’t feel ashamed”(69).This short comment addresses various important issues. Larry calls the club a ‘hellhole’, which implies that it is actually the opposite of what it aspires to be. The room’s name promises a blissful piece of heaven and paradise; Larry perceives it as a bottomless pit. Furthermore, he associates the strippers with an unaesthetic physique and drug abuse – the girls that work at the establishment,

according to the protagonist, are ‘pneumatic’ or ‘coked-up’.[30] He denies them the feature of humanity as well and compares them to objects that are controlled to copy and mimic human behaviour. In Larry’s comment, the club’s employees are likened to ‘dolls’ and ‘robots’. Both are connected to unnatural or even automated movements. There is also the allusion to an entity that controls them: In the first case it is the puppet master, who plays with the dolls; in the second case, a creator is required, who programmes the robot. Another significant issue is addressed: The erotic dancers often use ‘stage names’ to create an artificial identity for themselves; their real identity remains hidden behind the persona that is performed for the visitor. Marber has his characters dwell on the subject of stage names, as they discuss Alice’s colleagues’ choices. They probably serve to portray the lap dancing club as a typical representative of that type of non-place in more detail and mocking this convention at the same time: One of the girls calls herself “Venus” (67), another one selected “Cupid” (68); both aliases are taken from mythology.They are divinities of love. By employing these names, the girls probably intend to attract attention and allude to their proficiency in the art of (fleshly) love. Furthermore, they remain in the club’s main theme of paradise and heaven by using the appellations of gods. Larry reveals the triviality of this strategy by pointing out an ironic mistake. The female stripper who chose to call herself ‘Cupid’ actually conveys being a “bloke” (68) – at least to the well-educated customers, as the Roman god of love is always depicted as a young male. This joke is not carried further in the play, but one might wonder what visitors that particular stripper attracts, if any. However, Larry’s comment stresses the hollow and badly thought through strategy: using the name of a divine entity that brings love may not work to stylise oneself as an appealing erotic dancer.

[30] Beauty and the body are definitely prominent themes connected to the profession of striptease dance. Larry, the male protagonist, questions some strippers’ sense of aestheticism and thereby that of their visitors in an earlier passage as well. He refers to one of Alice’s colleagues and “judging by the scars, [declares her] a recent patient of ‘Doctor Tit’” (68). In this short comment, he alludes to the beauty craze and the fetishism of (often unnaturally) big female breasts and asserts that it is part of the profession as a stripper. Cosmetic surgery as well as make-up is inherent in the world of make-believe; they are quite possibly a part that is more closely connected to an erotic dancer’s persona than to the actual person behind it. Larry’s comment also implies the problematic role that the customers’ wishes and fantasies play: Their alleged appetite for certain signs of sensual beauty such as big breasts leads the women who provide services for them to let themselves be hurt and physically scarred. Larry’s comment about plastic surgery may sound entertaining due to the use of the nickname ‘Doctor Tit’. Nevertheless, it is a serious issue that is raised by the simple statement. By pointing out that some strippers scar their bodies for their work he challenges the idea that the women only profit from their jobs by earning a lot of money in relative anonymity, hidden behind their fake breasts, lavish costumes, heavy make-up and rehearsed performances.

To conclude, in Larry's descriptions, both roles – that of the stripper and that of the customer – have one curious aspect in common. People associated with them are likened to machines – Marber uses 'robots', 'dolls' and 'slot machines' as objects of comparison. On the whole, the portrayal of the lap dancing club's business is quite close to Augé's concept of the pure non-place as a non-existent extreme, because both individuals are reduced to their roles in the sensual bargain. These parts are marked by robbing the people involved in the deal of their individuality and, metaphorically, even of their humanity. As Saunders puts it, "[a] subject's own sense of identity [is blurred] [...] [to a great extent due to] a commodification of sexuality into a series of transactions between consumers and human 'products' as well as a breakdown in the demarcation between what is real and fake through both replication" (41).

Commercial replication and reproduction is addressed in another context as well, namely with regard to the establishment of the lap dancing club in general. In an early passage of the scene, Larry explores the room and finds a counterpart in his memory: "I went to a place like this in New York" (Marber 62). Alice comments somewhat sarcastically: "England always imports the best of America." (63) Both remarks affirm that the club is actually not an authentic part of the city of London, but a copy of similar venues in the US. Saunders correctly reads it as "an example of the term *globalization*, where a chain of identical establishments from America (in much the same way as fast-food outlets), has been transplanted and relocated to Britain" (41). Such a connection to the idea of a universal culture and cultural hegemony is indeed another clue as to the presentation of the lap dancing club as close to what non-place and placelessness mean.

The protagonists seem to perceive the prefabricated and antiseptic scenery of the lap dancing club in a different way though. Larry wants to know from Alice whether she could see in him more than a slot machine – a personal acquaintance and friend actually; this shows that he deplores being stuck with the part of a customer who does not possess individual features and is unable to develop meaningful relations. Alice apparently believes in the liberating quality of the relative anonymity and the hollow nature of the actions she performs. That is at least what Larry suspects: ".... you think you haven't given us anything of yourselves" (Marber 72). Alice neither affirms nor contradicts that comment. There is another passage in which the transaction between striptease artist and customer is loaded with a

negative connotation; it is again an interpretation from Larry's point of view. The male protagonist insinuates that as a stripper Alice behaves quite immorally (and is entitled to do so due to her profession). He reprimands her for only flirting with him "[t]o prise [his] money from [him]"(65). Alice affirms that reproach, probably in a self-confident and patronising, even slightly condescending, manner: "To prise your money from you I can say or do as I please"(65). She admits to having relative creative freedom in her profession, which she invests into persuading customers to tip her generously. Furthermore, her comment implies that she can play around with, lie to her visitors and trick them into paying extremely well. She by and large concedes that she sways people who come to her into bestowing huge sums upon her, regardless of the means and costs. For her, this is part of her work and therefore not a question of morals. And Alice claims that she enjoys every part of it: "Lying is the most fun a girl can have without taking her clothes off. But it's better if you do" (72).[31]

Alice seems to be content in her role. She adopts a rather positive attitude towards the non-place she works in, as her job provides her with money, freedom to lie, play around, and a persona to conceal her real identity. It seems a fitting profession for her personality; she is (– or at least pretends to be –) not searching for steady relationships. She is not on the hunt for anything the non-place cannot offer her anyway. Larry is presented differently in this scene. He seeks the solace of a kindred spirit in a genuine conversation: he tries to talk about the end of his relationship with Anna by linking it to the separation of Alice and Dan: "She [=Anna] won't even see me... You feel the same, I *know* you feel the same" (Marber 69). Larry wants to get to know Alice better, the true person, not the seductive striptease artist. He insists that she tells him her "real name"(68), for instance, as a start.[32] As she declines his offer of "look[ing] after [her]" (70) and remains in her role as a stripper who provides entertainment for her customer, Larry starts to question this status. First, he mocks the girls' service. The insulting tone is even marked by capital letters: "And We Get To See You Naked" (71). Then, he implies that Alice and her colleagues are not only at the receiving end of the bargain. This concept is discussed

[31] Alice's inclination to invent her own (his)stories and personas is not limited to the period in which she works as a stripper. With regard to her scar (11, 12 and 40, 41), for instance, Alice tells different versions of how she got it. (cf. Raab 141)

[32] Larry does not believe Alice anymore, when she tells him her name, because she confessed that she often lies to her customers in order to elicit more money or just because she enjoys it. Ironically, she tells the truth in this instant: It is revealed that her name actually is "Jane Jones" (113), as she claims in the scene set in the lap dancing club (68).

in more detail. Larry claims that the female employees of the establishment may "think [that they] haven't given us [=the visitors] anything of [them]selves" (71). The protagonist explains this assumption further by using metaphors of war or competitions: "You think because you don't love us or desire us or even like us you think you've won" (72). Larry elucidates that one's self-perception of being a winner, when one is hiding behind one's persona and refusing to establish relations, is an illusion. Above all, earning money is not free of consequences for a stripper. The price the erotic dancers pay is spelled out: They do give their customers more than the performance, including parts of their selves. Marber puts this conjecture into his male protagonist's mouth: "But you do give us something of yourselves: you give us ... imagery ... and we do with it what we will. If you women could see one minute of our Home Movies – the shit that slops through our minds every day – you'd string us up by our balls" (72). Larry alludes to the customers' fantasies which are inspired by the performance. Many visitors incorporate their impressions into their vivid sexual imaginations and thereby take an intimate part of the stripper with them – then, they can use and abuse it in whatever way they choose; judging from Larry's expressions ('the shit', 'you'd hang us by our balls'), the latter is more common – which is also suggested by the reference to the unnamed man's actual home video collection of sexual encounters in LaBute's *The Distance from here* (94-96). This brings an imbalance into the transaction; mutual profit cannot be achieved anymore.[33]

The closing passages are quite remarkable, because Larry eventually takes his role as customer up again and insists on it to humiliate and control Alice. He states his wishes which the stripper has to obey: "[Y]ou're going to take your clothes off right now and you're going to turn around very slowly and bend over and touch the fucking floor for my viewing pleasure [my emphasis!]" (72). He wants her to undress for him, as "Larry believes that Alice's nakedness [...] does unwittingly reveal her inner feelings" (Saunders 44), a theme that is taken up in the following scene of *Closer* again (Saunders 44, 45).

[33] Saunders interprets Larry's assertions not only as a way of questioning the "unobtainable status [of the stripper]"(43), but also as a comment on "masculinity in general"(43): They reveal much about "what Marber [himself] calls 'the uncensored male libido'" (Sierz 193). It is still noteworthy that the rendering of the gendered psyche of men surfaces in the context of a non-place of consumption, in the same way as it does in the chat room scene (Saunders 44), a representative of a different type of non-place.

On the whole, both characters fulfil their prescribed roles in a conscious manner, yet with a different premise. Alice believes in mutual benefits for both parties, Larry focuses on the exploitative nature of the transaction.

5.1.5. Blurring the textual boundaries in Closer

The device of introducing a theme that is recurring is not the only element that is noteworthy from a purely literary point of view in the lap dancing club passage of Patrick Marber's play *Closer*. The scene may be interpreted as a metatextual allusion as well. One aspect of the portrayed transaction has a lot in common with the practice of theatre itself. A striptease dance is not so different to a dramatic performance: both forms of art determine people's roles and the direction of looks. The artists, who provide the service, are the objects of the gaze; they are in the passive position. The persons looking at them constitute the audience, the active part as far as the capacity of sight is concerned. In the play, Alice serves as the object; in the private room of the club, the gaze is Larry's. Aleks Sierz expands that scheme for the whole play: Larry, Dan and Anna are the ones looking, Alice is always the object of that look (188). Alice is doubly marked as the passive pole: she is looked at both by the other characters and the readers (- at least in a mental representation) / the audience.

Saunders draws attention to another factor connected to fixed positions and voyeurism in theatre, which is emphasised in the lap-dancing club scene. When Alice points towards the two-way mirror, "*[s]he nods in the direction of the audience*" (Marber 66). Saunders reads that as playing with the concept of "the invisible 'fourth wall'" (45). Whenever the characters turn to the two-way mirror, they seem to refer to the diegetic club authorities as well as a theatre audience. David Ian Rabey stresses the theatricality of these moments, because they "both acknowledge[] and momentarily blast[] the fiction of the invisible audience"(Rabey 200). Hence, it may be a further allusion to the extreme theatricality of the whole striptease business as a staged sexual adventure, also in Boorstin's sense, and as a scripted performance that determines roles and undermines authentic relations.

5.1.6. Reluctance to perform one's role – repurposing and comic relief

As the sloppy manner in which the shop assistant in LaBute's *The Distance from here* carries out his work, described in the secondary text, suggests, he only fulfils his role in a rather unsatisfying way. In his conversation with Darrell and Tim, he also changes topic soon. He just affirms Darrell's estimation that a puppy would cost him "ten bucks" (LaBute, *Distance* 86), before asking the boys a few personal questions. He does not, for instance, show the boys around and tell them about how to take care of a dog, which would be important to know for a customer. Furthermore, there are no typical shopping phrases such as 'May I help you?' or 'How can I help you?', which are usually part of the standard repertoire of a polite shop assistant. The employee focuses on an intimate story instead, one that is not linked to the locale at all. He enlightens Darrell about his girlfriend's past actions and an acquaintance's shocking video collection. To be more precise, he relates the story about Jenn's amateur abortion undertaken by said acquaintance, who hit the girl right into the stomach (95). The pet store's employee tells Darrell that he saw this action and the blow job (96) captured on one of the videos (95) – a reference to a different non-place, one that distributes images. In the closing passages he almost reluctantly takes up his role again by asking Darrell, whether he has decided to buy a dog (96), and informing his customer about the shop's opening hours: "We open at ten"(97). Turning to the seller's counterpart, the purchaser, a similar development can be traced in the play. At the beginning of the relevant scene, Darrell is looking at the pets in the store.(85) By relating his intention of getting a nice puppy as a gift for his girlfriend (85), he affirms his status as a potential customer. Nevertheless, his interest shifts to the topic of conversation the employee started. Darrell does not mention buying a pet again before the closing passages of the scene and pays attention to the story, which is connected to his personal life and unrelated to the store. His questions exclusively revolve around Jenn and the videos.(91-96) Private matters dominate over business matters in the majority of the dialogue.

The shop assistant in *The Distance from here* goes about his work half-heartedly. Patrick Marber's *Closer* depicts a scene in which the failure of service is taken to an extreme. Scene eight is set in a restaurant where perceptive waiters are scarce. There are a few sarcastic references to the restaurant's service by the guests. Anna asks Dan whether he has already ordered; he answers "I ordered a menu about ten

years ago" (73). Larry pointedly enquires: "Do they have waiters here?"(75) in order to get the personnel's attention. Anna replies: "They're all busy" (75). Both (male) protagonists complain about the restaurant's service, alluding to the tardiness of cooking and the work ethos of the waiters, who apparently hide from their guests, pretending to be occupied. Larry even has to obtain drinks for Anna and himself from the bar.(77; 80) In the play, Dan and Larry are adamant about their rights as paying visitors of the restaurant. As the staff members do not fulfil their side of the bargain, they voice their disappointment by snarky comments and probing questions, which probably make readers / audiences laugh. Hence, these complaints about the service most probably function as jokes that lighten the atmosphere.[34] The quoted short exchanges are literally outstanding on a different level as well, because they interrupt the regular dialogue that revolves around topics related to the protagonists' lives such as signing divorce papers. Thereby, they draw attention to the setting that is otherwise hardly present at all. One might say that the non-place of the transaction creeps into the private conversation and holds the protagonists' attention for a few moments; it may be read as providing a temporary timeout from the serious nature of their personal emotional affairs.

5.1.7. Standard transactions, shocking deals

Two plays focus on unconventional or even awful consumer goods instead of on concrete venues, probably in order to raise awareness as to how far consumer culture has gone. LaBute's *The Distance from here* and the third part of Stephens' *Wastwater* introduce deals that have to be connected to the black market and the criminal underworld, which are an intrinsic ingredient of the system and space of consumption.

In the American playwright's piece the appalling deal chronologically happened before the play's action. The readers/the audience are not witnesses of it. The pet store's employee is the one who draws Darrell's attention to it – to be precise, it is only the story of a story captured on video that the young protagonist is told by the man. The important details of the transaction are later confirmed by the purchaser Jenn (LaBute, *Distance* 113, 114). As this incident of the past has considerable

[34] It may even be a caricature-like portrait of the work ethos in London restaurants; this can be judged only by frequent guests of the city's gastronomy scene though.

impact on the characters' actions in the diegetic present, it is a crucial element to be analysed in more detail. As despicable as the recounted deal is, as standard are its constituents. There are the parties involved in it – the seller and the buyer: the unnamed acquaintance of the pet shop's employee and Jenn, Darrell's girlfriend (92-96). Furthermore, references to the service and its price can be traced in the story. Jenn explains to Darrell why she struck the deal with the unnamed guy and thereby alludes to the purchase: "I come to find out ya left me a little *present*. Yeah. Carrying it around, which, at fifteen, is just not gonna happen So I found a way to get rid of the thing"(113). When the young girl found herself pregnant, she decided that she could not have a baby and went to have it aborted. Without any professional help, Jenn was forced to turn to a man who had a reputation of carrying out 'abortions' by punching the girls into the stomach (114). This treatment is the good Jenn bought. The price is specified as well. Jenn affirms that she paid with a blow job. She explains that she obliged "because [she] didn't-have-any-money! [...] 'S [=the blow job] what he charged [her] so [she] did it"(115). The videotape, linked to another type of non-place, provides evidence that both Jenn and the man fulfilled their roles as supplier and customer. The man abused his position, though, by recording the deal on camera for his private collection. The young female protagonist did not agree to be the lead actress in his home movie; Jenn vows that she was not aware of being filmed (113).

The key elements of the extraordinary transaction in part three of Simon Stephens' triptych *Wastwater* appear in a similarly ordinary way as those in Neil LaBute's *The Distance from here*. Specific protagonists are representatives of the business partners involved in the deal. Jonathan acts as buyer; Sian and Alain provide the consumer good in their role as sellers. The purchase is also introduced: it is Dalisay, a child from the Philippines (Stephens, *Wastwater* 50). Jonathan pays with cold cash, which is "[i]n a bag in the boot" (61) of his car. One can read this fact as a strong indication of the questionable nature of the business deal. Nevertheless, the bought product is even more remarkable. Jonathan is purchasing a child to raise it as his own (60, 61), which links the scene to several interviews with the play's author Simon Stephens, who drew attention to the phenomenon of buying children in order to adopt them.

