Concourse: The Airport as Trap for Engagement with Art

Kurt Nieminen

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CONCOURSE
Architecture as Agent of interaction

Terminal Schematics
- Arrive at terminal
- Check-in
- Security
- Gate lounge
- Board aircraft
- Security
- Immigration
- Arrive at terminal
- Ticket control
- Duty-free shopping
- Shopping
- Go home

Constructing the Trap: circulation before and after shopping is adapted as business plan circa 1990

Before
- JFK Terminal 8

After
Abstract

As global culture becomes more mobile, people spend more and more time in transition spaces. While commercial enterprises, specifically retail, have mutated to exploit the captive population of the airport concourse, museums, libraries, and performance venues remained contained to their traditional urban lots. The Artport takes on the challenge of operating in the securitized and necessarily efficient environment of the airport concourse. It is a contemporary art Museum and an airport in one, which uses the delineation of pre and post security environments to generate a play of desire between those inside and outside the securitized zone. Architectural manipulations of the traditional airport typology are used to transform the airport from a corral of forced spending into a desirably destination for the consumption of culture.
Concourse

Kurt Nieminen
Advisors: Jonathan Lott, Tomà Berlanda
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As air travel has become more common we spend an increasing amount of our time in the securitized trap of the airport concourse. **This project transforms the typology of the airport in order to engage trapped users with art and each other.** In opposition to the prescriptive nature of traditional airports which confine users to regimes of waiting and consuming, the concourse gallery creates an island of activity where hurried travelers, art viewers and waiting passengers are drawn into a field of interaction.

The intervention is sited in Newburgh, New York, on the site of the existing Stewart Airport passenger Terminal. It takes the collection of the nearby Dia:Beacon collection as a source for works of contemporary art to include in the new terminal.

Interaction between air-side and land-side passengers is facilitated by intertwining the two zones in a single spatial container which is conceived as an island floating on the tarmac. Through the sectional manipulation of the gallery floor, art space is allowed to enter all areas of the airport and augment the experience of each.
In a super-mobile world movement or flows is the only thing that can be counted on. Architecture cannot remain relevant in a dispersed urban environment acting as a mere container. Interaction can make a place out of non-places, creating events that incorporate the local site into the international mobility of the city as a place of exchange rather than simply as an attractor.

Trap conditions can be used to bring passing vectors into interaction, making them interact with the local environment. A concourse of moving vectors and local content which serves to inject value into the local art community and create an attraction for the perspective traveler. Combined with the nearby artist communities in Beacon and Newburg, the opportunity presents itself to shape this future site of international transit into a kind of culture trap. A concourse of moving vectors and local content which serves to inject value into the local art community and create an attraction for the perspective traveler.

Resistance from the local population has been great as much of the unused airport land has become a haven for wildlife and sports lovers. Stewart International Airport was purchased from private owners by the Port Authority of New York in 2007. As traffic at the other major New York Airports and local economies.

The glocal condition offers an opportunity for a hybrid between these two types or perhaps a new type that reinvents the relationship between transition space and place.

Mobility has inverted many of architecture's traditional typologies.

**trap**: a device for containing a subject, which takes him or her by surprise. Generally the subject's own movement contributes to the act of containing them.

**concourse**: the running, flowing together or meeting of things (material or immaterial), a conjunction of times and circumstances.
Claim

The airport is a momentarily realization of the utopian aspiration to control the user’s behavior. The departures concourse has become a trap for consumer traffic. As air travel has become a common event, it is time that architecture treat the airport as a site for user interaction rather than exploitation. By taking advantage of the tactics of trapping, architecture can create a space of events which inverts the alienation and isolation caused by the controlled condition of the terminal.

Traps

Traps are a particular tool for taking control of an individual. The key elements of a trap are firstly that they take the subject by surprise. That is the individual being trapped peruses his course of action with the intention of accomplishing one thing and in so doing comes under the control of another. While traps generally have a negative connotation, that is not of concern here so much as their capacity for control.

The Value of Traps

In the context of hyper-mobility which defines contemporary urban space, architecture can no longer remain relevant solely as a destination within the network, but must engage the user in transit. Transition spaces are typically treated as systems for efficiently conveying the user from one space of interaction to the next, but as these spaces account for more and more of the user’s engagement with the public realm, temporary confinement may be the only way to slow these trajectories to a point where interaction between users can take place.
Airport

The airport is a paradox of modern mobility. Within the liberating experience of rapidly moving from one part of the world to the next the user is trapped in a space generated by the universal protocols of security designed to protect the public from terrorism. The spatial solution is the proliferation of boxes, or some avian formal derivative thereof. Within the expansive container of the terminal the movement of users is controlled by a series of protocols which include baggage drop, ticket check-in, security checkpoint and boarding check. Each stage is accompanied by specific programs designed for accommodation but also exploitation. Check-in for instance separates passengers from those who are not planning to fly. The isolation of passengers for international flights affords the opportunity for duty free shopping because the user is no longer subject to the taxes which apply outside of the terminal.

