

## *Tanulmány*

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### **Space, time and affect in Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet***

#### **Abstract**

The present study explores the spatial, temporal and affectual structures in Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* implementing a *deictic center* approach to the analysis. The premises we adopt imply a *cognitive-phenomenological shift* into the world of the narrative (*the story world*), into the conceptual locus of the *deictic center*, the moving space-time location where narrative processing and interpretation occur. The investigations reveal striking similarities in the organization of the aforementioned structures analyzed.

#### **1 Theoretical assumptions**

The present analysis adopts a *deictic center approach* to narratives (cf. Duchan et al 1995; Talmy 2001 [2000]; Herman 2002). Narrative comprehension and interpretation in this account entail phenomenological and cognitive processes besides textual (linguistic) input. The dynamics of reading involves more than a propositional input: textual information is supplemented with stores of knowledge (e.g. frames, scripts, scenarios, world views, etc.), inferences ('gap-building' process) as well as a phenomenological, *vicarious experiencing* of narratives (cf. Gerrig 1993). Mental processes involved in interpretation (as well as production) require *mentally represented worlds*, cognized in the minds of authors and readers (cf. Fauconnier 1995 [1985], 1997; Emmott 1997; Werth 1999). The mental models of narratives, *story worlds*, are *perspectively constrained*: readers get inside the stories qua an imaginative act, a *deictic shift*, and construct a *deictic center* (DC) from which they interpret the sentences of narratives. The deictic center provides the perspective/vantage point on events in the narrated world: it is defined relative to different spatial and temporal viewpoints of *cognizing consciousnesses* (narrators/characters). Hence, there is always a focalizing WHO whose viewpoint readers unconsciously adopt when immersed in reading. The deictic center is a moving space-time location: it can shift as the narrative unfolds. We differentiate between the *narrative present* (events in the narrative line) and *earlier events* (such as memories, flashbacks) accessed from specific *now-points* in the narrative line (the present moment within a stretch of the narrative).

## 2 Space, time and affect in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*

### 2.1 Introduction to the novel

The protagonist of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Artur Sammler, is a Holocaust-survivor septuagenarian living in the apartment of his late aunt's niece, Margotte. He muses and surveys over the sheer banality, impotency and materialism of contemporary society as reflected in the tragicomic fate of his daughter, Shula and his benevolent's, Elya Gruner's children. Dr. Gruner is Sammler's nephew, a rich surgeon supporting Sammler and his daughter financially. Gruner's daughter, Angela, is a sex-addict and his son Wallace is a constant failure. In springtime New York Sammler has a strange encounter with a Black pickpocket whom he has repeatedly seen, bedazzled, taking people's wallets on the bus. Shula, his daughter steals Dr. Lal's, an Indian metaphysicist's manuscript on the moon and he tries to locate her several times. He finds her in Elya Gruner's house and learns that Gruner, who is terminally ill, has found out about his daughter's sexual escapades and is utterly disappointed with his children. Wallace and Shula search the house for Gruner's hidden fortune (under-the-counter money from the abortions he performed), and in doing so, Wallace manages to burst a water pipe. Shula finds the money stashed away in a hammock and intends to keep the lion's share to herself. Amidst idiotic individuals, a micro-societal mirror of contemporary America, the only stronghold Sammler has is the refuge to his own mental world, to his troubled past elevated to nostalgia, and to miscellaneous ideas and thoughts on his belated friend H. G. Wells whose memoir he intends to write. He seeks comfort as well as escape in his thoughts and this gives him the incentive to move forward with his life.

