

The Passenger and The Player: *Bluetooth* and the Subversion of Airport Space

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Airports represent contemporary forms of mobility – existing as nodes that connect travelers and passengers to a series of other nodes within a global network of movement. The localized space of the airport itself is subject to such forms of global mobility – providing a gateway to international travel. As such, the contemporary, post-9/11 airport is a highly regimented space of surveillance – coding bodies and subjecting travelers to an ongoing forward and store flow of movement. This paper analyses the contemporary airport space and the possible subversions to surveillance-driven forms of mobility that the pervasive game *Bluetooth* offers. The game utilizes the surveillance space of the airport as the game space – where players are required to discreetly distribute and then collect forms of illegal contraband. This paper focuses on two figures of mobility/immobility: the passenger-in-waiting and the player-in-waiting. Conceptualizing play as a form of mobility and as a potentially subversive act, this paper examines how *Bluetooth* works within the structures of the airport space, and the subsequent forms of mobility and immobility afforded to travelers. This paper argues that *Bluetooth* subverts the space of the airport not only via a provocative narrative, but by playing with forms of mobility and immobility, and the store and forward flow of

people within these highly surveilled spaces.

Introduction

“Airports are a type of city designed to facilitate global mass-movement as efficiently as possible. This city exists in no single location. It is dispersed and distributed in much the same way as most global information networks, and yet it is inhabited by real people and things (not just data). To access this city one needs to buy into a very particular set of procedures and rules.”¹

This paper explores the spatial politics of post-9/11 airports, using the pervasive game *Blowtooth* as an example of how play may subvert spaces of high surveillance. Hijacking the social science paradigm of mobility, this paper discusses the importance of mobility and immobility within the context of the airport, expanding the paradigm to include the act of play as a meaningful form of movement. This framework is then applied to the airport as a space of flows that affords both movement and stillness. What emerge from this discussion are two prominent figures, the passenger-in-waiting and the player-in-waiting. *Blowtooth* offers a subversion of both models of mobility – transforming the immobile body of the passenger/player, and subverting the highly regimented space of flows at the airport.

Developed at the Lincoln Social Computing Research Center, *Blowtooth* is a pervasive game developed for Android devices. *Blowtooth* utilizes the high-security space of airports as the arena for an international smuggling game. Of course, all forms of illegal contraband are virtual, and the game relies on nearby Bluetooth enabled devices in order to function. The game was designed to encourage players to commence play in places where other passengers tend to congregate such as check-in lines, cafes, and informational screens.² Players are then required to stash virtual forms of contraband on nearby passengers via Bluetooth, which may later be obtained once safely passing through security. The game will force a ten-minute waiting time before players are able to progress to the next portion of the game. Once the player has successfully passed through security check-ins, they are then required to re-locate all illegal goods, tracking down the selected drug mules, and collecting as much contraband as possible. Each of the patsies will be unaware of their participation in the simulated smuggling, and no data is stored on any device without prior consent.³ Like all pervasive

games, *Blowtooth* seeks to blur the spatial and temporal boundaries of what may be considered a game, utilizing the physical space as the arena in which play is conducted, and blurring the lines between player and non-player. The developers are highly aware of the structural affordances offered by airports and designed *Blowtooth* with these in mind.⁴⁵ The game's goal is to play with the affordances of this surveillance space, subverting the seriousness of the airport as a high security space.

Play as a subversive form of mobility

The airport functions as more than just a gateway to a means of transport. It is representative of a broader mobility, allowing for the movement of people, or passengers, across the globe. The airport functions as a "movement-space" – a means of constructing, and maintaining social relationships that are always inherently shifting between being present with others and at a distance.⁶ John Urry offers five interdependent mobilities that produce social life organized across distance: the corporal travel of people, the physical movement of objects, imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel.⁷ The new mobility paradigm emphasizes the relation between each form of mobility - that all places are tied into a network of connections.⁸ What becomes integral to the movement between places is the act of movement itself. Amongst the many forms of movement cited by Cresswell, the act of play is not one of them.⁹ This paper offers the addition of playful forms of mobility, forms of movement that may at times, undermine the cultural constructions of "serious spaces". In doing so, this paper argues that the performance of play is a product of social life – it is subject to forms of mobility present with the space of the airport.

