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Dwelltime



Airport Technology, Travel, and Consumption

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This essay speculates on the changing forms through which “traveler’s space” is materially constituted within the fabric of everyday life. The author first provides a history of traveler’s space as a non-place, via the writings of Le Corbusier, Boorstin, and Augé. Second, through an examination of the recent public work of celebrity architects such as Norman Foster, the author suggests that rather than displaying a tendency to an overarching “supermodernity” dictating flow and movement, contemporary technospaces work toward a new experience of waiting as pleasurable. This hybrid and remixed modernity invites a different kind of engagement between technology and travel that affects our ways of being in place. Finally, in a case study of the recent renovation of Sydney Airport, the author draws some distinctions between the scales of travel (local, regional, global), which affect such spatial performances.

Keywords: airports; travel spaces; liminality; distraction; consumption; modernity

They revamped the airport completely
Now it looks just like a nightclub
Everyone’s excited and confused.

—Flansburgh and Linnell (2001)

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Recent urban design has been characterized by a rejection of modernist functionalism. This is evident in the considerable emphasis on style in post-1970s urban architectural design.¹ A less discussed topic is the function of this architecture. The close attention that urban designers have recently given to considerations of utility strays far from the well-rehearsed divergence between form and function that is seen to mark postmodernism. Yet witness the new emphasis on fantasy in themed environments, the development of aesthetics of communal spaces in public art and street-scaping, the massive public- and private-sector investment in urban festivals and civic celebrations: All seek to reinscribe pleasure and desire in the urban subject. The motivations behind this increased focus on affect in design may range from warding off perceived threats to personal safety and security through increased surveillance to a need to increase property values and retail opportunities, yet their aggregate effect is remarkably similar. The formerly nonproductive act of loitering in the street and mall is encouraged, mobilized, and transformed into a form of economically useful activity.

This pleasurable postfunctionalism is particularly evident in the current revamping of airports, railway stations, and to a lesser extent bus stations by public and semi-public authorities.² This reinvestment in public and private transit has given a new distinction to urban routes: no longer somewhere to pass through, but somewhere to *spend* time. Here, after Siegfried Kracauer (1995), I consider the task of architecture in these new public spaces as an organization of distraction. Kracauer—influenced by the work of other cultural critics, including Walter Benjamin—believed that modernity was marked by experiences of distraction that hold at bay experiences of dissolution and fragmentation. Seizing on the ways in which the new cultural forms of “radio, telephotography . . . the expansion of land, air and water traffic . . . and speed records” represented a radical displacement and reconstitution of human sensory capacities through mechanical means, Kracauer (p. 70) and Benjamin sought to understand the new forms of subjectivity that these cultural forms allow. Kracauer believed that “spatiotemporal passions” of distraction (namely, travel and dance) delivered a

liberation from earthly woes, the possibility of an aesthetic relation to organised toil, [corresponding] to the sort of elevation above the ephemeral and the contingent that might occur within people’s existence in the relation to the eternal and the absolute. (p. 72)

Distraction from what is not the question, but rather distraction as an end in itself. Rather than contemplation or transcendence of the ephemeral, distraction’s object is to immerse the traveler in the very surface of the travel experience: hence a sense of the passing landscape as “flattened out” and relativized. Distraction is increasingly evident in the inclusion of fabulous spaces within the most banal, in other words (as expressed in this issue’s call for papers), the linking of junctural zones with liminal spaces—the airport as nightclub, the railway station as arcade, the Internet café.

Temporal investment, rather than pure expenditure, encapsulated in the notion of “spending” time, is crucial to this “nightclubbing” of nonplaces. Instead of experiencing waiting time as wasted time, which inevitably leads to boredom and alienation from one’s environment, the urban traveler is invited to use transit time to accumulate useful experiences of leisure and work in this revamped nonplace. The alleviation of anxiety about flying and other travel, through the introduction of a level of homeliness in the waiting zone—as well as an intensification of surveillance—has also become necessary in the age of the “War on Terror.” This notion of the livability of transit zones has even been recently encapsulated in the concept of *dwelltime*, which is now

used by airport planners to plan and create such zones. It is also used to measure states of waiting and consumption, as in “increasing per-passenger dwelltime” (Chandler, 2002, p. 2).