Sammler's reminiscences take us back to his Holocaust experiences, to the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 that he participated in, and the more recent encounters with a Black pickpocket. The earlier events in the story line are accessed through Sammler's perspective, which vary in affect (positive, negative or neutral), degree of emotional intensity and involvement. The story is heavily charged emotionally, spatio-temporal elements are inter-related with affectual elements throughout the novel. As a consequence, in my analysis of space and time in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, I explore the ways affectual elements associate with spatial and temporal components: the way spatio-temporal shifts affect the emotional charge coming into play or vice-versa, the way emotional intensity influences and/or triggers spatio-temporal shifts. The reader identifies with the protagonist's feelings, such as unease, joy, disgust, anxiety, perplex, etc. and in this way comes to a better understanding of his mind conveying all these emotions.

### 2.2 Time and affect

*Mr. Sammler's Planet* offers us little plot and the narrative present largely comprises Sammler's perplexing thoughts on eternally discussable abstract ideas: life, beauty, spirituality, chaos, madness, etc. "The meditative island on the island of Manhattan", as Sammler self-designates himself, is compliant with all the neurotic individuals coming to confide in him, who wish to "communicate chaos" as a sort of modern-day soul-purging therapy for their self-inflicted, meaningless life. All individuals who come into contact with him (Shula, Angela, Walter Bruch, Wallace, etc.) are seen through his eyes.

The basic level of the story world (the narrative present) is activated throughout the novel and the focalizing WHO, WHERE and WHEN (the deictic center in space and time) tends to stay in the narrative present. That is, the WHO, WHERE and WHEN of the DC usually remains with Sammler's current state-of-affairs in the narrative NOW. Sammler's Holocaust

memories as well as his 1967 trip to war-zones of Israel, however, are strongly disturbing and deeply felt and the level of involvement is higher: Sammler's war-related memories (unbidden or voluntarily recalled remembrances) always imply a shift of the DC to the events remembered. This is contrasted with another, more current event, which seems to be a crucial turning point in Sammler's life: the tête-à-tête encounter with the Black pickpocket. Table 1. explores the way the temporal shifts to key earlier events (war-related/the encounter with the pickpocket) influence/trigger a change in the affect.

"Memory is precious. It's much more vivid than chocolate cake, and much richer... everybody needs his memories. They keep the wolf of insignificance from the door" (p. 174) utters Wallace at the hospital, during a conversation with Sammler. Albeit Sammler needs his memories, he (un)consciously brings them forth from an entirely different reason: they provide the escape and refuge from having to simply exist in the painful reality of contemporary America. Physical objects or philosophical interior monologues of neutral or low negative effect in the current NOW trigger temporal shifts into earlier events that marked Sammler profoundly: World War II, the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1967 and the most recent pickpocket-scenes. The first recollections of all three events are negative, unpleasant; the focus is on the crudeness of the event itself. Sammler remembers the scene of watching the pickpocket in action, losing his wife in WW II, describing some Italian paparazzi's lovers or Father Newell, a Jesuit correspondent in Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967. The events recollected for the first time range from neutral through low negative to negative (affect column 1, 2 and 4). The second and subsequent remembrances of the events in question, however, surprisingly differ in affect. The neutral or slightly negative valence of the first mention moves to a consistently positive tone in each event alluded to (affect column part 1, 3 and 5).

The transition from neutral or low negative to positive valence is Sammler's transition from his ambivalent, negative feelings to an overall positive affect. Sammler brings forth his memories (either voluntarily or involuntarily) as a means to reach some kind of understanding of who he is and where he is going. The pickpocket-event is often contrasted with his war-memories (similarity between the delight of watching the pickpocket robbing some one and the elation he felt on killing a German during WW II), both key events in Sammler's final transformation. The escapes to memories, literal 'escapes' in the beginning, provide the relief and strength to return to present. The understanding he has sought for in his memories, paraphrasing Sammler at the end of the novel, is to know and meet the terms of our contracts here on Earth. Something that has taken a long way for Sammler to discover.