Turning briefly to roles determined by the non-place of consumption, one may argue that both parties fulfil them on the most basic level: Sian and Alain deliver the

ordered item; Jonathan pays for his purchase and collects it. Stephens depicts the transaction in more detail, though, as it is the main theme of the closing part of his play. What is striking is that the seller, Sian, wants to really get to know the person behind the mask of the buyer and seems concerned about the well-being of the consumer good, Dalisay, and probably about her own. First, she asks Jonathan a lot of personal questions to, as she says, "help us [=her and Alain] decide if we're going to go through with the transaction or not" (53). Furthermore, Sian gives Jonathan some advice about how to raise a girl ("Sort out a quick lick of paint [for her room]. A few posters. Get her a stereo. Girls like music." (60)). The evaluation of the buyer's personality stands in stark contrast to Sian's overall behaviour, which may be associated with notorious criminals: She threatens Jonathan with a gun (62) and terrorises him psychologically:

> SIAN. Where do you think these puddles come from?
> JONATHAN. I've no idea.
> SIAN. What do you think they're made of?
> JONATHAN. Water. Maybe. Oil.
> SIAN. Do you think so? (45,46)

Sian draws Jonathan's attention to the puddles on the floor and implies that they might be made of blood in order to scare and coerce him to complete his part in the deal. Another element of her strategy of intimidation is to highlight the possible consequences if the transaction gets public: "If anybody found out what you're about to do then you would go to jail for a very long time" (56). Such threats and blackmailing schemes are quite possibly part of underworld deals.

The way the transaction was set into motion, which happened before the start of the scene in the diegetic chronology, is also rather telling. Sian reconstructs the steps Jonathan took to get into contact with her:

> [...] you go to a website which you know is perfectly safe. You check the hit rate. Two and a half million hits in the last twenty-four hours. It's mainstream. It's very straightforward. It gets more hits than the *Guardian* sports page, for fuckssake. You've checked! And a photograph leads you to another website. And on that website there is an advert that leads you to a third wesite. And the further you go the less, what, professional? Yes. Professional-seeming these other websites are, but you keep going. Because nobody knows. (48)[35]

"[T]he internet seems a vector for deviancy", says critic Henry Hitchings in his review of the play (par. 6) and thereby hits the mark.The beginning of the deal is actually

[35] This quote is also quite remarkable in context of the non-places of communication and diffusion, which will be in the focus of the thesis's following main chapter.

traced back to some shady website Jonathan reached through advertisements on other pages in the WWW, some of which are frequented by the masses. The reassurance that many others have visited the initial site generates a sense of being part of a collective and the feeling of a certain normalcy. Due to the internet's anonymity, Jonathan felt safe to explore the content of a page that seemed less trustworthy and get into contact with the persons behind it. The other steps leading towards the portrayed transaction are as banal on the outside. Sian informs the readers/the audience that Jonathan "contacted Stephen [...],[...] sent [several] emails [and] booked a room in a Holiday Inn in Derby in order to make that phone call [and] [went] to meet him in a pub in Epping Forest" (50, 51). All those seemingly insignificant activities are noteworthy nevertheless, as they are connected to further non-places. Establishing contact via the website and exchanging emails are deeply rooted in the virtual space of the World Wide Web. Choosing a hotel chain like the Holiday Inn is also a common strategy to escape the prying eyes of neighbours and remain relatively anonymous and unbothered. Probably not as featureless as the hotel room is the pub in a different village, which serves as a meeting place; nevertheless it is a locale that may function as a non-place and provide sufficient privacy. To conclude, the business deal Stephens portrays in the last part of *Wastwater* is based on numerous, albeit different types of non-places.

What sets this scene apart from the stereotypical rendering of an illegal business deal, (and thereby probably making it even more unsettling), is the room given to the protagonists' background stories. Sian confronts Jonathan with his own past in order to get insight into his personality. She herself tells him about her time at Frieda's (47), linking the parts of *Wastwater* and, above all, revealing her psyche. Even though the setting and the transaction in that passage are dominated by the quality of non-place, Stephens' does not allow his characters to fully retreat into their roles in the business deal, even though they fulfil them on the outside. Both are portrayed in an elaborate way; they are humanised.

Another factor that undermines the homogenising practice of business deals in the plays is the motive to enter into the transaction in the first place. In both *The Distance from here* and *Wastwater*, the buyers purchase the respective goods for highly personal reasons and not only out of a vague desire of buying any product. Jonathan wants to acquire a child to raise it. Jenn's motive is the exact opposite: the teenager thinks that she is not able to care of a baby and, therefore, wants to get rid

of it. Both motivations are key factors of the psychological portrayal of the plays' protagonists. As they are also interwoven with the business deals as such, they are loaded with meaning for the readers/the audience.

5.2. Holiday resorts or exotic entertainment

5.2.1. Sugar Mummies in paradise? – The other trade as a non-place in (mass) tourism

A highly disputed consumer good is the inspiration of Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies*: the male black body. The play's main theme is female sex tourism, which consists of the archetypal all-inclusive summer holiday experience that can be subsumed under the five "'S's: sun, sea [,] sand and also sex and spirits" (Obrador Pons 2). It seems to have entered the field of mass tourism and is reminiscent of what Daniel Boorstin wrote about package tours and pseudo-events: Fun and spectacles have to be provided for the paying tourists. Due to its growing popularity, female sex tourism is a topic that has been discussed in various forms. Glimpses into these debates and their main arguments provide insight into the play's (broad) paratext. There is some purely academic interest in the topic. A far greater audience is reached, though, by journalists, who tried to report from the key destinations and describe what female sex tourism entails. A newspaper article that deals with this topic extensively is Julie Bindel's "The price of a holiday fling", which appeared in the *Guardian* in 2003, for instance. Such a text is identified as the inspiration for *Sugar Mummies*. This is confirmed by Tanika Gupta herself (*Punters* 266, *Women's Hour Broadcast* 2:05-2:36). From the starting point of this reportage, the story of the play's genesis as a whole becomes even more salient. The Royal Court Theatre sent Gupta on a research trip to Jamaica so that the playwright could investigate the topic herself. She relates many anecdotes of this trip in interviews. This major step in the writing process is also highlighted in academic publications (i.e. Griffin 234) as well as in newspaper articles and reviews linked to the production of *Sugar Mummies* (i.e. Martin par. 29), for many of which the journalists did their own research on scene – mainly being chatted up by the beach boys and flirting with them. There will be references to both Gupta's own tales and some other descriptions of such experiences in order to evaluate how authentic the portrayal of Negril beach and the locals is in the play at a later point in the thesis. Yet, there is another essential

paratextual aspect: The BBC organised a radio programme about *Sugar Mummies* and the issue of female sex tourism. First, this is remarkable, because it affirms that it is a theme of general interest. What is furthermore significant is the selection of guests. They have been chosen according to their standpoints; each of them represents a certain ideology. The key figure is certainly Tanika Gupta, who once again presents the play's genesis and stakes a claim for its authenticity due to the research trip.(Gupta, *Women's Hour Broadcast* 2:04-3:24) The BBC also invited Julie Bindel as a spokesperson against female sex tourism and Jeanette Belliveau, who embodied the pro-side as an occasional sex tourist herself.[36] One can deduce from many of those articles and programmes that *Sugar Mummies* deals with a high-profile, albeit controversial topic.

The most debated aspect of female sex tourism is the issue of exploitation and racial stereotypes, which are focused on in Julia Bindel's articles, in Kathryn Knight's reportage "Men for sale?" for the *Daily Mail* and Elaine Aston's academic piece "A Fair Trade? Staging Female Sex Tourism in *Sugar Mummies* and *Trade*", for instance. These contributions imply that exploitation is part of the non-place. The majority of literature on female sex tourism centres on the Western women abusing their position over the black men. The key argument is that these women "buy into the myth of the 'Big bamboo' [and thereby] commodify and [...] consume the black male body as an object of racialised sexual pleasure" (Aston 189; cf. Martin par.6 and Bindel, *Not Romance* par.5). Tanika Gupta herself draws attention to the fact that the black men are not purely innocent victims. They show cunning behaviour by exploiting the women's weaknesses in order to get more money; many also look down on them, which can be deduced from the nickname they have given the white women: 'milk bottles'.(Gupta, *Punters* 267; Gardner par. 16)

Turning towards the more graspable aspects of the paratext, the title ought to attract attention. *Sugar Mummies* is a pun on and the female counterpart of the so-called sugar daddies. Elaine Aston also points out that "sugar [...] alludes to the British, colonialist slave trade of the Caribbean sugar plantations" (183). Peter Billingham stresses this imperialist legacy as well. He explains that "the suffering [of the people in a colony like Jamaica] was the means by which businessmen and

[36] This programme, which intended to present various viewpoints on the issue, is very interesting. Due to space constraints, the guests' opinions can only be quoted in relevant passages about the textual presentation of the holiday resort and the local workers, though.

bankers back in Britain became wealthy beneficiaries of the slave trade" (Billingham 246). Hence, both associative components of the title relate to exploitation. The first hints at the unusual pairing of an older man, the sugar daddy, with a much younger woman; the latter is linked to the relationship between the empire and its colonies. The play's title, which combines these two elements, may be interpreted as an evaluation of the setting, without revealing it concretely. It only points to a situation that is dominated by exploitation. The book cover (figure 4) appears less grim. In fact, it shows a glimpse of what may be described as paradise. The image represents a dream beach fantasy: A vast stretch of golden sand leads down to the turquoise ocean. A red bikini with string tie sides, which only consists of an almost negligible amount of cloth and probably shows a lot of skin, is lying on the ground. It attests to various activities linked to the picture-perfect beach holiday such as swimming in the crystal-clear water and sunbathing. Three of the five 'S''s have already been captured in this image, namely sun, sand and sea. The other two are alluded to as well. The right bottom corner is dominated by a glass of cocktail. According to its name, the red-orange liquid promises 'Sex on the Beach', as Elaine Aston points out.(185) The fourth 'S', spirit, is covered by the cocktail on the book cover, so to speak. It also functions as a subtle clue to the fifth and last S, namely sex. There is a far more blatant hint to bodily pleasures though. "[A] cocktail stick in the form of a naked black man balances on the edge of [the] glass" (Aston 185n24), which is a clear reference to the last significant ingredient of a dream summer holiday, i.e. sex. To complete the paradisiacal image, the classic palm tree is reflected in the cocktail glass. Summarising all those aspects, the cover of *Sugar Mummies* evokes the atmosphere of a wonderful holiday full of fun in the sun by portending to all the quintessential elements of said dream vacation. It also reveals much about the play's setting.

Whereas the cover image focuses on conjuring up the mental image of a perfect beach holiday, the blurb rather draws attention to the darker aspects of such a fantasy in order to promote *Sugar Mummies* as a more complex piece of art. It refers directly to the play's setting and introduces its main theme:

> Jamaica: a sensual paradise where the sun, sea and sand are free but anything more comes at a price.
> Welcome to the 21st century, where women travel across the world in search of sex, love, and liberation but the reality is that hard cash equals hard men. Toned torsos, sweet talk and good lovin' beneath the coconut trees is a deal that leaves

everyone short-changed. (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* blurb)

The blurb tells the reader that the story is set in Jamaica, which seems paradisiacal on the outside with its spectacular beaches, glittering water and golden sunshine. Furthermore, it asserts that there are many women who do not only seek the sun there, but also men. What is striking is that female sex tourism is presented as a phenomenon of the 21st century. By that a strong relation to supermodernity is established. A further aspect that strengthens the connection to this period and non-places is the incorporation of consumerist language: Some goods are 'for free', but others have their 'price'; the holiday in the resort is a 'deal' and one needs 'hard cash' to get hard men. The other side of the coin, the negative aspect of such a holiday in the Jamaican paradise, is linked to the domain of consumption and its ugly characteristic of commodifying everything, including human bodies and emotions, and thereby depriving the locales as well as the people of genuine relations and meaning, seemingly making the transactions an epitome of a pure non-place. The blurb both introduces the play's setting and subject matter, and marks it as "a funny, provocative and revealing study of the pleasures and pitfalls of female sex tourism" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies*). It positions the piece as a valuable contribution to the whole discussion and, above all, an important portrayal of the 21st century, the contemporary world.

5.2.2. Plunging into the textual water – a picture-perfect summer holiday in paradise

Much of the secondary text of *Sugar Mummies* works in a similar way as the cover image. First, the beauty of the place is stressed at the beginning of several acts. To be more precise, the action takes place at Negril, where *"[w]e hear the sound of the waves lapping gently in a calm bay. The sun rises on [the] tropical beach in Jamaica with white sands and palm trees – the perfect beach*" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 17). The spectacular view is also implied by the characters' actions. Naomi, for example, "*stands for a moment and stares out to sea in wonder*"(18) – it is a comment that is very clear in the literary text. There are further means of evoking associations with a perfect holiday destination. During the events at night, the characters have fun "*under the stars*" (42) and the romantic potential of the beach setting is activated by "*the light of the full moon*" (61). The introductory stage directions of several scenes may generally be interpreted as an attempt to conjure up

the image of a breathtaking beach, where everything is beautiful and the atmosphere promising and ripe for intense emotions.[37] It is either the creation of false hopes of amorous encounters, or, more probably, a counterpoint to many of the shady and dark actions and transactions in the holiday resort. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the beach does not seem too far-fetched. Lorna Martin, who carried out journalistic field work in Jamaica for an article published in *The Observer*, describes the place and how it unfolds before her eyes as follows: "It's 10am on Jamaica's breathtaking Negril beach. Bleached white sand, swaying palms and crystalline Caribbean waters stretch into the distance for seven miles. It looks endless and, on a first impression, this could be paradise."(par. 3) The adjectives the journalist uses are similar to those in the literary text; they have at least positive connotations (i.e. 'bleached white', 'crystalline'). She also addresses the main ingredients of this paradise: sand, palm trees and the sea. Even though the journalist's eye may not be unbiased either, her description validates Gupta's portrait of Negril beach in the play.

The natural landscape appears to be captured rather authentically in the stage directions, if somewhat romanticised and stereotypical,[38] just like the portrait of the holiday experience. Innumerable actions are described in the secondary text which may be considered as quintessential for a summer vacation; some of them have already been alluded to in the cover image. Many of these activities are strongly connected to the setting and the characters' roles within the consumerist system. The white female tourists seem to know their guidebook of how to enjoy a beach holiday pretty well. They fulfil their roles by soaking up the sun, for instance: "*KITTY [...] is lying flat out on a sunbed, sunbathing*" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 17). (They do not forget to apply sun lotion either.(32)) In their gaudy bikinis and swimwear they venture into the sea and enjoy the water.(26) During the day, they furthermore drink certain liquids with relish: "*[S]at out on sundecks sunning themselves [, t]hey are all sipping cocktails*" (86). In the night hours more spirits and other mind-expanding

[37] It is a portrait reminiscent of that in light (or even pulp) fiction featuring stereotypical holiday flings with its focus on the beauty of nature and phenomena like the dazzling sunshine, the twinkling stars and the full moon.

[38] Many critics stress that the design for the Royal Court production aimed at being authentic as well. According to Elaine Aston "[t]he set design for *Sugar Mummies* had a sandy shoreline spilling out to the edge of the auditorium" (185). This beach scenery led to quite an uncommon requirement: John Thaxter points out that "the front row seats [had] to remain empty in case of spillage during the brief fight scene" (par. 9). Many other clichés about a perfect summer vacation have been incorporated in the production design as well. Kate Kellaway draws attention to the video installations accompanying the performance. The audience could see "a wraparound screen [on which] dreamy images of waves, palm trees [and] blue skies [floated]"(*Sweet surrender* par. 1).

drugs are consumed and some of the women try their luck on the sandy dance floor.(42) Some of them, Kitty and Maggie for instance, are intent on enjoying sweet kisses and similar intimacies.(47,48; act 1, sc. 6) The typical tourist experience is completed by taking photographs of the sublime surroundings (19) in order to document it, archive it and keep it as a visual memory of the wonderful time.

The employees of the resort fulfil their roles as well. They are perceptive of their guests' needs. They do everything that is required of them in order to produce the perfect holiday experience for the tourists. The staff offer their services and ask politely whether they can do anything for their guests (i.e. "Miss. You want a sunbed? Towel?" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 21)), which is reminiscent of Augé's theory that the mediation between the parties of a transaction in a non-place is carried out via signs, via language. A further instance of the typically attentive behaviour is that "*Andre appears by Yolanda's side with a cocktail*" (28), which is even her usual drink. As chef of the grill, a key element of a holiday resort, "*he [also] gets busy cleaning surfaces [there]. He puts out a large black board with the names of all the cocktails and another one with the menu*" (20). Needless to say, the boards that feature a list of the offered drinks and dishes are another requisite of mediation between the non-place and its user. As a cook, Andre is in charge of supplying food and drink. Angel cares about the guests' well-being in a different, albeit as typical, way. Her services include "*aloe vera massages and hair braiding*", which is also promoted by a written sign (17) . Reefie and other beach boys, a slightly euphemistic term, provide entertainment of another kind for the ladies. This ranges from harmless dances on the beach, where live music is arranged (42, 43), trips on a glass-bottom boat out to sea (act 1, sc. 5) to compliments, kisses and bodily intimacies in the female tourist's room (act 2, sc. 2).