Because my research method has been rather anecdotal and personal, I draw most of my examples in this article from the east coast of Australia, particularly Sydney, where I have lived on and off for the past 15 years. The phenomenon I describe here escalated sharply during the late 1990s, especially as Sydney’s property market dusted itself off from a long cycle of bust post-1987 and launched headlong into an Olympics-driven real estate boom. To provide a context for this new-fashioned non-place, this essay is organized into three sections: In the first, I trace how the notion of the nonplace was produced by the functionalist city; in the second, I examine some responses to late 20th-century calls to rework this form of urbanism; in the third and final part, I describe the ways in which the recent renovation of Sydney’s main airport, Kingsford-Smith, illustrates current trends in the structure of global cities, in which the nonplace itself becomes a destination for the tourist.

The Functionalist City

The practice of architecture in the 20th century has sought to understand and rework relations between social and spatial form. With the release of countless manifestos and declarations, modern architects have expressed their role as shaping everyday life rather than simply creating containers for it. For the “progressive” modernist architectural programs, such as Bauhaus and internationalism, which were assembled as the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in the 1920s, the key to a new social order was a new spatial order based on the benefits of technological progress. Thus “the four functions” of the modern city were defined in CIAM’s (1942) “Charter of Athens” of 1933: *habitation, work, leisure, and circulation*. The inclusion of the urban principle of circulation in the charter meant that in modernist designs, the mechanics of public transportation, including railways, roads, and pedestrian zones, took equal, if not greater, importance to urban monuments and housing. This discourse on transport technology inaugurated the modern urbanists’ attempt to transpose temporal social processes into spatial functions and “fix” them within the city’s structure. This new “city of circulation” had as its goal the clear definition and separation of urban environments into exclusive zones of domestic, labor, and leisure activities. New transport technologies offered the means to distance areas of work from housing, and work from leisure, and thus to solidify the modern city’s order for its citizens.

Indeed, French modernist architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier, an early member of CIAM and one of its most high-profile architects, saw the need to rework the entire scale of entire city design from the guiding principle of these urban flows. CIAM’s (1942) “Charter of Athens” guided Le Corbusier’s urban design well into the 1960s, and he particularly identified the charter’s “fourth function,” urban circulation, as crucial to his architectural philosophy. As Le Corbusier (1964) wrote in *The Radiant City*, “here we set the play of consequence in motion; everything is connected. Modern times are coming!” (p. 60). The connection of “everything” urban meant that public and private spaces were in correspondence, and all urban elements could be brought into a homogeneous totality. For Le Corbusier

(1959), the notion of circulation linked together the other three “functions” of the modern city, which were distributed and “contained” in formally zoned areas of living, working, and leisure:

The force of this Charter lies in giving the first place to the dwellings: the environment of living—the family under the rule of “24 solar hours.”

The second place is given to working, which is the daily act of human obligation.

The third is the culture of the body on one hand and an intellectual leisure on the other.

When all these goals have received their definitive containers, it is possible to give to each of them a respective rightful place and at this moment can interfere the problem of realizing the contacts: that is “circulation.”

This spatial separation of social functions in the modern city represented modernist architects and planners’ declaration of intent to design for a new mass mobility. Yet this functionalist city did not consider these sites of mobility as places in themselves—circulation, in Le Corbusier’s urban imaginary, was “uncontainable.” In a discourse of urbanism that applied engineering principles to the organization and layout of cities, Le Corbusier realized a modernist cultural program to offer all citizens access to the coming mobility. During the 1920s, Le Corbusier’s (1927, p. 100) writings on architecture had popularized the slogan “the house is a machine for living,” in a series of calls for a “new architecture” founded on the new speeds of modern traffic: “We may then affirm that the airplane mobilized invention, intelligence and daring: *imagination and cold reason*” (p. 101). In *Towards a New Architecture*, Le Corbusier instructed his contemporary readers not to see new technologies within the frame of nature but as distinctly new forms in their own right; “above all we must learn to see in an airplane not a bird or a dragon-fly, but a machine for flying” (p. 102). Le Corbusier thus posed his vision of the “essentially technological” as a corrective to a futile “wish image” expressed in designs that tried to emulate nature through technology: “To wish to fly like a bird is to state the problem badly, and Adler’s ‘Bat’ never left the ground” (p. 105). As a progressive and modernist architect allied with the European Left, Le Corbusier imagined the future city as much improved and profoundly democratized by a universally available mobility. Although he would moderate his initial ideas on the ideal balance between urban mobility and urban dwelling over his lifetime, Le Corbusier’s writings in the 1920s and 1930s placed primary importance on the former rather than the latter.

