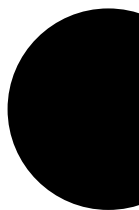
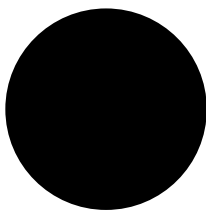
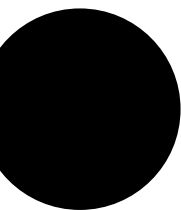


The Temporal Machine



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INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

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Charlotte Gosling

Abstract

This dissertation examines the contemporary airport as an architectural apparatus that actively produces waiting and compliance rather than merely accommodating them. It argues that waiting is not an accidental by-product of air travel, but a condition deliberately structured through spatial organisation, environmental control and regulatory sequencing. Drawing on theories of time and embodied experience, the first chapter explores how airport architecture disrupts passengers' temporal autonomy, suspending them between bodily rhythms and institutional schedules. Heathrow Terminal 5 is used as a case study to demonstrate how architectural scale, plan logic and atmospheric management materialise this suspended condition, transforming periods of delay into both operational efficiency and economic value.

The second chapter shifts focus to the security checkpoint, analysing it as an architectural threshold where movement becomes conditional. Through theories of liminality and surveillance, the checkpoint is examined as a space in which architectural design translates juridical authority into everyday practice, producing compliance through spatial choreography rather than force. Taken together, the dissertation positions the airport as a site where architectural form mediates the convergence of state power and commercial logic, shaping how mobility, behaviour and subjectivity are regulated in contemporary travel environments.

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Methodology

This dissertation adopts a qualitative, theory-led architectural analysis, combining spatial reading, critical theory and case study research. The methodology is interpretive rather than empirical, appropriate to an architectural humanities approach, and is structured around close reading of built form in relation to social, political and temporal theory.

The research is organised around two primary methods. The first is theoretical synthesis, drawing on interdisciplinary literature from architectural theory, cultural geography, mobility studies and political philosophy. Key theoretical frameworks include Henri Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis, which provides a lens for understanding the relationship between time, space and embodied experience; anthropological theories of liminality developed by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner; and political theories of sovereignty, surveillance and exception articulated by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Didier Bigo. These texts are not treated as analytical tools through which spatial conditions can be interpreted.

The second method is architectural case study analysis, focused primarily on Heathrow Terminal 5. This case was selected due to its scale, contemporary relevance, and explicit articulation of circulation, waiting and security within a single architectural system. The analysis draws on published architectural documentation, plans, sections and descriptive material produced by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, alongside industry reports and operational data from airport authorities. A combination of spatial organisation, sectional relationships, material transitions and environmental strategies are examined to understand how architectural decisions contribute to the production of waiting and compliance. The floor plan is used as an analytical device, allowing for spatial sequencing and thresholds to be read critically.

Throughout the dissertation, comparative references are used selectively to situate the airport within a broader architectural and institutional context, including historical airport terminals and other typologies such as hospitals and civic thresholds. These comparisons are not exhaustive but serve to clarify what is distinctive about the airport as an architectural type.

The methodology deliberately avoids quantitative measurement or passenger surveys, as the research aims to interrogate architectural the intention and experiential consequence rather than user satisfaction or operational efficiency. Instead, the dissertation prioritises architectural reading, critical interpretation and supported argumentation, ensuring that claims are grounded in both theory and spatial analysis. This approach allows the dissertation to engage architecture as an active agent in shaping temporal experience, behaviour and subjectivity.



Fig. 1: Waiting hall in Playtime (1967), illustrating spatial neutrality, enforced stillness and collective suspension within a modernist interior (Tati, 1967).

A couple sits on a bench, waiting (Fig 1). They're in a vast hall, where grey floors meet grey ceilings. Everything exists in the same desaturated palette, lit by cold, artificial lighting that flattens the whole scene. Three figures stand motionless in the background, also waiting. The only sound that can be heard is the sound of footsteps, rhythmic and robotic, which echoes off the reflective surfaces and empty walls. The space feels simultaneously expansive and oppressive, as the only furniture in sight is an arrangement of identical benches. This is a space designed for waiting, though what is being waited for remains unclear.

A voice can be heard through a loudspeaker: an Air France flight is arriving from Frankfurt. Only now do we realise that the setting is an airport. Suddenly, there is an influx of activity as dozens of people burst through the gates, as a group of tourists disembarking the flight are herded like sheep through the passageway into the corridor (Fig 2). The carefully composed stillness shatters; the airport's function as a threshold suddenly becomes visible as it sorts and channels human flow.



Fig. 2: Sequential stills from Playtime (1967) showing the transition from suspended waiting to controlled movement as arriving passengers are channelled through the terminal. (Tati, 1967)

This is the opening sequence of Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967), a satirical comedy that serves as an observation and critique of modernity set in 'Tativille', a vast futuristic set inspired by the city of Paris. Designed by Tati and architect Eugène Romain, the set was deliberately generic; its architecture stripped of identifiable features, meaning that it could belong to any major city in the modern world. What appeared as an exaggeration in 1967 has turned into reality today. Walk into any contemporary terminal and you will find the same grey palette, the same reflective surfaces and the same sense of sterility.

