

Chapter 5 : Re-imagining the *Transit Zone*

Up to this point this thesis has discussed the construction of the *Transit Zone* and its systems, including specific resistances to its structure. It has built a picture of international air travel based on legal and bureaucratic conceptions, the securing of its sites, systems logic and commodification of the passenger. The varying approaches that I have utilised focus on how the *Transit Zone* has evolved around international air travel. However, this approach does not take into account how the *Transit Zone* connects with cultural imaginings, and generates unplanned, messy, emotional, subjective responses. Psychiatrists argue that the separation of the passenger from their normal routine and social inhibitions can provoke withdrawal, disconnection from reality, and anger or fear responses. E. Graham Lucas wrote of air travel: "... every conceivable environmental stress is exaggerated at a time of maximum vulnerability when basic personality traits such as anxiety, aggression, obsessionality, and irritability can all be caricatured."²⁹³

Many discussions of the *Transit Zone* posit it as a de-individualising, ubiquitous and commercialised environment that must be endured. For example, Marc Augé described the airport and aeroplane as a quintessential 'non-place,' which creates "neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude."²⁹⁴ Indeed, much of my discussion to this point has implicitly endorsed this position. However, as Augé himself acknowledges: "Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten."²⁹⁵

While the systems of the *Transit Zone* create an imperative towards similitude and solitude, individuals transform this through their intentions, interactions and behaviour within the *Transit Zone*. Likewise, artists

²⁹³ E. Graham Lucas, 'Psychological Aspects of Travel', *Travel Medicine International*, 8, no. 3 (1987): 99.

²⁹⁴ Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 103.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

explore both the isolating imperative and its resistances in their work. This chapter explores how meaning, emotion, social relationships and cultural constructions have organically grown around and inside the *Transit Zone*. Within the *Transit Zone* there exists the possibility for transformative experiences, iconic figures and intense emotion. In this chapter I consider the *Transit Zone* through the concept of liminality, positioning movement through it as a rite of passage, with all its attendant transformative implications. I utilise the iconic figure of the flight attendant to discuss gender, eroticism and relationships within the cabin. And finally I discuss the rational and irrational fears and anxieties that occur in relationship to flight.

The diversity of individuals and reasons for travel which come together within the *Transit Zone* include: travel for business, education, leisure, visiting family or returning home; travel to migrate permanently; and travel as an invited refugee or uninvited asylum seeker. Whether making a new start, beginning an adventure, continuing a routine or leaving a place behind, the passenger brings their personal history with them into the *Transit Zone* and this has an impact on how they experience it.

In addition, the *Transit Zone* is informed by the complex historical and social associations with the idea of travel. The word 'travel' is used to describe tourism, adventure and exploration, evoking the idea of the overseas experience as a journey of discovery, of self and/or others. This notion, firmly embedded in the Western literary and scientific tradition, finds its expression in nineteenth century Prussian naturalist and explorer Alexander van Humboldt's statement: "I was spurred on by an uncertain longing to be transported from a boring daily life to a marvellous world."²⁹⁶ Yet Caren Kaplan, in her book *Questions of Travel*, argues that travel, "cannot escape the historical legacies of capitalist development and accumulation, of imperialist expansion, and of inequities of numerous kinds...."²⁹⁷ She goes on to point out that the word 'travel' can be used

²⁹⁶ Alexander van Humbolt, quoted in Alain De Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 253.

²⁹⁷ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 131.

inappropriately in reference to diaspora, forcible relocation and the inability to return home.²⁹⁸

Each individual entering the *Transit Zone* brings with them their own personal and cultural associations. A business person who flies overseas routinely is likely to respond to the procedures of security and transit with boredom, treating the time in the *Transit Zone* as part of their normal 'office' routine. A first time or infrequent tourist will more likely be excited and experience stress while travelling, whereas, a refugee who does not expect to be able to return home will have an entirely different emotional reaction to the *Transit Zone*. The complexity of experiences and subject positions brought to the *Transit Zone* inform my following discussion.

5.1 : The *Transit Zone* as a liminal site

The *Transit Zone* is a threshold which transports passengers to and from potentialities. Syed Manzurul Islam considers the crossing of the threshold between locations to be at the heart of travel, arguing:

Taken at its simplest, the narrative of travel unfolds the events of trekking space. The events that we call travel can be said to be composed of movement between spatial locations: leaving one spatial marker and arriving at another. The presumed departure and arrival, in the very process of their movement, paradoxically stages the threshold to be crossed, and enacts the between that divides and joins spatial locations.²⁹⁹

Traversing the *Transit Zone* can be considered a rite of passage. By passing over its borders and through its spaces the passenger enacts a ritual that changes their status and location. Islam argues that it is the negotiation of the rite of passage that creates the traveller. "We could say that it is precisely in the very process of negotiating 'the between'

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Syed Manzurul Islam, *The Ethics of Travel, from Marco Polo to Kafka* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 5.

traversing threshold and crossing boundary, that s/he makes her/himself a traveller.”³⁰⁰

Arnold van Gennep, in his book *The Rites of Passage*, posits that there are three phases to any rite of passage: *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation* or the pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal.³⁰¹ These three stages can be paralleled to the structure of the *Transit Zone* and the way an individual must pass through it. The initial stage of the rite of passage, *separation*, involves the demarcation of profane space and time from sacred space and time. The individual passes from the profane to the sacred space/time in an act of *separation*. In the case of the *Transit Zone*, the (profane) space of general access, held within the nation-state, is demarcated from the (sacred) space of the *Transit Zone*. In Chapter 2 I discussed the act of *separation* as a physical and bureaucratic movement of the individual across an arbitrary point, shifting the individual from nation-state territory to the excluded space of the *Transit Zone*. In this chapter, I liken this movement to a ritualistic separation of the individual from their current (profane) status in order to enter the space of the (sacred) *Transit Zone*. The entry rituals for the *Transit Zone* – passport control and security – are the rituals whereby a passenger exposes themselves to be cleansed and *separated* through the rite of inspection.

Within and at the entrance to the *Transit Zone*, can be found art works which mark and amplify the symbolic nature of its sites, they make visible the change the passenger is undergoing. For example, for five years, between 2000 and 2005, the Sydney International Airport marked the moment of separation with Robyn Backen’s *Weeping Walls*, Figure 79 and Figure 80.³⁰² In front of both entrances to the departure halls stood glass and metal frames which contained fibre optic strands that lit up, flashing Morse code messages. The *Weeping Walls* visually screened the entrances and marked the beginning of the *Transit Zone*. They were the last point of contact between those who were leaving and those who were

³⁰⁰ Islam, *The Ethics of Travel, from Marco Polo to Kafka*, 5.

³⁰¹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (3rd edn.; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

³⁰² In the 2005 upgrade of the Sydney International Terminal the works were relocated.



Figure 79: (top) Robyn Backen, *Weeping Walls*, 2000, fibre optics, morse code light generators, metal halide light boxes and mixed media, 25m x 4m x 0.2m.

Figure 80: (bottom) Robyn Backen, *Weeping Walls*, 2000, fibre optics, morse code light generators, metal halide light boxes and mixed media, 25m x 4m x 0.2m.

remaining; they became the site for photographs, last hugs and kisses and other farewells. Indeed, they were commissioned to provide “a focused emotional hub to the Total Journey Experience, to highlight the emotional transition from landside to airside, to provide a farewell point at the 'heart beat' of the airport.”³⁰³

Backen’s work dramatised the moment of separation and increased its significance. The rain-like strands of fibre called to the anguish, or wrench of separation, and spoke of the anxiety and fear of change. However, the messages flashed in Morse code are playful quotations spelling out phrases such as Andy Warhol’s “Famous for fifteen minutes” and Oscar Wilde’s “I have nothing to declare but my genius.”³⁰⁴ They turned the passenger, briefly, into a star and inject levity, joy and pride into the rite of separation.