Although still a modernist, rather than seeing wish images such as “Adler’s ‘Bat?’” as “false consciousness,” Walter Benjamin understood that this modern tendency to “cite” the natural within the technological exposed fundamental contradictions in industrial society. For instance, Benjamin observed that within the Paris Arcades, the “new is intermingled with the old in fantastic ways” (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 115). In new objects housed in the Arcades, artisanal labor and the work of the hand were displaced by mass-produced commodities, which in turn tried to appear as handcrafted objects. Benjamin, following Marx, saw the replacement of the new form of production by the old as a process of imbrication and intermixture of fantasy and fact, exposing the commodity’s alliance to myth and irrationality, rather than a clean break from one epoch and progress to another more “rational” one. Any attempt to represent the technological within the organic was therefore an attempt to make sense of the “modern” by styling new technologies through anachronism and outmoded materials.

Out of Place

The traveller's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*.

—Augé (1995, p. 87)

While the functionalist city was being formed from the 19th-century cityscape, Walter Benjamin, writing in exile from Berlin in Paris in the 1930s, noted in his *Arcades Project* that the buildings that defined modernity were “connected with transitoriness in both the spatial sense (as railroad stations, places of transit) and the temporal one (as galleries for world exhibitions, typically torn down after they were closed)” (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 130). The Eiffel Tower epitomized this style; it was built for the 1889 Paris Exposition but remained after the fair because it was used as a tower for radio broadcasting (Buck-Morss, 1989, pp. 130-131). The tower served a practical function, but it also served as a site for performing the “new heroic age of technology,” reflected in the stripped back, unadorned aesthetic of engineering embodied in the tower. The definitive figure of this heroic age was the modern architect, operating within rational and technical systems of thought, uncovering the essential technological function embedded within modern buildings. The coupling of form with function at this time was also an institutionalization of the urbanist principle of circulation.

The architectural program of functionalism has produced what Daniel Boorstin (1963) called “pseudoplaces” in the 1960s United States or more recently Marc Augé (1995) called “nonplaces.” Boorstin’s notion of the “pseudoplace” stemmed from his critique of the way that media industries privilege representation over reality. He perceived that the technologization of the experience of modernity fundamentally altered the relationship between the traveler and space en route:

Increase in motor travel, both for business and pleasure, has changed the character of lodgings en route. Formerly the motorist seeking good lodgings en route had to detour through the heart of the city. There he could not avoid a view of the courthouse, the shops, the industrial, commercial, and residential districts. Now the motel makes all this unnecessary. Meanwhile, city planners and traffic engineers, hoping to reduce congestion in urban centres, spend large sums on bypasses and super highways to prevent the long-distance motorist from becoming entangled in the daily life of their community. (p. 120)

Boorstin’s (1963) contrast between places and pseudoplaces is founded on a division between daily life in the heterogeneous, spontaneous space of the urban center and the homogenous, managed familiarity of the motel as a place apart from daily life. He saw this as part of a modernization process: “Planned travel, attractions, fairs, expositions ‘especially for tourists’, and all their prefabricated adventures . . . can be made convenient, comfortable, risk-free, trouble-free, as spontaneous travel never was and never is” (p. 124).

Augé (1995), to be able to tell the difference between place and nonplace, declared that a new, hyperactive stage of modernity—supermodernity—now exists. Supermodernity, as a form of asociality (the subjection of the “individual consciousness to entirely new experiences and ordeals of solitude, directly linked with the appearance and proliferation of non-places” [p. 93]), needs and creates nonplaces. Augé suggested that Benjamin’s study of the Paris Arcades was a precedent for his own model of nonplaces (or pseudoplaces) as “spaces which are not themselves anthropological places

and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places" (p. 78). Supermodernity marks the seamless integration of the functionalist landscape of circulation into a triumphant totality. In the "modernity of the Baudelairean landscape . . . everything is combined," the old and new are interwoven; on the other hand, supermodernity "makes the old (history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity . . . in the non-places of supermodernity, there is always a specific position . . . for 'curiosities' presented as such" (p. 110). The nonplace, like the pseudoplace, is defined by what it lacks (community, unpredictability, difference): "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (pp. 77-78).