The mobility paradigm allows for a shift away from categorical discussions of play, allowing for reconceptualizations of play as a process of interconnection and movement. This proves helpful in shifting away from game essentialism and debates concerning "the magic circle,"¹⁰ and allows for a focus on play as an experiential movement through space. As noted by Stevens, most definitions of play remain at play, constantly changing and becoming redefined based on social attitudes and culture.¹¹ Salen and Zimmerman's straightforward definition of play proves particularly helpful, defining play as free movement within a more rigid structure.¹²With

Blowtooth, these rigid structures are both the surveillance structures of the airport and the system-based structures of the game itself. The act of free movement adheres to a number of historical and categorical definitions of play, whereby play is viewed as a voluntary activity performed in opposition to daily activities of everyday life.¹³¹⁴¹⁵ Framing the act of play as a form of free and voluntary movement allows for play to be viewed as a process of playing with or against forms of mobility. As discussed by Moore, play is an act of mobility in itself.¹⁶ Play is framed by a series of mediations. Moore's view of play moving across multiple technological frames allows for play to move beyond even the rigid structures of games themselves – such as the act of modification or cheating. While typically, the act of play within airports is located within the structures of immobility and the “closed” location of a screen, *Blowtooth* allows for play as a form of subversive mobility within the context of the airport – allowing for a reorganization of the structured constraints imposed by both the device and the airport as a space of surveillance.

In order to fully understand the means in which *Blowtooth* may reconfigure patterns of mobility and immobility within the space of the airport, the structural organization of the airport as a space of flows needs to be further examined. While *Blowtooth* is designed to take advantage of periods of immobility – using queues and seating areas as a chance to virtually plant contraband – the game also offers reconfigurations of what it means to play within the context of being a passenger-in-waiting. Play, within the context of *Blowtooth*, offers an exploitation and subversion of patterns of mobility and immobility within the context of the airport. It is within these periods that the act of playing *Blowtooth* is given meaning – allocating contraband to passengers, moving within the space of the airport, subverting tradition notions of mobile play as killing time. The key figures of immobility, the passenger and the player in waiting, are reframed as subversive agents – moving within the afforded patterns of the airport while simultaneously offering a reconfiguration of the contextually specific forms of mobility and immobility.

Room to Move – Mobility in Airports

The contemporary, post-9/11 airport is a highly regulated space – it requires

high levels of surveillance to maintain effective security, as well as to foster the efficient mobility of passengers. The airport is famously described by French anthropologist Marc Augé as a “non-place” – a place of temporary transition where those who pass through having fleeting social interactions.¹⁷ Similarly, Harley describes the airport as a “Junkspace”, adopting the term from Rem Koolhaas who defines Junkspace as the “colossal mechanical and technological residue that mankind leaves on the planet”.¹⁸ In the case of airports, Junkspace takes the form of seating arrangements, informational signs, and a series of other technologies that afford a specific form of movement. In his work with Gillian Fuller, Ross Harley discusses the spatial and temporal politics of airports. The airport operates through a network logic, cutting across “categories of nation states and territory, humans and animals, products and machines, and material and informational modes of mobility that reconnects them in new relationships to each other”.¹⁹ Within the network logic of the airport, time and space collide in what Paul Virilio calls chronography, where the distance of a flight becomes measurable by time.²⁰ Time becomes important for the movement of space, bodies are moved through space in order to make flights on time, asked to arrive hours prior to take off in order to maintain efficient forms of mobility. The passenger is just one of many incorporeal transformations of the traveling body – places alongside citizen, baggage allowance, threat, or innocent.²¹ Here, the structures of the airport impose patterns of movement on to travelers – the traveler becomes the passenger-in-waiting, a figure of immobility.

Movement within airports is best described by Fuller as a process of store and forward. “We walk-we stop-we sit-we walk-we stop. We progress through a set of procedures that facilitate mobility”.²² The architectural structure of airports, a series of corrals and gates, facilitate pauses into the movement of people. During this process, the citizen, as identified when checking in, is transformed into “a generic passenger with no identifying marks”²³ – “an abstract model of movement, subject to the exceptional rules of airspace”.²⁴ Abstracted to a series of flows, the passenger is then required to wait. What emerges is a figure of simultaneous mobility and immobility, the passenger-in-waiting. Returning to the function of play as movement, the role of play within airport spaces, or indeed any moment of waiting, is located within digital space. Third generation mobile devices and dedicated portable gaming consoles have been culturally constructed to occupy periods of waiting.²⁵ The screens of such devices are often engaged with at a glance,

attracting sporadic attention from the player. The passenger-in-waiting becomes the player-in-waiting – using the act of play to occupy moments before travel.