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**Table 1. Temporal and affective structure of *Mr. Sammler's Planet***

Memories/Earlier Events				Near past		Narrative Present					Part
Childhood	WW II.	1967	Haifa	pickpocket	other	in house	in motion in/out of NY	in hospital	Elya's house	Affect	
			DC8	DC2,4,6	<u>DC10,12</u>	DC1,3,5,7,9,11,13				0→LN→P	1
M2	<u>DC7</u>			M1	DC3,5; M3	DC1,2		DC4,6,8		LN→N	2
	<u>M1/DC3</u>	M2				DC2,4	DC1,5			LN/N →P	3
		<u>M/DC2</u>						DC1		0→LN/N	4
	M	<u>DC3</u>					DC1		DC2,4	LN/N→LP/P	5
							DC2	DC3	DC1		6

Note. Time line of events in the story world is on the horizontal, time line of events in the narrative line is on the vertical. Temporal DC shifts are indicated with numbers: DC1, DC2, etc. Sometimes the DC is maintained in the here-now of the reminiscing protagonist and there is no shift to the event time. This is indicated by M (memory): the event is only focalized on from a point in the narrative NOW. Dashes in the affect column indicate the range of intensity and valence; arrows indicate the change in affect from one temporal shift (current now-point in the narrative line) to another (temporal shift to the referred event, specifically underlined as such). A full explanation of the table is provided in section 2.2.

DC = deictic center; M = memory

Degree of intensity (affect column): H = high; M = medium; L = low

Valence: P = positive; N = negative; 0 = neutral

Intensity and valence can be combined; for instance, LN = low neutral; LP = low positive

### 2.3 *Spatial shifts and affect*

The mental and real-life locations visited by Sammler during the unfolding of the narrative carry with them affectual significance. Sammler's Holocaust reminiscences, a traumatic legacy for a heavily opinionated, crotchety septuagenarian, are actually a 'safe' place to 'visit'. Albeit they engender negative affect, the remembrances of WWII Poland are often portrayed as palliative for avoiding confrontation with Sammler-in the Now, the present-day Sammler of unrestrained bitterness and utter perplexity. The refuge he takes to avoid the confrontation also resides in his thoughts: long pages of highly bewildering interior monologues of a Sammler in his West Side apartment are meant to counter the negative feelings brought on by the protagonist's sheer existence in the narrative present. The mental space that the protagonist journeys in his state of avoidance stretches from Poland in World War II through Israel in 1967 to the pickpocket encounter in the near past. When Sammler remembers a past event connected to the three main events (WWII, Israel in 1967, the pickpocket scene), there is a shift in location as well as time parameters.

Sammler's central location in the narrative present – on a larger focus, New York; on a middle scale, his Manhattan apartment; on a smaller scale, his bedroom – is a space of spatial confinement. Sammler recalls his first apartment he and Shula had after coming to the States and characterizes it as “a china cabinet into which he was locked” (p. 29). His present-day apartment does not make him feel that way, but it is the china cabinet where he withdraws to contemplate freely and avoid confrontation. “Daily at five or six a. m. Mr. Sammler woke up in Manhattan and tried to get a handle on the situation” (p. 7), to stop being an “old-fashioned sitting sage”, and “to try to live with disintegration, with crazy streets, filthy nightmares, monstrosities come to life, addicts, drunkards, and perverts celebrating their despair openly in midtown” (p. 70). Turning away from the world is failure in coping: in the intimate coziness of his apartment, Sammler's motions are diminished; he merely sips his coffee, drinks his grapefruit juice or lets the bathtub tap run while thoughts of various nature are whirling in his head.

The DC of the narrative present in the first part of the novel is located almost exclusively in Sammler's West Side apartment (except for his taking up on the offer to lecture at Columbia University – hence his trip to carry out this activity). This is where he, as a psychologist or psychiatrist, receives his friends or relatives for therapeutic confessions. It is a safe place, as are his frequent 'mental rushes' into the past. Poland and Israel of his past and his meeting with the Black pickpocket arouse fear, repulsion and some sort of admiration, delight, and attraction at the same time: before Sammler completes his transition, his journey, he must confront and resolve the 'emotional baggage' he is carrying. There can be no moving on with his life without it.