From a slightly different (perhaps eccentrically subjective) view, however, the nonplace can be seen as positive and enabling. Such places of circulation provide opportunities for habitation, work, and leisure for people for whom they were not intended. They can be more easily appropriated for marginalized forms of identity and communities in difference. For those outside or marginal to the authentic, organic community of the traditional town center, the nonplace may be the only place to be had. The everyday escapes both the "real" place and leaks into the nonplace, confusing stable identities and fixed subject positions. Another way of explaining this occurs in the concept of liminality. Victor Turner (1982) observed that when a social group or individual passes from one status or category to another, rituals or rites of passage are enacted at the moment of liminality, or "betweenness," when one state or identity is completed and a new state is about to be taken up. Liminal *states* take place in and are constitutive of liminal *spaces*, the space of an intermixed threshold between one clearly defined area and another. In these states, the homogeneity of each space is threatened, and rituals must be enacted to ensure the maintenance of centers and their boundaries. These rituals either incorporate the foreign body into the domestic or vice versa. What marks the oddness of the nonplace is that no intact, organic community holds the ritual power. Rather, the liminal state of the nonplace is iterated through rituals of consumption and transactions between companies or state authorities. In the case of the nonplace, the ritualization of states of identity suspended between home territory and foreignness does not produce stability but enables mobility.

The destabilization of categories of home and work in the nonplace can be particularly useful to marginalized subjectivities, as Meaghan Morris (1988) illustrated in her essay on the Henry Parkes Motel, located in the Australian country town of Tenterfield. Morris characterized the nonplace as a site of narrative suspension and described the way that she, as an "Unprotected Female Traveller," resided in the nonplace differently from the heroic male explorer. The motel's lack of place allows an estrangement of place and retelling of established histories for the woman as critic because it marks the site of symbolic struggle and transformation of dominant narratives. Precisely because it is betwixt and between places, the nonplace enables the reinscription of powerful meanings of home and travel, history and theory, work and play within its boundaries (Lloyd, in press). Any attempt to transform nonplace into place will also reinscribe dominant narratives, perhaps to the exclusion of such eccentric subjects.

Dysfunctioning Functionalism

New urbanism, perhaps the most renowned contemporary urban architectural movement, has stated its reformist objectives in explicitly antifunctionalist terms. Influential new urbanist critics such as James Howard Kunstler (1996a) have ridiculed modernist spaces that champion mobility, promoting instead the emblem of “Main Street” “as our [American] preeminent type of street . . . an outdoor room” (p. 120). In his article “Home From Nowhere,” in a section titled “Creating Someplace,” Kunstler³ asked his reader,

Is Main Street your idea of a nice business district? Sorry, your zoning laws won't let you build it, or even extend it where it already exists. Is Elm Street your idea of a nice place to live—you know, houses with front porches on a tree-lined street? Sorry, Elm Street cannot be assembled under the rules of large-lot zoning and modern traffic engineering. All you can build where I live is another version of Los Angeles—the zoning laws say so . . .

What zoning produces is suburban sprawl, which must be understood as the product of a particular set of instructions. Its chief characteristics are the strict separation of human activities, mandatory driving to get from one activity to another, and huge supplies of free parking. After all, the basic idea of zoning is that every activity demands a separate zone of its own. For people to live around shopping would be harmful and indecent. Better not even to allow them within walking distance of it. They'll need their cars to haul all that stuff home anyway.

New urbanism's vocabulary, expressed in the new urbanist charter, evokes an imaginary of consensus of place through authentic and identifiable regionalism, locality, community: “We dedicate ourselves to reclaiming *our* [italics added] homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment” (Congress for the New Urbanism, 1998). New urbanism embraces the notion of urban centralization and charges the architect and planner with creating clear boundaries to reorient the urban commuter away from the spaces of circulation: “The metropolis is made of multiple centers that are cities, towns, and villages, each with its own identifiable center and edges” (Congress for the New Urbanism, 1998). New urbanist philosopher Albert Borgmann (1999) identified consumption (defined as “the unencumbered enjoyment of glamorous commodities”) as a “debilitating malady” afflicting urban commonality: “Consumption is the adversary of community” (p. 1). Community can be wrested back from consumption (here equated with a harmful “distraction from reality”) only by small-scale, regionally based urban planning:

The New Urbanism is a principled attempt at restructuring the material environment so as to conduce to social and physical engagement. Neighbourhoods invite talking to neighbors and walking to stores, taverns and concert halls. In such ways, a common reality is regained from the isolation and distraction of consumption . . . Thus in addition to making towns walkable we must make them hospitable to focal practices and communal celebrations. (p. 1)

