

## Introducing the *Transit Zone*

In 1999 I undertook my first long haul international flight, travelling from Auckland, New Zealand, to Frankfurt, Germany, via Incheon Airport, Korea. The trip began when I said goodbye to my parents, passed through New Zealand immigration control, then stepped through the security screening processes. I experienced the excitement of the journey's beginning and its diminishment into an act of endurance. I encountered the strange separated spaces of transit waiting in Incheon airport for my connecting flight and I suffered the reduction of my personal environment in the aeroplane. Finally I arrived, exhausted and jetlagged, in Germany. Walking through the arrival doors ended that first traversal through the *Transit Zone*.

This experience signalled a beginning to my as yet un-exhausted wanderlust and my obsession (not to put too fine a point on it) with the environment of international air travel. In 2001 I again travelled internationally, and while transiting in Chicago O'Hare International Airport, I made my first artwork directly exploring the experience of international air travel, *Chicago O'Hare International Airport (1)*, Figure 1. Filmed on the underground moving walkways under the lights and music of Michael Hayden's neon and sound sculpture, *Skys the Limit*, Figure 2, and against curved coloured walls, it embodied my disorientation and fascination with the site. Hayden's sculpture dominates the environment and transforms the architectural immensity of the tunnel into an absorbing and surreal space. During my research I found the same site reproduced in photographs by Martha Rosler, Figure 3, and Ross Rudesch Harley, Figure 4. Chicago O'Hare's tunnel, with its moving walkway and public sculpture, has become emblematic of a certain experience of transit. In a contained space the passenger is transported from one point to another, but distracted from the duration and length of this journey by lights and music. Since I made this first work my engagement with the sites and politics of the *Transit Zone* has evolved and increased. Indeed, over the course of my critical and uncritical engagement with international air travel I have come to realise that I am in good company, artistically, theoretically and passionately.



Figure 1: (top) Melissa Laing, *Chicago O'Hare International Airport (I)*, 2001, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 2: (bottom) Michael Hayden, *Skys the Limit*, 1987, 7,193 sq. metres of mirror reflecting over one mile of neon, controlled by three solid state computers, one hour of electronic music. Chicago: O'Hare International Airport, United Airlines, Terminal 1. Image courtesy the artist.



Figure 3: (top) Martha Rosler, *O'Hare (Chicago)*, 1994, 1998, photograph, in Martha Rosler, *In the Place of the Public: Observations of a Frequent Flyer*.

Figure 4: (bottom) Ross Rudesch Harley, from the *Aviopolis* series, 2002–2005.

Air travel, from its inception, has captured the public imagination. Over one hundred years has passed since the first powered flight was achieved.<sup>1</sup> In that time air travel has become embedded into our culture to the point that it is considered an essential underpinning of global society, a driver of economic growth and an object of cultural investigation. It is within the perception, the reality and the problematic of air travel that I situate my research. More specifically, I focus on the unique nature and requirements of international air travel. The systems of international air travel have evolved out of private enterprise and national interests into a global, interdependent network. This network has impacted on, and been shaped by, nation-state controls on identity, territory and movement. The international agreements and methods of managing this form of travel have created a space for international air travel which is conceptually and physically demarcated from normative social space. This separation has created what I call the *Transit Zone*.

Throughout this thesis I will build up a detailed outline of the *Transit Zone*. However, to begin with I will simply define the *Transit Zone* as a site entered into by the act of crossing over a border located at an international airport. This border crossing, performed by passengers (and flight staff), shifts them legally and conceptually out of nation-state territory. The passenger does not re-enter nation-state territory until they re-cross another border on arrival. In transit they remain outside the nation-state. The distance the passenger travels collapses into the space and time between two border processing events, into and out of the *Transit Zone*. The physical and legal separation of the passenger from the normative space of the nation-state enables nation-state control over the international movement of people via air.

This same separation creates a unique and contained environment inside which logistical processes, distraction tools and control systems can be identified and discussed. The physical sites the passenger occupies, on the airside of the airport and inside the aeroplane, coupled with the

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<sup>1</sup> It is widely accepted that the first recorded instance of powered flight was on 17 December 1903 by the Wright Brothers in North Carolina.

duration of the experience, creates the environment for transit.<sup>2</sup> The passenger is filtered into and out of contained sites, directed within them, entertained and encouraged to spend, and within these sites they can experience, conform, resist, fantasise and create new cultural meaning.

Within the *Transit Zone*, there exists a multiplicity of sites and operations that condense, reflect, reveal or invert normative society. In 1967 Michel Foucault presented a lecture, *Of Other Spaces*, in which he expounded the idea of “certain sites that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.”<sup>3</sup> These sites can be classed as either utopias, unreal spaces which present society in either a perfected or inverted form, or heterotopias, real places, formed with the founding of society that represent, contest and invert other sites within the culture in which they are situated. These real places exist outside normative space, while still possessing a concrete form. I argue that the *Transit Zone* is a heterotopia, a real site that has formed alongside contemporary society and reflects on it.

The *Transit Zone's* separation from the normative space of the nation-state functions to both reinforce the nation-state and invert its structures. Foucault insisted that heterotopias “have a function in relation to all the space that remains.”<sup>4</sup> He compared their function to a mirror, which when gazed upon makes “this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.”<sup>5</sup> To perceive the structure of nation-state control over territory, citizenship and movement, I use the mirror space of the *Transit Zone*.