Sammler is forced to exteriorize when his nephew, Elya Gruner falls ill and has to visit him in the hospital. Thus, there is a gradual shift from the house as an inner, safe location to exterior, more foreign environments – a transition to move time along and ultimately to return to present. Time is practically at a halt in the beginning – Sammler is thinking, pondering, remembering events of his past. When events start to precipitate around him, time moves forward more quickly and he is spatially transiting more numerous locations in the narrative present (part five and six).

Affect is closely related to the transition we witness in the novel. While in the house, at the beginning of the novel, Sammler is fraught with neutral or negative feelings of high intensity towards both the present or past events. In the middle parts, he is transiting a stage of ambivalence, and we see a gradual change towards a reevaluation of his past. In the end, his

past reemerges on a positive tone, and so is his present. With swift motions in the narrative present in the last part and the voidance of remembrances affect also reemerges on a fully positive valence. Like Citrine (the protagonist of *Humboldt's Gift*) or Herzog (the protagonist of *Herzog*), Sammler turns to his past for comfort, re-experiences terrifying events to find the resources to take up the battle with his current disappointed, bitter self. In the end, he chooses to embrace life, live in the present – the ultimate reward for a dispirited soul. For a detailed analysis of the spatial and affective structure of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, see Table 2., pages 33–36.

### 3 Conclusions

We have shown how the spatial, temporal and affective elements interrelate in the novel: investigations reveal a striking *overlapping* organization of space, time and affect. In the first portion of the novel, the reader does not feel the progression of time and spatial movements are diminished. The static nature of time interacts with affectual structures: going backwards in time voids temporal advancement, but it also provides a healing device for the protagonist to resolve his confused state of mind and resume living in the present. Similarly, the static nature of the sofa (on a larger scale, Sammler's West Side apartment) suggests lack of coping with (and avoidance of) the outside world. When the protagonist decides to take part in the world around him and follow up on his goals and plans, his movements precipitate and the events in the narrative present speed up. The first events and locations visited during the protagonist's recollections arouse neutral to negative affect – indicative of the reminiscing protagonist's feeling in the narrative-now. We see a gradual reevaluation of past events as events of the narrative present take over, and a complete disappearance of remembrances at the end of the novel. Sammler returns to the present by bursting out in an epiphanic prayer to God. In reaching out to God, he resolves to continue his life in moral humaneness.

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**Table 2. Spatial and affective structure of Mr. Sammler's Planet**

Part	Text	Location/ Location*	Type of motion	Affect
1	Sammler awakes and attends to usual morning activities.	House	Planful	0
	He recollects watching the pickpocket picking purses.	House	---	LN/MN
	He muses over different things (e.g. his niece, Margotte's husband).	House	---	MP
	He recollects the pickpocket at work again.	House/bus*	---	MP/LN
	He calls the police from home.	House	---	LN/MN
	Sammler recollects pieces of conversations he had with Margotte.	House	---	0/LN/HN
	He muses about his daughter, Shula (physical + inner characterization).	House	---	LN/0
	He recalls his first visit to Israel (to fetch his daughter, to rescue her from her violent husband).	House	---	0/LN
	He is back to his thoughts about Shula: their living together after coming to USA in 1947.	House	---	HN/0
	He recalls a conversation with Angela, Elya Gruner's daughter.	House	---	0/LN
	He is invaded by different ideas on life/contemporary society.	House	---	HN
	He is back again to thinking about Shula.	House	---	LN
	He recalls young university students Shula hired to read to him.	House	---	HN
	He recollects one of his ex-readers, Lionel Feffer who persuades him to give a talk at Columbia.	House	---	MP
	He goes to Columbia Univ. to give a talk on the British Scene in the 30's. Description of the hall.	Large room	---	HN
	He begins his talk.	Large room	Mod/Planful	0
	He is disturbed by an obstinate young's man question. He can't defend himself.	Large room	---	HN
	He goes out in the city, wanders around, confused by what happened.	City (streets)	Rapid	HN
	He gets on a jammed bus home.	Bus	---	HN
	He observes the pickpocket in the bus, watches him do his work.	Bus	Planful	HN
	He realizes the thief has seen him so he gets off the bus and tries to disappear.	Streets (West End to Broadway)	Rapid/Erratic	HN
	He enters the lobby of his building. The thief comes after him and corners him.	Lobby of Sammler's building	Rapid/Erratic	HN
	The pickpocket takes out his sexual organ and makes Sammler look at it.	Lobby of Sammler's building	---	HN/P