These antifunctionalist ideas of pedestrianism over automobility, communality over consumption, Baudelairean modernity over supermodernity are manifest in several recent high-profile architectural projects. The work of “celebrity” architect Sir Norman Foster exemplifies the widening influence of new urbanism outside the United States, and outside mass housing developments, as an attempt to cite tradi-

tional forms of architecture and promote communal space. Such grand projects elaborate new urbanism beyond the scale of the street and neighbourhood. Indeed, the Foster Studio's recent achievements "include the new international airport at Chek Lap Kok, in Hong Kong, the largest construction project of modern times . . . the Commerzbank in Frankfurt, the tallest building in Europe" (Sudjic & Foster and Partners, 2001). An exhibition on the studio's work at the British Museum in 2001 curated by Deyan Sudjic and Patrick Uden identified four main themes in the urban work of the practice:

light and space—the use of daylight to enhance democratic spaces; routes and places—urban connections between and through buildings; density and energy—ecologically responsible and sustainable architecture; and old and new—urban regeneration and the revitalization of old buildings.

The studio's "use of daylight, together with flexible spaces" works to "create a sense of openness, encouraging communication." Such flexibility and daylight create "visual connections between different parts of a building, making it easier to understand and navigate . . . different activities can be combined under a single roof to promote interaction and break down barriers." The studio's design for Stansted Airport, according to the catalogue,

demonstrates the practical and spiritual benefits of and open space. Movement through the terminal is simple and direct with no frustrating changes of level . . . The concourse is entirely daylit on all but the duller of days. The constantly changing daylight and the play of light and shade on the floor give the space a poetic dimension . . . It has subsequently been adopted as a new model for air terminals worldwide.

Sudjic and Foster and Partners wrote of the Foster Studio's work as a "democratization" of public space, consistent with Foster's role as the architect laureate of Blair's New Labour. London's "Cool Britannia"—ization through a body of millennium projects authored by the Foster Studio (the British Museum, the Greater London Authority Headquarters, the wobbly Millennium Bridge, etc.), manifests the concern of the studio for the principles of community and society within "urban grain" of the public realm:

This is exemplified by the Studio's work on World Squares, the plan to turn the traffic-choked roundabouts that pass for London's great civic spaces—Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square—into places worthy of their role. The Studio is also involved with the creation of national and civic landmarks as disparate as Wembley Stadium and the Greater London Authority Headquarters—a building that embodies the revitalisation of local democracy in the capital.

In new urbanism, the revitalization of locality is understood to "produce democracy." The key to the new urbanism is the reclamation of nonplace for public use. The studio's program to reformulate the relationship between "routes and places" seeks to "humanize" the scale of the city, to turn "traffic roundabouts" into "lively public plazas." Significant for their potential to reduce alienation and anomie, and therefore to produce community, the nonplaces in between are seen as needing as much attention as the buildings that form the contemporary city: "Revitalising and regenerating the routes between places is as important an architectural challenge as the design of

individual places themselves.” The rejection of functionalist principles of traffic planning signified by the “World Squares” project seeks to turn nonplace into place: the place in between is invested with identity, specifically the identity of the citizen-tourist rather than the alienated consumer or bored commuter. Here, Michel Foucault’s (1986) comment (partly responding to criticism of the work of Le Corbusier) during an interview with Paul Rabinow, provides a corrective to this environmental determinism:

I do not think that there is anything that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating. Liberty is a *practice* . . . I think that it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom. (p. 245)

In the next section, I examine some local effects of this refashioning of nonplace in Australia. Rather than a complete rejection of alienated consumption in favor of a warm and fuzzy urban democracy, I demonstrate some ways in which new urbanism has ushered in a “new regime of commerce.” This phrase was used by Frank Mort (1995, p. 573) in his study of the transformation of London’s Soho for and by media professionals in the 1980s. Mort argued that new architectures of consumption built on Soho’s bohemian reputation to produce a new “regime of commerce” founded on “a spatial resumption of more normalizing transactions—of mass entertainment, shopping, or tourism—which were absent from Soho itself” (p. 575). Like Soho during the 1980s, nonplaces of traffic are “fast becoming the site of an expanding commercial infrastructure,” representing “a brisk flow of commercial energy in a compressed urban space” (p. 579).