Foucault's concept of heterotopia as a way to reflect on society is not unique. The idea of an exception illuminating the general appears in Soren Kierkegaard's argument that:

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<sup>2</sup> “Airside” refers to the secure areas of the airport, including the tarmac.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics*, 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): 23–24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

The exception explains the general and itself. And when one really wants to study the general, one need only look around for a real exception. It brings everything to light more clearly than the general itself. After a while one becomes disgusted with the endless talk about the general – there are exceptions. If they cannot be explained, then neither can the general be explained. Usually the difficulty is not noticed, since the general is thought about not with passion but only with comfortable superficiality. The exception, on the other hand, thinks the general with intense passion.<sup>6</sup>

Many contemporary issues are thought passionately within and around the *Transit Zone*. Immigration, national defence, international politics, logistics, architecture, social interaction and cultural fantasy become visible through the lens of the *Transit Zone*. I approach these issues by describing four sites, combinations of physical and conceptual systems, which can be analysed to reveal particular facets of the *Transit Zone*.

The first site is concerned with the construction of nation-state territory, population and legal movement. Its physical expression can be found at the border between the *Transit Zone* and the nation-state. However, its conceptual reach is much more extensive, appearing in immigration policy, national law, international covenants, data-sharing practices and the creation of a space external to, yet within, the nation-state system. This site creates the *Transit Zone's* paradoxical position of being excluded from nation-state territory while simultaneously defining it. The second site is premised on the (in)security of civil aviation and is expressed through the varying forms of physical, optical and data-based screening. The striving towards absolute security, and the unachievability of that goal, can be seen in the *Transit Zone* and is a reflection of the prevalence of (in)security discourses in contemporary society. The third site is created by corporate interest within the airport terminal and the aeroplane. It is the site of logistics and sales, of the passenger functioning both as an object or unit of movement and as a desiring purchasing

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<sup>6</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, quoted in Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1985), 15.

subject. This site is often referred to as a non-place, yet, as will be shown in my thesis, in many ways this site has a locus and is individualised. The fourth site is constructed through the imagination – it is made up of the ideas, cultural dreams and responses that have accreted around the site of the *Transit Zone*. These intimate and personal responses transform the *Transit Zone* from a site of function, profit and government control to a vehicle for the construction and realisation of fears, fantasies and rites of passage.

As can be seen by the diversity of subjects I will tackle, the *Transit Zone* is made up of sites which function in juxtaposition despite their conflicting interests. As Foucault argued “the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”<sup>7</sup> These sites exist simultaneously, their various needs jostling and competing within one overarching structure.

Within the bounds of the *Transit Zone*, the normative routine of the external world is ruptured, and duration becomes the dominant measure. Foucault asserts that heterotopias either operate by accumulating time or exist as fleeting, transitory sites. Ironically, the *Transit Zone* achieves both these forms of time adjustment: it is a zone of short, intense experiences and accumulated waiting time. “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.”<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of his text Foucault asserted “we are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.”<sup>9</sup> In a literal sense the *Transit Zone* is a network that connects points, brings the near and far together and

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault, ‘*Of Other Spaces*,’ 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

enables the dispersal of migrants, tourists and business people. This network reconceives geography, nation-state territory and perception of place, contributing to the creation of global society.

Aspects of aviation appear in music, literature, film, the performing and visual arts reflecting its widespread influence on western society's expectations, interpretations and experiences of the world. Throughout my analysis of the *Transit Zone*, I integrate discussion of specific performance and visual artworks that explore, explain or contest aspects of this site. The artworks reveal or create new meanings and perspectives. Art has a long standing engagement with societal constructs, ethnographic discourses and political systems. "Anthropology and modern art have always shared, in very different ways, a function of cultural critique in relation to forms of Western modern life."<sup>10</sup> Artists, historical and current, engage with the culture in which they exist, as much as they are formed by the culture in which they exist.

The artists I discuss use the site of the *Transit Zone* as a means to segue into broader themes of movement, stasis, observation and imagination within contemporary society. Their approach led me to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*,<sup>11</sup> wherein he uses the photograph as a conceptual device to move his discussion from photography into a meditation on presence, death and his mother. In a metaphorical way I am going to borrow from Barthes' discussion of photography to express the attraction of the sites of air travel. Barthes described his analysis of photography as both an endeavour to "give a name to Photography's essence" and discuss it as "immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria."<sup>12</sup> I would argue that my interest in the *Transit Zone* stems from a similar desire to pin it down and map it out logically yet discuss it in terms of desire and repulsion. It is a zone that operates through identifiable systems and logics but it also accumulates emotion and fantasy in a way that resists logic. It fascinates and repels, it is traversed in joy and in sorrow. With

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<sup>10</sup> George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, 'The Traffic in Art and Culture : An Introduction', in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

familiarity these emotions are disregarded, yet they are always potentially present.

In two ways I draw a parallel between Barthes' discussion of photography and the ways artists and theorists have approached the *Transit Zone*. The first is through the way he approaches his subject as a spectator, not an operator. Barthes approaches photography as both someone who is photographed, the observed subject, and someone who looks at photographs, the subject observing, rather than as a photographer, "I possessed only two experiences: that of the observed subject and that of the subject observing."<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the theorists and artists I discuss come from similar perspectives: as the passenger in transit, the observed subject; and as the critical analyst, the subject observing. Barthes, by refusing to discuss photography from the perspective of the photographer/operator, articulates the photograph's impact, rather than its technological production.