The airport terminal that Tati envisioned represented architecture at its most instrumental and functional, a building type where passengers are submitted to processing, where waiting becomes compulsory and circulation and security determine every design decision.

Critics like Rem Koolhaas have described contemporary terminals as 'junk-space', the architectural residue of modernisation where the prioritisation of commercial gains overwhelms spatial clarity (Koolhaas, 2002, p. 176). However, Koolhaas' critique, while provocative, frames airports primarily through aesthetic failure, neglecting the more fundamental question of how these spaces operate as mechanisms of temporal and juridical control. The question isn't whether airports succeed or fail as architecture, but rather how they use spatial design to manage populations and enforce compliance through built form.

This dissertation argues that contemporary airports operate as temporal and juridical machines that actively produce waiting, liminality and compliance through architectural means. Rather than treating waiting as an incidental by-product of air travel, it positions enforced stillness as a designed condition through which passengers are rendered temporally vulnerable and spatially constrained. Drawing on theories of time, rhythm and embodiment, Chapter 1 examines how airport architecture suspends passengers between subjective and institutional temporalities, creating temporal disorientation that serves both operational efficiency and commercial exploitation. Chapter 2 then shifts to the security checkpoint as a critical architectural threshold, analysing how spatial sequencing, legal exception and material design transform citizens into securitised subjects. Together, these chapters reveal that airports carry out the less visible role of orchestrating mobility through carefully constructed architectures that regulate time, behaviour and identity.

01

Waiting & Suspended Time

In the opening scene of *Playtime* (Tati, 1967), passengers wait for something unnamed. In contemporary airports, that something takes material form: ongoing boarding calls, gate changes, and slow-moving baggage carousels. Although airports have transformed considerably since the film's 1967 release, the passenger experience remains strikingly similar. Waiting continues to occupy a central position within contemporary air travel, becoming one of the primary modes of human interaction with the architectural fabric of the airport. While circulation has been extensively theorised in studies of terminal design, the architectural production of stillness has received far less attention. However, in the airport, this is not an ordinary stillness. It is enforced and spatially contained. To comprehensively analyse the architecture of the airport, it is therefore necessary to analyse the architecture of waiting, departing from a point of trying to understand the lived experience that it creates.

For many passengers, the interval between check-in and boarding produces a fracture in temporal perception, where hours may feel compressed or, conversely, minutes may stretch unbearably. Clock-time advances, yet subjective duration becomes unstable. This chapter argues that such distortion, whilst felt at a psychological level, is produced through architectural organisation.

Fig. 3: Atmospheric drawing of people waiting inside an airport (Author).

1.1 Waiting as an architectural condition

What, then, does it mean to wait? Addressing this question first requires examining how time itself is understood within modern thought. The concept of waiting is commonly understood through a Cartesian model in which time progresses linearly, whilst waiting-time occupies an empty interval between productive moments. Within this framework, waiting seems passive, defined by absence rather than activity. However, this interpretation fails to account for the experiential quality of waiting.

To wait is to orient attention toward a future event that has not yet occurred but already shapes bodily experience. This creates what might be understood as a temporal suspension. The waiting subject exists in a temporal paradox, simultaneously present in the body yet mentally elsewhere, trapped between the now and the not-yet. Bissell emphasises that waiting should be understood as embodied presence rather than abstract time passing (Bissell, 2007). At the airport, this condition is not optional. Architectural procedures demand and reinforce it, ensuring that passengers repeatedly enter states where movement is forced to a halt.

Once inside the terminal, passengers encounter an environment that operates continuously. Flights arrive and depart at all hours, while artificial lighting, ventilation and security systems remain in constant operation. The terminal functions as a temporal microcosm in which the distinction between day and night becomes unstable. Hours may feel elongated or compressed.

This experience is inseparable from the ideological conditions under which time is organised. Within capitalist societies, time is treated as a scarce resource, valued according to productivity. Bissell notes that mobility studies have often characterised waiting as 'dead time' or a slowing of urban rhythm, implicitly framing it as a weakness in societal efficiency (2007, p. 277).

Time thus takes on the function of a commodity. Thompson's analysis of industrial time discipline demonstrates how time becomes something to be spent rather than passed, unevenly distributed along lines of class and labour (Thompson, 1967, p. 61). This control is unevenly distributed according to an individual's economic precarity, mobility privilege and social position. At the airport, this inequality becomes spatially legible.

Waiting is compulsory and unevenly consequential. For someone living paycheck to paycheck, a day lost to airport delays carries far more serious consequences than for someone with disposable time. Architecture does not create this inequality, but it does provide the spatial framework through which it is enacted.

Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis provides a useful framework for understanding how this occurs. He argues that rhythm emerges wherever time, space, and energy intersect (Lefebvre, 2004). Rhythms exist in relation to one another, and their interactions can be harmonic or dissonant. Cyclical rhythms, such as hunger and fatigue, arise from biological necessity. They are fundamentally embodied. Linear rhythms, by contrast, are externally imposed through social systems (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 6). In the airport, linear rhythms dominate. Flight timetables and boarding sequences structure movement according to abstract time rather than bodily need.