The middle phase of the rite of passage, *transition*, is described by van Gennep as a period and/or site of ambiguity, a state of limbo. He invokes the idea of spatial and symbolic areas of ‘no man’s land’ or neutral territory, of which the *Transit Zone* is a complex contemporary version. Of neutral territory, van Gennep states that “Whoever passes from one to the other [adjacent territories] finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds.”³⁰⁵

An example of an art work connecting the secular movement through space to the magico-religious transition can be found in the United Airlines Terminal at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. The long underground passageway between concourses B and C is home to an immersive art work by Michael Hayden which envelops the passenger in changing sound and light: *Skys the Limit*, Figure 81. It is made up of “23,600 sq. ft. of mirror reflecting over 1 mile of ‘neon’ ... controlled

³⁰³ 'Sydney Airport, Australia / Aéroport De Sydney, Australie ', <http://www.euran.com/airportsydney.htm>, (accessed November 7, 2005).

³⁰⁴ Robyn Backen, 'Robyn Backen – the Weeping Walls', http://www-personal.usyd.edu.au/~rbacken/text/ww02_txt.html, (accessed December 6, 2005).

³⁰⁵ van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 18.



Figure 81: 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.

by 3 solid state computers. 1 hour of electronic music.”³⁰⁶ The neon tubes turn on and off in patterns over the distance of the passageway, and the music creates a trancelike effect.

This passageway is truly a no man’s space; its only purpose is to provide a pathway from one set of departure gates to another. The lights and sound create a magical effect transforming a long tunnel into a visually and aurally astounding space. The art work constantly changes the tunnel, making it waver between a functional link between terminals and a transformative aesthetic environment. Passengers passing through the walkway are briefly connected with the wondrous possibilities of a rite of passage before they emerge from the underworld, up into the concourse.

The final phase of any rite of passage is *incorporation*, the re-assimilation of the individual into their normative or newly defined position in the total society. In the case of the passenger, this is achieved by the exit processes of the *Transit Zone*. Here the passenger undergoes rituals to reintegrate them into the normative space of the nation-state. In 2000 Mark Wallinger created the single channel video work *Threshold to the Kingdom*, Figure 82 to 85. Shot at an arrival gate in Heathrow Airport, the art work presents the act of walking through the automatic doors into the general space of the arrivals hall as a transcending moment. The slow motion footage is combined with Allegri’s religious hymn *Miserere Mei*, to make crossing from the *Transit Zone* to general space, momentous.

Wallinger’s *Threshold to the Kingdom* transforms the secular act of passing through the arrival gates to that of a magico-religious rite of incorporation, into the ‘Kingdom’, whether it be heaven or the secular nation-state. As Ralph Rugoff wrote in the catalogue text for Wallinger’s exhibition at the 49th Venice Biennale, “Imagery of a random dispersal in a profane and soulless environment is somewhat miraculously made to suggest its opposite; in a place characterised by indifference, if not oblivion, Wallinger prompts us to envisage the possibility of mercy and

³⁰⁶ Michael Hayden, 'Thinking Lightly Incorporated', <http://www.thinkinglightly.com>, (accessed October 10, 2007).



Figure 82: (top left) Mark Wallinger, *Threshold to the Kingdom*, 2000, single channel video.

Figure 83: (top right) Mark Wallinger, *Threshold to the Kingdom*, 2000, single channel video.

Figure 84: (bottom left) Mark Wallinger, *Threshold to the Kingdom*, 2000, single channel video.

Figure 85: (bottom right) Mark Wallinger, *Threshold to the Kingdom*, 2000, single channel video.

spiritual arrival.”³⁰⁷ In *Threshold to the Kingdom*, there is a lightness, a sense of relief that emanates from the people crossing the threshold into the United Kingdom. On their faces, and in their postures, are the varying emotions of arriving, of exiting the paradox of transit and entering the 'real world' again.

Van Gennep argues that magico-religious rites of passage are present in everyday ceremonies and acts, for example, crossing a house threshold. He demonstrates that the symbolic and spatial areas of transition may be found in some form in all ritualistic passages from one position to another. He articulates the connection between the physical crossing of a threshold and the symbolic crossing of a threshold by saying “In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting, and of departure – that is, as rites of passage.”³⁰⁸ As can be seen, artists draw out the liminal associations of *Transit Zone* through articulating or accenting its rites of *separation, transition and incorporation*, the three stages of the rite of passage that are enacted when moving through the *Transit Zone*.

Traversing the *Transit Zone* has the potential to be a journey of self discovery or a ritual marking a change in status. Rather than articulating the role of the passenger as a complicit unit of movement and a commercialised subject, the rite of passage introduces the possibility that traversing the *Transit Zone* can be symbolic and transformative.

Pipilotti Rist approaches civil aviation from this perspective in her work *Pamela*, Figure 86 and Figure 87, a four minute, one channel video loop which she made in 1997. Rist’s practice uses humour and popular culture coupled with an underlying seriousness to examine the world in which we exist. Rist’s video, *Pamela*, is a complex and densely packed work which explores many ideas within the interior of a small aeroplane. It

³⁰⁷ Ralph Rugoff, 'Jesus Is an Oxymoron', in *Mark Wallinger: British Pavilion the 49th Venice Biennale 2001*, eds. Ann Gallagher and Hannah Hunt (London: The British Council, 2001), 12.

³⁰⁸ van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 25.



Figure 86: Pipilotti Rist, *Pamela*, 1997, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 87: Pipilotti Rist, *Pamela*, 1997, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.

transforms the mundane into the fantastical, converts the rituals of air travel into spiritual and/or religious rituals, and examines perceptions of air travel. In *Pamela* the aeroplane is the device and facilitator for a journey of discovery.

The video's protagonist, played by Rist, is a flight attendant dressed in a dark blue uniform with white gloves and a white hat with headscarf. Her clothing declares her to be a vision of respectability, to be admired and desired from afar. However, Rist explodes the role she is dressed for, continually changing the enacted role of the flight attendant, shifting it away from the clichéd construction of the flight attendant as a subordinate feminine figure providing service and maternal care. The video can be divided into four parts, or the four roles that Rist performs. She becomes a life guide introducing the passenger to new possibilities, a pilot flying the plane, a figure of worship and a free spirit. Through these roles she changes the flight from an experience of transit to one of exploration.

At the beginning of *Pamela* Rist reinterprets the flight safety demonstration, an iconic aspect of the inflight experience. It is a necessary aspect of flight and the information given in the demonstration can significantly improve a passenger's chance of survival in the event of an accident; however, it also reminds the passenger of the potential accident and can increase anxiety. Airlines expend much effort on inflight safety videos which are multi-lingual, accessible and reassuring. In Rist's flight safety demonstration we see and hear both what is normally said and what she is actually saying. Standing in the aisle of the aeroplane she begins a series of hand movements which reference dance, sign language and the hand motions of an inflight safety demonstration. She performs these actions in silence as a female voice-over speaking English, German and French guides the passenger into reconsidering the space they are in, as well as the flight attendant's role within the plane. The familiarity of the ritual gives her reinterpretation more weight.