Theorists who write on the systems of international air travel from the perspective of 'operator' focus on how to manage airports, airlines, immigration, security, air traffic and safety. They approach the subject from a different position to that of the observed or observing subject of the passenger, orienting their research towards achieving best possible practice, maximising efficiency, safety, profit and customer satisfaction. In contrast, the subject observed or observing discusses the impact of the *Transit Zone* on themselves and others, as well as the impact of the 'operator's' political, legal and social practices.

The second parallel transfers to the *Transit Zone* Barthes' articulation of how a small detail within a greater whole gives an image an intensity unique to the specific viewer. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes argues that his broad interest in the photographic image constitutes a *studium*, or "a kind of general enthusiastic commitment."<sup>14</sup> He likens the *studium* to inconsequential taste – we look at photographs because we aesthetically appreciate photographs, but in general they do not capture our continuing attention. However, he continues, within the body of

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

photographs that we observe, we encounter personally specific photographs from which a *punctum* arises unasked and grabs our attention. The *punctum* is that aspect of a photograph unique to each viewer, that attracts or distresses them. It is a small detail like the curve of a shoulder, or a pair of shoes present within the greater whole of the photograph. Barthes says the *punctum* “shoots out like an arrow and pierces me.”<sup>15</sup> This arrow is what gives the photograph a life beyond its image; it provokes the viewer to consider the image with intensity, to attempt to understand what it is about the image that ‘pierces’ them.

In my research into theoretical and artistic discussions of the sites and systems of international air travel, I was struck by the diversity of access points that theorists and artists had found to approach the *Transit Zone*. I came to think of the body of moments, spaces, technologies and concepts that make up the interconnected site of international air travel as a *studium*, or area of general interest. Within the *studium* of international air travel, the theorist, artist and passenger periodically encounter their *punctum*, that which punctures the generality of their experience and becomes the pivotal point of their observation. Within this thesis I will discuss both my general interest in the *Transit Zone* and the elements of it which constitute my individual *puncta*.

These *puncta* can be seen most clearly in my artworks through the objects and subjects that repeatedly appear. For example, the airline blanket has long been a personal *punctum* arising out of the aeroplane. Throughout my work I have utilised the airline blanket as a device to discuss air travel. It represents an airline in its specificity, but more than that, it stands in for the comfort and discomfort of flight, the superficial privacy and intimate physical contact of close quarters, the idea of security and the danger of flight. The blanket is a object of retreat and protection. A simple object, but one which has many associations which can be used with great complexity. I have used the airline blanket to create a variety of artworks since 2003, including the sculptures *Harbouring I by Tentline*, 2003, Figure 5, *Harbouring II by Tentline*, 2004, Figure 6, and *Obsessing with the Surface*, 2005, Figure 7 and Figure 8.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Figure 5: (top) Melissa Laing, *Harbouring I by Tentline*, 2003, Lufthansa and British Airways blankets, tarpaulin, guylines, plastic, fabric. The work was exhibited with the video *The Stewardess*, Figure 9, playing inside it. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 6: (bottom) Melissa Laing, *Harbouring II by Tentline*, 2004, inflight blankets from Garuda Indonesia, American Airlines and Varig Brazil, aluminium, fabric, tarpaulin, book, Discman, inflight cup. Image courtesy the artist.

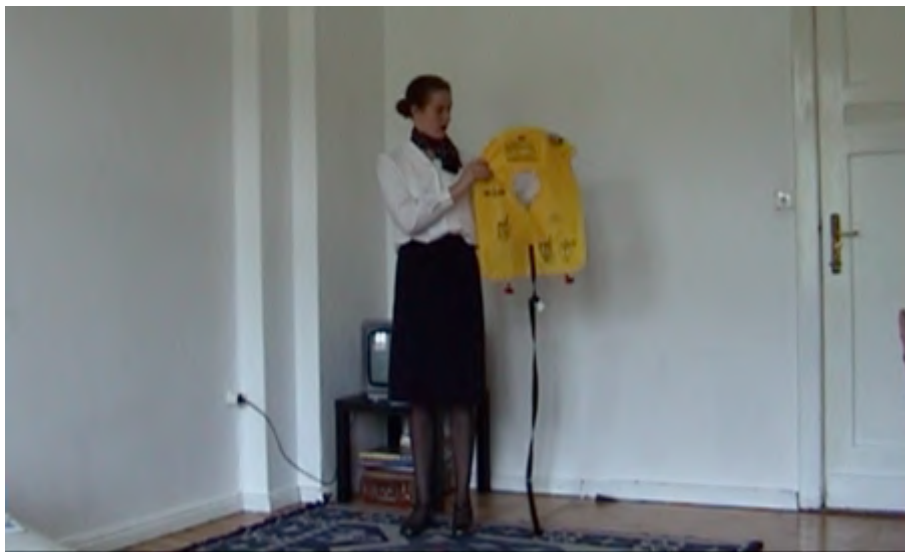


Figure 7: (top left) Melissa Laing, *Obsessing with the Surface*, 2005, Air New Zealand inflight blankets, model plane and people, plinth. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 8: (top right) Melissa Laing, *Obsessing with the Surface*, 2005, Air New Zealand inflight blankets, model plane and people, plinth. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 9: (bottom) Melissa Laing, *The Stewardess*, 2003, single channel video, 45 min. Image courtesy the artist.