When these rhythms fail to align, Lefebvre identifies a condition of arrhythmia, associated with bodily discomfort and strain (2004, p. 16). At the airport, this condition is not accidental. Passengers experience a fundamental contradiction: they must maintain heightened temporal awareness (i.e. checking boarding times) whilst inhabiting spaces that suppress bodily cues. When passengers are held in suspension, severed from cyclical bodily anchors, they become unmoored from their own sovereignty of time, forcing them to mould to institutional time.

1.2 Heathrow Airport: Spatialising suspended time

These abstract temporal dynamics are materialised through architectural form. Heathrow Terminal 5 exemplifies how waiting is spatially organised at a large scale through deliberate formal decisions. As one of the busiest airports in the world, handling over 79 million passengers in 2023 (CAA, 2024), the terminal is required to reconcile extreme passenger throughput with legibility and flexibility. Its architectural strategies respond directly to this operational demand.

RSHP describe the main terminal as a long-span 'envelope', within which much of the programme is housed in freestanding steel-framed structures that can be dismantled and reconfigured as needs change (Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, 2008). (Fig 3) This separation between container and fit-out reflects a conscious decision to prioritise long-term adaptability over fixed spatial definition. By treating the roof and envelope as structurally independent from internal functions, the architects avoid locking zones into permanent arrangements, allowing the building to absorb future changes.

The scale of the building is central to how time is perceived. The concourse sits beneath an arched roof with a stated span of 165 metres, supported at the perimeter to eliminate internal columns (Fig 4). This decision produces uninterrupted floor plates and extended sightlines across check-in, security, and onward movement. Architecturally, this openness allows passengers to visually anticipate subsequent stages of their journey, reducing disorientation in a space of considerable size. RSHP describe this as a strategy of legibility, leading passengers through a 'logical and readable sequence' rather than relying on signage alone.

Fig. 4: Interior view of Heathrow Terminal 5 departures concourse, showing the long-span envelope and freestanding internal structures. Source: Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (2008).



As shown in Fig. 6, land-side check-in is set out as a broad field before passengers are drawn into a narrower security pinch-point; beyond this threshold, circulation is re-expanded into dwell zones and retail corridors.

The plan's alternation between field, funnel, and release reflects the spatial grammar we have already established for suspended time: that waiting is produced where the architecture narrows choice, then prolonged where space opens again.



Fig. 5: Interior view of Heathrow Terminal 5 roof structure, showing the arched long-span beams supported at the perimeter. Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (2008).



Fig. 6: Axonometric drawing of Heathrow Terminal 5 concourse, illustrating the relationship between the long-span roof and column-free interior space. Source: Heathrow Airport Limited (n.d.).

1.3 Atmospheric Control and Bodily Endurance

Approximately 30,000 square metres of retail is positioned along primary circulation routes (BAA, 2008), so that once passengers cross the one-way threshold into airside, consumption becomes the most readily available way of occupying time. The period of enforced waiting that follows corresponds to what Lefebvre describes as a 'hole in time', a temporal suspension produced when institutional rhythms override bodily ones and demand to be filled (Lefebvre, 2004). At Heathrow, this gap is not left open. By 2009, non-aeronautical revenue accounted for nearly half of the airport's total income (BAA, 2009), indicating that waiting is actively treated as an economic resource. Gottdiener's account of airports reframing passenger dwell time as commercial opportunity is useful here, because at Terminal 5 this logic is legible in plan, where retail corridors are aligned with the very spaces in which movement slows and waiting intensifies (Gottdiener, 2001).

It is important, however, to acknowledge that these same architectural choices can be read differently. They may also be understood as attempts to humanise a highly regulated environment, offering visual relief, orientation, and a sense of openness within an otherwise constrained journey. From this perspective, the architecture does not simply exploit waiting; rather it mitigates its psychological burden. Nevertheless, this interpretation still remains inseparable from the terminal's economic and institutional logic. Openness extends dwell time as much as it alleviates discomfort, and flexibility serves commercial adaptability as much as passenger comfort.

Beyond spatial organisation, waiting is also shaped through a carefully managed sensory environment. Terminal 5 operates through what Adey describes as a calculative architecture of affective control, in which behaviour is influenced through atmospheric conditions that subconsciously act on the body (Adey, 2008). Airports do not remove cyclical rhythms altogether, rather they reorganise them through lighting, acoustics and ventilation systems that recalibrate how time is felt.

RSHP's loose-fit strategy also helps explain why the terminal's atmosphere can feel continuous and difficult to 'locate'. Because much of the programme sits within independent internal structures under a single roof volume, environmental conditions read as building-wide and infrastructural rather than room-specific.

These conditions align with Böhme's notion of atmosphere as an affective quality that arises between bodies and space, shaping experience before it is consciously processed (Böhme, 1993). Atmosphere, in this sense, is not something that can be easily pointed to. Its effects are felt rather than named. As McCormack suggests, such environments operate through distributed agency, producing bodily responses without a clear or singular source (McCormack, 2008).