Enjoy the Traffic: A Tale of Two Terminals

The privatization of Sydney’s airport was forecast for several years by successive governments but was long delayed during the 1990s by internal policy debates within the former national Labour government, widespread protests about aircraft noise, election nerves, and most recently the downturn in the aviation sector worldwide following September 11 (Fahey, 2001). In the lead-up to the 2000 Olympics and in part as a dressing-up for privatization, the international terminal underwent a A\$600 million⁴ refurbishment, completed in March 2000. During this preparation, the airport’s management invested in an “art at work” program and employed a consultant to commission Australian artists to develop site-specific works for the international terminal. The art component constituted A\$4.5 million of the total budget (Best, 2001; Macgowan, 2000).

The path to full privatization was begun soon after the Olympics in late 2000, when the government established the Sydney Airports Corporation Limited (SACL), announcing on December 13, 2000, that the SACL group would be separated and privatized as two separate and competing companies. One company would operate Sydney Airport; Bankstown, Camden, and Hoxton Park Airports would be operated as separate companies jointly managed by one company (Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001b). During 2001, heavy investment by the SACL in business, retail, and its future development plans paid off when it achieved five awards for top survey results for service, retail, or construction excellence, including first in overall passenger satisfaction 2000 in the International Air Transport Association’s Global Airport Monitor Pas-

senger Satisfaction Survey, released in May 2001 (Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001c). In June of the same year, Sydney Airport was named best airport worldwide (in the 15-million- to 25-million-passenger category) at the Airport World Global Airport Service Excellence Awards, a fact heavily promoted in the airport's advertising campaigns (Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001c). In response to these awards, the SACL's CEO, Tony Stuart, said that "the commitment to deliver a world class Total Journey Experience was strong in all Sydney Airport's partners, including airlines, border agencies, retailers and ground transport providers to deliver" and ensure that "this facility meets the increasingly high demands placed on airports by passengers, domestic and international" (Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001c).

Despite its "privatization-ready" status following this substantial investment of public funds, and in contrast to every other Australian international airport, Sydney Airport continued—until its sale in June 2002 for A\$5.6 billion to a consortium led by Macquarie Bank—to generate substantial revenue for the government (Condon, 2002). Indeed, the profit stream from Sydney Airport was outstanding in the lead-up to its privatization. The fiscal-year figures from the year before its sale (2000 to 2001) show that the income contribution of the retail function of the airport alone (A\$117 million, or 31% of the total income) outstripped aeronautical charges (A\$109.5 million, or 29% of the total income), and commercial trading and property and development combined contributed another third of the A\$377.6 million revenue generated by the airport (15.6%, or A\$58.5 million, and 17.8%, or A\$67 million, respectively; Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001a). Retail revenue was up by one quarter compared to fiscal-year 1999 to 2000, despite an overall drop in profits of nearly one half.

Particularly striking is the airport's performance as a sales point, as noted in Arthur Anderson's *2000/2001 Airport Retail Study*, which placed it first in gross passenger sales and second in overall airport retail performance worldwide (Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001c). The Nuance Group, one of the best performing tenants of the airport, is particularly held up for its outstanding sales record during 2000, and was recognized with a Raven Fox Award for Travel Retail as Asia Pacific Retailer of the Year in May 2001 (Sydney Airports Corporation Limited, 2001c). Although this accounting period does include the some 4 million passengers passing through the duty-free shops managed by Nuance during the Olympics, these figures point to a new intensification of consumption activity at the airport rather than the city center.

Nuance, a "travel retail" company formed from the amalgamation of Swissair and Crossair's duty-free operations in 1992, is now "the world's largest airport retailer and the global number three in duty-free sales" (The Nuance Group, 2001a). According to the company's Web site, Nuance grew out of Ocean Trading, the company's ancestor, which began operating aboard cruise ships in 1917. In 1961, it opened its first duty-free shop at Zurich Airport, and in 1995 it expanded into Australia with the acquisition of Downtown Duty Free and City International Duty Free, both Australian companies. Nuance restructured and detached itself from its parent companies in 2000 to distance itself from the financial crisis and eventual demise of Swissair. The company now trades in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Denmark, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States (The Nuance Group, 2001b). Nuance's company profile and marketing discourse make for particularly fascinating reading:

“Excitingly different”—that’s what The Nuance Group claims and aims to make its customers’ travel shopping experience. That’s why the whole Nuance philosophy is geared to providing a range of retail outlets that offer a genuinely unique shopping environment, with quality products that are carefully aligned to each location and its customers’ needs, and an appealing shopping ambience, too.