They have featured in two video works, *The Stewardess* in 2003, Figure 9 (on the previous page), and *What more can I say* in 2006, Figure 10, and in the unpicked blanket series, Figure 12.

Another personal *punctum* appearing in my work arises out of visa waiver policies. International relations and freedom of movement are articulated for me by the seemingly simple differentiation between nation-states whose citizens receive a visa waiver, and those whose citizens must apply for permission to travel to the same destination. The differentiation is articulated at multiple points in advance of the *Transit Zone* and at its borders. This particular *punctum* was very influential in my perception of the *Transit Zone* as a separated space. My acute awareness of the nation-state interests being played out at the airport border arose out of my experience of working for the New Zealand Immigration Service in Germany, New Zealand and Sydney. Prior to this, I had only ever considered the experience of international air travel from the privileged perspective of a New Zealand citizen with an automatic visa waiver to every country I had visited.

This *punctum* is most explicitly referenced in the work *Atrium* in 2004, Figure 13, a two-channel video which lists all the countries in 2004 whose citizens did not receive a visa waiver to New Zealand or South Africa. This list is normally obscured by the infinitely shorter list of countries whose citizens do receive a visa waiver. Most recently this *punctum* reappears in the 2008 video work *borderline*, Figure 14, which recreates the spaces in which passports and visas are checked.

Last I will mention the fantasy of the flight attendant (not the reality), a *punctum* which has led to some of the more quirky and perverse artworks I have made. The works that have evolved out of this *punctum* explore the fantasies that arise within the Transit Zone. The fantasies surrounding the flight attendant have provided me access to the obsessive relationship I, and other people, have with air travel.



Figure 10: (top left) Melissa Laing, *What more can I say*, 2006, single channel video, 30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 11: (top right) Melissa Laing, *What more can I say*, 2006, single channel video, 30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 12: (bottom) Melissa Laing, *Unpicked blanket series : San Francisco International Airport (32 Hours)*, 2007, Air New Zealand business class blanket. 1.2m x 1.7 m. Image courtesy the artist.



Figure 13: (top) Melissa Laing, *Atrium*, 2004, two channel video, 6.30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 14: (bottom) Melissa Laing, *borderline*, 2008, production still. Image courtesy the artist.

As can be seen in video works such as *The Stewardess*, 2003, Figure 9 page 13, and *Do you know what you really want*, 2007, Figure 15 and Figure 16, I directly engage with the fantasy of being a flight attendant. In other works such as *Abject Apology: August 2001: Performed by an Airline Attendant to Placate Air Rage*, 2005, Figure 17, I look at how emotional responses within the Transit Zone are played out through flight attendants. This list of *puncta* in the studium of the Transit Zone is not exhaustive. However, the *puncta* have acted as points of expansion, and have led to other works which explore related areas.

Both my work and the work of others demonstrate the broad socio-political implications of the sites and systems of international air travel and its extensive links to other fields. However, within this thesis, I restrict my analysis to international civil aviation and the formation of the *Transit Zone*. Although many of the factors that form the *Transit Zone* are present in domestic aviation, international civil aviation demonstrates the most extreme and identifiable manifestations of the separation of the space of civil aviation from normative space and the most dramatic reshaping of geography. Additionally, the internal transit environments of international air travel are generally more complex.

The *Transit Zone* itself forms the boundary of my discussion. While issues of citizenship, immigration, security and nation-state responses to terrorism inform and underpin my arguments, I restrict myself to their impact on the *Transit Zone*. Each of these complex and highly political discourses have had widespread impact internationally; however, they lie outside of the scope of this discussion, which is specifically focussed on how the separated space of international air travel is constructed.

I have also excluded travel discourses from my analysis. In doing so, I choose not to discuss the reasons for and history of travel, other than to recognise that people access the *Transit Zone* for diverse reasons and that this access is not universally available. Those who use air transport are engaged, in various ways, in forms of 'travelling', be it for business, leisure, study, permanent migration, or as a refugee.



Figure 15: (top left) Melissa Laing, *Do you know what you really want*, 2007, single channel video, 30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 16: (top right) Melissa Laing, *Do you know what you really want*, 2007, single channel video, 30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 17: (bottom) Melissa Laing, *Abject Apology: August 2001: Performed by an Airline Attendant to Placate Air Rage*, 2005, single channel video, 2.56 min. Image courtesy the artist.

The entire process, that each individual who flies the ‘friendly skies’ engages in is, in the simplest form, travel, the act of going from one place to another. In discussing the experience of international air travel as transit, I am not excluding it from the experience and act of travel. I am positing it as a state within travel. As such, this thesis does not concern itself with actual destinations and reasons for travel; rather, it concentrates on the networks that exist between destinations and the state of transit that these networks engender.

In 1998 Graeme Hugo wrote:

The last three decades have witnessed a number of parametric changes in the scale, diversity, spatial patterning, and impact of population movements between nations. This is of course a function of broader trends of globalisation but also of increasing levels of education, penetration of mass media to all parts of the world, reductions in the real costs of travel, and increasing demographic and economic inequalities and differences between nations. It has also been facilitated by the proliferation of migrant social networks linking nations and the development of a global and regional immigration industry.<sup>16</sup>

Ten years on from this statement international air traffic volumes are still rising. In 2007 the Airports Council International released a report stating that “By 2010 the number of global passengers is forecast to surpass the 5 billion mark and by 2025 there is expected to be in excess of 9 billion passengers globally.”<sup>17</sup> Statistics released by the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) demonstrates this ongoing increase in movement.<sup>18</sup> In the 2006 – 2007 financial year 22,325,702 international arrivals and departures

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<sup>16</sup> Graeme Hugo, ‘The Globalization of Population Movements: Legal Migrants,’ in *Redefining Security : Population Movements and National Security*, eds. Nana Poku and David T. Graeme (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), 91.