History

Beginning in the 1970’s airports, which had formerly operated according to the logics of efficient movement, were transformed by the collective fear of hijackings. Architecture which had previously been deployed as an expression of the freedom of air travel was converted into a machine for separating the potentially dangerous general public from users within the sensitive zone of international transit. While this has an invasive effect on the experience of travel for the passenger, it brings public architecture into intimate contact with the user. Unlike the train station the airport terminal is a trap which specifically addresses the user’s desires, if only for the purposes of commercial exploitation. Outside of accounting for the volumes required for passenger traffic airports target the user’s specific
frame of mind. Presumably exotic merchandize for the vacationer, coffee lounges with laptop computer stations for the business traveler and generic fast food kiosks for anyone hungry and lacking in other options.

*This thesis is about the control of the physical environment (or lack thereof) to produce specific types of user behavior.

Utopia

Attempts to control user behavior weave their way through many of the key discourses of architecture from Bentham’s Panopticon to the soviet Microrayon. These projects insist on architecture’s own agency as a force for generating user behaviors rather than simply accommodating them. The idea of shaping society through the design of the physical environment is a central theme of Utopian discourse. Corbusier’s canonical City of Tomorrow presents the modern city of tower blocks in the garden as a way to transform the lifestyle of the urban dweller from one of congestion to one of openness, affording the luxury of exercise and time spent in nature.

Utopian proposals position themselves in an alternate physical environment in order to generate a different system of behaviors in contrast to those existing. Utopian proposals whether existing in conceptual space or implementing themselves within the existing human environment employ specific methods of isolation including massive walls and all encompassing enclosures. In this way utopian projects assume to control the user or inhabitant of their utopia.
While utopia traditionally achieves control through isolation of space and separation from existing social conditions, Foucault’s Heterotopias are the physical locations where unseen systems of control become manifest in a single physical location. Among his heterotopias are many extreme examples such as the prison or the barracks, but his final example presents the boat as the ‘heterotopia par excellance,’ because despite being detached and thereby isolated from any specific place, the boat exists at all times in a physical location connected by its movements to potentially all places. In this way they are an ‘other space’ rather than an alternate “place” as in utopia.

Utopia assumes the complacency of the user in the system, as in Corbusier’s ‘Six Million’ inhabitants who presumably re-enter their transformed city to happily traverse the garden spaces made open between the cruciform towers. In contrast Foucault writes that among heterotopia’s defining characteristics is that ‘either entry is compulsory’ or one must go through some kind of ‘purification’ process to enter. While the inhabitant of utopia is there by choice, heterotopia’s inhabitants are trapped.

Airports, highways and shopping malls are just a few of the environments which could be said to be heterotopian spaces of everyday life. They cause a temporary condition of isolation from the outside world by removing us from any specific place, leaving us in a generic realm without events.
Study of Typology

To following investigations seek to define the ways different airport have deployed program to accommodate or take advantage of the user’s needs.

FOR FOLLOWING PAGES
*red=retail/concessions
*grey=service offices

TWA Terminal, JFK, New York
Stansted, England
American Airlines Terminal, JFK
Munich Airport
Dulles International Airport, Virginia
Hong Kong International Airport
Hong Kong International 1998
passenger throughput: 47,857,746

 Trap Type: Endless Corridor

security

Airplane

corridor with central concessions and retail

Passenger Traffic: 47,857,746

Munich International Airport
1992 Munich, Germany

Passenger Traffic: 34,730,000

Trap Type: Passenger Path Blocked by Retail
Waiting areas adjacent to concessions
Dulles International, Virginia 1962
passenger throughput: 23,578,000

Expected Passenger Traffic: 25,000,000

Proposed US Airlines Terminal

1999 JFK International, New York, USA
Passenger Traffic: 23,578,000

Dulles International Airport
Trap Type: Repeated Island Concourses
Trap Type: Shopping Obstacles

Terminal Building
Island Concourses
Scale 1:5000

Security
Airplane
Airplane
Airplane
Airplane

Trap Type: Satellite Islands

double loaded corridor
islands of retail
Munich International 1992
passenger throughput: 34,730,000