Mesdames et Messieurs

Bienvenue a bord de notre vol a destination

To nowhere ... to you... deep inside
 Auch wenn Sie verletzt sind,
 auch wenn es schwierig erscheinen mag
 sind wir vor 5 min. abgehoben
 Die Liebe ist unklar,
 darum bleiben Sie bitte angeschnallt
 Beachten Sie den Orbit, Mondaufgang, Sternenstaub
 Beachten Sie links und rechts ihre Nachbarn
 We are on the way to find you...
 So please forget who you are
 Nous vous remercions de choisir, choisir, choisir la joie ³⁰⁹

This opening sequence introduces many of the themes that are present in the video. The monologue begins by welcoming the passengers and viewers to a destination that is nowhere, yet inside themselves. This changes the flight from one with a specific, mundane, physical destination to one of internal exploration and discovery, one which should be pursued despite the potential for pain and difficulty. It then indicates that the journey will be challenging and turbulent, and so asks the passengers to keep their seatbelts fastened. It is not a journey undertaken alone, the words invite the passengers to consider the external world and their neighbours, and so realise their mutual connections. This invitation contests the perception of 'solitude and similitude' within the plane and positions the duration of a flight as pure potentiality. This idea disrupts the normative perception of a flight as wasted time and asks the viewer to reconsider their approach to air travel.

³⁰⁹ Ladies and Gentlemen
 Welcome on board this flight bound
 To nowhere ... to you... deep inside
 Even if you are hurt
 Even if it seems to be difficult
 We departed five minutes ago
 Love is unclear
 Therefore please leave your seatbelts fastened
 Observe the orbit, the moon rising, the star dust
 Observe your neighbours to the left and right
 We are on the way to find you...
 So please forget who you are
 We thank you for choosing, choosing, choosing joy

Having introduced the passenger to the transformative potential of the journey, Rist proceeds to transport them. In the second sequence, clouds fill the sky and then part to reveal the flight attendant drawing aside the galley curtain and walking the length of the plane to the cockpit, a baby in her arms, Figure 88. She enters the cockpit, places the baby in the co-pilot's seat and takes the pilot's controls herself, Figure 89. The video, which places the flight attendant and the child in a circle of colour amid a black and white environment, directly references the Christian roles of the Madonna, Baby Jesus and God. These are represented by the flight attendant as Mary the mother (Madonna), the child (Jesus Christ), and the flight attendant as pilot (God). Taking a Catholic approach to the three figures, the Madonna intercedes between the passenger and God, guiding them as a mother figure and transmitting their needs to the pilot. As the flight attendant passes through the door of the cockpit the video solarises, visibly transforming her. She becomes the pilot or God the Father who, on the plane, is the ultimate authority, holding the passenger's life in his (or her) hands. The child, the Son becomes the co-pilot.

Rist utilises the systemic Christian structure of the Father, Mother and Child to transform the aeroplane into a place of worship. When the flight attendant/pilot re-enters the cabin it is to the adulation of the passengers. She progresses down the aisle extending her foot in its high heeled black patent leather shoe to be kissed, Figure 90, and then the passengers stand and cheer her. She has become a Messiah for the transformative possibilities of flight and they thank her for guiding them through their liminal experience. In the final segment of the video, the back of the plane dissolves and the flight attendant is seen walking down a forested path as an object streaks across the sky, Figure 91. This poses the question: was the entire video a fantasy imagined by the woman walking down the path; or, is walking down the path a personal fantasy of the attendant in the plane?

The religious overtones in *Pamela* can be compared to Wallinger's transformation of the mundane into spiritual travel in *Threshold to the Kingdom*. Both Wallinger and Rist overtly reference Christian 'mythology' in conjunction with air travel. *Threshold to the Kingdom* combines



Figure 88: (top) Pipilotti Rist, *Pamela*, 1997, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 89: (bottom) Pipilotti Rist, *Pamela*, 1997, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.



Figure 90: (top) Pipilotti Rist, *Pamela*, 1997, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 91: (bottom) Pipilotti Rist, *Pamela*, 1997, single channel video loop. Image courtesy the artist.

entering the borders of the United Kingdom with religious ideas of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. The profane, the bureaucratic governance of entry to the United Kingdom by immigration and customs, is contrasted with the complex theological beliefs governing spiritual entry to heaven.

Carl Schmitt in his text *Political Theology* argues that Western society's legal systems and the conception of the state are based on religious concepts.

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure³¹⁰

Wallinger's video parallels the systematic structure of the *Transit Zone* to the structuring of space in Christian theology. The exclusion of the *Transit Zone* from the normative space of the nation-state creates a physical purgatory which resembles that of theology in which souls wait in limbo to be allowed into heaven, or not. Wallinger is comparing the rite of passage through the *Transit Zone* to the most significant rite of passage in Christian theology. The word play in the work's title, *Threshold to the Kingdom*, positions the arrival destination as heaven with the border officials guarding its gates. The act of exiting the *Transit Zone* is, like entering, governed by processes of proving identity, asserting intention and proving innocence: one's luggage is rescanned, one's identity documents inspected. Asylum seekers and suspect people are detained, are not allowed the redemption of entering the Kingdom.

However, where Wallinger positions the *Transit Zone* as purgatory, Rist suggests that the in-flight experience can be a rite of passage or metaphor for a personal journey of discovery, in the same way 'travel' has been in literature and art throughout history. *Pamela* represents the potential for

³¹⁰ Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, 36.

magico-religious experiences for the passenger as they occupy the transitional space of the *Transit Zone*. The art work wavers between fantasy and reality, interweaving the two to create the aeroplane journey as transformative experience, making it a rite of passage for the passengers who follow the guide – the flight attendant.

5.2 : Performed gender

Rist, by structuring her video around the figure of the flight attendant and transforming her into the pilot, explores the two iconic and gender polarised figures of flight. Within civil aviation, the flight attendant and the pilot occupy the binary positions which constitute a normalised and highly traditional construction of heterosexual sexuality and gender roles. Indeed, they have come to stand for specific constructions of femininity and masculinity. Normative females within the aeroplane have historically been presented as “distillations of subordinate feminine heterosexuality,”³¹¹ caring, nurturing, attractive and submissive. Airlines have promoted their companies through images which sexualise the flight attendant and reinforce this image of subordinate femininity. In Asian airlines these characteristics are accentuated through marketing campaigns selling the exotic orientalism of the flight attendants.

This construction of the flight attendant has its roots in the restrictions on marital status, age, and appearance, combined with an expectation that flight attendants will perform emotional labour. Emotional labour commodifies traditional feminine virtues such as “charm, pastoral care and sexuality”³¹² and is implicitly constructed around the idea that women naturally possess the required skills to perform such tasks. While the discriminatory restrictions on weight, age, marital status, etc. have been contested with much success, the socialisation of the airline attendant through strict grooming rules and behavioural expectations still reinforces the image of ideal femininity. The flight attendant as a feminine icon repeatedly appears in popular culture, as do the historically linked roles of nurse, mother and waitress.

³¹¹ Claire Williams, 'Sky Service: The Demands of Emotional Labour in the Airline Industry', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 10, no. 5 (2003): 516.

³¹² Drew Whitelegg, 'Cabin Pressure: The Dialectics of Emotional Labour in the Airline Industry', *The Journal of Transport History*, 23, no. 1 (March, 2002): 73.

On the other hand, the role of the flight deck staff has been constructed as specifically masculine, and few women are employed as flight crew.³¹³ Albert Mills, in his study on constructions of masculinity within the history of British Airways, argues that the gender role of the pilot was constructed and promoted to reassure the public. Initially, the pilot was portrayed as “a *type* of man – brave, unflappable and calm in the face of danger; concerned about his company and his passengers; highly skilled and technically knowledgeable, and, ultimately, reliable.”³¹⁴ Later, the heroic image changed to a more corporate, professional image of a man who embodied “experience, scientific and technical knowledge, careerism, and contradictory notions of professionalism and organizational commitment.”³¹⁵ These two constructions of masculine identity typify idealised forms of masculinity within society.