Discomfort emerges gradually, often without passengers being able to identify its cause. Lighting plays a significant role in this process. Research in environmental psychology suggests that large transport interiors frequently rely on consistent artificial illumination across day and night in order to support security and operational continuity, often at the expense of reinforcing natural circadian cues (Heschong Mahone Group, 2003; Boyce, 2014). At Terminal 5, daylight enters through the vast arched roof and glazed façades during the day (Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, 2008). However, this relationship to external time weakens once passengers move deeper into the terminal, where artificial lighting predominates and temporal cues weaken. (Fig 5) When combined with constant loudspeaker announcements and the steady hum of human circulation, the result is an environment that complicates rest and encourages alertness.

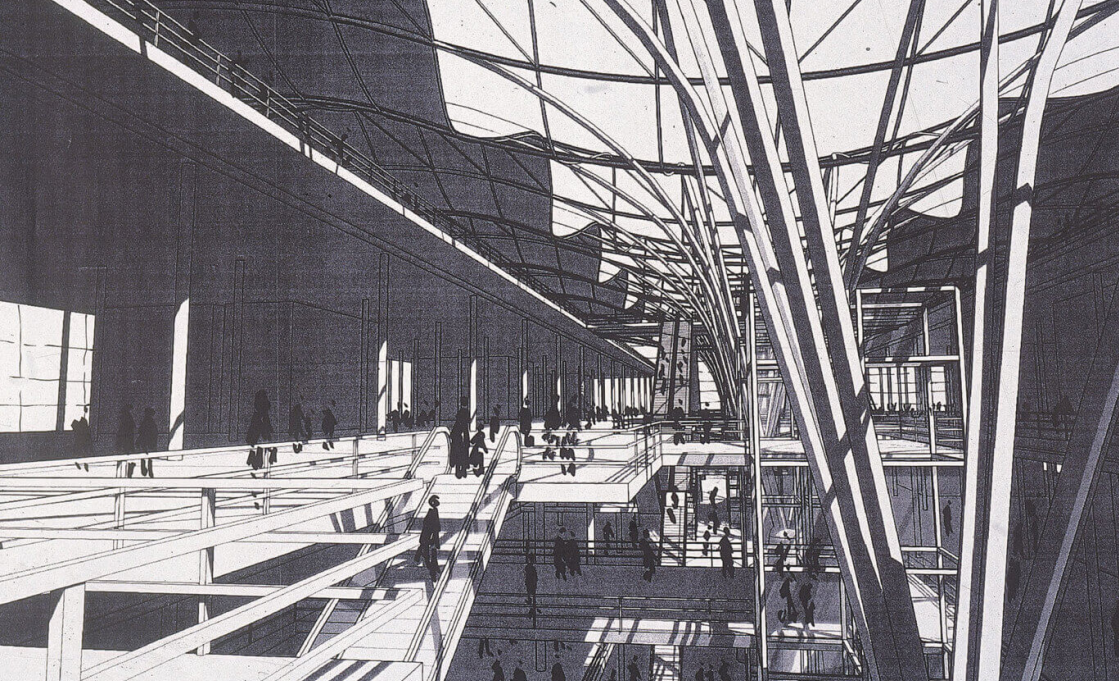


Fig. 7: Interior render of Terminal 5 showing atmospheric qualities. Source: Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (2008).

While Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that architecture can slow perception and encourage attentiveness to the sensory world- what he terms ‘haptic’ experience where material qualities invite tactile engagement (2005, p. 41)- the airport can at times produce the opposite effect. Fixed armrests and angled backrests limit how long the body can remain in one position. While designs like this are often justified through concerns of circulation, maintenance or crowd management, they also regulate posture and duration of use in subtle ways (Petty, 2016). In an attempt to adjust their posture, passengers produce constant micro-movements that prevent rest, which in turn leads to fatigue. Even so, passengers continue to adapt, improvising rest where possible.

The effects of this sensory environment become more visible during moments of disruption. When severe weather forced the Amsterdam Schiphol Airport in January 2024, hundreds of passengers were stranded overnight and attempted to sleep on terminal floors under continuous artificial lighting (NOS, 2024). Media coverage framed the event as an exceptional breakdown, yet the reported difficulties of rest and bodily strain reflected an intensification of conditions already embedded within everyday airport waiting.

This approach to waiting marks a clear historical shift from earlier conceptions of airport space. Early twentieth-century terminals often incorporat-



Fig. 8 Holiday-makers waiting in the departure lounge at Terminal Three of London's Heathrow airport during delays caused by industrial action taken by Canadian air traffic controllers, 11 August 1981. Photograph: by Keystone/Getty Images



Fig. 9: Early plane spotters in the viewing enclosure c.1949, with a Trans-Canada Airlines Canadair North Star in the background. Photograph: Via Tom Singfield/The History Press