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Part	Text	Location/ Location*	Type of motion	Affect
	The thief leaves and he goes up to his apartment.	Elevator/house	Planful	MN
2	Sammler starts reading Dr. Lal's manuscript on the future of the moon.	House	---	0
	Under mental compulsion, his thoughts wander back to the pickpocket.	House	---	LP/MP
	Walter Bruch, Margotte's cousin knocks on the door, interrupting his thoughts. He gives a description of Bruch, recollecting some bits of conversation.	House	---	0/LP
	Bruch tells Sammler his fixation on a cashier in a drugstore.	House	---	0/LN
	Sammler engages in thinking about modern-day fixations, sexual neuroses.	House	---	LN
	Bruch goes away; Sammler sinks back into contemplating about sexual madness.	House	---	0/LN
	His thoughts wander on to Angela and Wharton Horricker.	House	---	0/LN
	He experiences a whole range of thoughts on the condition of the subject in 20 <sup>th</sup> cent. America.	House	---	0/HN
	He turns his line of thought to Dr. Gruner (his nephew; supports him and Shula financially).	House	---	LP/HP
	He goes to visit his nephew in the hospital.	Hospital	Mod/Planful	0/LP
	He recalls bits and pieces of Gruner's past.	Hospital	----	0
	He talks to Gruner, and then encounters Wallace with a doctor in the corridor	Hospital	Planful	0
	He muses over Wallace, a 'cipher', 'portent' that he can't figure out.	Hospital	---	0
	Wallace brings back to his memory Cieslakiewicz, a Pole who helped him escape in WWII.	Hospital/Mezvenski tomb, Poland*	----	0/MN
	He has a conversation with Wallace.	Hospital	---	0/LN
3	Sammler is walking homeward from the hospital, reading Dr. Lal's manuscript.	Streets in New York	Mod/Planful	0
	He notices Feffer who is rushing towards him; Feffer tells him that Shula stole the manuscript.	Stuyvesant Park	Moderate	0/LN
	Headed towards the subway, Samler engages in rapid thoughts about Shula and 'creatureliness'.	Fifteenth Street	Moderate	0/LN
	On Feffer's insistence, he tells him why he is taking the subway (to avoid meeting the pickpocket).	Streets towards the subway	Mod/Planful	0
	At home, he tries to call Shula and makes a sandwich; then he goes to Shula's apartment.	Apartment	Rapid/Planful	0
	Shula is not at home; so he goes home and asks Margotte if she's seen her.	Apartment	Rapid/Planful	0