<sup>17</sup> Airports Council International, ‘Global Traffic Forecasts 2006 – 2025: Executive Summary,’ [http://www.airports.org/aci/aci/file/Press%20Releases/2007\\_PRs/ACI\\_Forecast\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.airports.org/aci/aci/file/Press%20Releases/2007_PRs/ACI_Forecast_Executive_Summary.pdf), (accessed March 7, 2008), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, ‘Immigration Snapshot 2003–2004,’ <http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/index.html> (accessed June 16, 2005).

occurred via Australia's sea and airports.<sup>19</sup> Three years earlier, DIMIA stated that "In 2003–04, around 18.6 million air passengers and 1.1 million aircrew personnel arrived and departed compared with around 16.6 million air passengers and one million aircrew arrivals and departures in 2002–03."<sup>20</sup> These statistics demonstrate the increasing scale and prevalence of international air travel in contemporary society. Given the significance of this type of travel, it is important that its sites are explored and contested.

Indeed, the air transport industry has generated a significant amount of writing on its history, management, security, psychology and economics. In addition, international air travel is referenced in discussions on globalisation, territory, citizenship, migration, and sociology. However, in the existing literature, issues such as immigration, nation–state control of territory and security are not discussed concurrently with the internal sites of the *Transit Zone* and the subjective experience of transit. Also of note is that border processing, the interior systems of the airport and the site of the aeroplane are discussed in isolation from each other. I argue that the separation of these issues leads to an incomplete perspective on international air travel as a whole. Through combining the political and legal construction of the *Transit Zone* with reflections on the physical experience of it and artistic interpretations of it, I will endeavour to explore the theoretical and social complexity of international air travel.

Two texts that I have found influential, *Aviopolis*<sup>21</sup> by Gillian Fuller and Ross Rudesch Harley and *Airspaces*<sup>22</sup> by Donald Pascoe, analyse aspects of the *Transit Zone*. These theorists utilise cultural production as an analytical tool and transfer their discussions to the broader socio–cultural arena. This use of international air travel as a means to discuss broader theoretical and cultural issues can also be seen in Manuel Castells' use of

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<sup>19</sup> Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 'Overseas Arrivals and Departures Statistics,' <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/statistical-info/oad/totalmovs/totmov.htm> (accessed January 8, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 'Managing The Border: Immigration Compliance 2003–04 edition,' <http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/index.html> (accessed June 16, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Fuller and Harley, *Aviopolis: A Book About Airports* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> David Pascoe, *Airspaces* (London: Reaktion, 2001).

air travel to discuss society in terms of networks in his book *The Rise of the Network Society*.<sup>23</sup> Likewise Marc Augé utilises the airport and aeroplane to advance his idea of *non-place* in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.<sup>24</sup> And Paul Virilio repeatedly brings air travel into his theoretical arguments on speed, time and distance.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in this thesis I utilise the *Transit Zone* to discuss the construction of nation-state territory, immigration, identity, security and the conversion of waiting time into economically useful activity. All of these aspects are also part of broader societal issues that exist outside the *Transit Zone*.

Pascoe uses the airport and civil aviation as a lens on contemporary society, as do Fuller and Harley. As Fuller writes in the introduction to *Aviopolis*, “In a world where mobility and connectivity of all kinds is increasing, the cultural significance of what we call the aviopolis has become apparent – for reasons ranging from security issues and civil rights, to urban planning and biometrics.”<sup>26</sup> Pascoe, reflecting on our cultural history through the airport, says, “It is not simply through the basic physical manifestations of airspace that we can discern the shapes of our modernities; we must also be aware of its representations.”<sup>27</sup>

Fuller and Harley locate their discussion of the airport within contemporary control and network society, focussing closely on how the airport functions as a system of interconnected human and non-human actors. In *Aviopolis*, the subject is approached from multiple angles: methodologically through photographs, text and diagrams; and conceptually through an analysis of logistics, networks, signage, identity, biometrics, the language of architecture, scale and terraforming. The photographic analysis forms a core part of the book, the images demonstrating more clearly than a description how the spaces are dominated by signs, windows, clocks, queues and security devices.

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<sup>23</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London, New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Columbia University, 1986).; Virilio, *The Lost Dimension* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Fuller and Harley, *Aviopolis: A Book About Airports*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Pascoe, *Airspaces*, 10.