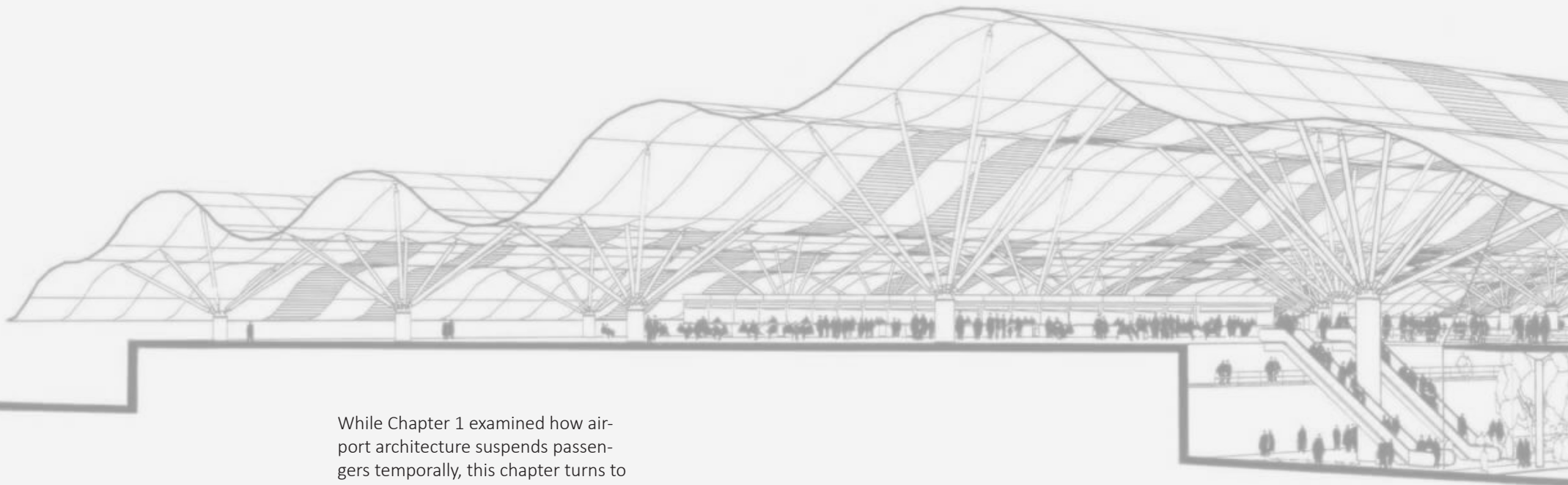
ed observation decks and terraces that allowed visitors to watch aircraft movements and engage with the surrounding environment (Pascoe, 2001).

At London Croydon Airport in the 1920s and 1930s, spectators could spend hours observing takeoffs and landings from rooftop viewing galleries; the airport functioned partially as a public spectacle. Even Heathrow's earliest terminal, The Europa Building, opened in 1955, featured rooftop terraces overlooking the airfield (Heathrow Airport Limited, 2015). Yet post-9/11 security imperatives and escalating passenger volumes fundamentally restructured contemporary airports to prioritize circulation efficiency and security.

Comparable sensory strategies appear in other institutional settings. Hospital waiting rooms rely on controlled lighting and seating to regulate behaviour and maintain alertness, particularly in emergency departments (Gesler et al., 2004). What distinguishes the airport is firstly the scale and intensity with which these techniques converge. Another distinctive feature that it exhibits is its coupling of temporal suspension with spatial transformation. Passengers who enter do not simply wait, instead they occupy an experiential threshold between landside and airside. What suspended time produces, in other words, is liminality.

02

Threshold Architecture



While Chapter 1 examined how airport architecture suspends passengers temporally, this chapter turns to the threshold as the point at which suspension becomes regulated, enforced, and juridically sanctioned.

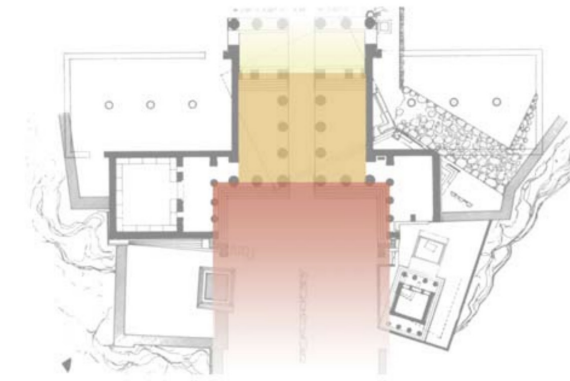
Fig. 10: Sectional Perspective of Terminal 5.
Source: Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (2008).

2.1 The Spatial Production of Liminality

What transforms a citizen into a passenger? To understand this transformation, we must first consider thresholds as spaces between two states of being. Anthropological theories of liminality provide a useful starting point for understanding this process, particularly Arnold van Gennep's study of rites of passage. The anthropological concept of liminality, first developed by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, describes certain thresholds that permit passage while simultaneously catalysing transformation. Van Gennep, studying ritual ceremonies across cultures, identified three stages of change: separation (preliminal), transition (liminal) and incorporation (postliminal) (1909, p. 10-11). The liminal stage, positioned between departure and arrival, marks a period in which previous identities are suspended while new ones have yet to stabilise. Victor Turner develops this concept further, characterising liminality as a condition of being 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969, p. 95). The liminal subject becomes suspended between spaces and social roles. They are neither fully part of the old identity nor have yet reached the new one.