Checkpoint Bottleneck

attached corridor with retail clogging space after security check
American Airlines Terminal 8, JFK 1999
passenger throughput: 10,000,000

Layers of retail along departure path
London Stansted 1986
passenger throughput: 2,000,000

Encircled Waiting Area

Airplane

Security

Main terminal Waiting area surrounded by retail, plus concession on concourse islands

Expected Passenger Traffic: 25,000,000
Proposed US Airlines Terminal
1999 JFK International, New York, USA

Passenger Traffic: 23,578,000
Dulles International Airport

Trap Type: Repeated Island Concourses
Trap Type: Shopping Obstacles

Terminal Building
Island Concourses

Scale 1:5000

Security

Airplane

Airplane

Airplane
Shopping Trap

“Captive markets, prime demographics, tired and susceptible travelers, and detailed tracking make for an ideally controlled laboratory in which developmental processes can be synthetically induced, intensified and hastened.

The combination of airports and shopping has triggered an as yet unacknowledged paradigm shift, from efficiently and overtly delivering on function to delay it.”

-sze tsung leong
Retail

The Growth of airport retail as a sustaining business model for airport has led to a proliferation of retail that creates a maze. The passenger is drawn through a circuitous maze of spaces rather than being efficiently delivered to the aircraft.

As Built 1991

Today (2010)
Expansion

Increase in air traffic demands additional space to be added onto the terminal. These expansions allow for ever more trap space for shopping and consuming. Especially in the isolated satellite concourses where users are stranded on an island in a sea of tarmac.
The “Efficient” Section

In newer airports multiple levels are becoming more common with arrivals and departures split between two level. Sometimes shopping concourses are added as another level. This increase complexity adds to the retail potential of the terminal and makes the terminal trap more disorienting.
Space of Flows

The airports form and tactics are a direct result of its passenger traffic.

Daily passenger traffic is represented. Thickness of band represents proportional amount of passengers. Zones bordered by dotted lines represent levels of entrapment through which all users pass.
promenade

The system of security protocols combined with interjection of retail creates a kind of perverse promenade from road to plane.
**Connected in Isolation**

Like Foucault’s Heterotopia of the boat. Airports are in part of a global network of airports. Once inside the security zone of the airport the user stays within it until immigration at the destination.
Concourse

The term concourse is indicative of the transitory condition. Concourse suggests a coming together of individual paths without assuming any interaction between them besides their coincidental coexistence in a common space. It is an appropriate term to describe the structures which contain the collection of users in the airport, each with their own trajectory, temporarily trapped together in the space of the airport terminal. The charge of architecture in this context must be the injection of spaces which create the potential for events and interactions outside of commercial ventures which currently dominate the airports non-essential functions. In no case does “concourse” discuss the interaction of people due to their collectivity but rather a simple “confluence of individual vectors by means of there intersecting trajectories. It is not a place of confrontation or interaction but rather a space formed by matching common (concurrent) interests or intentions.

The objective of this thesis will be to make a place out of a non-place by trapping the individual trajectories of users to converge on programs which encourage interaction. I will proceed through designing for the events which define the contemporary airport including those not currently planned for such as layovers. By creating a web of intersecting trajectories the airport can offer accommodations for individual scenarios rather than the existing generic terminal space.
24 passengers
killer people
mixture consumer
accelerators
shop food
security security
work shop
sleep work
play shop
people mixer
Proposal Continued...

The project seeks to insert cultural program, art specifically, into the space of the airport concourse in order to activate the airport as a space of exchange and interaction rather than exploitation. Art program will take over all concourse functions in order to create a zone of activity rather than stasis.

As a part of the city the airport concourse hangs somewhere between public and private. It is urban but highly controlled. Could this space provide an opportunity for a new kind of museum? One which takes art out of the white box and places it in the public realm, while respecting the work itself?

![Concourse at JFK](image1)

![gallery at the Beacon Dia](image2)

**Imagining an interaction between air travel and museum art experience...**
integrating the airport into the network of urban places...

Bridging airport and museum program through shared content (art)...

AIRPORTS AS ISOLATED SYSTEM

AIRPORTS INTEGRATED INTO CITY

MUSEUM

AIRPORT

THE CONCOURSE PROJECT
Site

The Concourse project will be sited in Newburgh New York. It will replace the existing passenger terminal at Stewart International Airport which is a satellite of the NY/NJ Port Authority Air Transit System. The site is within the proximity of the Dia Beacon Museum which holds the majority of the permanent collection of contemporary art owned by the Dia Foundation headquartered in Manhattan. Dia’s commitment to public art installations and non-conventional exhibitions makes it an ideal client for the new type of exhibition proposed for the concourse project.
Examples of Dia’s Collection

Dia’s collection includes many works with unique modes of exhibition. Off-site locations, Gallery modifications as art and reproducible works offer opportunities to engage the airport concourse as a new venue for experiencing art.