It’s a philosophy that extends throughout all of Nuance’s various retail operations: from its 350 stores all over the world to its inflight sales activities and its convenient Internet and mail-order purchase channels. And it’s a philosophy that’s reflected time and time again in its innovative shop concepts and its wide range of accompanying promotions and events. (The Nuance Group, 2001d)

Ostensibly, only about half of Nuance’s retail outlets “are tax and duty-free shops in the classical sense.” The company claims to have “steadily broadened [its] range to include category shops centred on particular product groups with clear customer appeal, specialist shops with a strong local colour, and brand stores that are operated in partnership with established brand manufacturers” (The Nuance Group, 2001c). These product groups include perfume and cosmetics, liquor, tobacco, fashion products and accessories, jewelery and watches, “destination products,” food and confectionery, electronics, children’s products, and sport and style products (The Nuance Group, 2001c). This expansion of shops under the rubric of “travel retailing” is evident in the kinds of shopping and other consumer activity available at the Sydney Airport



Figure 1. Games Lounge, Arrivals, International Terminal

terminals. The international airport’s new marketing slogan—“people to see, places to go, things to do: shop where the world begins”—expresses this repositioning of the airport as a fun place to be. The redesign of the public areas of the international terminal along the lines of an urban mall provides places for dining in fast-food outlets, cafes, food courts, and restaurants; places for listening to music and drinking; personal services such as beauty salons and hairdressers; amusement arcades (Figure 1); postal and financial services; art exhibition space; and monthly themed “street theater” (*Recent Events*, 2002; *What’s Happening*, 2001). During November 2001, the international terminal hosted “a variety of multicultural musical entertainment including Spanish Guitarist Phil Moore and his Spanish dancers, saxophonist Blake Kearney, the Calypso Band Maracas and Batucada and Condombe Drummers,” and in the previous month, during Australian school holidays,

an assortment of children’s entertainment . . . including Cinderella and Prince Charming, Alice and the Mad Hatter, our Magical Fairy, Court Jesters, Stilt Walkers and our gorgeous Jungle Cats [and a] Circus Workshop . . . featuring two trained Circus Performers



Figure 2. Internet Terminals, Check-In Area, International Terminal

teaching visitors of all ages all those unique Circus tricks such as juggling, stilt walking and uni-cycling. (*Recent Events*, 2002)

However, the domestic terminal, as the poorer sibling of the international airport, lacks this sense of a destination. The redesign of the domestic terminal completed in 1999 and 2000 included a greater diversity of retail and dining outlets, but the relatively minor flow of tourist dollars through the domestic terminal has attracted a smaller share of “travel retailers.”

Of particular relevance to this discussion—because it indicates highly differentiated dimensions of scale refracting through the nonplaces of contemporary cities—is the incorporation of digital and media spaces within the two airport terminals.⁵ A comparison between the use and positioning of Internet terminals in the international and domestic passenger terminals shows a restructuring taking place through an opposition between global and national entities. The international terminal has installed free Internet access terminals (Samsung-sponsored “e-lounges”) positioned near high-turnover and public areas such as the retail arcades, the Catalina Bar, and the departure gates (see Figure 2). Internet access at the domestic terminal is available (outside the airline club lounges) only at kiosk-type terminals that are placed in out-of-the-way corners (Figure 3) next to the post office (Figure 4) and alongside food-vending machines in the baggage collection area (Figure 5). Advertising surrounding the Internet terminals in the international terminal emphasises the terminal as the place where the “world begins” (see Figure 2). In the domestic terminal, the advertising hoardings and promotional mate-



Figure 3. Internet Kiosk, Domestic Terminal



Figure 4. Internet Kiosk, Domestic Terminal



Figure 5. Internet Kiosk and Vending Machines, Baggage Collection Area, Domestic Terminal



Figure 6. Advertising Display, Baggage Collection Area, Domestic Terminal

rial emphasise the domestic terminal as the first step on the road to national territory. The imagery of the road and automobile is invoked in several billboard-style advertisements (Figure 6). A particularly clever series of advertisements on the baggage carousels in the domestic terminal create a seamless interchange between airspace and the road, making the baggage appear to be popping out of the trunk of a new car by using the gap in the wall above the luggage conveyor belt as part of the ad (Figure 7). Finally, the positioning of cinema-sized television screens in the international terminal in the visitor waiting and meeting areas far exceeds the scale of the television terminals in the domestic terminal, which are visible only next to information boards showing flight arrival and departure times (Figure 8).