Fuller and Harley posit the airport as an advance warning system for effects of globalisation on society, forecasting the future of urban and political environments through the vehicle of the airport. At one point, Fuller describes the airport as “a seeping miasma of control spaces and logistical architecture that is woven into the everyday life of the city.”<sup>28</sup> Underpinning their analysis is the assertion that what occurs at the airport, physically and logistically, has the potential to be implemented in everyday life. In the introduction Fuller provides the following examples: “Innovations in Security (such as biometric processing), legislative exceptions (such as the USA’s Homeland Security Bill) and transnational sovereignty (IATA and other global entities) are often tried out at the airport before being introduced to the polis in general.”<sup>29</sup> Paul Virilio has also argued that the airport is a testing ground for new control technologies that are later found in prisons and cities. In the *Lost Dimension* he writes, “As airports were turned into theaters of necessary regulation of exchange and communication, they also became breeding and testing grounds for high–pressured experiments in control and aerial surveillance.”<sup>30</sup>

Forecasting future political and social systems through the airport is one of two dominant approaches to the subject of the civil aviation. The other approach, exemplified by David Pascoe’s insightful book *Airspaces*, explores the role civil aviation plays in contemporary society through a historical analysis. Pascoe’s book tracks the development of contemporary airspaces, in conjunction with the rise and fall of modernist ideals, through the appearance of aeroplanes and airports in literature, politics, war and architectural writing. Drawing from historical moments as diverse as Adolf Hitler’s election campaign in 1932, the opening of the TWA Terminal in 1961 and the Concorde crash at Charles de Gaulle Airport in 2000, plus the work of modernist cultural icons such as Le Corbusier and Marcel Proust, Pascoe constructs a compelling picture of how aviation has influenced society and cultural production positively and negatively.

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<sup>28</sup> Fuller and Harley, *Aviopolis: A Book About Airports*, 106.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, 10.

For example, Pascoe, discussing flight as a public spectacle, demonstrates the excitement and creative impetus that aviation has created. He presents examples from Marcel Proust, who used the aeroplane as a simile for creative velocity and achievement. He also provides a contrasting view of the airport as a theatre for war and disaster. He exposes the ways in which airports and aeroplanes have been intimately connected to war, violence and trauma in a discussion of the acts of terror–violence by the German Red Army Faction occurring at Berlin’s Tempelhof Airport in the 1970s.

Through his historical analysis of the airport Pascoe arrives at an understanding of the complexity of the airport’s role in societal imagination. His examples show that despite the contemporary cliché of the airport as a site of ubiquity and modern alienation, it is a lightning rod for dreams, inspiration and disaster. Pascoe presents airports and ‘airspaces’ as existing in a tension between the prosaic and the fantastical, the logistics of flight and the inspiration of it existing uneasily in parallel. As Pascoe says of the airport, it communicates “a resonant duplicity: the double feeling of hating control and yet cherishing it; of reaching for the sky and yet being fixed in place; of wanting to take off and yet not wanting to.”<sup>31</sup>

In my thesis I take up both Pascoe’s examination of the potential of aviation for inspiration and disaster, and Fuller and Harley’s logistical analysis of the airport. I expand their discussions on the airport to include the construction of the nation–state border and the in-flight experience. The airport straddles that border and is a point of transfer where national and international interest meet and can be analysed. The interior of the aeroplane is both a reflection of the re–conceptualisation of territory embodied in the airport border, as it has a mutable relationship to national territory, and it is a significant part of the passenger experience through the *Transit Zone*. While both the interaction of the nation–state border with the site of the airport and the in-flight experience are referenced in *Aviopolis* and *Airspaces*, they are not examined in detail. In my thesis I will

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<sup>31</sup> Pascoe, *Airspaces*, 18–19.

demonstrate the importance of discussing the airport, the border and the inflight experience in combination.

I follow Pascoe and Fuller and Harley's lead in using art work as a research tool. Throughout the thesis I use my own, and other artists' art works to analyse the *Transit Zone*. As David Pascoe demonstrates in *Airspaces*, artists, authors and filmmakers have been reconceiving civil aviation since its inception. All the artworks that I discuss in this thesis are engaged in creating new meanings within, around and through the *Transit Zone*. I use their elaboration, simplification, accents and fantasies as points to work from or towards in my analysis of the systems of the *Transit Zone*. In some cases, I theorise what they demonstrate about the structure of the *Transit Zone*; in other cases I use them to disrupt the conventional view and suggest potential for wonder, change and meaning within what is traditionally held to be a repressive, controlled non-place.

To contextualise the artworks within contemporary art discourse, I have chosen to preface my analysis of the *Transit Zone* with a discussion on contemporary art practices. Chapter 1, *Art in Context*, explores how artists access the *Transit Zone* through contemporary art practices, creating what theorist Justine Lloyd calls documents that are "strategic and tactical statements in themselves, as they often intercede in and contest, as well as reproduce, the fantasies of a society in motion."<sup>32</sup> These include art as a form of critical and political discourse, the artist as ethnographer, performativity as a form of art practice and public art at the airport. This chapter provides a context for the interpretation of art as an independent area of critical research and informs the analysis of the *Transit Zone*.

I have constructed my discussion of the *Transit Zone* like a matryoshka doll, the nested doll which, when opened, reveals a new doll inside, and inside that doll another, and so on. Each chapter is independent, yet what it discusses fits within the previous chapter, as each doll fits inside the larger one. These chapters represent four different approaches to describing the internal structures of the *Transit Zone*, and the external

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<sup>32</sup> Justine Lloyd, 'I'd Rather Not Be in Marrickville: Aerial Modernities and the Domestication of the Sublime' (PhD diss., University of Western Sydney, 2000).

forces that it interacts with. As a result, each chapter engages with different areas of research and theorists. This approach fits the diversity of interests which converge at the *Transit Zone*.