**Gerhard Richter**

**George Trakas (Beacon Point)**

**Walter De María (NYC)**

**Michael Heizer**

**Sol LeWitt**
What would the SFO model of distributed exhibitions look like for Dia?
Dia Concourse Model: Airport as new urban site
Searching for an opportune relationship between airport and museum program...

Program Analysis: Opportunities for the combination of Museum and Airport

Strategy (1): Align Program Spectrum

Strategy (2): Combine Compatible Clusters of Program

Current Program

Museum Type Program Comparison

Concourse Art Trap (NTS)

Museum Type Program Comparison

Concourse Art Trap (NTS)

Museum Type Program Comparison

Concourse Art Trap (NTS)

Museum Type Program Comparison

Concourse Art Trap (NTS)
could variation in program along a prescribed path allow art to condition the rest of the concourse program?

art invades the plan of the linear concourse...
transforming the linear concourse: using typology as a gallery trap

Dulles International

Courtesy of Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
splitting land-side and air-side to create an island concourse
Airport focus their architectural efforts on the terminal building in order to present a celebrated front to the city. Ironically travelers typically occupy this space for far less time than the departures concourse which is typically constructed cheaply and efficiently. Why invest in architecture in the concourse when the passenger has no choice but to spend time there? I propose inverting the sectional relationship of terminal and concourse to make the concourse a desired space which lures passengers and art views to an island trap where an interaction between people and art is staged.
**Active Gallery Wall:**

Rather than assuming the interest of the art viewer the active wall intrudes into the concourse space to address art to the passing traveler.
Display Boxes:
Individual spaces for each work conceal the art, enhancing the user’s desire to explore and interact with the gallery program.
Opportune Curatorship:

site specific works occupy
opportune locations within the
concourse, trapping travelers
in a gallery sequence


**Gallery Diversions:**

Dia Galleries are relocated to the Stewart concourse as skewers that divert the user into art gallery circulation.
the radial concourse type allows for more programmatic adjacency and more open exhibition space.
studies in transforming the radial terminal

Galleries collected at the center of the concourse invade the perimeter waiting area
a series of stacked floor plates are deformed to allow galleries to invade airport program.

The concourse gallery is conceived as a continuous malleable floor plate which bends and warps around blocks of airport program, creating a space which crosses programmatic and security barriers.
The Concourse Island
area map

site plan
sections

The terminal and concourse are combined in one building which floats on the tarmac. The building is accessed by an underground tram which delivers both passengers an art viewer to a shared airport museum space. The gallery floor plate moves between levels visually linking air-side and land-side.
exiting the tram

landside and airside paths intertwine
escalator arrives in landside gallery
security promises access to art

passing security

security as spectacle
circulation as gallery path
jet bridge as viewing corridor
**Traps for Engagement with Art and Other Travelers**

**Inverting the Trap**
Landside public accesses by space for video or performance exhibition, which is being viewed by airside public.

**Travelers as art**
All concourse amenities are accommodated in gallery cubes. All activities become part of the concourse gallery.

**Views Create Desire**
Prescriptive paths of movement surround moments of stasis creating an atmosphere which encourages interaction.

The spectacle of security becomes part of the exhibition for landside public in the loop.

After leaving the tram, attractions like the cafe are displayed to travelers who access them through gallery paths (escalator to landside loop, security to airside gallery).
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Summary

The argument of this thesis is that cultural institutions in the contemporary city assume a far too passive role in reaching the public. While commercial enterprises, specifically retail have mutated to reach into every corner of daily life, museums, libraries, and performance venues remained contained to their traditional urban lots. In this role, culture becomes a mere commodity rather than a productive force to better daily life. This thesis argues for a more active role of culture through the transformation of the art gallery into a ‘trap’ for airline passengers. contemporary art exhibition space is embedded in the functions of an airport terminal in order to lure travelers into intimate contact with local art and culture.

The airport terminal serves as an ideal site for this intervention because of the radical transformation it has experienced as a typology due to the intersection of retail interests and security requirements. While airports were first built as stations for efficiently transferring passengers form ground to air, contemporary airports have become labyrinths of forced consumption, which take advantage of the passenger’s captivity to generate predictable revenue.