Rist, by positioning the flight attendant in the roles of pilot and life guide, contests both the subordinate feminisation of the flight attendant and the masculinization of the pilot. She exposes the roles of the pilot and flight attendant as performative. For example she performs the hand gestures accompanying the flight safety demonstration without giving them function. She performs maternal behaviour by holding the baby. While enacting the pilot she gives the screen the thumbs up sign, performing the control and capability of the ‘masculine’ pilot. In doing so Rist parodies these multiple roles. As Judith Butler argues, “The parodic repetition of ‘the original’ ... reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original.”³¹⁶

Beginning in the 1960s, the eroticisation of the aeroplane cabin and sexualization of the flight attendant through airline advertising and costuming has shaped a popular perception of her as a sex symbol. Slogans such as “I’m Cheryl, Come Fly Me” and “We Would Move Our Tails for You” have had a lasting impact on the idea of the flight attendant long

³¹³ In 1991 only 5% of commercial pilots in America were female, and only 2% in Britain. Albert J. Mills, 'Cockpits, Hangars, Boys and Galleys: Corporate Masculinities and the Development of British Airways', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 5, no. 3 (1998).

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 175

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 41.

after it has become a mixed gender profession without age and weight restrictions. Indeed, because it is considered a female role, the male flight attendant is commonly perceived as feminine, that is homosexual, thereby continuing the stereotype of the flight attendant as feminine.

Claire Williams in her article *Sky Service: The Demands of Emotional Labour in the Airline Industry* asserts that “the aircraft cabin, is an eroticized site where women flight attendants are constructed as the main objects of desire.”³¹⁷ This leads to passengers making sexual advances towards the flight attendants. Williams conducted a survey of members of the Flight Attendant Association of Australia in 1994 which showed that the feminisation and sexualization of the role made female flight attendants more vulnerable to sexual harassment.³¹⁸ Male flight attendants are not exempt, experiencing harassment regarding their masculinity and sexual orientation as well as unwanted sexual advances from both male and female passengers.

This is fuelled by the eroticisation of the cabin and crew embodied in the idea of the ‘Mile High Club’. To become a member of the Mile High Club one must engage in sexual intercourse while in flight, a mile or greater above the ground. This long-standing and salacious concept has done much to promote sexual behaviour within the aircraft. It appears in newspaper reports of arrests or scandals following sexual activity in the air, in exposés such as *Air Babylon*³¹⁹ and most explicitly in online postings regarding the Mile High Club.³²⁰ Descriptions of sex in the toilets, or on the seats with known or unknown co-passengers, passengers being fellated by other passengers, having sex with the pilot while flying, paying flight attendants for sex in business class, or getting it for free are all common themes. Whether or not the contributors to these online discussion groups have genuinely performed the acts they describe is not relevant, what is important is that their stories reveal the fantasies that exist around sex on aeroplanes.

³¹⁷ Williams, 'Sky Service: The Demands of Emotional Labour in the Airline Industry', 545.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Imogen Edwards-Jones, *Air Babylon* (London: Bantam Press, 2005).

³²⁰ 'Mile High Club', <http://milehighclub.com/> (accessed April 7, 2006).

Evidence that some of these acts are actually occurring can be seen in articles by flight attendants who report witnessing sex on aeroplanes: "Throughout 14 years as a commercial airline flight attendant, I've witnessed numerous inductions into this infamous society of airplane passengers who engage in fellatio, cunnilingus and various other forms of sexual communion at high altitude."³²¹ In February 2007, the 'scandal' of Qantas flight attendant Lisa Robertson having sex in the aeroplane toilets with movie star Ralph Fiennes hit the media, reigniting discussion about the Mile High Club.³²² Robertson initially denied that she had had sex with Fiennes, asserting that he had followed her into the toilet and she had requested him to leave. Later she affirmed that she had had sex with him on board the plane.

The difference between the fantasy of the sexually available flight attendant and what the airline considers acceptable behaviour can be seen in the ensuing fallout from this sexual encounter. Qantas suspended Robertson while investigating the case and later fired her, thereby distancing itself from the scandal and condemning the sexual behaviour of the flight attendant. This is ironic given that airlines have historically constructed and benefited from the flight attendant as sexual object. On the TV show *60 Minutes* the interviewer, Peter Overton, repeatedly asked Lisa Robertson to iterate the unacceptability of having a sexual encounter while working.³²³ Robertson said "I mean, we both did the wrong thing. What we did was – it was silly, it was inappropriate; it was very unprofessional for me, as a flight attendant, to do what I did. I'm very well aware of that, you know."³²⁴

³²¹ Elliott Neal Hester, 'Welcome to the Mile-High Club ', *Salon.com*, September 21, 1999, <http://www.salon.com/travel/diary/hest/1999/09/21/hester/index.html>, (accessed April 6, 2006).

³²² Jo Knowsley, 'Qantas Sacks Mile-High Hostie', *The Daily Telegraph*, February 19, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,21245846-5006002,00.html>. (accessed July 27, 2007); Fiona Hudson, 'Ralph Fiennes: I Was the Victim', *The Daily Telegraph*, February 18, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,,21243247-5001021,00.html>. (accessed July 27, 2007)

³²³ Peter Overton, 'Flying High: Lisa Robertson's Story', *60 Minutes*, February 25 2007, Nine Network, (Australia, 2007).

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

However on the same program they showed a clip of American comedian Jay Leno making the following joke: “And that Qantas flight attendant – remember the one that had sex with the actor Ralph Fiennes in the airline bathroom? She's now been fired. Is that fair, huh? Finally, an airline employee dedicated to customer service, she gets fired.”³²⁵ The joke goes to the heart of the sexual fantasy about the airline attendant, positioning her sexual availability as part of her customer service role.

In the interview Robertson openly stated that she desired Ralph Fiennes and asserted that she would “have to be insane not to [want to have sex with him]”, going on to describe him as an excellent lover.³²⁶ Her open acknowledgement of her own sexual desire reminds the viewer that the flight attendant is a desiring human as well, not merely an object of desire. However, the ‘discovery’ that Lisa Robertson had worked as a call girl made her sexual behaviour seem more predatory.³²⁷ The statement that Ralph Fiennes’ publicist Sarah Keene released also positions Robertson this way. “This woman seduced him on a plane. She was the sexual aggressor.”³²⁸ Lisa Robertson subsequently endorsed services offered by a Sydney brothel, *The Site*, including a re-enactment of the toilet encounter.³²⁹

The complexity of roles that Robertson occupied throughout the scandal ran the full gamut, from real to fantasised, that are attached to the flight attendant. These include the flight attendant as: a glamorous jet setting professional, in that Robertson was working in business class on an international flight from Darwin to Mumbai where she associated with Fiennes, a film star; a sexually harassed employee, embodied in the statement “Mr Fiennes became amorous towards me and, after a short period of time, I convinced him to leave the toilet, which he did ... At no

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Marnie O'Neill, 'Fiennes' Hostess Was an Escort', *The Daily Telegraph*, March 18, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,21400386-5001021,00.html>. (accessed July 27, 2007)

³²⁸ Fiona Hudson, 'Ralph Fiennes: I Was the Victim', *The Daily Telegraph*, February 18, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,,21243247-5001021,00.html>. (accessed July 27, 2007)

³²⁹ Sydney Confidential Exclusive, 'Fiennes Hostie Backs Bordello', *The Daily Telegraph* May 25, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,21788779-5001021,00.html>. (accessed July 27, 2007)

time did any crew member come to my assistance”³³⁰; an independently desiring woman as expressed in her *60 Minutes* interview quoted above; and a sexually available ‘escort’ or sex worker which was revealed in later articles such as *The Daily Telegraph’s* ‘Fiennes’ Hostess Was an Escort’.³³¹

Artists, including myself, have been drawn to the eroticised site of the aeroplane and its icons, the flight attendant and pilot. In my 2007 video work *Do you know what you really want*, Figure 92 and Figure 93, I explore sex and eroticisation via the figure of the flight attendant. Mathieu Gallois, in his 2004 animation, *Social Body*, Figure 95, populates an entire aeroplane with identical passengers/flight attendants who lose their inhibitions as the plane crashes in a strange act of self-masturbation and violence. My multi channel sound work for my examination exhibition, *Is it bravery*, which is constructed around the transcript of the averted Japan Air Lines Flight 46E disaster, approaches the role of the pilot, exploring it in terms of hero worship and bravery.