The two airports' interplays between distraction zones, specifically arcade games, the Internet, television, and machine interfaces with data flows demonstrate the emergence of physical expressions of "terminality" that are configured around the individual user. In these formations, established divisions between national subjectivity and political agency are transformed by access to mobility. The figure of global traveler is allied to the global consumer, whereas the national citizen's "othered" figures, the homeless person and refugee, are precluded by consumption practices that imagine the domestic terminal as an interface between airspace and the freedom of the road. This imagescape of free



Figure 7. Advertising Display, Baggage Collection Area, Domestic Terminal

mobility in the international terminal is markedly different from the backstage containment of national others—in identity checks, detention, and deportation—that takes place within the very same institution (Figures 9 and 10). In the domestic terminal, the traveler is positioned as a driver with access to national-scale space; the illegal migrant is absolutely invisible, outside and beyond such space.

This uneven access to global scale space shows that the character of the nonplace is highly fluid and context specific. Different formations of “terminality” in both physical and data space show that the merging of junctural zones with liminal places is not a predetermined phenomena. As a kind of hyperspace, the airport terminal offers a shortcut between national territory and globality, with the erasure of spaces in between. Yet at the same time, this hyper-spatiality gives rise to a concomitant remodeling from flow to habitation and a forestalling of total dissolution in practices of partial distraction. The case of Sydney Airport foreshadows a new kind of engagement between the zones of circulation, work, and habitation and therefore a new urban form: the airport city.



Figure 8. Television in Waiting Area, Arrivals, International Terminal

This essay has shown how the global-national-local junctural zone of the airport has been redesigned to reincorporate liminal spaces of distraction and consumption into the functionalist city of circulation. The example of Sydney Airport, through a two-tiered design, shows how airports materialize both the global and the national. First, in the international terminal, the traveler is offered abstracted, global-scale space in the form of luxury goods and electronic communication. Second, in the domestic

terminal, the traveler is situated in national, terrestrial, and geographic space through the metaphor of automobility and his or her situation within postal and televisual networks.

The modernist spatial strategies of the functionalist “city of circulation” advocated by architects such as Le Corbusier have been radically re-configured by new economic formations such as the airport mall. The opposition of habitation and circulation in the modernist urban model is overrid-



Figure 9. Billboard, Freeway to City From International Terminal

den by new spaces that offer “pleasurable waiting.” The totalization of the principle of traffic in the urban plan, although unintended by modernist architects, is a result of the dominant relationship between physical and economic transactions. The question faced by city planners in this age of mass air travel has passed from the management of the space of technological flows to how to position the architectural superobjects of airports, shopping malls, and freeways as necessary but not all-encompassing strategic

installations in local space. The anxiety about the status of the local, detected in the focus on the scale of house, street, and neighborhood in new urbanist discourse, desperately needs to be articulated with the anxiety about the global, evident in state-sponsored urban planning projects such as “airport cities.” Neither guarantees freedom or oppression but offers different ways of being in nonplace.



Figure 10. Billboard, Freeway to City From International Terminal

Notes

1. This is a theme long observed in the copious discussion of the elaborate featurism and nostalgia of postmodernist architecture (Jameson, 1991).

2. One high-profile (yet underperforming) example of this is the Euro tunnel transit center in Lille, Euralille. Architects involved with this project include Rem Koolhaas, Jean Nouvel, Christina de Portzampac, and Claude Vasconi (Allenspach & Spinatsch, 1997, p. 84.).

3. The wording of this section differs slightly from that published in Kunstler's (1996b) book of the same name. The text quoted here is from the online article archived on the Web site of the *Atlantic Monthly* (Kunstler, 1996a).

4. All figures are given in Australian dollars. One Australian dollar is worth roughly half of a U.S. dollar and one third of a British pound.

5. Indeed, the architecture of the airport itself can become a data terminal: Wireless applications figured in the integration of the iPass global broadband roaming service into U.S. airports and hotels. Wayport, Inc. (2001), "a leading provider of high-speed Internet access in airports and hotels" now offers, through a partnership with "iPass Inc., a premier provider of remote access service", "wireless access throughout all gates and terminals in airports and hotel common areas."

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