5.2.3. The other trade, part one – the gigolos' job description: sweet talking and dangerous services

Many of the actions described in the stage directions are linked to the characters' respective roles. With regard to those, the dialogue itself is at least as remarkable. One important aspect is the gigolos' language. They have to appeal to the ladies in order to make them interested in them and earn money. That entails a vast repertoire of compliments, which Gupta expertly introduces. There are various scenes in which

the beach boys flirt with the tourists. A few of these compliments shall be presented here, a potpourri of the best flatteries, so to speak: “You’re a pretty lady. Maybe we can walk together on the beach” (20), “Me like de girl with de big batty. More to hold on to...”, “Me no wan’ the kitten, me wan’ the cat” (29), “I see you on de beach, prettiest ting I ever see” (33), “Me want to see your smile from morning ‘til nighttime”(34), “You like a flower in my hand waiting to bloom” (48), “You ageless. But you have wisdom and intelligence. Me love an intelligent ‘oman”(48), etc. Many of the lines are quite soppy, but one can imagine that they work – they do in most of those scenes. The gigolos know how to turn their potential clients’ physical imperfections into features that can be adored: old equals wise, intelligent and experienced; fat equals having something to hold on to. They focus on telling the women how beautiful they are and how they would worship them. It is part of their job.

Although most of the chat-up lines seem to be taken out of tacky romance novels and movies, they are quite authentic, as the experiences of a few journalists and Tanika Gupta herself affirm. Lorna Martin observed the real beach boys of Negril beach, while they worked. She witnessed their flirtations and quoted the gigolos’ language in her article. Some of the examples, based on her field work, are: “You are gorgeous. [...] What part of heaven did you fall from?”(Martin par. 15), “No, you ageless.[...] We are real man. In Jamaica, real men like the cat, not the kitten. And real men like real women. Mature and intelligent and beautiful women like you” (par.19). During her research trip for the play, Gupta was approached in a similar way by the beach boys. One of them said to her “Me no wan’ the kitten, me wan’ the cat” (Gupta, Punters 267). Even though she is “definitely no supermodel, [...] [the young Jamaican] had all the chat-up lines – ‘Naomi Campbell’, ‘my size’”(Gardner par.1) for Tanika Gupta. Needless to say, many of these compliments have been adopted for the play. What is further significant is that all these experiences provide evidence for the authenticity of the employed language. The compliments may be considered as typical of the non-place of commercialised love; they function as mediation between gigolo and client.

The fact that sex is part of the trade at the holiday resort is discussed in detail among the Rastafarians. Reefie is portrayed as the experienced pimp, who teaches the young ones like Antonio how to seduce the female tourists and make money by that. He takes him under his wings and talks about principles. The most important

rule is to treat the women “like ladies”(Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 57). Reefie claims that the Jamaican men are “better than their white man. They ain’t up to the mark, so when [the women] come out [to Negril] and see that [the] black boys healthy and look good and ting, dey wan’ try something new”(57). The experienced beach boy is well aware that white tourist women look for a man who treats them well. Reefie’s strategy also includes the attraction of the exotic linked with the male black body. Another useful advice for the new ones is to focus on the older women; according to Reefie, “they’ll be generous” (57), whereas the young girls “don’t have no cash [and] wan’ a man for free” (57). He also reveals the ultimate compliment: “Tell dem they got pretty eyes – it always works”(57). It is as important to show the women that one has “all de time in de world”(97). After the unsuccessful night with Maggie, Reefie coaches Antonio again and examines his methods and his repertoire of flatteries.

ANTONIO. She pretty? [...]
No matter. Me no care. Tonight Anna is de most beautiful ting on dis island.
REEFIE. What else you gonna tell her?
ANTONIO. That she has hair de colour of gold spun in the sun.
REEFIE. She hab black hair. [...]
ANTONIO. Oh – den – she hab hair de colour of night, wid de moon glistening and shimmering in her locks. [...]
And when de stars come out... (96,97)

Antonio shows Reefie that he knows that the woman’s physical appearance is not important. She would only fall for him, if he manages to make her feel like the prettiest girl on the island. That can be achieved by the appropriate compliments. In the preparatory session with Reefie, Antonio focuses on the beauty of the lady’s hair. Among themselves, the beach boys try to support each other. Sly is also experienced and has a few tips for the new one: “Be cool. Don’t go too far wid de compliments. Den dey suspec’ you fakin’ it” (97). This piece of advice is striking, as it directly addresses the issue of make-believe and role-playing. The beach boys have to create an agreeable persona and find a balance in their behaviour so that the women can hold on to the illusion of real love. The gigolos have to be careful not to destroy this fantasy by exaggerating and making their pretension too obvious.

One dangerous aspect, which is quite closely connected to working as a prostitute, is not discussed among the younger beach boys at all: sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. Nevertheless, this serious theme frames the play, as Angel’s husband is suffering from it. At the beginning of Gupta’s play, Angel confides in Reefie that her spouse is “a walking duppy [and will] die soon”(18). His death

comes at the very end of the play. According to Peter Billingham, “Gupta evokes the spectre of the human cost of sex tourism [in that passage]. Angel recounts that her man, a former male prostitute, has died prematurely: ‘Las’ Night. In him dirty room, on him own.”[(Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 126)] The haunting misery of AIDS and poverty permeates this final moment.”(247) Illness and disease are as much a part of the trade as the dancing, flirting and kisses on the sandy beach – a part that the majority of the boys seems to suppress.

5.2.4. The other trade, part two – women looking for company and fun in the sand

The first question regarding the holiday guests and/or the gigolo’s clients is who they are. Tanika Gupta tries to offer a comprehensive panorama of the types of women who go to resorts such as the fictional one in her play. Most probably her research trip had a major influence on the characters. To prove this point, one has to turn to the paratext, in which Gupta’s field trip is dealt with. Lorna Martin provides a useful summary of the respective types of women the playwright came across on Negril beach:

> The ‘Ibiza-type’ are young, frisky and just looking for a good time. ‘Many of them were sexy, beautiful, young and slim’, says Gupta. ‘But because they didn’t have that much money, the guys weren’t interested.’ The second group are in their mid- to late-30s and desperate for a baby, perhaps a cute brown one. She saw many simply looking for love, and finally what she called the ‘grandmother-type’: white-haired, sixty-something women melting in front of these guys. (par. 31)

The origin of many of *Sugar Mummies’* female protagonists can apparently be traced back to these observations. Kitty is the textbook example of a woman in her 30s, who is gripped by the idea of starting a family with a beach boy, including having children with him (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 116). Maggie – at least as portrayed by Lynda Bellingham in the stage production – is still blonde and does not have any grey strands of hair.[39] Nevertheless, she is “*in her fifties*” (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 15), which makes her at least twice as old as most of the beach boys. Therefore, she may be considered as a representative of the grandmother-type; she could in fact be the grandmother of 17-year-old Antonio (15), whom she has chosen for company. Naomie is the youngest of the group, but does not fit into the category of the Ibiza-

[39] Although it is not directly linked to place, this noteworthy casting choice shall be addressed briefly, as it might add meaning to the play. Kathryn Knight stresses the fact that Lynda Bellingham of all people plays the sex-hungry Maggie – the actress had been “the wholesome face of family values in the Oxo television commercials” (par. 11).

type. She wants to enjoy her holiday, but has a more serious agenda as well. Despite this difference another hypothesis, one about the beach boys' preferences, proves true: Sly moves quickly on to the elder Yolanda, when his attempt to chat up Naomie fails (20, 29). His comment: "Me no wan' the kitten, me wan' the cat."(29) The last female tourist presented in the play is Yolanda. She is an exception and a typical representative at the same time. Yolanda is an "African American [...], a married woman who returns year after year to rekindle a holiday romance with [...] Reefie"(Benedict par. 4). She is neither white nor single, which distinguishes her from the other characters and from the (stereo)typical female sex tourist. What she has in common with the majority of them is that she considers the holiday fling as more fulfilling than her relationship at home; she comes to Jamaica to have "some fun" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 79).

Having briefly discussed the question of who indulges in the kind of holiday that offers sun, sea, sand, spirits and sex, the issue of how these tourists behave and what their attitude towards the non-place is like shall be focused on now. The beach boys in Jamaica are conscious of the venue's mechanisms. They know that they will only get paid by the female tourists, if the service is good. What is significant is that at the beginning of the play the female characters are also aware that the flattery and flirtations are only part of the men's job. Maggie, who has not been to Jamaica before, actually refers to the illusion of romance and love, for example:

> KITTY. Men here certainly know how to treat a lady. They love us!
> MAGGIE. Least they pretend to (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 24,25)

She knows that the beach boys treat the women well, but only perform the role of boyfriends. This means that a woman can buy herself a good time, because that is part of the gigolos' service, but not real feelings and earnest affection. Kitty even takes the position of the watchful and wise client, when Sly tries to pick her up. She initially brushes his tacky compliments off and counters them with "I'm not falling for your tricks" (33). She claims that the beach boy's show and false flatteries will not work on her. She argues that "[she knows] what [...] Jamaican boys are like"(33). In other words, Kitty tries to discourage Sly by implying that his words are hollow, because they are only part of the trade. She asserts that she recognises the intimacies and compliments as a consumer good and that the Jamaican men are only playing their roles as gigolos. Kitty voices her distrust more clearly:

> SLY. You the prettiest girlfriend I ever have.

KITTY. I don't believe that for a second.(47)

She shows a copious amount of awareness of Sly's pretences, when she points out the corny and rehearsed quality of Sly's lines. When Sly tells her that it does not matter that she is older than him because age equals wisdom and he likes intelligent women, Kitty scoffs at him: "Bet you say that to all the girls"(48).

Naomie is also conscious that the holiday resort works as a non-place of consumption that offers fun in the sun and later in bed. She laughs about Yolanda's double entendre "Lot of women folk come here looking for a break" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 30). She agrees with the American ("I noticed. (30)). She also states that "[she is not] here for ..."(30); clearly the dots stand for paid sex with the locals. She claims that she does not intend to relish in the liberating aspects of the unrelational non-place. Quite to the contrary, she desires to "get back to [her] roots"(31).

5.2.5. The other trade, part three – colonialism revisited: racial stereotypes as part of the deal

As Tanika Gupta pointed out in several interviews, female sex tourism may be interpreted as a trade with mutual exploitation. She draws attention to the fact that both groups – white women and black men – are characterised by a racist attitude. For the Westerners the male black body is something exotic, they look for, as Julie Bindel puts it, "'some dark meat', 'the big bamboo', [and the] 'dirty banana'"(*Women's Hour Broadcast* 05:08-05:57). These fairly deprecating nicknames are based on the stereotypes of quality and duration of the black men's sexual performance. But Gupta asks whether 'milk bottle', as these men often refer to white women, is any better and less racist. It ought to be argued that it is not, because it draws from stereotypes as well. These racial stereotypes seem to be intrinsic to the sexual transactions in Jamaica and other countries to which comparatively rich, white women fly in order to have fun with rather poor black men. They appear to be typical of that particular non-place. Therefore, it may not come as a surprise that a considerable part of the dialogue is influenced by racist jargon. Gupta employs various well-known clichés, especially in scenes where the representatives of each respective group are among themselves. When the Rastafarians discuss their job within their own circle, they are happy that "[a]nother plane load flew in" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 51), for example. They know that the plane's cargo is wealthy white women, who are eager to enjoy the local men's services. They hope to elicit as much money from them as possible.

Sly actually uses the racist nickname “white milk bottles”(52). Another aspect that has been touched upon is the prejudice black men hold about white men. They believe it is easy to seduce Western women and earn money by that, because they consider themselves “better than their white man” (57). Their self-image focuses on physical attributes, which make them more attractive than Western men (“we black boys healthy and look good and ting” (57)).

The black men use a physical stereotype to their advantage. In Gupta’s play, and, deducing from several newspaper articles on the topic, often in reality, white women highlight the beauty of the physical appearance as well. They may also compare them to white men, but from their point of view the Western males are the norm and black men the exotic other, the extraordinary. Therefore, their praises of the Jamaican males’ bodies ought to be classified as racial stereotyping and objectifying. What makes this racist attitude even more prominent in the play (as well as in real life) is the fact that white women almost exclusively focus on colour, ethnic clichés and myths. Parts of the dialogue shall provide evidence for this claim. Let us now listen to the voices of the fictional tourists Maggie and Kitty:

KITTY. Watch all those men diving off the cliff?
MAGGIE. They’re amazing. [...]
KITTY. Incredibly agile.
MAGGIE. Beautiful bodies.
KITTY. Beautiful bodies.
MAGGIE. Flat stomachs, muscles all over...
KITTY. Watch them and you kind of... (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 24)

Even though both women are not interested in cliff diving, they enjoy it from a voyeuristic position. They are not so much fascinated by the men’s talents, but more by their ‘beautiful bodies’, which both women affirm. Muscles and flat stomachs are all that counts for them. The scene that is evoked resembles a meat inspection. Conceded, Kitty considers the Rastafarians “romantic”, is glad that the beach boys treat her well and make herself feel beautiful.(25) Nevertheless, this aspect is only treated in a few lines. More lines are dedicated to Maggie’s and Kitty’s thoughts about the male black body. Their talk retains its focus on the outward appearance, especially on ethnic stereotypes:

KITTY. They’re so sweet.
MAGGIE. And really black.
KITTY. Blue black.
MAGGIE. Nice smiles- white, white teeth against black skin.
KITTY. Tall and strong.

MAGGIE. Big, luscious, kissable lips.
KITTY. Real men.(25)

These comments are clearly of a racist nature, as one feature is constantly referred to: the skin colour black. There are further widespread stereotypes, which are echoed in the dialogue between Maggie and Kitty. The lips, for instance, are considered more voluptuous and luscious than a white man's. Even the smiles are only so nice, because the white teeth are a striking contrast to the dark colour of the men's bodies. Another factor linked to the concept of maleness is addressed as well, namely the quality and, above all, the duration of the sexual performance. Kitty borrows the myth that black men "can keep going all night" (25). Maggie agrees unanimously. She even issues the racist jingle: "Once you've had black, you never go back" (25). Kitty and Maggie also have a few saucy nicknames in store: "The Big Bamboo" and "Jamaican Steel" (25) - both monikers refer to a certain body part that is said to be as big as bamboo and as hard as steel. Both nicknames imply a sexualisation and objectification of the male black body. Therefore, they can be considered as another piece of evidence for the racist attitude of white women who engage in such a sexualised kind of holiday.

Such a racially prejudiced ideology sometimes even shines through in more intimate situations between white women and the local men. A key example is scene three in the second act of *Sugar Mummies*. In this part Kitty and Sly are in her hotel room. Sly is eating greedily, clearly enjoying the food; apparently he wants to still his hunger. Kitty gets impatient and criticises his manner of eating: "More...? You've eaten... [...] You eat like a savage" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 76). She uses the term 'savage', whose connotation is predominantly negative, to show Sly that he is inferior. In calling him so, Kitty demonstrates that she regards him as untamed, uncivilised and uncultured. One may even interpret her comment as telling him that he resembles a wild animal and not a refined human being.

There are many more examples from the play in which the alleged otherness of black men is stressed. One last comment should be included, as it is a picture-perfect summary of the racist stereotypes. Yolanda discusses the white women's attitude towards the local men with Angel, who is from Jamaica, as follows:

[White women] say 'Black men like fucking, black men enjoy the sex act, they don't make love. [...]
He's big, he's like an animal, untamed, primitive, he'd fuck you in the sand and wouldn't think anything the matter with it...'(Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 80)

Yolanda voices the argument that white women are at least as exploitative as the beach boys, as they draw from racist stereotypes and consider themselves sophisticated and therefore superior. This demeaning attitude foregrounds the connection of black males with sex. They are expected to be able to perform and enjoy physical action all the time. Furthermore, they are compared to animals, which is in itself an illuminating aspect. The roughness and wildness linked to animals makes them fascinating on the one hand. On the other hand, it makes them different; they are not as civilised as white people. Both aspects are echoed in the quote, which reveals the racist and disdaining mind-set behind such observations of the behaviour of black men that is connected to a certain type of non-place such as a Caribbean holiday resort that caters to the needs of predominantly female Western sex tourists.

A last aspect that is connected to the exotic but uncivilised quality of the holiday destination is its difference to the home countries of the Western tourists. White vacationers perceive their holiday destination as more liberating and permissive. There they can do things they would not dare to at home. (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 25; cf. also Aston 185) Conceded, the degree of anonymity that the non-place provides and the huge distance to one's family and friends has a major impact on this assumption. Nevertheless, it also implies that these countries are lax in morals, as they encourage promiscuity and sexual excess. Such a reference to the difference in standard behaviour and morality is another example of the prevailing racist, colonial ideology that is at work in the non-place of the Jamaican holiday resort in the play and probably in reality as well.