Do you know what you really want explores the female flight attendant through various morphing sexual roles, ranging from a woman who fulfils the fantasy of the sexually available airhostess, to one who contests her sexualization, and one who asserts her own desires. In my performative video I enact these roles, playing with my perceptions of them and the desires and fantasies associated with each role. In this way I create a character that merges myself, the artist performing, and characters that are not myself. For simplicity in the following discussion I will refer to the character/myself in the third person.

Dressed in a pastiche of a flight attendant’s uniform, made of a military influenced 1950s form hugging dress and a garrison cap, wearing ‘vamp’ lipstick and 4 inch high heels, she walks into camera and introduces herself, “Hi, and welcome to the flight, my name’s Magdalena and I’m your stewardess for the day. The Captain’s told me to take extra special care of you, so if there’s anything I can do to make your flight more special

³³⁰ ‘Hostess and Ralph Fiennes in Mile High Sex Claim’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, February 11, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,21205870-2,00.html>. (accessed July 27, 2007)

³³¹ O’Neill, ‘Fiennes’ Hostess Was an Escort’.

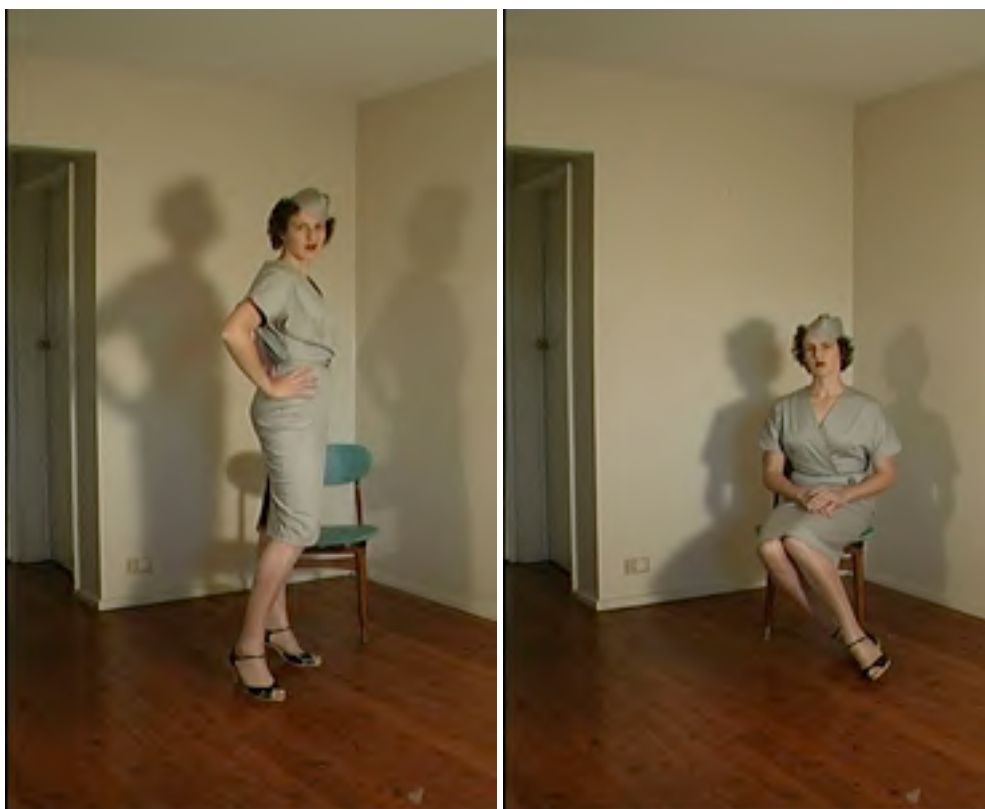


Figure 92: (top left) Melissa Laing, *Do you know what you really want*, 2007, single channel video, 30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 93: (top right) Melissa Laing, *Do you know what you really want*, 2007, single channel video, 30 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 94: (bottom left) Mathieu Gallois, *Social Body*, 2004, digital animation, 6 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 95: (bottom right) Mathieu Gallois, *Social Body*, 2004, digital animation, 6 min. Image courtesy the artist.

don't you hesitate to tell me."³³² Over the duration of the video the flight attendant tells the camera/viewer about what has 'happened' to her inflight, expresses her fantasies, directly asks the viewer questions and reads out descriptions and criteria of an airline hostess.

Throughout the video she uses body language and gestures to sexually challenge the viewer: to invite desire or express hostility towards her sexualization. No one role is fixed. She is a good and bad girl, a vamp, a sexually aware and autonomous woman, and a woman who refuses to be defined by her sexuality. The choice of the 1950s clothing and make-up specifically references the glamour years of the cabin, when air travel was exclusive and adventurous. However, where the Lisa Robertson scandal as it played out in the media, created a 1950s era story where the sexually adventurous woman is punished through loss of reputation and job, the attendant in my video asserts that this is her fantasy and she enjoys it, unpunished.

In my artwork the protagonist embraces her desire to explore both the eroticised site of the aeroplane cabin and the role of the flight attendant as she sees them. She reveals herself to be performing the varying roles as an expression of her own sexual fantasies and asks if it matters whether she is an actual flight attendant. In both Pipilotti Rist's *Pamela* and my *Do you know what you really want* the aeroplane cabin is seen as an arena through which inner desires, dreams and sexual identity can be expressed or contested.

In his book *From Ritual to Theatre: the human seriousness of play*, Victor Turner utilises van Gennep's theories on the liminal, or suspensory, qualities of a rite of passage to argue that a rite of passage, for its duration, liberates the individual from the normative constraints of society, thereby changing their behaviour and mental states. He described this as "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate

³³² Melissa Laing, *Do you know what you really want*, (2007), 30 min. single channel video.

group.”³³³ Mathieu Gallois, in the 2004 video animation *Social Body*, explores the expression of sexual desire as a symptom of the separation from the normal routine and social relationships which allows for a freeing of restrictions and repressions. This separation opens up possibilities and provides an opportunity to embody different roles.

Gallois’ work begins at an airport, Figure 96, depicted in greys, as Blair French’s catalogue text about the earlier work *Flight 934B*, discussed in Chapter 4, appears on screen:

Both aircraft and airport as quintessential mainframe processors of societal flows have in recent years become ubiquitous subjects of (and sites for) contemporary art. But rarely does the ‘passenger’ feature as either individuated subject or class of social organisation as here in Matt Gallois’ ‘The Social Body’. Why so? Perhaps this is due to a certain incongruity introduced by the human subject that disturbs an accepted reading of the aircraft body, for example, as exemplar of French academic Marc Augé’s ‘non-places of supermodernity.’ Augé’s non-places are marked by an absence of identity, relations, history or organic society—all supposed conditions of aircraft travel and supermodernity.³³⁴

The text asserts that Gallois’ work contests Marc Augé’s construction of the aircraft as non-place. However, as I argued in Chapter 4, Gallois’ works supports the perception of the *Transit Zone* as a non-place by treating the passenger as a representative object. In *The Social Body* ‘solitude, and similitude’ of non-place is made evident by the uniformity of passengers and staff. Each passenger appears identical to the female flight attendant, Figure 97, as does the pilot.

Yet, through the narrative of the video Gallois reactivates the passenger as an individual. The camera point of view shifts from the aeroplane cabin,

³³³ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 44.