The first of these chapters, *The Transit Zone and the Nation-State*, explores how international air travel has impacted on the contemporary structure of the nation-state and how it is in turn formed by the international and national discourses of territorial sovereignty, citizenship and the nation-state's right to control movement across national borders. I argue that international air travel has had a significant impact on how nation-state borders are conceived through an examination of an internationally-codified juridic conception of the nation-state as the legitimate source of authority over its territories and citizens.

I use the Chicago Convention, an international convention drawn up in 1944 that is still used today to structure international air travel, to demonstrate how territorial sovereignty over land, air and water is codified through international air travel.<sup>33</sup> The linking of international air travel to nation-state interests and processes, which are informed by global agreements, demonstrates the ongoing importance of the nation-state system in a society which is increasingly globalised. As Saskia Sassen argues, "The epochal transformation we call globalization is taking place inside the national to a far larger extent than is usually recognized. It is here that the most complex meanings of the global are being constituted, and the national is also often one of the key enablers and enactors of the emergent global scale."<sup>34</sup>

I explore the reconceptions that have occurred around the sites and systems of international air travel to maintain territorial sovereignty while managing international movement. I argue that the major conceptual shift forms around the creation of the micro-border, arbitrarily located inside the physical borders of the nation-state. Using Giorgio Agamben's influential exposition on contemporary and historical uses of exclusion and

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<sup>33</sup> International Civil Aviation Organisation, 'Convention on International Civil Aviation, Signed at Chicago, on 7 December 1944 (Chicago Convention)', 1944.

<sup>34</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights : From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.

banning, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*,<sup>35</sup> I argue that the nation-state strategically suspends its territory to create the airport border and so enables the control of movement across it. In this way the *Transit Zone* as a separated space is formed.

This conceptual, bureaucratically-realised border is not concerned with territorial connections to neighbouring countries. Rather, it is focused on international relations and movement. Air travel's impact on geographic proximity reorders the perception of space and draws the world closer for those who can travel; however, it also exposes global inequality. I argue that the exclusion of the *Transit Zone* from the space of the nation-state has created a confinement space. Inside this confinement space, undesirable travellers presenting themselves at the airport border are denied entry and held outside the nation-state, until they are returned to where ever they came from.

The construction and control of international air travel also has strong and ongoing links to the identification and embracing of its citizens by the nation-state system. Utilising John Torpey's in-depth analysis of the history of the passport and other national identity documents in *The Invention of the Passport*,<sup>36</sup> I explore how ideas of citizenship and proof of identity have interacted with the *Transit Zone*. The passport, together with national immigration policies, provides a basis for nation-states to manage legal and illegal movement in and out of sovereign territory. Continuing with Agamben's theory of exclusion as a fundamental operating principle of the contemporary nation-state, I look at how immigration policy uses citizenship to regulate desirable and undesirable movement. I also explore how refugee status, and the loss of citizenship, can negatively impact on an individual, causing an individual to be excluded from the normative space of the nation-state and the associated rights that citizenship grants. The stratification of rights to movement by citizenship, identity documents, and visas is visible at the border of the *Transit Zone*.

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<sup>35</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

In the final part of this chapter, I draw together the changing ideas of the border and individual right to international movement. I explore how nation-states are pushing their borders further and further away from their physical territory. Visa decisions made at embassies and consulates and the advance transfer of passenger information by airlines allow nation-states to screen passengers before they even enter the *Transit Zone*, creating a virtual border in advance of the airport. Airline officials make border decisions at check-in. Passengers are advance-processed into the United States on the Canadian side of the border, and the *Schengen* states of the European Union have shifted their borders to the outermost points. Borders are constantly being reconceived, and international air travel is pivotal in these changes, as will be demonstrated throughout Chapter 2.

I then move on to the next nested layer of discussion. Chapter 3, *(in)Security at the Border*, explores how much of the physical expression of the *Transit Zone* as a separated space has been shaped by the ever-increasing systems of control over movement, identity and security. Whereas early international air travel occurred in an environment of openness and privilege, since the late 1960s there has been an escalation of immigration and security measures and suspicion that runs concurrently with an increase in hijacking and terrorism and the arrival of spontaneous or illegal refugees at the airport border. The arrival of a spontaneous refugee, the success of a hijacking or an act of terror-violence represents a failure of the systems of the *Transit Zone* to control and filter its inhabitants.

Security in the *Transit Zone* makes a promise of safety for the nation-state which is conflated with safety for the individual. However, acts of terror-violence evolve with security practices and a guarantee of safety is unrealistic. In seeking this guarantee, security practices create a culture of unease and an insecure, obedient public. At this point in the evolution of security practices at the airport, one can see the growing dominance of the presumption of guilt, and the demand for self exposure or confession, that occurs when entering and exiting the *Transit Zone*. Security in the *Transit Zone* also makes visible a focus on permanently fixing identity through the use of biometrics. The scrutiny of identity, body and luggage

aimed at preventing potential terror–violence has become intimately linked with the other major security discourses around immigration and customs that occur in the *Transit Zone*. The existence of multiple security practices at the airport border creates a ‘clean space’ for international air travel which reinforces the separation of this space from the normative space of the nation–state.