5.2.6. Breaking from the non-place – a rocky road to an individual identity

As was already discussed in some detail, all the characters are aware of the fact that sex on the beach is part of the holiday experience in Jamaica and that it is a consumer good just like the cocktail of the same name. They are aware of the mechanisms of the non-place. Most display a rather racist attitude that seems to be typical of this transaction, probably fuelled by the legacy of colonialism. Above all, they highlight that the experience is based on illusion and fantasy, but that it is never more than that: the compliments are fake, they are part of a script, and the white women express their appreciation with cash – real feelings cannot be found on either

side. Nevertheless, there are various instances in which characters break out of the non-place. They may consciously breach the silent contract and behave inappropriately or involuntarily misunderstand the mechanisms. Some characters even try to make an (anthropological) place out of the non-place. They intend to change Jamaica and the Negril beach into a location that holds meaning for them, a place that they can use as a reference point for their lives.

The first example is Kitty's failure to take Sly's compliments and actions for what they are: for goods that she has to pay for. Although she was intent on not falling for the beach boys' tricks at the beginning of the play, her resolve vanishes. She starts to believe in the illusion of genuine love between herself and the beach boy Sly. She tells the other women that "[she] think[s] that Sly's the one for [her]" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 88); Kitty has built her own fantasy of starting a real family with Sly in Jamaica. By rejecting her role as pure customer and claiming authenticity of feelings, she detaches herself from the non-place that impedes stable and authentic relations. However, a thorough disengagement only seems possible, if the other person reciprocates it. Sly wants to remain in the client-gigolo relationship though. He uses the positive features of the non-place for his advantage. He emancipates himself at least from the supposed inferior position due to his skin colour by stressing the consumerist character of his relation to Kitty. When she tries to hurt him by calling him a "prostitute"(119), he effectively shows her how naive she is by explaining the nature of their transaction and exposing their love as a pure illusion fed by his need for money and her need for intimacy:

> SLY. And how am I suppose to respec' a gyal like you? You tink me a savage, a house slave. You look at me and you is jealous of my skin, but glad you is white. You tink you is superior.
> KITTY. I am superior because you're nothing more than a prostitute.
> SLY. And you is jus' a client. You hab to pay for each lickle second me spend wid you. Every lickle compliment costs. One cent for every step me tek wid you, every footprint in the sand. One dollar for me to say you is lookin' good; five dollars when me say me care for you. You pay for every kiss, every whisper, every stroke, every fuck. How empty your life mus' be Kitty when you hab to pay smaddy to say a lickle sweetness to you. (119,120)

Sly addresses the racial prejudices and exposes Kitty's racist attitude as one major aspect dominating their relation. Even more significant is his description of the non-place of consumption. The gigolo refers to his silent price list: Every compliment and touch costs a few cents or even dollars. The reference to money is something extraordinary. Lorna Martin describes the real-life situation as follows: "There seems

to be a mutual but tacitly agreed deception at the heart of the gigolo-client relationship. Payment is rarely mentioned because this would shatter the illusion that she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen and he has fallen desperately in love with her" (par. 10). In *Sugar Mummies* Sly shatters this illusion on purpose, because Kitty has lost herself in it. He acknowledges his profession and shows her her place in the transaction: she is no more than a client. He also raises the question whether a customer's life is empty, if she has to resort to paying for sexual and intimate services in the first place.

Interestingly enough, another character voices the dream of starting a new life by fostering a love relationship. It is not a female tourist like Kitty, but a Rastafarian. Reefie "want[s] to grow old with [Yolanda]" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 107). It is a plan that would enable both characters to break away from the non-place. Despite their mutual feelings for each other, they remain close to an admittedly rather respectful gigolo-client relationship though. Yolanda accuses Reefie of being unable "to hold on to people" (110), which arguably does not make a stable basis for a love relationship. There is another, even more significant obstacle for Reefie's dream of quitting his profession and living with Yolanda: The American woman is married and is not prepared to leave her husband (109), not for a man she does not trust completely (108).

Two actual breaches of the mute contract behind the trade of pleasure can be exemplified by turning to the pairing of Antonio and Maggie. The young Jamaican boy cannot fulfill his client's expectations. He is not able to perform (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 61) and tries to find excuses and new compliments to stay in Maggie's good (and profitable) graces. Nevertheless, he is clearly incapable of playing his assigned role of gigolo properly. Therefore, Maggie is left as an unsatisfied customer. Instead of trying to solve the problem with a complaint, she takes matters into her own hands and adopts violent measures. She wants to exert power over the boy: She ties him to a tree and whips him (63, 67). Maggie also insults him by pointing out his role as gigolo. She accuses him of "taking advantage of innocent tourists" […] [and] taking [their] money, making [them] buy […] drinks [and] food"(64). Natalie Bennett interprets this scene as an "overt reference[…] to slavery – the whipping, the 'unsayable' insults – [even] seem to shoehorn a message – 'look, this is almost slavery – a replay of it!"(par. 8).(cf. Thaxter par. 2) Needless to say, Maggie's behaviour as a client is not appropriate – she does not have the right to exert such

violence against Antonio. (Whether comparable attacks are common in female sex tourism outside of fiction remains an issue of debate: Gupta claims that she was told about one similar case of a young beach boy that was tied up by tourists (*Women's Hour Broadcast* 7:22-8:06); Julie Bindel has not come across such incidents in her research (*Women's Hour Broadcast* 8:20-9.20)). Whereas Maggie takes matters into her own hands, her crime against the young boy is punished by the other Rastafarians. They exact revenge on her by slipping laxatives into her drink (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 98, 99).

Another couple represents a different ideology towards the non-place. Both Andre and Naomi intend to strengthen the location's potential for relations and avoid the emptiness and exploitation of consumerism. Andre works as a beach grill chef and dreams of becoming a "proper chef" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 44). For him, this is a job in which he can apply his talents and maybe even add his personal creativity. Andre rejects the work as a beach boy/prostitute, although it would be more lucrative for him than his actual job in the hotel – Reefie can afford to buy part of a glass-bottom boat (58). The reasons he gives for his repudiation of playing boyfriend and lover for female tourists are significant with regard to racial stereotypes and morality. Although many white women ask for his services, he does not oblige. He says that "[he] cyan sleep with dem mampi, ugly 'oman" (53). Andre alludes to two crucial factors in that statement. First, he admits that he cannot even pretend to find most of the female tourists attractive. Secondly, and most importantly, he rejects the myth of "black men being hypersexual and unable to control their sexuality [which] enables [the women] to explain to themselves why such young and desirable men would be eager for sex with older and/or overweight women, without having to think that their partners are interested in them only for economic reasons" (Sanchez Taylor and O'Connell Davidson quoted in Bindel, *Economic Aid* par.11). He presents himself as a man who wants to consciously choose his lover. Self-respect is important for Andre, which would be impossible for him, if he worked as a prostitute.(Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 53,54) For Andre and his mother Angel, working as a gigolo equals selling one's soul.(70) Andre extends his negative attitude towards the commodifying practice of the non-place of consumption. He refuses to be regarded as a good for sale. He even feels betrayed and offended, when Naomie proposes to pay for Andre's diploma course at the catering school in Kingston.(93) Having his own father as a bad example, Andre only sees her offer as part of a transaction that requires him

to provide certain services in return for her generosity; he considers it as selling himself.(93,94)[40]

Naomie is a crucial character in Gupta's play with regard to her position to Jamaica. Her father is Jamaican.(Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 43,44) Hence, her journey to the holiday resort is not so much a vacation as a trip to trace her, as Peter Billingham puts it, "cultural and ethnic roots" (246), and to discover some clues about her identity. She hopes to find her father and get to know the country in which she was born better. When she discusses her origins with the locals, Angel gives her valuable advice: "If you want to see the real Jamaica, find your roots, dat sort ting – jus' gwan. Travel around. Go to the Blue Mountains and Port Antonio. Go to Ocho and Black River. Drink de islan' up wid your eyes. Plenty beautiful tings to see here. And good people. Not everybody after your money. Not everybody hustlin'. (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 86) Angel implies that everything inside the holiday resort is fake. The blue sea, the white sand, the cocktail bars and the beach boys are a mere backdrop and do not tell much about the country itself. Angel mentions a few localities that are more typical of Jamaica. She recommends places that are still pristine places and have not fallen completely into the clutches of mass tourism. She promises Naomie that she will find natural beauty there. Above all, she claims, one can also find people who are not corrupted by the non-place of consumption in such places. Angel draws attention to a darker aspect of Jamaican life as well: "Real Jamaica no different from anywhere else. Everyone suffrin' – lookin' for the next dollar. [...] Dem yout' earn more selling ganja on de beach than workin' as a grill chef"(86). The 48-year-old woman is talking about the poverty on the island, which she does not consider as anything special or exclusive to her home country. She alludes to the fact that one can earn more money in shady business enterprises than with honest work. According to several articles, this description may be considered as quite accurate and authentic. Both Lorna Martin and Kathryn Knight highlight the low wages that local people earn, when they work as hotel staff, and show that it is more lucrative to play guides for rich tourists and sell drugs and/or sex.(Martin par. 9, Knight par. 24) In the play, Naomie takes Angel's advice. She looks for her father and intends to explore areas where unspoiled nature still prevails.(Gupta, *Sugar*

[40] Andre and Naomie can enjoy their happy ending, however. They agree on a deal: Naomie lends her money to him and Andre will pay her back, when he has completed his education. (111) This deal enables them to explore their friendship and growing feelings for each other without the fear of deception due to money issues.

Mummies 92) Naomie, as she often claims herself, is different from the average women that come to Jamaica for a holiday and sex (30, 112). She does not intend to indulge in the non-place. Quite to the contrary, she is on her own mission, so to speak, to reclaim Jamaica as a place with history and reinforce her personal relations with the country. She is also looking for authentic personal relations, a true friendship that is not sullied by purely economic concerns.

6. Illusions of proximity – non-places of mass communication and diffusion

Flying to foreign and exotic places is a dashing means of getting there. Nevertheless, there are even faster ways of establishing contact with faraway locations. One can phone people from the other side of the globe, for instance. A call can be made via the internet as well; webcams actually allow for face-to-face interaction. An even more comfortable way of observing other peoples' lives and foreign places – be it real ones or fictional ones – is to turn on the TV. People who have a penchant for acoustic pleasures might prefer the radio; music by artists from all over the world is featured there.

All these communication and broadcasting tools create and form part of a virtual space, which ought to be defined as promoting proximity and distance at the same time. It is a space for simulation of experiences that allows for anonymity and identity play, which are employed in several of the chosen plays.

Investigating Neil LaBute's career as a writer and movie director, it is not surprising that he incorporates other media into his plays. In *Nurse Betty*, a movie from 2000 starring Renée Zellweger, he explores the boundaries between fiction and reality portraying a heroine who loses herself in the fake world of her favourite TV soap, for instance. In both chosen plays he does not go that far. Nevertheless, references to music culture and television are part of the world and the characters that the playwright presents to the reader. Music and international stardom is an essential ingredient of the holiday experience in Gupta's *Sugar Mummies* as well. The icon Bob Marley is part of the island's attractions. Jamaica would not be the same Jamaica without this famous musician. Many of the songs in Stephens' *T5* can almost be heard playing in one's head during the reading process, as they are quite well-known.[41] The British playwright uses music in *Wastwater* as well, but not to such a great extent as in the monologue. There are only a few references to classical pieces and pop albums. It focuses on other forms of media, which exude the aura of supermodernity more adequately. The triptych offers a crucial insight into the virtual spaces of television and, above all, the World Wide Web. Interestingly enough, the comparatively oldest of the chosen plays, Marber's *Closer*, dedicates a whole scene to the virtual world of the internet, the 'youngest' of the technical inventions

[41] In the actual production Meg Fraser intones the music. There are even more sung parts than in the written version. (*T5* production video)

connected to the non-places of communication and diffusion. Dan and Larry, the two male protagonists, meet in an online chat room.

6.1. Broadcast sounds

6.1.1. An ode to meaningful music – paratextual notes

The plays' major themes connected to place fall almost exclusively into the categories of consumption and circulation. Hence, the obvious parts of their paratext play with these topics. Music is neither featured in the titles nor the cover images overtly.[42] The only playwright who employs music, or rather cultural references, to introduce his play is Neil LaBute. He utilises a quote from the song 'Smells like Teen Spirit' by Nirvana as one of two mottoes for *The Distance from here*. It is an iconic piece of popular music that implies the lack of movement and progress through its association with a disinterested and disillusioned youth generation. Due to that general connection with space, place and mobility it has already been discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Personal confessions in interviews and an investigation of an author's oeuvre ought to be a valuable starting point, at least with regard to Simon Stephens, as music is an integral part of many of his plays. The playwright himself admits that "music runs through all of [his] plays"(*In Conversation*, 8:10-8:15). The fascination with the acoustic form of art goes back to his youth. Stephens confesses that he has always been into music.(7:42-7:47) Hence, it is not surprising that this passion influences his theatre. One may only think, for instance, of *Punk Rock*, whose title is a clear reference to a musical genre. During the programme *In Conversation with Simon Stephens*, the author talks about one of the plays chosen for this thesis specifically. He reveals one aspect of the composition of *T5*: "The monologue [...] is kind of pattered with song lyrics" (7:57-8:02). Dominic Hill, the director of this piece, elucidates the ideas behind that method in more detail. He claims that in a talk with the playwright, Stephens discussed the creation process and a crucial inspiration of the incorporation of numerous little snippets of lyrics. Hill explains that Stephens

[42] Two more entertaining apostilles: First, the play's title is actually a minor form of plagiarism: Marber "t[ook] his title from the second album of the introspective beat group Joy Division" (Saunders 6). Secondly, the title of the play is often used as a title for pop-singles as well. A brief (non-professional) Google-search reveals a few bands and artists, who chose 'Closer' for their compositions – i.e. Ne-Yo, Kings of Leon, Nine Inch Nails and Dido.

constantly listened to music on his walkman, or more probably – as he is a man of the 21st century – his iPod, while he wrote *T5*.(Rehearsal 1:50-1:57) Maybe some of the more recognisable and remarkable bits of song have found their way into the drama's text in that way. Hill explains that Stephens intended the song parts as a means of "punctuat[ing] the [dramatic] piece"(2:08-2:12). What is always of considerate interest is the director's own interpretation. It is a comment on the playwright's success in this endeavour. Dominic Hill feels that sometimes the connection between the song and the action in the play is quite clear, sometimes it is not.(2:12-2:20) Unfortunately, he does not provide concrete examples from the text. Therefore, the readers/the audience have to decide for themselves whether Stephens attains his ambitious goal. In the rehearsal video, Hill mentions one other aspect connected to music. It is linked to the way it is perceived. He refers to a talk with Simon Stephens, in which the playwright drew attention to the fact that "most songs that people listen to in Europe are in a foreign language [...]; actually, [...] lots of people [...] don't really know what they are listening to"(3:03-3:12). The majority of the most successful pop songs is sung in English, which may not be every listener's mother tongue. Consequently, many people cannot understand the lyrics, the songs become mere tunes. One might argue that this thesis does not only apply to persons who do not speak English (or the respective language a piece of music is sung in) at all. Many do not pay undivided attention to the songs; the music becomes only a background noise. In either case, if the listener is not conscious of the lyric's meaning, pop songs lose part of their potential to build relations and their connection to the world, in which they are based. Hence, they increasingly show qualities related to non-place.[43] To conclude, Dominic Hill provides an interpretation for the songs that strongly connects them to place or rather to a separation from non-place: The production's director reads them as part of the protagonist's detachment, as one step towards a total disengagement from the world around her (2:20-3:00). He claims that the female protagonist "starts [...] thinking about what songs mean for the first time, what the lyrics actually mean" (2:33-2:44). This consciousness transforms them from mere tunes into pieces of music that might activate relations and identification.

[43] What both Stephens and Hill do not even include is the commercial aspect of music, which links it to non-places as well. Often it is more important that songs are easy on the ear. A catchy melody or the artists' fame tends to be a firmer guarantee for success than demanding lyrics.

6.1.2. A literary chorus – musicality and complexity through sounds and references

The actual texts of the plays are more revealing than the paratexts with regard to music. With the exception of Marber's *Closer*, there are references to popular songs or classical pieces in all the chosen plays at the very least. As the examples are rather concrete and only scarce, their use and their connection with non-place shall be dealt with in this sub-chapter.

The most striking employment of music in Stephens' *Wastwater* is the reference to the 'Habanera' from Bizet's famous opera *Carmen*, an aria in which love is compared to a rebellious bird. It is one compositional element that connects the individual parts; it may also be an allusion to the unstable nature of relationships and the impossibility of forcing someone into genuine feelings. In part one, Harry sings the opening of the Habanera to himself, according to the stage directions (3). In two, it is Lisa who intones this piece (27). In part three, different kinds of music are mentioned in the text proper. Sian mentions that Jonathan bought "the second Arctic Monkeys album, a decision which [she] find[s] frankly bewildering"(52), when she gives him an exact record of what he did that day. One of her test questions for the future adoptive father revolves around music as well. Jonathan answers it after some thought. He claims that "'Music for the End of Time' by Messiaen" (54) is his favourite musical piece. Sian asks Jonathan why it matters to him. His reply proves that he has considerable background information about that piece and is well aware of its meaning: He appreciates it not only because of its beautiful melody, but also because "[i]t moves [him] that it was written entirely for the instruments that were available to [the artist] in the camp where he was imprisoned" (54). This awareness of the historical dimension marks a curious transformation: the piece of music holds meaning and a potential for relating to it; it approaches the characteristics of anthropological place (, even though it is not a place in the strict geographical sense).