³³⁴ Blair French, ‘Aircraft Body/Social Body’, http://mathieugallois.com/text/flight943b_2.html (accessed March 13, 2008) quoted in Mathieu Gallois, ‘The Social Body’, (2004), 6 minute digital animation.

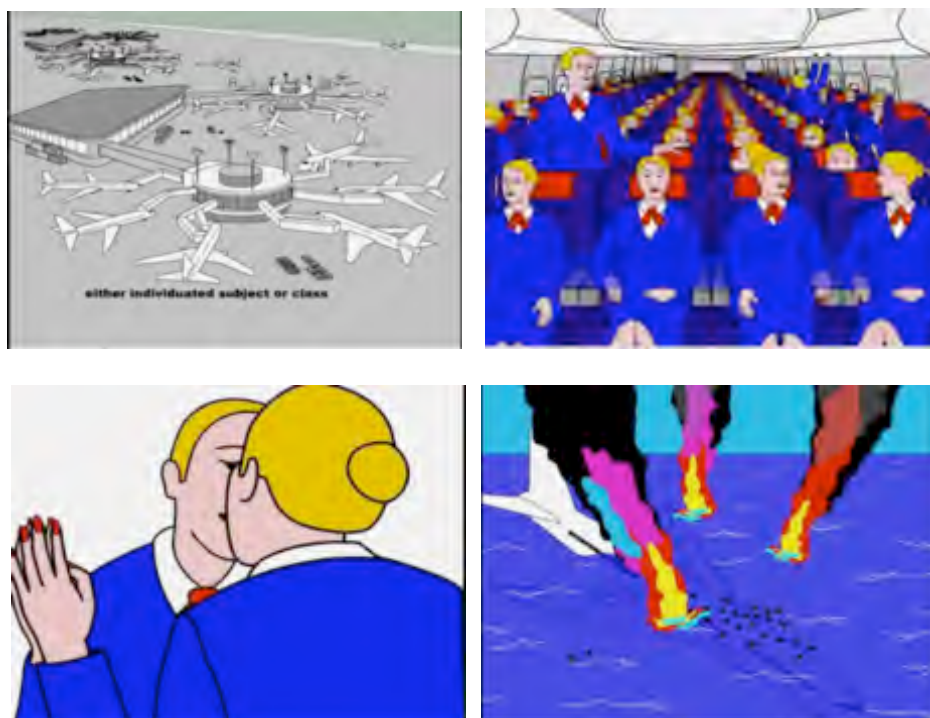


Figure 96: (top left) Mathieu Gallois, *Social Body*, 2004, digital animation, 6 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 97: (top right) Mathieu Gallois, *Social Body*, 2004, digital animation, 6 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 98: (bottom left) Mathieu Gallois, *Social Body*, 2004, digital animation, 6 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 99: (bottom right) Mathieu Gallois, *Social Body*, 2004, digital animation, 6 min. Image courtesy the artist.

which is filled with identical women, to the cockpit, where the pilot proceeds to place the plane on autopilot and enter the bathroom. She asks her reflection “a community by default for the duration of the flight, does this cargo, do these data units represent a hiatus from the conditions and apparatus of society? A suspension from the acculturated norms of social and individual behaviour.”³³⁵ Following this statement the pilot kisses her reflection and masturbates, Figure 98 on the previous page. Her expressions of pleasure are mirrored by the identical passengers in the plane. Gallois’ explicit mention of suspended cultural norms, followed by masturbation, links the separation of the passenger from the normative space of the nation–state and their everyday routine to sexual expression.

However, the passengers’ cries and gasps suddenly gain sinister meaning when a wing engine in flames is revealed. As the plane crashes the pilot continues to masturbate, Figure 99. The disaster associated with the expression of female sexuality forecasts the personal disaster that was the result of Lisa Robertson acting on her desire. *The Social Body* culminates in a series of scenes where the passengers/flight attendants fight for life jackets, drowning each other in the struggle for survival. The passengers’ identical nature raises the possibility that this is an internal struggle represented through the experience of flight. Alternatively, liberation from social restriction, compounded by the aeroplane disaster, has stripped the passengers/flight attendants back to their primary instincts: sex and survival.

5.3 : The aeroplane crash

The history of flight goes hand in hand with accidents and disasters. Many attempts at heavier–than–air flight crashed back to the ground before success was achieved. The first fatal heavier–than–air accident occurred on September 17, 1908, when Orville Wright crashed while demonstrating his plane, killing his passenger Lieutenant Thomas Selfridge.³³⁶ Robert Wohl in his book *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western*

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings : Aviation and the Western Imagination 1908 – 1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Imagination 1908 – 1918 argues that the many deaths and other injuries that accompanied the development of aviation enhanced the appeal of aerial displays. “The West was much too intoxicated by speed and the exhilaration of flight to refuse the sacrifice of human lives that the conquest of the air would demand. Indeed, the danger of flight enhanced its attraction to the public.”³³⁷

This intoxication with speed, flight and disaster is revealed in media representations of the disasters of air travel. Despite the vast, and primarily successful efforts that were made to make flight safe, it still carries with it the aura of this history, the danger lurking at the back of our minds. Images of the mangled, widely distributed remains of an aeroplane hit the news media regularly in the wake of plane crashes. The detritus that remains after a crash is imbued with a lingering horror. The wreckage reminds us of the fragility of flight and human mortality. For example, it was an insignificant, small piece of metal on the runway that tore a tire and caused the infamous Air France Concorde disaster on July 25, 2000. The exploding tire cut fuel lines and caused the Concorde to catch on fire and then crash into a nearby town.³³⁸ The simple phrase ‘human error’ can cover air traffic control misdirecting planes, pilots flying into other planes in the air or ground, and crashes due to improper maintenance. Even with a perfectly maintained plane, unforeseeable events like pilot heart attack or the simple case of a bird flying into the plane can cause disaster. All these possibilities are immanent in any flight. The pilots, flight crew, maintenance staff and other airline and airport staff can only guard against the disaster; they can never fully eradicate its presence. As Virilio argued, every technological invention concurrently invents its disaster.³³⁹

The sublime terror of the aeroplane crash can cause its image to linger in people’s imagination and reappear in artworks. As Edmund Burke, in his second edition of *A Philosophic Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* wrote, “What ever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible,

³³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³³⁸ Pascoe, *Airspaces*.

³³⁹ See Chapter 3

or analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, production of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”³⁴⁰ He goes on to later assert that “Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime.”³⁴¹

Terrance De Pres argues that Burke approaches the sublime on both an aesthetic level and as a “special kind of experience in response to objects and conditions” which by “virtue of the terror they thrust upon us, are perceived as sublime.”³⁴² The aeroplane, crushing itself into the ground through its momentum and being consumed by flames connects with the viewer on the sublime level, as is demonstrated by the opening sequence of Johan Grimonprez’s *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, Figure 39 on page 108. The plane, which rushes towards the camera in an exploding ball of flame, inspires an awe and terror that can only be sublime, in that it produces “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”³⁴³

Nancy Rubins’ 2002 sculpture, *MoMA & Airplane Parts*, Figure 100, captures the sublime of the accident by evoking its aftermath. Emerging off the ceiling and tumbling down to the floor, *MoMA & Airplane Parts* is a cabled together construction of battered aeroplane parts that spiral around the exhibition space at MoMA and loom over the viewer. The innards of the aeroplane are on view; the unidentifiable mechanical items from the aircraft expose the internal, mechanical logic of flight. Other recognisable portions are sourced from the ruptured, damaged and bent exterior skin of the aeroplane. The sculpture serves as an uncomfortable reminder of how fragile flight can be, echoing the crash which deconstructs the aeroplane through abruptly halted velocity.