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Part	Text	Location/ Location*	Type of motion	Affect
	He writes an apologetic letter to Dr. Lal which Margotte volunteers to deliver in person.	Apartment	Mod/Planful	0
	He washes his feet and lies down; is immediately invaded by different thoughts.	Bedroom	---	0/ LN
	Feffer's story of his mad insurance adjuster firing at a phone book takes him back to WWII.	Bedroom/Zamosth Forest, Poland*	---	0/MP
	He gets up, and while dressing, he recalls the summer of 1967 in Israel.	Bedroom/Israel	---	0
	The Arab-Israeli war makes him ponder on humankind's maniacal persistence of certain ideas, pure madness and hatred that pushes people to kill for a certain idea.	Bedroom	---	LN/HN
	Waiting for the bus to take him to the hospital for another visit, he is still thinking.	Bus station	---	MN/HN
4	Dr. Gruner is asleep; so he goes to the visitors' room and has a conversation with Angela.	Hospital	Mod/planful	0/HN
	Angela's cap reminds him of the Six-Day War (Israel, 1967).	Hospital/close to the frontline*	---	0
	Wallace and Eisen appear in the visitors' room. Eisen tells him of his new pursuits.	Hospital	---	LN
	Margotte calls him on the phone: Shula's gone and so is the manuscript.	Hospital	---	HN
	Dr. Gruner wakes up; he and Sammler have a short conversation.	Hospital	---	0
5	Sammler and Wallace are driving out of NY to La Rochelle, Dr. Gruner's home; they engage in conversation during the ride.	Car	---	LN/HN
	In the house, he examines the kitchen and goes upstairs in hopes of finding his daughter. He finds her in the bathtub.	New Rochelle (Gruner residence)	Mod/Planful	0
	Sammler has a long conversation with Shula.	Gruner's house	Moderate	MN/MP
	Margotte appears at the door with Dr. Lal. They converse.	Gruner's house	---	0/HP
	The conversation is interrupted by the sound and sight of a burst pipe. The water floods the house; they try to find a shut-off for the water. Sammler talks to Wallace.	Gruner's house	Rapid/Planful	LN/MN
	Sammler recalls his 1967 Israeli experiences.	Gruner's house/Sinai desert*	---	MNMP
6	The next day, Sammler finds Lal and Wallace gone. He talks to Shula in the kitchen.	Gruner's house	Moderate	0
	He is vexed by current happenings and how they may affect Dr. Gruner (thinking, musing).	Gruner's house	---	LN
	He phones his nephew; tells him he's been delayed, but he's on his way over to the hospital.	Gruner's house	---	0

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Part	Text	Location/Location*	Type of motion	Affect
	In the garden, he talks to Emil (the driver) and notices small Cessna planes flying low. Wallace is piloting one of them, trying to take snapshot pics of the area.	Gruner's house	Moderate	0
	Margotte calls: they have found the manuscript stashed in the safe. She continues talking, But Sammler doesn't listen. He is preoccupied with the subject of death.	Gruner's house	---	LP/LN
	Emil is driving Sammler to New York. Sammler is thinking in the car.	Car (on the way to NY)	---	LN/MN
	Emil stops the car; Feffer and the pickpocket are fighting, Eisen is there too.	Near Lincoln Center, NY	Mod/Planful	LN
	Sammler steps in the fight, tries to calm both parties, asks Eisen to for help.	Near Lincoln Center, NY	Fast/Erratic	HN
	Eisen beats the pickpocket up; the squad car is approaching; Emil draws Sammler away.	Near Lincoln Center, NY	Fast/Erratic	HN
	At the hospital, Sammler finds only Angela. They talk about the current situations. He asks Angela to ask for her father's forgiveness.	Hospital	Moderate	HN
	Shula calls him to tell that she has found Gruner's hidden money stashed in a hassock.	Hospital	---	LP
	The doctor comes to inform Sammler of Gruner's death. He asks to be taken to his side.	Hospital	---	HN
	Sammler, in a 'mental whisper', prays to God for Gruner's soul.	Hospital	---	HP

Note. \* indicates a mental location (memory). The locations specified range from small-scale (car, bedroom) through medium-scale (apartment, hospital, Gruner's house, Zamosth forest, Sinai desert) to large-scale locations (New Rochelle, Poland, Israel).

Intensity is indicated by: H = High, M = Medium, L = Low.

Valence is indicated by: 0 = Neutral, P = Positive, N = Negative.

Intensity and valence are shown in the affect column. The dashes across the column indicate the shift in the