The exact opposite is portrayed in the second part of the triptych of *Wastwater*. Stephens has his characters switch on the radio in the closing moments in order to make the atmosphere more relaxing. The background music is intended to set the scene for the planned, adulterous intimacies between Lisa and Mark. "*It [=the radio] plays very uplifting commercial pop music*"(41). In contrast to the other passages of the whole play, neither an artist nor a song title is specified. The only qualities that are mentioned are the song's commercial value and its presumably easy and

outwardly beautiful melody. The lack of precise background information and the association with consumer culture deny the characters (and the readers) the possibility of identifying with and relating to the song. The music is devoid of meaning, actually. Above all, it is replaceable; it can easily be interchanged with any piece of music that creates a feel-good atmosphere, a tune that glosses over complex and difficult interpersonal relations.[44]

Music comes up as a topic of conversation in one of LaBute's one-act plays as well. In 'bench seat' the male character thinks about a certain song and quotes it: "Breaking up is hard to do"; he even starts to sing it to the girl (*autobahn* 20). As she is not sure whether she recognises the song, the guy explains that it was very popular when his parents were young and that it can be found on a compilation like "Power Ballads" (20, 21). The song title sounds like an aphorism. The readers/the audience may know the song though. It is most probably Neil Sekada's 'Breaking up is hard to do', a song which the artist originally (and quite successfully) released in the 1960ies; a different version of the song made it into the charts in 1975 (Viglione). The discography for that song is extremely elaborate – there are numerous compilations featuring love songs and ballads among that list (Viglione). The top positions in the charts and the fact that it is part of so many collections mark the song as a highly commercial one. These features may be considered typical of its link to non-place. Nevertheless, the employment of this stereotypical love song has another dimension of meaning to it. It might function as a metatextual comment on the one-act play's content. 'Bench seat' actually deals with the difficulties of ending a relationship. Hence, the song title may be read as a motto or even a synopsis of this piece in the cycle. As the ballad is related to the characters and their actions, it moves out of the realm of non-places.

In *The Distance from here* there is another direct reference to music. Jenn receives a CD by The Cult from Tim (LaBute, *Distance* 36). It is not only a music album though. First, it alludes to the often criminal hobbies of the main characters. Tim explains that "Darrell swiped it"(36). Stealing objects is one way of passing time, when there is no meaningful way of spending time available to the young people. Therefore, this layer of meaning ought to be connected to the boredom, emptiness

[44] The substitutability of the background music is probably an aspect that is even more prominent in the written text than in the stage production. The director has to choose an actual piece of music, which may trigger off associations.

and the lack of opportunities that dominates the protagonists' lives. Secondly, the CD serves as a present, which might be interpreted as a token of Tim's feelings for Jenn. Making the record a gift to the girl may be read as a clumsy attempt to show her that he cares about her. In either case, music is not simply introduced as a pure non-place. In LaBute's play, the record is loaded with multi-faceted meanings.

Gupta's play *Sugar Mummies* focuses on one famous artist, to wit, on Bob Marley. Various references show what a massive impact Marley's life and music have on Jamaica and in what ways he can be considered as a national icon. One minor example of his fame's scope is that the marijuana is named after him; Sly tries to sell weed to Naomie on the beach, namely "Bob Marley cones" (Gupta, *Sugar Mummies* 20). The musician's influence on the homogenised concept of Jamaican culture is alluded to in the choice of music for the beach party as well. The secondary text reveals that "*loud reggae music is playing*"(42) in order to evoke the right vibes and make the night a spectacle for the paying tourists. One may even insert a famous piece by Marley himself. On the outside, it appears to be authentic music which supports the feeling of (anthropological) place. Later in the play, the authenticity of the national icon Bob Marley is called into question. First, an enlightening discussion among the beach boys offers several direct references to the reggae legend and his fame. Antonio notes that "[t]he milk bottles dem like Bob Marley"(56). He even thinks about claiming kinship with the musician as an illegitimate child to make himself more attractive and impress both the other beach boys and probably also the white tourists: "My ma said she slep' with [Marley] once" (56). Andre sees through him and stresses the impossibility of Antonio's thesis. The young man cannot be Marley's son, as he was born after the musician's death.(56) Although Antonio's claim of being related to Marley is only a crafty means of self-representation and improving his image, it insinuates several crucial aspects with regard to the non-place of music. The fact that Antonio intends to amaze his friends by boasting with a blood relation to Marley shows that the musician is a well-respected artist in Jamaica. However, his fame does not cease at the borders. Bob Marley is a person with international fame. He himself, his songs and his Jamaican roots are renowned in the whole world. Therefore, many people strongly associate him with the country and its culture. He is one of the faces of the nation. By recognising Marley and his music, or rather their mental picture of both, as something familiar and as something they fancy, Western tourists may feel closer to Jamaica and the locals. Hence, Antonio is probably right

when he asserts that the milk bottles like Bob Marley and his epigones. Interestingly enough, it is Andre who incorporates the musician's international fame into his dream of the future as well during his conversation with Naomie. He tells her that he imagines himself as a famous chef presenting his culinary compositions. He acts this fantasy out for the girl: "Hi, this is Andre Marley live in Paradise, showing you how to make crab soufflé"(45). When Naomie asks him whether Marley is his real name, he negates that, but issues a noteworthy comment: "No. But it sound good. And I could grow me some dreads and skank it up while I cook jam" (45). The surname of Jamaica's most famous musician does not only sound 'good', but it probably sounds familiar to the masses. Due to the recognition of the name a process of association will be triggered off. To strengthen the connection Andre intends to imitate Marley's style, especially growing quintessential dreadlocks and smoking marijuana. To complete his performance for Naomie (and the readers/the audience), Andre "*sings a chorus of Bob Marley's 'Jammin'*"(46). Although Andre's show of his imaginary future as a celebrity chef is more a means of entertaining Naomie than a serious idea, it alludes to similar factors as the discussion among the beach boys does. A young Jamaican man would probably benefit from an association with the successful and famous musician established via a shared surname. People all over the world are more likely to recognise him due to this affiliation with the Jamaican icon. Hence, Andre's imaginary cook show may be read as a second instance that questions Bob Marley's status as an authentic Jamaican person. It rather suggests that the musician has become an image, an idolised figure that stands for a relaxed way of life. Furthermore, Elaine Aston stresses Marley's affiliation with "the One Love anti-racist, liberation discourse"(189). In other words, the mediated representation of Bob Marley highlights his success and his 'hassle-free attitude', which may easily be oversimplified as typical of the Jamaican culture. One has to bear in mind, though, that excessive mediation is often a sign of non-place. Both instances of alluding to the possibility of profiting from Bob Marley's fame by association with the musician himself may be read as exposing the constructed nature of this image. The discourse of liberation and a relaxed way of life are revealed as a pure fantasy, as a fantasy propagated by both the music and the tourist industry. Thereby, a feature that supposedly belongs to the anthropological place of Jamaica is closely linked to non-place in Gupta's play. What is revealed, though, is that by reiterating the image of the

laid-back Jamaicans to the tourists, real economic problems are concealed (see also Aston 189).

6.2. Broadcast sounds and images

6.2.1. The TV set as a piece of (home) furniture or the noisy intrusion of non-place

Most of the chosen plays are not exclusively set in the open or at least public space that is often connected with non-place. Nevertheless, private homes are not portrayed as pure anthropological places in the pieces either. The private rooms are opened to the outside world and to mediated images via gadgets that allow for one-sided contact with people from different countries or social spheres. An almost iconic apparatus that makes it possible to see and hear, or almost experience, international stars, for instance, is the TV set. It has found its way into the family home and influences the inhabitants' lifestyles.

Deducing from the secondary text of Neil LaBute's *The Distance from here*, a television set is an integral piece of furniture in the protagonists' home. When the family living room is introduced to the reader, the stage directions immediately reveal that there is a "*TV in the corner, on and loud*" (LaBute, Distance 19). That specific gadget is mentioned as well as part of the scenery in every other passage of the play that is set in the interior of Darrell's family home (37; 53; 77; 97; 119).[45] What is striking is the frequency of references to the television set in the stage directions alone. It seems to take centre stage over other pieces of furniture and objects of family life. Apart from the considerable amount of citations, the 'how' of its introduction stands out as well. The way the television set is presented is quite remarkable, because the preparatory passages of the relevant scenes resemble each other in expression and content. The first time the TV set is mentioned (see quote above), the gadget is 'on and loud'. When the action returns from the mall bus stop to the family's living room, "*[t]he TV is blaring a game show*" (37). Later, the "*TV [is still] turned on*" (53). Several scenes after that, the living room is again filled with the sounds of the "*TV blasting with a rerun of Walker: Texas Ranger*" (77)[46]. Twenty

[45] The stage part that represented the living room was indeed "dominated by the television [(] and the sofa [)]" (Loveridge par. 4) in the London production in May 2002.

[46] This passage includes a cultural reference to an American TV series starring action hero Chuck Norris. With regard to place, it might make the play more authentic, as it roots the action in the real

pages later, the action is once more set in the living room, which has not changed much. The "*TV [is] still on and loud*" (97). There is hardly any alteration in the stage directions of the last scene set in the interior of the family home. As for the telly, it is "*still noisy, this time with a World War II picture*" (119). Those descriptions have several significant aspects in common. First, in all the scenes in the living room, the television is turned on. It seems as if the patch-work family needs the telly as a background for their private life. Secondly, almost every reference alludes to the sounds and noises of the gadget that is apparently never switched off, in other words, permanently going. The particular sounds are evaluated by the use of certain verbs and adjectives like 'loud', 'noisy', 'to blast' and 'to blare'. All those attributes and acoustic actions allude to a high sound intensity, which is perceived as negative, maybe even as objectionable by the entity describing the scene. It is probably quite normal for the protagonists in the diegetic world, though. Nevertheless, the focus on the turned on television set and its portrayal as only emitting disturbingly loud noises may be read as a significant comment on family life and the quality of the relationships between the protagonists. The great frequency and the negatively loaded attributes, which the stage directions ascribe to the TV, insinuate its status as a non-place that hinders relation. To be more precise, a television set that is constantly turned on compels people's attention. They watch the broadcast pictures and listen to its noises that almost drown out any other sound; in a stage production they might quite literally do so. Sounds that may be more important for affirming the home's potential of strengthening interpersonal relationships – conversations – are predominated by the cacophony of TV programmes. First, the intrusion of the non-place of television into the family via the permanent exposure to media images is one factor that leads to a dysfunction of the family (see also Fehle 160, 161). Secondly, it may be linked to a subject that has been addressed earlier in the thesis: The TV can be interpreted as a sign of an adherence to materialist culture just like the car or the other objects that are portrayed on the cover image. Its importance as a status symbol links it with the non-place of consumption as well.

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world. Another important aspect is the potential of gender identification between viewers and the male movie icon, which cannot be discussed further, as it is not central to this thesis's focus.

6.2.2. A manual for the small screen – assets and dangers of the non-place of TV

The television set is used as a piece of furniture (and more) in a slightly different type of room than the family home as well: The second part of Simon Stephens' triptych *Wastwater* is set at an airport hotel near Heathrow. To provide some evidence for the apparatus' significance, the description of the hotel room shall be quoted: "*It's a modern, rather beautiful room. It has a large bed. There is a large, plasma- screen television. A large screen for a computer. A digital radio.*" (Stephens, *Wastwater* 20) The first object that is mentioned is, not surprisingly at all, a bed. It is necessary in a hotel room, as guests have to be provided with a facility to sleep in. What is more remarkable, though, is the second item on the list of essential pieces of equipment: it is a television set – one with a fashionable 'plasma-screen'. Beside the bed, the TV, the computer screen and a radio are probably the first items that are perceived by the hotel guests immediately after entering the room. The stage directions' focus on these particular devices may be interpreted as a representative portrayal of the expansion of non-places of communication and medial distribution in the contemporary world. It is quite telling that those appliances are regarded as indispensable to hotel guests. It shows that people have developed a kind of dependency on these technical tools; they want to have them at their disposal, regardless of where they are. The setting of the second part of *Wastwater* actually shows quite a peculiar situation: the room at the airport hotel, which is closely connected to the non-place of travelling, is dominated by various other tokens of a different kind of non-place. In other words, the location is doubly marked with regard to that particular spatial concept that is sometimes considered as impeding relations due to its nature. Nevertheless, there is a slight difference between the ways the television set is utilised in LaBute's *The Distance from here* and Stephens' play. Stephens' portrait of the non-place is not a purely bleak one, to put it plainly. The playwright has his characters address the issue of hotel room furniture as part of the initial small talk intended to relax both the characters before the planned adulterous adventure. Mark describes the thoughts he has at entering: "I like the way that the television welcomes you to your room" (22). In this comment, the protagonist regards the telly as something that has the potential to invite people into a room, to make them feel welcome, maybe even at home, which appears to be a rather positive attitude towards it. Like the stage directions, such a comment implies that the gadget

is an integral and required part of the comforts provided for hotel guests. However, Stephens has his characters slightly modify this praise of the TV set by stressing the peculiarity of its central status both in the room and in the guests' esteem.

Mark observes that in the airport hotel room

> [one] can watch television from the shower. They arrange it so the inside of the room means that wherever you stand you can see the television. Probably, the people who come here feel so lonely that they need the television to remind them that there's a world outside and things are happening and they're not, you know, alone. (22)

He explains that a TV set is often positioned in a way that one can look at its screen, regardless of where exactly one is in the room. It is, so to speak, the idiot box that apparently dictates the arrangement of furnishings. The array of other rooms, pieces of furniture and bathroom facilities like the shower seems like a carefully planned orchestration oriented towards the television set. Such a comment may be interpreted as an allusion to television as a new form of religion, as the central position of the electronic device is reminiscent of that of an altar in a church. This sacred object is also intended to be in full view for each member of the large congregation of believers. Mark actually continues with the telly's psychological significance for the hotel guests. He thinks that they are often dependent on the television set in a hotel room. They turn to the familiar gadget in foreign surroundings for comfort. To be more precise, they seek an assurance that they are not alone. In the function as a comforter, the television does not only invite guests into the room, but also into the outside world, which is transmitted via images and sounds. The TV is again likened to a spiritual entity, namely to one that offers solace, in the protagonist's comment. The machine provides the consolation that one is close to other people and not alone through its pictures and sounds. The fact that people seek the specific reassurance that they are not isolated from that machine and not directly from the source – the other people – is somewhat paradoxical. It is probably an insinuation that a valid opening to the wide world via the television is, to a great extent, an illusion, an illusion of unity and intimacy with the persons and places shown in the TV programmes. Lisa's contribution to the discussion may be read as a cautionary note on the use of the TV as well. She adds to Mark's observations that "[the guests] always have the news on. If you watch it for too long they repeat the same stories, but every time they repeat a story they present it like it's the first time you're seeing it and you start to feel like you're going a bit mad" (23). The female

character presumes that most of the people staying at the hotel turn on the news. She highlights the way these programmes are made: The same old stories are recycled and presented as something new. In this comment, Lisa points out the main problem of mediation: it has considerable influence on the content due to selection, which empties it of (part of) its meaning or even changes its original sense. What may be deduced from this comment is that it is important to develop a conscious way of using the non-place of television. Although the concept of an informed consumption of TV programmes is not fully implemented in the play, the portrayal of the television is not as condemning as in LaBute's piece *The Distance from here.* In the scene in *Wastwater*, it even helps Lisa and Mark to establish a common ground for a conversation.

A brief, closing glimpse at LaBute's short-play cycle *autobahn* shows that the playwright should not be considered as a radical moraliser who preaches against television and its devastating effects on family life and personal relations – a stance that is suggested by the desolation associated with the permanently turned on telly in the stage directions of *The Distance from here*.[47] In the first piece of the short-play cycle *autobahn*, he employs intermedial references to movies and television in an entertaining and possibly metatextual way. They are interwoven into the story of the journey home from the rehabilitation clinic. The daughter tells her mother about watching "an old black-and-white movie on the TV [in the rec room]" (LaBute, *autobahn* 8). She does not know its title – research suggests that it is *The Postman always rings twice* of 1946, but is fascinated by the movie's setting. The film's action revolves around "a roadside café called the same thing [as the rehabilitation centre]: Twin Oaks" (9): The setting of the movie is paralleled with the setting of the prior history of the diegetic content of the play by its name. The daughter also refers to the movie's plot (9, 12, 13). It is a movie where past crimes catch up with the protagonists, even though the court could not prove their guilt initially. As a reader one might wonder whether the daughter gets away with continuing her drug abuse. The cultural reference may be a device of teasing the reader/audience by foreshadowing events that are left open in the play. One will never know whether the daughter will meet a similar fate as the protagonists of *The Postman always rings*

[47] The fact that LaBute may take a critical, but never completely hostile attitude towards television is also connected to his personal career as a writer and director: He profits from the broadcast of his movies on the small screen as well as on the big screen.

twice. Apart from the playful and not fully implemented metatextual potential of the cultural reference to the black-and-white movie, there is another function. It is used to illustrate and question stereotypes with regard to the relation between the generations. Initially, the presupposed prejudice of young people towards old classics and TV programmes lacking colour is voiced by the daughter. She explains to her mother: "[Y]ou know me, right? I usually run the other way when you and Dad are watching that crap, *Gone With the Wind* or whatever, I'm outta there" (8,9). She basically asserts that old movies are for old people and that they are not an appropriate choice for a family movie evening. To put it more general, young people do not seem to be able to relate to black-and-white movies as well as the older generation, they remain in the realm of non-places for them. The stereotype that traditional movie classics are just 'crap' from the point of view of adolescents is challenged by the girl's story, though, in LaBute's play. It is an almost ancient piece from 1946 that the young woman relates to; granted her mind is expanded by drugs. Still, the daughter's enthusiasm and fascination for it allude to the movie's meaning to her.