Typically, the player-in-waiting engages with the screen of mobile gaming devices at a glance. What have been deemed casual games; offer quick bursts of game-play to occupy the player during moments of waiting or in transit.²⁶ Pervasive games seek to utilize the physical environment as a core element within game-play. With the case of *Blowtooth*, the material surroundings of the airport becomes integral to the act of play – as does the socially and authoritatively constructed forms of control. *Blowtooth* offers a subversion of the airport as a space of surveillance not only by offering a simulation of illegal activities, but by playing with forms of culturally constructed mobility within the space of the airport. *Blowtooth* subverts both the passenger and player-in-waiting. The passenger-in-waiting, subject to the process of body coding within the queue is unknowingly reconfigured into a drug mule. They unknowingly pass through the routine security checks with any number of illicit (virtual) contraband on their person. Those subject to post-security waiting, and the subsequent "stillness" involved in being a pending passenger becomes an item for the player to find. The player transitions from a body in waiting to become a pervasive game player – subverting culturally constructed notion of mobile game play as a means of killing time. Interestingly, the player is still subject to the same store and forward flow, hunting for their patsies while at the same time adhering to the afforded flows of the airport. What occurs is an increase in freedom of movement within these rigid structures – reconfiguring patterns of immobility, and transcending beyond virtual mobility within the confines of a gaming device's screen.

Blowtooth offers a counter to patterns of mobility and immobility within the surveillance space of the airport. The application of mobility as a paradigm allows for an analysis into the movement of travelers, and regulation of people within the space of the airport – as well as the role of the airport as a node in a wider global network of mobility. Furthermore, the classification of play as a form of meaningful movement – an act related to a series of objects, people, processes, and discourses, allows for play to be classified as culturally significant and potentially subversive. The notion of play as free, voluntary movement may be applied to *Blowtooth*, to some extent. The rigid structures that exist within the game and the surrounding space of the

airport still restrict the mobility of the player – the player-in-waiting is constantly subject to a flow of store and forward. However, the act of play is framed and functions within the rigid boundaries, allowing for the full extent of the games narrative to be appreciated. It is impossible to completely remove one's self from the structural and organizational flows within the airport. What *Blowtooth* offers is a reconfiguration of both the player-in-waiting and the passenger-in-waiting, subverting the serious space of the airport into a temporary play space.

Notes

- 1 Gillian Fuller and Ross Harley. *Aviopolis: A Book about Airports* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 11.
- 2 Conor Linehan Ben Kirman, Shaun Lawson, and Mark Doughty. "Blowtooth: Pervasive Gaming in Unique and Challenging Environments." In. *ACM Press*. (2010), 2698.
- 3 Ben Kirman, Conor Linehan, and Shaun Lawson. "Blowtooth: A Provocative Pervasive Game for Smuggling Virtual Drugs Through Real Airport Security." *Personal Ubiquitous Computing* 16 (6) (August): 767–775 (2012).
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Thrift, in John Urry, *Mobilities* (London: Polity, 2007), 45.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Mimi Sheller and John Urry. "The New Mobilities Paradigm." *Environment and Planning A* 38 (2): 207–226. 9 (2006: 1).
- 9 Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. (Routledge, 2006)
- 10 Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 304.

- 11 Quentin Stevens, *The Ludic City: Exploring the Potential of Public Spaces* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007).
- 12 Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*, 304.
- 13 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: The Beacon press, 1955).
- 14 Roger Caillois. *Man, Play, and Games* (University of Illinois Press, 1962).
- 15 Quentin Stevens, *The Ludic City: Exploring the Potential of Public Spaces* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007).
- 16 Christopher Moore, "The Magic Circle and the Mobility of Play." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17 (4) (2011): 373–387.
- 17 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London & New York: Verso Books, 1995).
- 18 Ross Harley, "Airportals: The Functional Significance of Stilness in the Junkspace of Airports." in *Stillness in a Mobile World*, ed. David Bissell and Gillian Fuller (Routledge, 2011).
- 19 Gillian Fuller and Ross Harley, *Aviopolis: A Book about Airports*, (Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2004), 39.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Gillian Fuller, "Store>Forward: Architectures of Anticipation," in *Aeromobilities: Theory and Research*, ed. SC Werner, S Kessering & J Urry (London: Routledge, 2009), 64.
- 23 Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York : Routledge, 2006), 238.
- 24 Fuller and Harley, *Aviopolis*, 65.
- 25 Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson "The Waiting Game: Complicating Notions of (tele)presence and Gendered Distraction in Casual Mobile

Gaming." *Australian Journal of Communication* 36 (2009): 23–35.

26 Jesper Juul, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010).

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