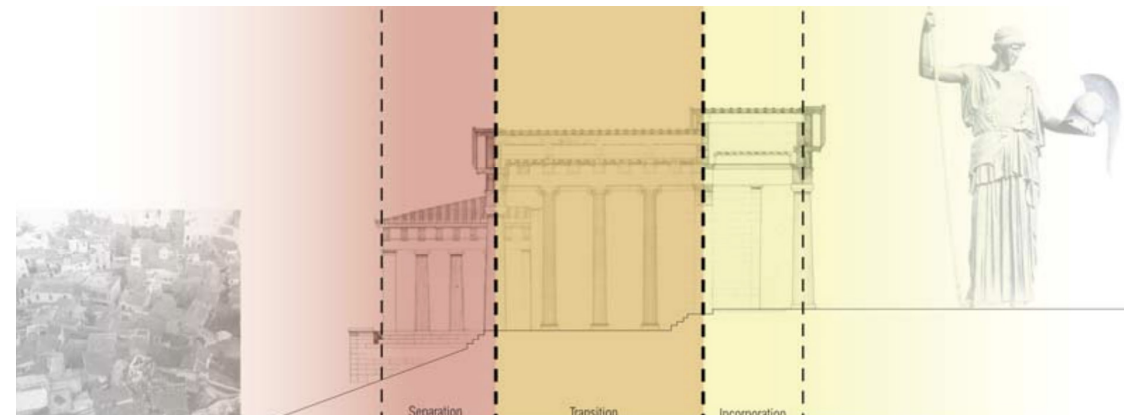
Within an architectural context, the ritual subject is replaced by space itself. It is the building that enacts transformation.

Fig. 11:
Annotated plan
showing zones
of separation,
transition and
incorporation
(Zimmermann)



Zimmerman's analysis of the Propylaea, the monumental gateway to the Athenian Acropolis, demonstrates how architecture can function as a mechanism of transition (Zimmerman, 2008). For the Greeks, the Acropolis represented sacred ground, separated from the profane world of the city below, and the Propylaea served as the threshold between these two realms (Wang, 2014). The approach to the Acropolis was carefully staged. The visitor began in the everyday world of Athens, surrounded by the noise of urban life, but upon entering the Propylaea's colonnade, they were drawn into a sequence of carefully layered, transitional spaces, with each threshold marking a shift in status. The passage was deliberately gradual: the wide steps slowed the ascent, the central hall compressed and amplified the sense of approach, and the narrowing gateways filtered the crowd. Finally, the visitor emerged onto the Acropolis plateau, where the Parthenon awaited (Zimmerman, p. 6). This sequence mirrors Van Gennep's tripartite structure. The city below represents the separation from the profane, the Propylaea itself becomes the liminal threshold and the entrance into the Acropolis marks the incorporation into the sacred realm. In this sense, architecture performs the ritual by guiding the visitor through space.

Fig. 12: Section
showing zones
of separation,
transition and
incorporation.
(Zimmermann)



A comparable logic operates within contemporary airport security checkpoints. Passengers are first separated from the landside public areas, then guided through a controlled sequence of transitional spaces that systematically strip away their ordinary status. This process becomes liminal because it suspends normal experience: passengers exist temporarily in an in-between state, neither fully part of the public realm nor incorporated into the airside zone they seek to enter. Only after completing this ritual of verification do they re-emerge as secured passengers, granted conditional passage.

Turner describes such rituals as producing a sense of 'communitas', in which participants are stripped of status distinctions and subjected to a shared vulnerability (Turner, 1969, p. 96). At the checkpoint, this appears to be enacted architecturally. Everyone, regardless of class or status, must remove their shoes, empty their pockets and submit to the same screening protocols. For a brief moment, social hierarchy is flattened and vulnerability is shared. However, this apparent equality is complicated by the commodification of time. As established in the previous chapter, time under capitalism is framed as a resource to be either spent or wasted. Paid fast-track services such as TSA PreCheck or Heathrow's own Fast Track provide a shortcut for those able and willing to pay for it. Whilst the procedure may remain egalitarian, the duration of vulnerability is no longer shared. Sharma describes this condition as one of 'differential speeds', in which temporal advantage functions as a form of power (Sharma, 2014). Hierarchies that appeared to be momentarily dissolved are therefore reinstated through time itself.

Moreover, the transformation produced by the checkpoint remains unstable in ways that exceed Turner's framework. Where Turner (1969, p. 95) describes liminality as a threshold leading to 'incorporation', the secured passenger occupies a far more precarious position. In Van Gennep's (1909) and Turner's models, the liminal subject emerges from the threshold with a stable, recognised identity. On the other hand, the checkpoint produces a subject with a conditional identity, whose status is continually monitored and subject to being revoked. Identity does not stabilise but remains contingent and structurally bound to the airport.

This instability invites comparison with Marc Augé's (1995) concept of the 'non-place'. Augé describes spaces of transit as environments that lack enduring social relations, identity and memory, producing subjects defined by anonymity and passage rather than belonging (Augé, 1995). Crucially,

he argues that non-places produce a distinct form of subjectivity through erasure, where 'a person in the space... is relieved of his usual determinants' (Augé, 1995, p. 103). In such spaces, the traveller is temporarily reduced to ticket numbers or bar codes suspended in the eyes of the system.