6.3. Communication and the WWW

6.3.1. A (small) paratextual window into the virtual world – questioning closeness

The most typical representatives of the information and communication era have not been addressed yet – mobile phones, computers and, above all, the internet. As hinted in the introductory section to this chapter, those tools are an integral part of the majority of the chosen plays. Although they are so important for the texts, and certainly for the period of supermodernity, they are not specifically dealt with in the narrow paratexts of the books. Only one play's title may be read as an ironic comment on the major pledges of the virtual world. *Closer* to each other is what people who use the world wide web, email programmes and chat rooms want to feel. They expect the internet's promises of intimacy and immediateness to be fulfilled when they turn on their machines and contact persons sitting behind a similar screen even in a faraway location.

Nevertheless, the title is probably intended to be more general and not exclusively as a statement on the era of mass media and mass communication. It postulates closeness and thereby raises the readers'/audiences' expectations of a play that

plays with relationships and various forms of nearness and distance; with spatial constellations in a broad sense, a fact that is also addressed in Kate Kellaway's review of the play:

> Closer is an excellent title for a play: a single word that seems to have dropped out of a sentence; the other words that should surround it are missing. Closer to what? Closer to whom? The word is a clue to the content of a play in which love is not unlike hide-and-seek. The lover searches, gets warmer, but will never quite find what he or she seeks. In this play intimacy is a struggle and love relative. (par.1)

6.3.2. Technical toys as part of the supermodern furnishings

The majority of rooms in the chosen plays exhibit a collection of furniture and equipment, including technological paraphernalia typical of the contemporary world that may be considered as belonging to the non-places of communication and diffusion. The almost old-fashioned television set has already been mentioned in that context, but has to be kept in mind still. In many of the pieces trendier gadgets such as mobile phones or computers are put into the spotlight, though, which are presented in a similar way. They are introduced as integral parts of supermodern rooms, be it a hotel room or one of the protagonists' private homes. These gadgets are, as their frequent use suggests, representative of the present-day lifestyle. They have become, as the texts imply, de rigueur in people's professional as well as in their private routines. This general trend shall be traced in the plays' texts by providing concrete examples. In the initial phase, the focus is to be on the secondary text, as it is the main source of information about the settings and the characters' physical appearance and actions.

To begin with, the mobile phone is a minor, but indispensable tool for Sian in the closing part of Simon Stephens' *Wastwater*. It is her contact to the outside world, to her partner in crime (Stephens, *Wastwater* 61). Without it, she would not know whether Alain managed to get Dalisay through Immigration and could not confer with him about their plan.

The mobile phone is a frequent presence in the first part of *Wastwater* as well. The airplanes' noises are actually not the only sounds that are contrasted to the quiet and tranquillity of the greenhouse in that component of the triptych. It is most probably an annoying jingle that enunciates the receipt of a text message in regular intervals or at least the faint sound of the mobile phone's vibration that disturbs the

personal talk in the serene surroundings (Stephens, *Wastwater* 6, 8, 9, and 10); Michael Billington also reads the internet "as a conversation-killer" (par.3). In an actual stage production, the mobile phone's noises can be employed to interrupt the exchange; in the written text, the italicised stage directions are a visual barrier between the lines of the dialogue proper. According to these, the incriminating gadget belongs to Harry (6). The 22-year-old protagonist is part of the young, tech-savvy generation, who is used to the world of instant communication. This competence is proven by his actions: In a swift motion, he "*takes [his phone] out [, l]ooks at it [, t]exts something quickly [and p]uts it away*"(6, also 8, 9). Harry's every manoeuvre is to a tee, his movements are brisk and expertly. It seems as if he does not need to put much conscious effort into reading the messages and sending a reply. Moreover, as the quote and the relevant pages show, the stage directions and therefore Harry's movements are always the same; there is not even a slight variation in the secondary texts' expressions and phrases. This absolute stylistic concordance suggests that communicating in short messages is a homogenising and seemingly automated activity. Harry is likened to the robot Stephens referred to in *T5*, even though this assumption is not voiced in *Wastwater*; the mobile phone ought to be no more than a piece of equipment – at least on the surface.

It has already been mentioned that technical toys are not only part of the private living space. The airport hotel room in the second part of Stephens' triptych *Wastwater* provides evidence for the proliferation of non-places of communication and broadcasting in the (semi-)public space. There is not only a television set that awaits the guests, but also "*[a] large screen for a computer [and a] digital radio*" (Stephens, *Wastwater* 20). They are at least as important a part of the hotel's service as the minibar. Moreover, they are presumably frequently used, both in a real-life setting and in the fictional world. Lisa and Mark, the hotel guests in Stephens' play, in fact turn on all of the three gadgets. Lisa watches "BBC News 24"(39). Later, she intends to show Mark certain video-clips on the World Wide Web. Hence, "[*s]he goes to the computer [,] [t]urns it on [and] [...] goes online*"(40). Eventually, the radio is switched on too (41). Lisa and Mark open their hotel room to various non-places that are associated with virtual worlds. This theme is presented as an integral element of the hotel experience, partly because the technical tools are key elements of the room's furniture.

Patrick Marber also equips a few rooms in *Closer* (and thereby their occupants) with communication tools such as computers. As early as in scene three of the first act, "*Dan is in his flat sitting at a table with a computer*" (Marber 25). In this passage, the protagonist exploits it for his private amusement. As an author, he probably makes use of it for his profession as well. Larry, the other character present in the scene, is not at home, but at work. Nevertheless, he "*is sitting at his hospital desk with a computer*" (25). Although the male protagonists are positioned in different rooms and spheres (– home and workplace), they resemble each other in their activities. The similitude and actual synchronicity of the action is conveyed in the stage directions in quite an illustrative manner and by similar expressions. Both Dan and Larry are seated in front of a computer: Their hands are on the keyboard most of the time, typing; their eyes are directed at the screen (scene 3). It is quite a powerful visual image that is created, which may be read as an implicit comment on the non-place of the virtual world. The picture (that is painted by the words in the text and performed in a concrete production) – almost a tableau vivant – consists of the two protagonists and their respective technical tool. The men resemble each other in their posture, they often even move in the same way, which reduces their individual features. The loss of personal characteristics and the resulting relative anonymity attributed to and presupposed of the pure non-place is made visual by the focus on the synchronicity and homogeneity of their actions. Once again, as a distanced observer of the scene, one might be reminded of robots carrying out several tasks in an automated way.

6.3.3. Roles and authenticity

Many of the chosen plays introduce various non-places linked to mass media and communication, which seems to be remarkable on its own. What is even more significant is the manner of their portrayal. The authors appear to strive for authenticity and an accurate representation. A first, albeit minor clue to that aim lies in the frequency of addressing these technical tools and in the importance they are given in the whole text or at least in one scene. Secondly, the actions described in the often quite detailed stage directions provide further evidence for the intention of a realistic depiction. As a quick reminder, people who use mobile phones, the television set or the computer carry out typical activities, which are required of them

in order to be able to utilise them: Characters turn their gadgets on, watch a programme, go online, read messages and type texts, for instance. Those are all small actions, which may seem insignificant on the outside. Nevertheless, they are crucial for the depiction of watching TV, listening to the radio, surfing the World Wide Web, sending short messages or participating in an online chat, as they are an integral part of the usage of such devices considered as belonging to the non-places of communication and diffusion.

In the majority of cases, the content of the sent and received messages or chosen television programmes is not revealed or defined[48] – there are hardly any concrete references to the signs that are used to mediate between the person using a tool and the non-place. There is one passage that stands out, though, due to its detailed treatment of the non-place of the virtual world on several levels. It is scene three in the first act of Patrick Marber's play *Closer*. This particular scene has a double, or to be precise, triple setting. The characters sit in separate rooms, Dan is in his flat, Larry at his desk at his workplace (Marber 25). Their physical distance requires them to switch to a different kind of space to have a conversation; a third place is opened up, namely an internet chat room. Hence, the last part of the setting is the virtual world, a typical non-place. Marber focuses on this particular type of space, as almost the whole dialogue is rendered as typed text. There are only a few hints at the intrusion of the concrete, diegetic surroundings: Larry's telephone rings twice (27, 28), for example. Furthermore, he comments on typing errors ("Larry (*speaking*) Shit."(27)).

Marber's objective to portray a chat room conversation authentically is apparent. A close investigation of this scene will show that internet speech is imitated on various levels. First, the issue of content shall be addressed, as it is closely connected to the conventions of the specific non-place. Larry and Dan meet in a chat room called "LONDON FUCK" (26), which sounds like a name for an erotic dating and cyber sex portal. This context has a major impact on 'appropriate' topics of conversation: People who enter such a chat room are expected to talk openly about intimate and sexual matters – a fact that is even addressed by Dan /'Anna' in the play as a response to Larry's assertion that his chat partner is "v[ery] forward" (26): "And UR chatting on 'LONDON FUCK'" (26). It is implied that people who frequent that

[48] A minor exception is the reference to the BBC News in *Wastwater*, which at least is culturally loaded.

portal do not normally choose, for instance, birds, bees or flowers as topics for their conversations. Even the opening passages of the whole chat scene show that this is the case; the content is determined by the setting and the underlying chat etiquette – in short netiquette (Bell David 218) – of the particular portal. Dan and Larry 'flirt' and talk quite openly about sexual fantasies (Marber 28). Their initial focus is on the physical appearance of their bodies (26, 27), or rather on a construction of their bodies based on the expectations of the situation and the imagined ones of their chat partners. The intention is probably to impress the person sitting in front of the computer screen just like oneself does and get his/her attention. It is not necessary to go into more detail here, as the brief glimpses into Marber's text already showed how stereotypical the chat scene appears with regard to its content and structure. The latter can be reconstructed as follows: Both characters begin by bragging about their supposed physical assets, then, they discuss their relationship status and ask about each other's sexual fantasies. They complete their chat by the insinuation of an orgasm – at least of a pretended one – and the prospect of a meeting in real (diegetic) life. The content, which is based on the conventions of the portal, also considerably influences the language the characters use. Consequently, there are innumerable expressions and phrases that belong into the semantic field of erotica and sexual relations. Just to mention a few: the 'f-word' is even applied to name the chat room and there are frequent references with sexual connotations (i.e. "well hung" (27), "cock" (26, 28), "suck" (26), etc.) There are also numerous swearwords used as nicknames and for a characters' self-description: "Fuckboy" (27), "Sultan of Twat" (28), "bitch" (28) and "slut" (28), for example. On the whole, the language both Larry and Dan use in the scene of the play is quite explicit, which is due to the aim of portraying such an erotic chat in a typical, albeit realistic way, on the one hand. On the other hand, the focus on sex, the body and vulgarity quite possibly still has some potential to pique conservative readers/audiences. The frequency of explicit expressions probably attracts the aspired attention. Nevertheless, the profanities used for the chat scene are not the only striking aspect of the employed language. With regard to the non-place of the virtual world the imitation of internet language is far more important. Marber's play provides a meticulous portrayal of the semantic and orthographic conventions of online conversations (c.f. Wienerroither 47). He has his characters use typical and common abbreviations like "RU" (Marber 26) for 'are you', "2"(26) for 'to', "B" (27) for 'be' and "4"(29) for 'for'. An "x" (30) is also quite a

common sign; it stands for a kiss. Furthermore, internet speech is marked as an insider jargon. Larry, who chats on the particular portal for the first time and quite possibly does not indulge in this activity very frequently, is not familiar with all of its conventions. He interprets Dan's /'Anna's' "Y"(26) as a question and provides an answer. His chat partner clarifies it and tells him that it is actually meant as a "yes" (26). Daniel Rosenthal stresses that incident as well with regard to the impact of the early productions of the play by quoting the playwright himself: "This all made sense in 1997, in a world where so many people weren't yet online. Larry is an internet novice, and so were more than half the audience" (lxxii). The scrupulous reproduction of internet jargon shapes the graphic layout as well: There are more words highlighted by capital letters than in the other scenes[49]; i.e. "GET IT OUT"(27), "PARADISE SHOULD BE SHOCKING" (29), "MEET ME" (29), "HOTEL" (29). Gestures and actions (– whether they are actually carried out physically by the characters is not important –) are transformed into signs. One has to draw from the limited repertoire of symbols and letters provided by the computer programme. Agreement and questioning looks may be shortened to punctuation marks like "!" (29) and "?" (29). The (fake) orgasm is conveyed by an onomatopoetic imitation and an allusion to the loss of coherent thought, which catches the readers' attention: "ohohohohohohohohohohoho [...] ooooooooooooooooooooooooooo [...] +_)(*&^% [...] %%^^%&^% &&*&* ((* (*) &^%*((£££"(28). Once, Dan lets his gentlemanly side shine through: As 'Anna' he sends Larry flowers (30). The love token is a rose, albeit one constructed entirely from computer symbols: The blossom is represented by the following combination: (@); stem and leaves consist of an arrangement of several short lines.[50]

There is one aspect that is even more salient and emblematic in Marber's portrait of the cyber world. It is linked to the tension between the physical body and the virtual one that arises when the cyber world meets with the real world (Bell David 206). One might also refer to it as, plainly put, identity play or masquerading: in the space of the World Wide Web the possibilities of charades and disguises seem to be

[49] Marber uses capital letters, italics and underscores to stress words in the dialogue quite frequently throughout the whole play.

[50] There are variations of the computer rose symbols. Some examples are: **@>---;----** (Source: http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_do_you_make_a_rose_symbol_using_your_keyboard. 24 May 2012), **{))}>---%-----**
(Source: http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080316142736AAoDk8E.24 May 2012). For more complicated patterns see http://www.geocities.com/spunk1111/flowers.htm. 24 May 2012)

endless. Choosing a virtual alias, which can deviate from one's real identity, apparently is an integral part of that specific non-place. The more expert one is the more knowledge one has about creating a simulated character, or even an avatar, for oneself. An insider status is what allows a person to fully enjoy the liberties of the virtual world. Such a classification based on the criteria of computer literacy and expertise in the code of conduct is an essential element of online activities.

The whole theme of constructing internet personae is incorporated into the play by having the protagonist Dan pose as a woman named Anna (26)[51], quite possibly an adapted version of his object of desire, in the chat room. Saunders interprets it as "a 'fictional' Anna whom Dan can construct and manipulate as he wishes via the anonymity of the internet" (36, 37). Dan, who is portrayed as quite experienced and a 'cyberphile', is aware of the possibilities and regulations that govern online chatting. As an insider, he knows that it is accepted in the virtual world to play with one's identity. Marber allows his protagonist to be quite creative, Dan's virtual persona is a woman called Anna, who has "[d]ark hair, [a d]irty mouth [and e]pic tits ", [...] [size] 36DD" (Marber 26), a character that fits perfectly into a portal called 'FUCKING LONDON'. The novice's cyber body is quite different from that of the master, as it hardly deviates from the real life one. Larry chooses to give his actual name (26) and reveals his profession as a doctor (27) instead of finding a different excuse, when he has to end the online conversation – both elements of the protagonist's identity in the diegetic world have been established in the list of characters and the earlier scenes. (Whether his description as being well-hung is accurate, or just an adaptation to the chat portal's expectations, cannot be certified.) Nevertheless, Larry's cyber body is closer to his physical one with regard to important categories like gender, name and profession than Dan's. As an internet "newbie" (Bell David 170; 218) Larry is probably not aware of the extent of freedom granted by the non-place of the virtual world. In other words, to support the authenticity of the portrayal, Marber uses the hierarchy produced by the WWW. Dan and Larry are representatives of different categories of internet users: Dan is the expert, the insider, who consciously plays around with identity and simulation. By arranging the meeting, his intention of tricking an inexperienced conversation partner is revealed to the reader/the audience. His

[51] Saunders points towards the connection to theatre history. He claims that having a male protagonist adopt a virtual persona that is female is an act of "cross-dressing", a device "borrowed from Elizabethan theatre" (37).

inexpert (and innocent) counterpart is Larry – a typical newbie, who is not aware of all the liberties. He does not seem to know either that masquerading or cyber personae are part of the conventions of the virtual world. Hence, he is shocked, when he wants to extend the chat into the (diegetic) real world. Even though he meets an Anna, it is not the person he talked to online, who clarifies that he was talking to someone "[p]retending to *be* [her]; [...] to Daniel Woolf"(32). Anna explains to the novice, how easily one can "play around on the Net" (33).