³⁴⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54

³⁴² Terrance Des Pres, 'Terror and the Sublime', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 5, no. 2 (1983): 137.

³⁴³ see note 340



Figure 100: Nancy Rubins, *MoMA & Airplane Parts*, 1995, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo: Adam Reich.

5.4 : Fear, anxiety, aggression

The aeroplane crash is closely linked to fear of flying as was iconically captured in *Rain Man*.³⁴⁴ Raymond Babbitt, the autistic brother as played by Dustin Hoffman, refuses to fly, listing a series of plane crashes and mid-flight explosions as the grounds for his refusal. Although flying is statistically safer than driving, many prefer driving as they retain a greater sense of control. In a 2006 *Time* article David Ropeik, an independent risk consultant, asserted that a feeling of control affects our risk perception:

We similarly misjudge risk if we feel we have some control over it, even if it's an illusory sense. The decision to drive instead of fly is the most commonly cited example, probably because it's such a good one. Behind the wheel, we're in charge; in the passenger seat of a crowded airline, we might as well be cargo. So white-knuckle flyers routinely choose the car, heedless of the fact that at most a few hundred people die in U.S. commercial airline crashes in a year, compared with 44,000 killed in motor-vehicle wrecks.³⁴⁵

Loss of control, or the fear of losing control, is one of the influencing factors on anxiety and distress within civil aviation. Zoran Juretic categorises passengers' fears as "acrophobia (fear of heights), claustrophobia (fear of closed spaces), fear of airplane crash – death, and the fear of loss of control over a situation (control relinquished to somebody else)."³⁴⁶ Fear, the unplanned and uncontrollable response to flight and its attendant procedures, impacts on a quarter of the flying population. Studies performed in Europe and the USA report that "10% of the general population do not fly due to intense fear. In addition, 25% of the population that flies experiences intense distress during flight."³⁴⁷ This distress does not only occur when the passenger is in the aeroplane,

³⁴⁴ *Rain Man* (1988), directed by Barry Levinson.

³⁴⁵ Jeffrey Kluger, 'Why We Worry About the Things We Shouldn't... ...And Ignore the Things We Should.' *Time*, 168, no. 23 (2006): 64.

³⁴⁶ Zoran Juretic, 'Fear of Flying: An Overview', *Arh Hig Rada Toksikol (Archives of Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology)*, 51 (2000): 425.

³⁴⁷ C. Botella et al., 'Treatment of Flying Phobia Using Virtual Reality: Data from a 1-Year Follow-up Using a Multiple Baseline Design', *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy* 11 (2004): 312.

situations that can stimulate anxiety include: purchasing the ticket, packing, watching planes overhead and just being in the airport. In some cases the pre-flight activities cause more anxiety than the actual flight.³⁴⁸

As I discussed earlier, there is potential for intimate contact on board the plane, however, the majority of passengers limit themselves to their seats and only superficially connect with the other individuals around them. This isolates and exposes the individual to their personal fears and insecurities. The physical impact of travel fatigue coupled with psychological stressors such as anxiety, anticipation and frustration can lead to a dissociative reaction where the passenger withdraws from the world. Distress caused by fear of the real or perceived disaster, and by emotional isolation and separation from the known, as well as other anxiety causes, such as immigration and security screening and the imperative to perform instructions efficiently, underlies the *Transit Zone*. All of these and many other environmental and associational stressors create an anxious and fearful environment for the passenger to traverse, externally and internally.

The separation of the individual from their normal surroundings and social contacts, coupled with enforced inactivity and monotony, can promote fantasy and impair contact with reality in those who are predisposed toward dissociative behaviour.³⁴⁹ The resulting dysfunction is “usually of a minor order such as expressions of irritability, mild distrust of strangers, etc.”³⁵⁰ Many artists explore responses to the emotional stressors of flight, withdrawal and aggression. The two works I discuss are Karen Yasinsky’s *Fear*, Figure 101 to Figure 103, and my own *Abject Apology : August 2001 : Performed by an Airline Attendant to Placate Air Rage*, Figure 104.

³⁴⁸ Fear thoughts include: fear of aeroplane failure caused by mechanical failure or pilot error, fear of falling and dying, the aeroplane catching on fire, falling in the ocean and not being found, and fear of panic attacks, loss of personal control, dizziness, and others noticing the panic attacks and loss of control occurring. Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Don E. Flinn, 'Transient Psychotic Reactions During Travel', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 119 (1962).

³⁵⁰ Francis F. Barnes, 'Travel and Fatigue as Causes of Partial Dissociative Reactions', *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 21, no. 1 (January/February 1980): 60.



Figure 101: (top) Karen Yasinsky, *Fear*, 2001, two channel video loop.

Figure 102: (middle) Karen Yasinsky, *Fear*, 2001, two channel video loop.

Figure 103: (bottom) Karen Yasinsky, *Fear*, 2001, two channel video loop.



Figure 104: 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.

Yasinsky looks at the fear of and desire for intimacy in society. Her 2001 two channel video, *Fear*, explores isolation through the site of the aeroplane cabin. Yasinsky creates her wordless dramas using stop motion to animate handmade dolls. The video begins with a couple making love on a beach as a plane passes overhead. Both the characters are dolls, the man is a handmade doll representing a human, but the woman is a traditional commercial doll. The difference between the dolls makes the commercial doll seem not alive in comparison to the animation of the handmade 'doll' man who is expressing his desire. The difference between the two kinds of doll, one individuated, the other a commodity, implies that the man can only have a simulated rather than real relationship.

The video then shifts to a male and a female doll sitting in an aeroplane cabin on opposite sides of the aisle, each side of the aisle a separate projection. The two characters in the video are seen to desire intimacy, but do not achieve it, prevented by their physical and mental isolation, which is represented by the aisle and the edge of the separate projections. The two protagonists are confined to their own screens. The dolls are awkward and inarticulate, yet simultaneously lucid and poetic. They sit with tears running down their faces but the pathos of the work lies in their inability to make a meaningful connection with each other. When they stand and reach out to each other on the other side of the aisle the flight attendant hugs them but simultaneously intercepts them, thereby preventing any interaction between the two sides of the plane.

Through awkward movements and introspective gestures, the characters speak to our own anxieties; anxieties that are exacerbated by the stress, claustrophobia, fear of flying and separation from the normal daily routine which provides security and stability. Brett Kahr, in his chapter on *The Psychodynamics of Travel Phobia* points out that air travel impacts on our internal mental state, saying:

We can readily understand that the very nature of airline travel will not only become a lightning rod for realistic fears and for reasonable fears of crashing or of being caught in a terrorist attack, but that, additionally, our more primitive agonies will become inflamed as air travel forces us to deal with separation and

loss, fears of falling, and the regressive situation of having parental substitutes controlling some of our bodily functions amid a gaggle of needy siblings.³⁵¹

The dolls' tears and outreaching arms can also be read as responses to the anxieties and fears that Kahr outlines; the passenger/doll's fear of falling or of being irreparably separated from everyone and everything they know.

The dolls are manipulated, and only gain 'life' through stop motion; every movement is a display of someone else's control. The dolls' inability to initiate activity is analogous to the passengers' disempowerment. Travel psychologist Robert Bor argues that "Almost every aspect of the [travel] experience reinforces a sense of lack of control Feeling that we have little control in the situation and associated feelings of being infantilised can increase feelings of anxiety."³⁵²

The airline infantilises the passenger, placing them in their seat and abjuring them to behave. The seat with its eating tray forms a confining space like a child's high chair and the passenger calls the attendant with a 'crying' button rather than acting for themselves. The pilot (father) and flight attendant (mother) even control when a passenger may leave their seat, thereby controlling their access to the toilet. Sleep times are regulated through adjusting the light in the cabin. According to Brett Kahr:

As passengers on board an aeroplane, we do not have complete control over our basic alimentary-incorporative or defecatory-expulsive capacities. This situation will undoubtedly encourage regressive behaviours or fantasies: hence the preponderance of air rage, but more especially, the experiencing of fear and terror. As we sit passively strapped into our seats, we do succumb to a certain regressive pull, potentiated by the fact that we sit helpless

³⁵¹ Brett Kahr, 'The Psychodynamics of Travel Phobia: A Contribution to Clinical Aerospace Psychology', in *Anxiety at 35,000 Feet : An Introduction to Clinical Aerospace Psychology*, by Robert Bor (London: Karnac, 2004), 70.