Even so, upon closer inspection, the checkpoint reveals the limits of this framework. Where Augé emphasizes anonymity, the checkpoint operates through hypervisibility. Passengers are not entirely relieved of their identity; instead, they are over-determined by them by being subjected to heightened forms of identification and surveillance. After being broken down into scannable bodies, they are then reconstituted through data capture as biometric profiles legible to institutional systems (Amoore, 2006; Lyon, 2003).

While Turner's rituals and Augé's non-places offer valuable insights, neither framework fully accounts for the legal powers embedded within checkpoint architecture. To fully grasp its transformative power, we must examine the checkpoint as a threshold where law and architecture converge.

2.2 The Juridical Threshold: Exception and Compliance

While the checkpoint's spatial choreography physically reshapes passengers, its legal architecture performs an equally profound transformation. Giorgio Agamben's concept of the 'state of exception' is useful here, describing a situation in which normal legal protections are suspended in the name of security (Agamben, 1998). While passengers are not reduced to bare life in the absolute sense that Agamben describes, the checkpoint produces a temporary juridical condition in which rights are subordinated to discretionary authority. As Salter observes, the border functions as a permanent site of exception, where extraordinary powers are exercised as routine practice (Salter, 2008, p. 365). The airport checkpoint exemplifies this condition.

Upon entering the security zone, passengers submit to a temporary reordering of rights. Privacy, bodily autonomy and freedom of movement are subordinated to security protocols authorised by post-9/11 legislation. In the UK, measures such as the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001) expanded the statutory powers of security personnel, embedding exceptional authority within everyday procedures. What began as an emergency response has since been normalised, becoming the baseline condition under which mobility is governed. Once the usual legal frame is subordinated, it generates a distinctive mode of subjectivity. Agamben describes this as bare life, a condition in which individuals are reduced to biological existence subject to sovereign decision (Agamben, 1998, p. 181).

Screening processes reinforce this condition through a lengthy process of pre-screening, document checks and visual inspection- measures increasingly supplemented by biometric verification. Each step strips back layers of social identity, reducing passengers to bodies requiring verification. As Adey notes, participation in this regime is formally voluntary, yet 'to refuse to be screened is to refuse to fly' (Adey, 2009, p. 275). The choice is structured so that conventional legal protections are traded for mobility under terms defined solely by these security regimes.

This isn't coercion in the traditional sense, it is what Foucault terms 'governmentality': the structuring of conduct through the management of possible actions (1982, p. 221). Once again, the checkpoint governs through the withdrawal of alternatives, producing compliance as the only rational response to spatial and juridical constraint. The following section examines how contemporary checkpoints translate juridical theory into architectural practice, signaling through spatial design that passengers have entered into a zone governed by different rules.

2.3 Materialising the Threshold

Contemporary airport security checkpoints give tangible form to the state of exception through architectural arrangements that enforce what Amoore describes as ‘preemptive security’, where inspection occurs before threat materialises and all passengers are transformed into subjects of suspicion (Amoore, 2006). As Fuller and Harley argue, ‘the checkpoint is not merely a site of inspection but an architectural divide that produces specific forms of subjectivity’ (2004, p. 56). This occurs through three primary spatial mechanisms: enforced linear circulation, visibility imbalances and material differentiation.

The first mechanism is enforced linear enforcement. Airside zones are constructed to eliminate unintended connections (between public and restricted areas), ensuring that all access passes through inspection (IATA, 2019, p. 334). They do this by channelling passengers from open circulation areas into controlled lanes, producing a funnel effect through which dispersed crowds are transformed into manageable queues. This recalls the Propylaea’s architectural choreography, but with an inversion. Rather than preparing bodies for a sacred encounter, the checkpoint prepares them for scrutiny. Queue barriers, typically linked by retractable belts, systematically bring order to the crowd by giving shape to the line of passengers and by providing flexible adjustments to passenger traffic volumes. As Adey argues, such barriers render ‘mobile bodies manageable’ by enforcing linear progression and limiting retreat (2008, p. 443). Once passengers cross the initial threshold, the spatial progression follows what Lynch’s terms ‘forced paths’ routes from which deviation is structurally impossible (Lynch, 1960, p. 100). Security checkpoints at Heathrow employ serpentine queueing systems, defined by zigzag configurations that maximise queue capacity within limited floor area while allowing for the constant visual surveillance of waiting passengers.