6.4. Beyond the non-places of virtual worlds

6.4.1. Hidden layers of meaning – the protagonists' background stories

On the outside, the actions connected to the various types of non-places associated with communication and mass media seem uniform and monotonous. They appear to deprive the space as well as the characters of their individual characteristics and impede genuine relations; one might even argue that humans are likened to the machines they use. Nevertheless, this portrayal is often undermined by the dialogue and the protagonists' attitude towards their surroundings. Several examples shall illustrate instances of both emancipation from and immersion into the numerous non-places integrated into the chosen plays' settings.

On the one hand, it is true that Frieda asks Harry to "put [his mobile] phone away" (Stephens, *Wastwater* 10). Theatre critic David Benedict reads technology (in general) as an "alienating" ingredient of *Wastwater* (Review par.5), which proves true to a certain extent. Frieda probably really feels disturbed in their conversation by the other, virtual talk Harry conducts via the communication device. The short messages may be considered as a (minor) obstacle in the relationship between Frieda and her foster son. On the other hand, these messages get the readers'/audiences' attention. Harry exchanges them four times in the play, in a span of time of less than an hour (- the scene starts at 9pm (3), the bus to the airport leaves shortly before ten (4)). It seems to be a regular and quite frequent use of such a profane activity, which renders it extraordinary. What is also striking is that there is no reference at all to the content or addressee(s) of these messages. Both these aspects remain a mystery and constitute a blank in the narrative – a crucial blank: It hints at a part of Harry's personality and life which is revealed and concealed at the same time. That aspect insinuates a characterisation that individualises Harry, one that introduces him as

more than the foster son who wants his own life and more than the future passenger of an airplane.[52]

Furthermore, there are allusions to non-places and how they are used by people in their daily lives in the dialogue of the second part of Stephens' *Wastwater*, which have been discussed briefly in the section on the television set. The focus is on one specific non-place which opens up to further, different non-places, namely the airport hotel with its radios, TVs and computer screens. Mark and Lisa guess that it is probably the search for something familiar in the strange environment of that special room and a desire to feel connected to the world that is the underlying motive of letting images and sounds enter the room via various media of communication and broadcasting. This assumption is most probably an accurate one. It shows the characters' awareness of the underlying mechanisms of the non-places they talk about. Ironically, the same hypothesis may refer to the protagonists as well. In other words, Lisa and Mark are not so different from the other guests they talk about. They also long for the recognisable images and programmes on television like the BBC news. Furthermore, they intend to enjoy the relaxing music without thinking about it, probably without consciously perceiving it. It is a background sound that provides good vibes. Lisa and Mark search for the well-known in their surroundings in order to make their endeavour easier and more ordinary. They use the non-place of the airport hotel room for its anonymity and turn to gadgets that offer at least an illusion of connection to the world and, above all, familiarity and normalcy. This helps them to relax and simplifies the process of relating to each other, as their earlier confessions of past adventures, personal failures and dreams created a tense atmosphere (Stephens, *Wastwater* 23-39). Only then both can embark on a sexual adventure, which will shape their personal lives and identities. Mark's and Lisa's conscious and informed use of non-places makes interpersonal relations easier, albeit implicitly. In a similar way as in Stephens' monologue *T5*, they do not have to pay special attention to their surroundings and therefore can concentrate on each other (or on each other's body).

An exception in itself is the use of the computer in the same part of *Wastwater*, because significant pieces of information that point towards its purpose in the text are supplied to the readers/audience. There are direct references to the content of the

[52] This individualisation is supported in the text by an extended discussion of the past. (cf. Mitchell SkyArts 1 06:22-=6:30).

website Lisa and Mark look at. The whole scenery is illustrated in the stage directions: Lisa turns on the computer and "*finds a porn site. She plays a porn video. It's importantly clear that[...] it's not her in the film*" (Stephens, *Wastwater* 40). Earlier passages of the talk between Mark and Lisa (29-31), and the quoted pieces of the secondary text stress Lisa's connection to the (internet) pornography business. Even though they do not watch a movie starring the protagonist, the nature of the piece that is playing serves to characterise Lisa and present her as an individual with a history. In this case, the non-place of the virtual world is loaded with personal relations through Lisa's past.[53]

6.4.2. Challenging the idea of an egalitarian and connecting medium in Closer

Patrick Marber's play *Closer* presents a fairly ironic conversation passage: Anna and Larry discuss the internet as the medium of the future at their chance meeting after Dan's online prank, for which he posed as 'Anna' in a chat room. They voice an outstanding opinion about it, which has already been deconstructed by the earlier scene:

> ANNA. Wonderful thing, the internet.
> LARRY. Oh yes.
> ANNA. The possibility of genuine global communication, the first great democratic medium.
> LARRY. Absolutely, it's the future. (Marber 34)

Both Anna and Larry consider the World Wide Web as a liberating technology that will prevail and shape the way of people's lives. Anna even uses the adjective 'democratic', implying a new and equal power distribution by it. After the previous scene in the online chat room, this assumption has to be questioned though. The constellation of the conversation partners is a hierarchical one in the third scene of the play. Dan, as an internet wizard, holds power over the newbie Larry. He can play around and explore adopting the role of a woman, for example. Furthermore, he is lying about his intention to meet the chat partner. The second aspect that Anna mentions, global communication and therefore an extension of relations, is also undermined in the chat room scene. Graham Saunders stresses that [the] sense of human isolation is compounded [...], when even the chance of brief connection

[53] If Lisa would not have told Mark (and thereby the readers/audience) about her past as an occasional actress in productions for the online pornography industry, the porn video would remain close to the extreme of a pure non-place.

through solitary, yet simultaneous acts of masturbation are denied the men. Larry is deterred by fear of being caught at his workplace, and Dan fakes his orgasm [...] (39). Critic Jack Kroll puts it more bluntly by searching for a literary predecessor of Marber's chat room episode: "If Aristophanes had a Macintosh, he might have written this classic scene, the metaphor of emotional disconnection in a world of digital sex" (par.4).

The potential of the third scene in Patrick Marber's *Closer* to question the emancipating, levelling and deconstructing aspects of the non-place of the WWW is most clearly expressed by Christopher Wixson:

> [He highlights the fact that the] entire scene [is set] in cyberspace, a site seemingly infused with the liberating potential of democratic negotiation of identities and erotic practices. Yet, besides trading in the usual misogyny and patriarchal contradiction, th[e male protagonists'] interaction in a chat room confers no lasting satisfaction or coherence. Rather, it becomes another emblem of alienation, no help in suturing the fractured subject, anathema to an antioppressive politic. While it promises identity and desire as fluid, mobile, and irreducible to binary categories, this new world disorder cannot evade the logic of Otherness that governs how space is organized and how the self is understood. (footnote 1)

6.5. Paratextual retrospective or the difficulties of staging virtual reality

An anecdote regarding the stage production of Marber's *Closer* provides quite a remarkable comment on incorporating new technologies into theatre. The production crew had to learn the hard way that creative imagination and theatrical practice sometimes do not go together smoothly. Marber envisaged one scene as a comprised tête-à-tête in cyberspace. It was meant to be an authentic conversation held, or rather typed, in "webspeak designed to save time and effort [...], in this case to speed up the rush towards a sexual hook-up" (Rosenthal lxii,lxiii). It was intended to imitate the rapidity and immediacy of communication in the virtual world. Rumour has it, though, that the rehearsing process did not go as planned: Daniel Rosenthal reports that "the first attempts at the scene, with actors typing words on to the keyboard linked to the display screen, lasted forty minutes (lxiii). Apart from surely disgruntling and boring the audience, such a long scene would not achieve its aims. Ironically, it would actually imply the opposite. In other words, the actors' slow typing tempo seemed to ruin the authentic and envisioned portrayal of fast internet speech.

To meet theatrical needs, an artifice had to be employed to ‘save’ the performance. Daniel Rosenthal describes the solution to the problem, which is in fact a technical trick: “A special software program was developed by Paul Groothius of the National Theatre’s sound department so that as soon as an actor began to type, one of the stage management team hit a key and the program instantly ran out the next line of dialogue”(Rosenthal lxiii). Groothius’ electronic finesse shortened the scene considerably; the staging took approximately six minutes then (Rosenthal lxiii). It was only technical magic that moulded the theatrical performance into what it was intended to be: a gripping, magical journey into the virtual world that would both entertain and make audiences think.

Although the difficulty of performing the scene in the online chat room is only a minor and more entertaining than serious anecdote, it alludes to a significant issue. Plays are normally intended to be staged. There are certain limitations to the theatrical practice in general, a fact that Neil LaBute addresses in his introduction to *autobahn*, for instance, and dramaturgical principles that have to be observed. Rehearsals for *Closer* showed that a performance of the chat-scene in real-time with its duration of approximately forty minutes would breach length conventions. A trick had to be found in order to meet the expectations dictated by theatrical standards. Without the development of special software, the performance probably would not have worked well. Non-places enhance and extend the world; they are often connected to movement, speed and distance. These are categories that appear to be hard to capture in the medium of the theatre with its comparatively small and fixed stage. Such spatial as well as mimetic and sometimes budgetary limitations may be one reason why non-places are much more frequently used in other, related forms. They seem to be portrayed more often in novels, which only rely on words and the readers’ imagination. Cinematic conventions and both technical and monetary possibilities make it easier to incorporate faraway locations, large means of transport, or just the typed text on a computer screen. Marber’s *Closer* can be classified as a textbook-example of a comparison between genres, as it has been adapted for the cinema, and the ease with which such a scene in the virtual world can be captured on film.

7. Non-places in drama

Drama may not make use of classic non-places like airports, motorways or shopping malls as frequently as its neighbouring fictional forms novel and film. The authors of the six plays chosen for this thesis nevertheless did so and thereby made important contributions to portraying the contemporary world, in other words, supermodernity. Although it might only be the beginning of activating theatre's potential as a medium of raising issues linked to non-places and how they shape our everyday life, it is a rather remarkable development. Quite possibly, there will be an increase in incorporating such special locales, which have become a quintessential ingredient of the present. Life without computers, planes, entertainment centres or shopping temples is no longer imaginable indeed. Globalisation, an obsession with mobility and speed, consumer culture and the mediation and broadcast of images have left their mark, often in a hidden way. The interaction is of a rather unconscious nature; normally not many thoughts are spent on the non-places. What these plays do is portray these venues and the way they shape the behaviour and relations among users. Thereby they raise awareness. This seems to be reason enough to review the results and major trends of the extensive textual analysis based on the fertile ground of Marc Augé's theoretical discussion of non-places.

There appears to be a tendency to provide rather authentic vignettes of car journeys, underground rides, cybersex, flight preparations, picture-perfect summer vacation trips, various business transactions and similar activities in the texts – traces of this meticulous portrayal can be found in the paratext, the secondary text as well as in the dialogue proper. It is noteworthy, though, that authenticity of non-places is closely connected to required components, people's roles and typical behaviour sanctioned by the code of conduct. As far as a car trip is concerned, for instance, a discussion of route between driver and assistant driver is as emblematic as packing one's suitcase with clothes and one's passport before going to the airport is with regard to journeys with the plane. Business deals are presented with a basic, standardised structure in the plays: they consist of two parties, the buyer and the seller, the consumer good itself and the payment for it. All these components can be identified in the deals in LaBute's *The Distance from here*, Stephens' *Wastwater*, the lap dancing club scene in Marber's *Closer* and the all-inclusive holiday in Jamaica that is portrayed in Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies*. A key factor in fulfilling one's

role dictated by the non-place is language: Quite often, a certain level of politeness is expected (i.e. in shops or at ticket counters), especially from the person providing a service. There may also be a certain amount of indirect self-marketing, not only by paying compliments or attracting attention by being seductive, but also through certain actions adapted to the other person's – the customer's – assumed expectations. All these features are extensively incorporated into the lap dancing club scene in *Closer* and into many episodes in *Sugar Mummies*, as both these plays focus on a similar kind of business evolving around beauty, the body, sexual enticement and voyeurism. A remarkable effort of an adequate portrayal with regard to language is the chat room scene in Patrick Marber's *Closer*. Not only the expressions, but also the graphic representation of the online flirt is attuned to the setting's parameters: Internet language is scrupulously replicated with its common abbreviations and signs; Dan sends Larry a virtual rose, for instance. There are also a few terms rooted in computer jargon. The requirements based on the themes of cybersex and erotic pleasures are met as effectively by lascivious innuendoes and a focus on physical appearance straight out of (male) sexual fantasies. Due to a technical trick, this scene, which "culminat[es] in a mighty cybergasm that pours out in a stream of keyboard characters - ampersands, asterisks, dollarsigns, exclamation points" (Kroll par.4), could be appropriately performed on stage as well – and might stick in the audience's minds as well as in the readers' as an early example of cybersex in drama.

Many of the chosen dramatic pieces play with the possibility of breaking away from unrelational non-places and refusing to fulfil one's role. According to Marc Augé, breaching the mute contract of the non-place might be sanctioned though. The plays portray various forms of consequences. Quite often, however, people take up their respective role again in the first place: The unnamed female protagonist enters the train as if nothing had happened, after throwing her mobile phone under it, for example. Larry eventually decides to enjoy Alice's strip show at the end of the lap dancing club scene in *Closer*, in order to get a glimpse of her personality, after resenting Alice's professional and slick demeanour towards him. Darrell and the shop assistant in *The Distance from here* also return to questions linked to the pet store. In some cases, the dictated roles are not resumed, though, or not adequately fulfilled at all, with different consequences. To begin with the comic side, the waiters of the fictional restaurant in *Closer* are chided by the guests for their missing work ethos by

snarky comments about having ordered years ago. *Sugar Mummies* offers different scenarios. Antonio and Maggie have to suffer consequences for overstepping their rights and duties. Antonio, who is unable to perform and, therefore, cannot offer the promised service, is punished by Maggie herself: She ties the young beach boy to a tree and hits him with a rope. That inappropriate act of self-administered justice is revenged later by the other Rastafarians with the help of laxatives. Disillusionment is the result of Kitty's attempt to foster a real relation and not a strictly professional one with Sly. The only pair that can enjoy their happy ending in Gupta's play is Naomie and Andre: Both refused to enter the deal in the beginning; they refused to buy and sell their bodies and souls – a fact that is considered as too soapy by many critics (i.e. "Similar patterns of romantic belief and cliché plotting accumulate. Vinette Robinson's mixed-race architect falls for an *impossibly virtuous* [my emphasis] young chef who refuses all financial aid. […] Sugar Mummies serves up sex tourism as as sweet and savoury TV dinner." (De Jongh par.9, 10)).

A frequent theme is obeying the non-place's regulations and disregarding the locale as an obstacle to personal relations at the same time. Sometimes the non-place is even appropriated for the fictional characters' purposes. On a basic level, the characters act according to the code of conduct. They accomplish typical tasks connected to the location with ease (e.g. turning on the television or radio, looking at art exhibits, getting on or off an underground train, consuming drinks, driving a car, etc.). On a sometimes inwardly-directed level, the protagonists particularly concentrate on their own little aches and pains. In fact, it seems as if the familiar steps of usage in a non-place facilitate serious personal reflection and interaction. The textbook-example of the portrayal of such a situation is the unnamed protagonist of Stephens' *T5*. The readers / the audience are confronted exclusively with the woman's thoughts and feelings regarding her immediate surroundings as well as her past. Everything is reflected in her mind; other voices are completely shut out. Harry, the young protagonist of the first part of Stephens' triptych *Wastwater* also adopts a rather positive attitude towards the non-place. For him, the plane and his journey to Canada take on a symbolic quality; it is his chance to leave part of his past behind and start an independent life. The possibility of exploring one's identity within the non-place is illustrated by his humorous insinuation of adopting a different name (Stephens, *Wastwater* 7, 8). Furthermore, non-places and (semi-)public spaces are quite often used as meeting points in order to discuss personal matters there: this

territory is neutral and does not require much attention to one's environment. Obvious examples of that category are the London Aquarium, a museum and the restaurant in Marber's *Closer*. The pet store in the mall depicted in LaBute's *The Distance from here* serves a similar purpose to a certain extent: the personal story dominates the business transaction. The confessional or conspiratorial character of the constellation in a fast, albeit confined space – the car – is stressed in most of the one-act plays in Neil LaBute's cycle *autobahn* as well. Within the vehicles, relationships are discussed, past sins are revealed, plans of retrieving a game console are made, and so on. Non-places can literally be an important background noise too: Familiar images on TV and relaxing music clear the somewhat tense atmosphere in the second part of *Wastwater*. Lisa and Mark's adulterous adventure (, whose climax is not shown anymore,) is orchestrated by the perfect soundtrack, which creates a relaxing ambiance: It is a commercial pop song with a sweet and simple melody that does not compel its users to engage with it. The opposite is shown in *The Distance from here*: The constant blaring of the television drowns out the family talk, it ceases to be a calming accompaniment.