³⁵² Robert Bor, *Anxiety at 35,000 Feet : An Introduction to Clinical Aerospace Psychology* (London: Karnac, 2004), 12.

at 35,000 feet, cared for by parental figures of unknown capabilities.³⁵³

In *Fear* the regressive pull in response to being infantilised is expressed through the strangely adult dolls that, nonetheless, are symbols of childishness. The flight attendant/mother captures them as they attempt to leave their seats and returns them to their rightful place.

As Kahr mentions, air rage is another common response to stress, anxiety and loss of control inherent in air travel. Air rage is expressed through the acting out of aggressive and/or violent impulses within the aeroplane. These range from verbal abuse of passengers and staff to physical abuse of property and people, including individuals storming the cockpit and taking control of the plane. The causes of air rage have variously been attributed to excessive alcohol consumption, the inherent personality of the passenger (demanding or intolerant), timetable delays, travel stress, smoking bans, cramped conditions, unmet and overly high passenger expectations, and/or crew mismanagement of passenger problems.³⁵⁴

A primary component of an airline's marketing focuses on the inflight service staff, entertainment, facilities and seat comfort. As a result of the constructed image of air travel, the expectations of the passengers are greater than the reality of the *Transit Zone*. Expectations of "punctuality, quality of service, or amenities available at airports or on board the aircraft"³⁵⁵ can enable passengers to cope with the anxiety of flying. Consequently, disappointed expectations underlie many instances of air rage. While airline advertisements promote the quality of food and show fully reclining seats "Today's air traveler is frequently crammed into a narrow, high-density seat, surrounded by carry-on luggage,

³⁵³ Kahr, 'The Psychodynamics of Travel Phobia: A Contribution to Clinical Aerospace Psychology', 69.

³⁵⁴ Robert Bor et al., 'Managing Disruptive Passengers: A Survey of the World's Airlines', (working paper, Psychology Department, Guildhall University, London, 2001).

³⁵⁵ Bor, *Anxiety at 35,000 Feet : An Introduction to Clinical Aerospace Psychology*, 9.

grasping a tiny bag of pretzels while trying to quench a powerful thirst from a 3-ounce glass that also contains two ice cubes.”³⁵⁶

The passenger's aggressive response to a service failure by the flight attendant is symptomatic of a growing emotional and performative response to the environment of transit. In these situations the flight attendant's role of feminine subordination removes any shield of authority or status from her and makes her more vulnerable to the passenger's frustrations and anger. In cases of aggressive behaviour against female airline staff the passenger is, through dominating them, effectively rejecting their roles as both maternal figure and official representative of the airline.

My 2005 work, *Abject Apology : August 2001 : Performed by an Airline Attendant to Placate Air Rage*, arises from a reported case of air rage when a Japanese flight attendant spilled whiskey on a passenger's shirt on an international flight from Tokyo. The passenger demanded that the flight attendant crawl the length of the plane gangway in apology.³⁵⁷ The work focuses on the performed apology and the abasement of self that was required from the airline flight attendant. In the video a mechanised 'baby' doll in a flight attendant uniform, crawls across the carpet. The groan of the mechanism provides the sound track for the re-enactment of the flight attendant's physical shaming and domination by the passenger. The use of a doll reinforces the flight attendant's complete subjectification to the passenger.

Air rage is symbolic of a rejection, conscious or not, of the environment of international air travel. It results in a disruption of the smooth running of the *Transit Zone*, emotionally, logistically and legally. Acts of air rage which involve assault on property or persons, and other criminal acts occurring within the *Transit Zone* disrupt the exclusion of the *Transit Zone* from the normative space of the nation-state in that it must appeal to the

³⁵⁶ Steve Luckey, 'Air Rage', *Air Line Pilot* <http://cf.alpa.org/internet/alp/2000/sept00p18.htm>, (accessed April 4, 2006).

³⁵⁷ Angela Köhler, 'Unordentliches Verhalten in Der Luft', *Berliner Zeitung*, August 4, 2001, <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2001/0804/vermishtes/0063/index.html?keywords=Unordentliches%20Verhalten;ok=OK%21;match=sloppy;author=K%F6hler;re-sort=;von=;bis=> (accessed August 15, 2007).

law of the nation–state. If the passenger is truly excluded from any nation–state territory then national law cannot be applied to him or her. Attempts to resolve this problem have resulted in varying international conventions, including the Tokyo Convention, the Hague Convention and the Montreal Convention.³⁵⁸

The Tokyo Convention, signed in 1963, states in Article 3 that: “1. The State of registration of the aircraft is competent to exercise jurisdiction over offences and acts committed on board.”³⁵⁹ This means that the nationality of the aeroplane determines the criminality of the act. This jurisdiction is deemed to be in place from the moment the aeroplane closes its doors, even though it still sits on the soil of another nation–state. This designation reinforces the contractual and conceptual nature of sovereign territory in the *Transit Zone*. However, the Convention also mandates that the Captain (or aircraft commander) may request the destination state to prosecute the passenger. Article 9 states “1. The aircraft commander may deliver to the competent authorities of any Contracting State in the territory of which the aircraft lands any person who he has reasonable grounds to believe has committed on board the aircraft an act which, in his opinion, is a serious offence according to the penal law of the State of registration of the aircraft.”³⁶⁰ Yet the state of destination is under no obligation to allow the passenger to enter their nation–state, thereby effectively refusing to take responsibility for them.

Nation–states have proven reluctant to take responsibility for prosecuting acts of air rage. Indeed, according an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) report:

Many States' legal systems do not include jurisdiction to charge a person for an offence, which has not taken place in its own territory. This means that it is often impossible to lay charges against the offender if an offence is taking place in a State that is

³⁵⁸ These conventions came about in response to acts of terror–violence and hijacking, and attempt to identify the various jurisdictions that could prosecute the perpetrators. However, the conventions include criminal acts.

³⁵⁹ International Civil Aviation Organization, ‘Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft, Signed at Tokyo, on 14 September 1963’ (Tokyo Convention), 1963.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

not the State of arrival and on an aircraft that is not registered in the State of arrival.³⁶¹

In the case of air rage this has resulted in an inconsistent treatment of it depending on the policies of the airline and the 'competent authorities' in the city and nation-state of destination. In 2007, the ICAO was still urging contracting nation-states to implement appropriate legislation, indicating that this problem is as yet unresolved.³⁶²

The expression of an extreme response to the environment of the *Transit Zone* illustrates how its structures can be disrupted by human emotion. Sex, fear and rage all interrupt the conceptual and contractual relationships established by the *Transit Zone*.

³⁶¹ Presented by the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA), 'Unruly Passenger', *Facilitation (FAL) Division — Twelfth Session: Cairo, Egypt, 22 March to 2 April 2004* (Cairo: International Civil Aviation Organisation, 2004), http://www.icao.int/icao/en/atb/fal/fal12/documentation/fal12wp055_en.pdf. (accessed February 12, 2008).

³⁶² Legal Commission, 'Draft Text for the Report on Agenda Item 48', *Assembly — 36th Session* (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2007), http://www.icao.int/icao/en/assembl/a36/wp/wp301_en.pdf. (accessed February 12, 2008).