I argue that the current (in)security practices in place in the *Transit Zone* have evolved out of watershed periods of hijacking and terror–violence. In this chapter, I focus on two periods: 1968 – 1972 and 2001. Acts of terror–violence against civil aviation achieve a disproportionate impact on the public, aided by the high levels of media attention they receive. Despite the relatively low frequency of such attacks compared to attacks on other public and private institutions, the public perceives a high risk and accepts a concurrently high level of intrusive security in the *Transit Zone*. I argue that the events of September 11, 2001 are the latest in a series of event periods which have led to the implementation of new security systems in the *Transit Zone* and the concurrent tightening of the *Transit Zone*’s borders.

Having focused on the *Transit Zone* specifically in relation to how nation–state interests in local and global arenas play out in and around it, in Chapter 4, *Passenger–Object, Passenger–Subject*, I deliberately shift my attention to how non–state actors such as architects, airport management bodies, airlines, and associated commercial ventures in areas such as retail and multimedia have constructed the internal experience of the *Transit Zone*. Both the *Transit Zone* and the greater system of commercial aviation exist to manage, and profit from, the business of moving passengers and cargo by air. To achieve this, commercial aviation constitutes itself through a multiplicity of interconnecting sites and systems. While the factors that I explore exist throughout domestic and international aviation inside and outside the nation–state, I focus specifically on how they reveal themselves within the *Transit Zone*.

To manage and profit from moving and holding people, the systems of the *Transit Zone* must both automate and standardise the passengers, thereby maximising operational uniformity, as well as provide services,

conveniences and consumer opportunities catering to individual taste in order to maximise profit and customer satisfaction. The logistical and commercial structures create an obedient, standardised, complicit unit of movement, while also activating a desiring, consuming subject. I argue that these two positions shape the individual experience of the *Transit Zone*.

I first explore how the passenger is automated, with their co-operation, into a unit of movement that moves swiftly through the *Transit Zone*, and the strategies that are in place to engender this. I argue that the passenger moves through the *Transit Zone* guided by fixed and changeable architectural and informational systems. These include the physical layout of the environments, management of time, informational and directional signage, electronic flight indicator devices, itineraries and boarding cards, data transfers and human and non-human customer service agents. These systems channel passengers into flows and create holding points for them in both the airport and the aeroplane. I identify these systems and analyse how they are used to structure the passenger experience.

Operating in parallel with the logistical systems of the *Transit Zone* are retail, entertainment and distraction devices. Using a number of case studies including the multimedia inflight entertainment systems, the construction of spectacle and Changi Airport's facilities, I explore how the passenger as a desiring subject is activated. The *Transit Zone* is separated from the normative space of the nation-state, and this separation also severs the passenger from their usual environment. I argue that, in addition to generating profit, the facilities at the airport and in the plane are designed to distract the passenger from this separation and the experience of duration that underlies the *Transit Zone*.

Through my discussion of the *Transit Zone*, I explore the ubiquity of its sites, constructed by systems that demand uniformity, and the familiar international retail chains which can be found in every airport. I contrast this ubiquity with the place-making endeavours of airports and airlines that locate each site culturally and aesthetically and politically. I argue

that airports and airlines promote themselves to the travelling public as unique through their facilities, using Changi Airport as an example.

The fifth and final chapter, *Reimagining the Transit Zone*, explores the cultural imaginings, desires and fears that have evolved around civil aviation and the *Transit Zone*. As David Pascoe, in *Airspaces*, argues, “Airports, lying as they do at the threshold of airspace, should be treated not as the sterile transitory zones with which we are all familiar, but as ‘vessels of conception’ for the societies passing through them.”<sup>37</sup> Utilising diverse artworks, I explore how aspects of the *Transit Zone* have been linked to existing religious and social rituals, fantasies and emotions. These reimaginings contest and rework the structure of the *Transit Zone* and the meanings that nation-state and commercial interests have created around it.

I discuss how artists have explored the liminal nature of border crossing and the separated space of the *Transit Zone*, and how they have compared it to a rite of passage with associated emotional resonance and cultural significance. I also look at works by artists that explicitly link Christian theology with the sites and figures of the *Transit Zone*. These associations include ideas of purgatory, spiritual guidance, the invocation of the pilot as God and the flight attendant as Virgin Mary. I connect this to the contemporary political structure of the *Transit Zone* through Karl Schmitt’s argument that western juridic principles have evolved out of traditional theological structures.

Another area of discussion focuses on how gender is constructed and performed within the *Transit Zone*. By analysing the cultural expectations of the primary roles associated with flight, the pilot and the flight attendant, I explore the *Transit Zone* as both a site of normalised heterosexual roles, and a site of sexual fantasy. The role of the flight attendant as mother, comforter, symbol of subservient femininity and subject of sexual desire is variously explored and contested by artists and theorists. Likewise, the pilot’s construction as masculine, competent and brave is subverted.

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<sup>37</sup> Pascoe, *Airspaces*, 10.

I argue that the *Transit Zone* generates unusual behaviour due to the separation from normal routines and social constraints. This is expressed through explicit sexual behaviour and air rage in the aeroplane. I link this back to the legal exclusion from the nation-state and how aggression and other behaviour that breaks the law upset this separation. Finally, I explore the site of the aeroplane as a place of fear and isolation, and how this site has been used to expose these same emotions in the normative spaces of society.

The above chapters that I have outlined explore the structures and contradictions of the *Transit Zone*, building a complex picture of its political and social impacts and conventions. The artworks push at these structures, creating room to rethink them. It is within the spaces that these artworks, and the discussions theorists have created, that I construct my understanding of the *Transit Zone*.