This leads to the second mechanism used, the visibility imbalance. Foucault’s analysis of the panopticon, a prison design where inmates are constantly visible to unseen observers, offers a useful conceptual frame for reading airport security architecture (1977, p. 200). In Bentham’s original design, the central watchtower allows guards to observe all cells without

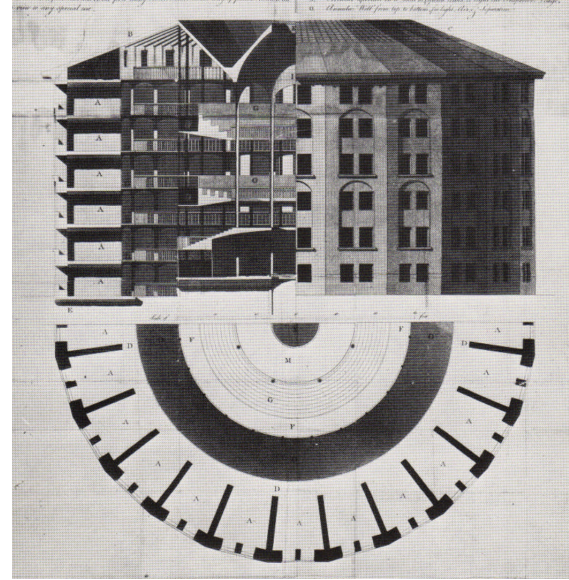


Fig. 12: 1791 design for the Panopticon by Jeremy Bentham, Samuel Bentham and the architect Willey Reveley. Source: Plate II in ‘Postscript-Part II’ Works of Jeremy Bentham.

prisoners knowing whether they are being watched at any given moment (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). This uncertainty produces self-discipline as a result. Inmates regulate their own behaviour because surveillance feels perpetual, even when it is not. Contemporary checkpoints enact a similar logic.

Rather than functioning as a literal architectural model, panopticism operates at the airport as a diagram of power that is distributed across space. Surveillance is not concentrated in a single vantage point. Instead, the checkpoint fragments the logic of the panopticon across multiple architectural elements, producing a condition in which visibility is constant but unlocatable. Passengers regulate their own behaviour because the possibility of observation is embedded within the very fabric of the spatial order itself, within elements such as queuing systems and scanning devices.

Security personnel observe passengers from positions that give them broad oversight of queuing areas whilst remaining partially obscured themselves. The spatial design renders passengers hyper-visible, and body scanners exemplify this visibility most starkly. Introduced at UK airports from 2010 onwards (UK Government, 2010), these devices require passengers to adopt standardised postures with their arms raised and feet apart while remaining still (Australian Parliament, 2011; US Department of Homeland Security, 2013). This posture demonstrates a performance of compliance as passengers stand exposed, awaiting permission to proceed. Discipline is enacted spatially, reinforcing the internalisation of compliant behaviour that Foucault (1977) identified as central to panoptic power.

Material differentiation forms a third layer to this process. Security zones are characterised by finishes that evoke a sanitised aesthetic that feels more medical than civic. Stainless steel surfaces, rubber flooring and fluorescent lighting contrast sharply with the warmer materials and commercial imagery found elsewhere in the terminal. This material transition once again produces an architecture that communicates to passengers that they have entered a space governed by different rules. The rubber mats absorb sound, creating what Bissell terms 'affective atmospheres' characterised by acoustic deadening and heightened anxiety (Bissell, 2010, p. 272). Furthermore, the fluorescent overhead lighting eliminates shadows, ensuring total visibility and exposure. The sterile atmosphere induces feelings of exposure and vulnerability that work to normalize compliant conduct (Fuller and Harley, 2004, p. 63).

It should be acknowledged, however, that not all passengers experience these atmospheres identically, and practical considerations such as operational efficiency and regulatory compliance also shape checkpoint design. Upon completing the screening process, passengers encounter a material shift. They re-enter softer zones where colour and commercial advertisements are reintroduced, conveying that the previous zone (and its imposed conditions) have ended. This transition marks what Salter calls 'the performance of sovereignty' (Salter, 2008, p. 367). Passengers have submitted, been inspected and received architectural permission to proceed.

The intersection of these mechanisms produces what Foucault describes as 'docile bodies', subjects who have internalised compliance as the inevitable precondition of mobility (Foucault, 1977, p. 135). Hence, it can be argued that compliance at the airport checkpoint is enacted through the materiality of the architectural.

This dissertation begins in the grey, sterile waiting hall of Tati's *Playtime*, an image that reveals how waiting operates as a defining condition of modern travel. Although airport architecture has evolved dramatically since 1967, the significance of waiting within it has not diminished. Contemporary terminals have instead refined the means by which time is distorted and movement is regulated.

Through an analysis of time, space and atmosphere, the dissertation has shown that waiting at the airport is not just an incidental consequence of air travel- it is also an architecturally produced condition. At Heathrow Terminal 5, environmental systems, spatial sequencing and commercial planning work together to suspend passengers between bodily and institutional temporalities. Perpetual lighting, climate control and restrictive seating disrupt circadian rhythms, while retail corridors convert enforced stillness into economic value, revealing waiting as a resource to be managed and monetised.

This logic intensifies at the security checkpoint, where spatial choreography intersects with juridical power. Reading through theories of liminality and exception, the checkpoint emerges as a threshold that does more than regulate access. It temporarily reconstitutes passengers as securitised subjects, subjecting them to procedural vulnerability. Architecture here materialises authority through controlled circulation and surveillance, producing compliance without the use of force.

Taken together, these findings position the airport as a site where architecture and state power converge. Far from neutral infrastructure, the terminal operates as a machine that can shape subjectivity. In this sense, the world Tati imagined in *Playtime* no longer functions as satire alone. It has become an architectural reality, one in which the environment is polished to the point of anonymity, where human behaviour is made to bend to the script of the building.

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