In this context the insertion of an institutional program, a gallery for installation art in this case, presents the opportunity for culture to participate in metropolitan life, which more than ever, is defined by the mobility facilitated by the airport. It accepts a lifestyle more defined by trajectories from one place to the next than by a traditional hierarchical relationship of institutions within a given place.

The specific site of the intervention is Stewart Airport, in Newburgh New York, which currently serves the regional air traffic needs of the surrounding Hudson Valley Area. The Port Authority of the State of New
York has recently taken over Stewart’s operation and passenger volume has increased. Because of the airport’s proximity to the densely populated New York Metro Area (about 1.5 hours drive from Manhattan) and its ample runway space, Stewart has the potential for drastic expansion.

Across the river from Stewart Airport is the Beacon Dia Museum which is a significant site for the display of contemporary art, particularly large installation pieces, which it can house easily because of the availability of land on its relatively remote site. Unfortunately this very remoteness presents difficulties in generating the necessary traffic to support large exhibitions. If Stewart Airport is traffic without content, Beacon Dia is content without traffic. This condition offers the opportunity to combine the commercial and cultural resources of the area to create a trap for public participation in the production of culture. The notion of architecture as trap is taken as the means by which architecture can generate an active role for culture in daily life.

The project began with an investigation into the function and operation of airport terminals in general, as well as specific case studies of airport terminals of varying sizes. In this work special attention was given to the way airport terminals have grown and mutated to accommodate shifting functions increasingly geared toward retail. Visits to the Beacon Dia Museum and the Newburgh airport were undertaken to establish the specifics of the site in question. Photos were taken and assembled to augment site material gathered from other sources. The project was guided throughout by readings from Manfredo Tafuri, and Pier Vittorio Aureli, concerning architecture’s role as an instrumental force in the
production of culture.

The final project involves a design for the combined Museum/Terminal structure to replace the existing passenger terminal at Stewart. It is executed through a reading of the tactics of trap elaborated on in the first semester, toward the end of luring passengers into participation in Middle Hudson art culture rather than simply experiencing a generic commercial airport. The logics of museum galleries were compared to airport concourses to find appropriate meetings between the two systems.

During the design phase of the project the concourse building took on two forms. The first was a linear concourse focused on the linear organization of the airport and the potential to build the museum program into this system. Finding this operation unsuccessful, the second phase was based around a radial concourse structure which made it possible to break down the prescribed linear paths of the concourse and create a kind of gallery stage for the scripting of interactions amongst users and art.

Working with the generic linear structure proved to be extremely difficult. Some of the more successful experiments were simple manipulations of the double loaded corridor by the addition of galleries and displace cases which filled or bisected the concourse. All along the ability of these interventions to actually trap the user of force an interaction with art remained in question. Obviously architecture except in its most insidious forms cannot literally force people to do anything. Brutish methods such as disrupting people’s path or misdirecting them have negative consequences which I do not intend. In some way I think my desire to turn
the commercial machine on its head lead me to use overly overt tactics such as bottlenecking which would not work for art space nearly as well as they do for retail. Literally adopting these tactics as I was forced to in the linear scheme created a persistent scenario of art vs. the airport in which I always hoped that art could win. However I found my attempts at this unconvincing.

The move to the radial scheme was in some ways a retreat from the real. The linear scheme had been completely confining. I was convinced that if the airport were allowed to play such a dominant role in the design the integration of art in a believable way would be impossible. The radial layout allowed me to operate within a square plan which immediately increased the opportunities for programmatic adjacency and typological manipulation. The idea of specifically transforming each “trap” within the airport into an engaging piece of art program was an idea which became the driver for the design. Thus the escalator is glorified and used to deliver travelers directly from the security and baggage area to the public gallery loop. The spectacle of security checks becomes a part of the gallery. Rather than travelers desiring to escape the concourse users confined to the landside loop long to pass security to gain access to the art within the concourse.

The malleable plate which unifies the gallery program as it crosses security lines and programmatic divides is an essential tool for blurring the prescribed and indeterminate functions of the concourse space. The challenge was always how to balance this element as a representation of that idea or realize it a functional element. In the end, the gallery floor plate is perhaps too deformed. Perhaps it replaces one form of
prescription with another. The success of the project as a whole however is its ability to suggest fundamental changes in the airport concourse which might alter the way people interact within them.

I conclude this project with the feeling that the goal of scripting interaction between passing user groups is perhaps too difficult a challenge to work on through an architectural project, however I think that the investigation was productive in allowing for a rigorous assessment of how people interact with buildings and to what degree architects can script that interaction.