Now, it may be worth having a look at the figurative level. The metaphors, which are employed for characterising people interacting with the non-place, either directly as in Simon Stephens' *T5* and in the dancing club scene of Patrick Marber's *Closer* or indirectly through the outward appearance and the script-like language in most of the other plays, stand out indeed. The pieces are full of robots and similar automated creatures that only imitate human behaviour and might as well have been pre-programmed. In *T5* the London Underground is, probably quite literally, crammed with robots and newspaper, as the protagonist puts it. The passengers resemble each other in their posture and (lack of) activities; there is possibly hardly any deviation, but an all-permeating synchronisation. The driver is also required to fulfil his role adequately, which he does by chauffeuring the underground users along the train's particular line. Larry, one of *Closer*'s protagonists, even compares himself to a slot machine that spits out money as a customer in the strip club. He considers the erotic dancers (ugly and drug abusing) baby dolls and, once again, robots. Fixed positions and frequently repeated, quite often only slight movements allude to the apparent resemblance to androids as well. Both *Closer* and LaBute's *autobahn* demonstrate the physical homogenisation quite aptly: In LaBute's one-act plays, each pair of protagonists is sitting in a car, sometimes checking one of the mirrors or

staring straight ahead, paying attention to the road. In Marber's piece, two men are glued to their desks, in separate buildings, hands on a keyboard, eyes fixed on the computer screen. A similar example is the family home in LaBute's *The Distance from here*. The television set takes centre stage, shaping the characters' positions and moving space – the TV set's alleged magnetism is explicitly discussed in *Wastwater*: In an (airport) hotel room, "the television welcomes you to your room" (Stephens, *Wastwater* 22). Automating of a different kind, namely of performing a rehearsed act chock-full of stock phrases, is in the centre of Gupta's *Sugar Mummies* and, to a minor extent, in the lap dancing club scene in *Closer*. Empty compliments are paid in order to keep the customers satisfied – an activity that might as well be carried out by a talking doll or a machine. This figurative level is emphasised especially with regard to *Wastwater*, *The Distance from here* and *Closer* by several critics. They speak of a general dehumanisation in the plays (i.e. Billington, *Wastwater Review* par.4, CM par. 8, Hitchings par.10; Lahr par.3; Brantley par.14), which is, to some degree, connected to a lifestyle dominated by the incorporated non-places.

The issue of extreme individualisation and solitariness is addressed in a notably candid manner. The first quote that stresses the rapidity and, above all, the passing nature of the movements within non-places is one that has been cited in the thesis before:

> WOMAN. Maybe the Germans have it right, after all. [...] I certainly don't agree with their, you know, politics ... but the car thing, that autobahn they've got there, maybe that's not a bad idea, actually. Perhaps that's the way it should be... all of us speeding by one another, too quick to stop, too fast to care… just racing along, off on our little journeys and no sense of how dangerous or careless we're being. Because we'd be safe, wouldn't we? [...] Safe inside our bubbles of glass and steel [...] we'd be sheltered there, in these cars, as we moved along. All protected and careening about. Yes. And maybe then we wouldn't hurt so much. Or feel so deeply when we've been betrayed or hurt or lost. (LaBute, *autobahn* 92,93)

This quote may be read as an epitome of what non-place can mean, if it is not used in a conscious way. We may speed by one another. Patrick Marber offers a fairly similar, albeit shorter aphorism in his play *Closer*: "Dan. [...] The bestsex is anon. We liv as we dream, ALONE."(29) The key word 'alone' is stressed with capital letters. Highlighting detachment and isolation as the prevailing attitude towards contemporary life is remarkable. It raises the question whether that observation is accurate.

As was repeatedly mentioned, the plays introduce various possible ways of interacting with the non-place. Characters may plunge into them completely and thereby lose themselves in illusions. The other extreme is refusing to enter in the first place. There are many scenes, however, in which characters appropriate the non-places according to their needs and agendas, often benefitting from the relative anonymity of the venue and the ease with which it can be used. The multifaceted portrayal suggests that the chosen plays neither condemn nor glorify non-places. Nevertheless, they address significant and sometimes controversial issues. Themes rooted in consumption critique like the exploitative nature of many transactions, the price many people are prepared to pay for something they desperately want and the idea that everything has become consume- and purchasable are touched upon in several pieces. Thus, these issues are brought into the spotlight. An awareness of potential negative consequences of the expansion of certain types of non-places is also shown with regard to ecological as well as sociological concerns. Worries about the impact of (air) traffic on the environment are voiced by Simon Stephens in interviews. According to the playwright, a mobility craze that is unsustainable adds up to the fascination and the actual paradox of an airport like Heathrow. How transportation infrastructure can indeed affect people's lives is insinuated by a reference to the plan of appending an extra runway to the airport in Stephens' *Wastwater* – an entire village would be erased by such a project, inhabitants would have to leave their homes. Nevertheless, it is not exclusively the other side of the coin that is portrayed in the chosen plays. Most of the texts also draw attention to the positive effects of many types of non-places. The feeling of liberation is addressed, especially by means of presenting characters that enjoy exploring and playing around with their identities, often in order to gain distance to the past. It is a conscious use and the knowledge of potential perils which provides them with the power to form their surroundings and transform them into something that actually approximates what (anthropological) place means.

As to the link between non-place and drama, in a somewhat anticipatory disposition, an artistic project shall be introduced that combines, to some extent even merges, both worlds. The initiative is called *Urban Scrawl*, its patron is none other than the notorious British playwright Mark Ravenhill, whose *Shopping and F***ing* is also considered an important comment on the theme of consumer culture. *Urban Scrawl* can be found on the internet since 2009; it is a collection of mini-radio-dramas

set along London's Piccadilly Line – each station gets its own (very short) play, so to say.[54] The agenda of this project is quite revealing with regard to non-places as settings for drama. Dominic Cavendish, initiator of *Urban Scrawl*, sketches the aims and expectations of this theatrical experiment:

> We said the constituent bits would join together to form a panoramic survey of London at the end of the decade and I believe they do; the capital that we glimpse above the rattle and hum London Underground trains is a place teeming with youthful energy, diversity and possibility – but also melancholy and anxiety… Suicide, as well as deaths accidental and pre-meditated, are of a piece with the highly charged atmosphere of this netherworld. Writers weren't obliged to home in on the Piccadilly Line itself – the remit allowed for overground – and quite elliptical – excursions; but more often than not they gravitated down towards the tracks, drawn by the smells, the history, the ominous noises (beautifully rendered in the soundscapes) and the darkness. For many of the writers, it seems, the Tube acts as a locus of psychological confrontation, a place of emotional extremes experienced by millions every week but rarely commented upon; in the organized chaos of the Tube network lie countless possible departure-points of opportunity – for romance, adventure and so on – but also the crushing embodiment of deadening routines and tunnel-visioned lives. In transit, in those fleeting moments of private reflection rammed hard against the most public, exposing situations – all kinds of sudden crises and cries of help arise; hence the persuasive way in which magic realism keeps leaking into the mix. Here, the unexpected lurks in the most unremarkable corners of the quotidian, because something profound and existential and poetic is going on, beneath it all.

What Cavendish says about the London Underground can as well be applied to other non-places. It may be an indication that they in fact possess a lot of narrative and dramatic potential, which only has to be activated by playwrights. That can as well be done in the near future of the genre.

[54] One author of two plays chosen for this thesis collaborated in this project: Simon Stephens. Readers who have paid attention to the paratextual sections on his works can quite likely guess to which station his piece is dedicated. Not surprisingly at all, it is Heathrow Terminal Five.

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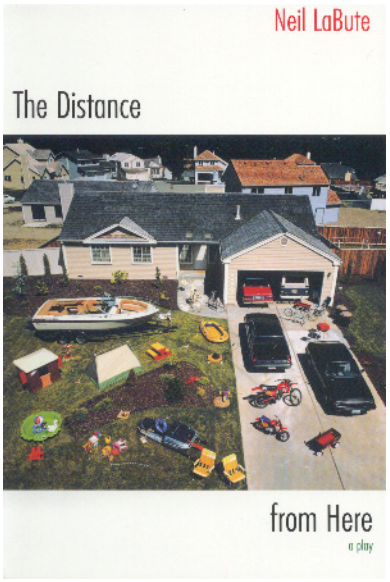
Appendix

Figure 1

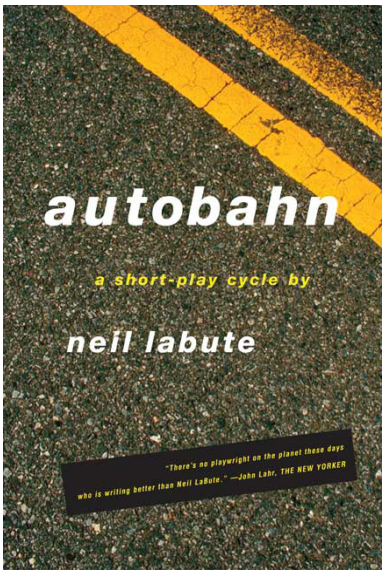
Cover-image *The Distance from here*



(Source: http://www.broadwayplaypubl.com/distance%20from%20here.htm. 12 June 2012)

Figure 2

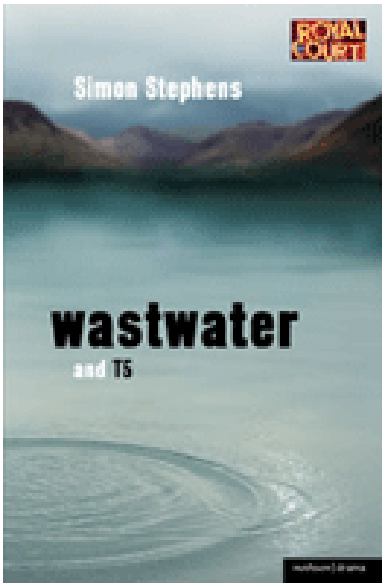
Cover-image: *autobahn*



(Source: http://jacketupload.macmillanusa.com/jackets/high_res/jpgs/9780571211104.jpg . 12 June 2012)

Figure 3

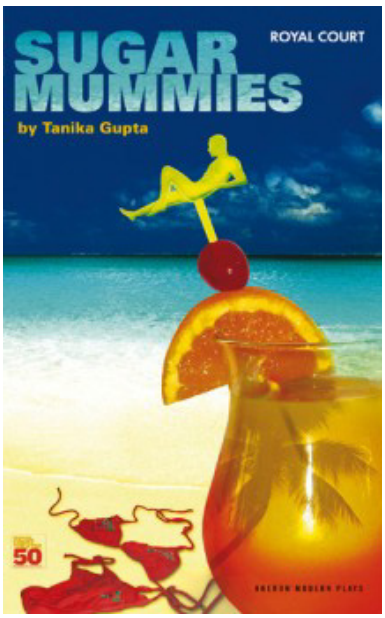
Cover-image *Wastwater and T5*



(Source: http://www.doollee.com/PlaywrightsS/stephens-simon.html. 12 June 2012)

Figure 4

Cover-image *Sugar Mummies*



(Source: http://oberonbooks.com/modern-plays/sugar-mummies. 12 June 2012)

Abstract (German)

Spezielle Stätten wie Shoppingtempel, Autobahnen, Urlaubsressorts oder Flughäfen, Örtlichkeiten die Marc Augé als „Nicht-Orte“ bezeichnet, werden häufig als Schauplatz für Filme und Romane verwendet. In der Gattung ‚Drama‘ finden diese noch relativ selten Berücksichtigung. Es gibt allerdings einige wenige Dramatiker, die versucht haben, das narrative Potential von Nicht-Orten zu aktivieren, um die zeitgenössische, ‚supermoderne‘ Welt abzubilden. Augés Postulate bilden den theoretischen Rahmen für die Analyse; er versteht unter ‚Nicht-Orten‘ „spaces which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity”, also Räume, die keine Beziehungen zu anderen aufbauen, keine Vergangenheit haben und sich nicht mit Identität beschäftigen. Diese besonderen Lokalitäten sind das Gegenteil von anthropologischen Orten. Sie finden für verschiedene Zwecke Verwendung, ihre Funktion steht meist im Vordergrund. Oft bringt man sie in Verbindung mit aktuellen Phänomenen wie Urbanisierung, Globalisierung, Mobilität und Konsumkultur. Aufgrund der Vorherrschaft der Funktion, ist die Benutzung dieser Örtlichkeiten streng geregelt; Augé spricht sogar von einem „stummen Vertrag“, der als Verhaltensgrundlage dient. Diesen muss jeder Mensch ‚unterzeichnen‘, wenn er einen dieser Nicht-Orte betritt. Die Regeln basieren auf den Rollen, die von Transaktionen wie Einkaufen, Fernsehen und Urlaub machen, um nur einige zu nennen, festgelegt sind. Nicht-Orte scheinen Menschen auf ihre Parts als Fahrer, Passagiere, Kunden, etc. zu reduzieren und ihnen dabei gleichzeitig ein gewisses Maß an Anonymität zu gewähren. Der Fokus einer literarischen Analyse von Dramentexten, die entweder jene speziellen Räume als Schauplätze haben oder sich extensiv mit diesen auseinandersetzen, muss auf der Repräsentation solcher Nicht-Orte auf verschiedenen Textebenen liegen.

Anhand von ‚Close reading‘ von Paratext, Regieanweisungen und Dialogen aller ausgewählten Stücke lassen sich verschiedene Auffälligkeiten feststellen. Die erste Gruppe von Nicht-Orten, jene, deren konkrete Ausprägungen auf Mobilität und Geschwindigkeit ausgerichtet sind (Autos, U-Bahn, Flugverkehr), ist ein signifikanter Bestandteil von *Wastwater* und dem Monolog *T5*; beide Texte wurden vom Briten Simon Stephens verfasst. Die an Besessenheit grenzende Faszination des Autors für den von Paradoxen geprägten Flughafen London Heathrow hinterlässt ihre Spuren sowohl im Paratext als auch in den eigentlichen Dramentexten. Stephens spricht vor

allem das Thema eines Neubeginns durch eine Flugreise an; ebenso macht er auf mögliche soziale und ökonomische Auswirkungen des Flugverkehrs aufmerksam. *T5* zeigt vor allem die Homogenisierung, die U-Bahn-Passagiere werden zu „Robotern", aber auch das Potential von Freiheit, das auf Anonymität und der einfachen Nutzung des Nicht-Ortes beruht: Die Protagonistin kann sich gänzlich in ihr eigenes Inneres zurückziehen, ohne die Fahrt zu unterbrechen. Zwei Stücke des amerikanischen Dramatikers Neil LaBute, *The Distance from here* und *autobahn*, verlegen das Geschehen auf die Straße beziehungsweise hin zum Automobil. Das Verkehrsmittel wird als Vehikel für das Spiel mit Genderidentität genutzt, es ist Schauplatz verschiedenster Machtkämpfe, wird aber auch dazu verwendet, Beziehungsbande zu knüpfen. *The Distance from here* stellt die Leere der Konsumgesellschaft in den Vordergrund, symbolisiert von einem heruntergekommenen Einkaufstempel. Ähnlich wenig Sinnstiftungspotential haftet mehreren Örtlichkeiten in Patrick Marbers *Closer* an, die ebenfalls in den Bereich von Geschäftemacherei und Unterhaltungsindustrie fallen. Das Paradebeispiel für ausbeuterische Transaktionen ist die Szene im Striptease-Club. Marber verwendet diese Einrichtung aber auch als Basis für metatextuelle Überlegungen zu theaterspezifischen Praktiken. Tanika Gupta widmet sich in *Sugar Mummies* ebenfalls dem Geschäft mit dem Körper. Sie zeigt weibliche Sextouristen in einem jamaikanischen Urlaubsressort und bearbeitet damit ein recht brisantes Thema. Das vermeintliche Urlaubsparadies kann dabei als typischer Nicht-Ort interpretiert werden. Eine letzte große Gruppe solcher speziellen Räume beleuchtet Fragen nach Realität und Authentizität. Geräte wie Radios, Fernsehapparate, Handys und Computer sind aus der supermodernen Welt nicht mehr wegzudenken. Sie sind, oft als Einrichtungsgegenstände, in die fiktionale Welt vieler der ausgewählten Dramen integriert. Die Verbindung zu Augés Nicht-Orten liegt vor allem in der Art und Weise ihrer Benutzung. Diese gewährt ein relativ hohes Maß an Anonymität und ermöglicht das Spiel mit der eigenen Identität. Das wahrscheinlich einprägsamste Beispiel, das beide Eigenschaften vereint, ist die Chat-Szene in Patrick Marbers *Closer*. Sie ist eine detailgetreue Präsentation von Cybersex.

Viele der von Augé postulierten Eigenschaften von Nicht-Orten finden sich in den fiktionalen Welten der ausgewählten Dramen. Die Repräsentation und sogar die Metaphern, die für Menschen verwendet werden, die sich in Nicht-Orten bewegen, zeigen signifikante Ähnlichkeiten. Allerdings gibt es auch Versuche einiger Figuren,

Nicht-Orte zumindest subjektiv zu Orten zu machen. Dies geschieht entweder durch Emanzipation, ein bewusstes Eintauchen in den Nicht-Ort oder durch eine gänzliche Zweckentfremdung. Dies mag für die Gattung ‚Drama' im Allgemeinen bedeuten, dass genau jenes Fehlen von konkreten, sinnstiftenden Beziehungen und der Mangel an Vergangenheit, die Nicht-Orten anhaften, das narrative Potential dieser speziellen Räume erhöhen, da die Lücken mit Bedeutung gefüllt werden können. Außerdem sind diese so eng mit der Gegenwart verbunden, dass sie für Autoren und Dramatiker, die die zeitgenössische Welt abbilden wollen, unerlässlich sind.

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