



## Book Review

Salter, Mark B., ed. 2008. *Politics at the Airport*.  
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.  
183 pp. \$20.00 (US) paperback ISBN 978-0-8166-5015-6

### Willem De Lint

Head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. <mailto:delint@uwindsor.ca>

Traveling recently from Windsor, Canada to Brisbane, Australia I packed a change of clothes, a Macbook and Mark Salter's edited collection, *Politics at the Airport*. Consistent with much recent interdisciplinary work on surveillance and the border, the volume situates the air traveler in the context of the war on terror and global capital flows as an object of mobility governance. In addition to an introduction and chapter by Salter, it features chapters by David Lyon; Colin Bennett; Galya Lahav; Francisco Klauser, Jean Ruegg and Valérie November; David Muller; Peter Adey; and Gillian Fuller.

As Salter pointed out in a previous book (co-edited with Eli Zuriek in 2005) the airport is a "classification engine" and "transient institution" that is divided into "arrival halls" or citizen sorting stations, "confessionals," where border agents "inquire into your provenance," and "hyperdocumentation" zones where a "body-biometrics-file-profile" is audited. When you arrive at the ticket counter or gate you carry a receipt (a ticket) that links your body with the passage of the data. While a land crossing between friendly states (Canada-USA) allows you and your data double (or "virtual identity located in a networked database," as David Lyon puts it (30)), to travel together in time and space, identity securitization is more intense at airports. Arriving by taxi after crossing the American border at Metro-Detroit I handed my e-manifest to the Northwest Airlines agent who checked the computer and said slowly, "Oh, I see here that you require a travel visa for Australia." Passage denied. At the biometric border, I was incomplete and dangerous, at least according to a "data handling regime" (Lyon, 31) that would appear to have allowed for some interpretive discretion.

An airport is a sieve that filters capital and labour flows. According to Peter Adey it is a "difference machine" that modulates mobility through assembling and reassembling bodies into "processing categories" including citizen, passenger, labourer, threat. As Salter notes, passage through the airport conditions and normalizes "particular identities, certain authorities, and...ways of managing the mobility of a population" (xii). By not (apparently) registering a travel visa, my re-assemblage as a valid visitor was incomplete, I was not normalized to the Australian authority, therefore I still carried an unchecked risk; I was an abnormal identity inconsistent with my planned itinerary.

Airport governance has been particularly powerful because it has harnessed both public and private authority. Major airports and much of the technology and operating systems are outsourced and privately owned and airports themselves are major public-private partnerships. Galya Lahav (95) argues that "new rules of the game" at the airport were initiated by states themselves who, consistent with neoliberal governmentality, determine the rates of exchange. However, Klauser, Ruegg and November investigate CCTV at the Geneva airport and conclude that the process of "global security politics recalibration" is being achieved through mechanisms that "reorder security politics toward economic goals" (123). As Klauser et. al. point out, sometimes there is conflict between security and economy and it is important to investigate how public and private interests are played up in the technologies. Adey also investigates the commercial and security interests of the "security pinch-points and compulsive consumption

zones" (156). He finds that practices perfected in the defense against "terror" have been combined with those that are dedicated to the absorption and retrieval of global wealth. This sorting produces a politics of control that involves sufficient ambiguity so as to produce extraordinary compliance and commitment to the extant ordering regime.

Denied passage at the ticket counter at Metro-Detroit, I made a hasty online application for an Australian Electronic Travel Authorization or eVisitor visa whereupon I learned that "normal processing for an ETA or eVisitor visa is 2 business days." It was Saturday and I was due in Australia on Monday. I stood at the internet kiosk looking over my shoulder wondering how my data double could have gotten *behind* me.

Contributors to the volume go beyond describing the airport assemblage to query moving parts. In addition to the no-fly list, assessed is CCTV, systems for prescreening, the design of airports to facilitate unobtrusive "filtering and shaping" (Adey), and the nature of windows as an expectation of governance (Fuller). These technologies contribute to altering perception and expectations. Prods and probes ("why are traveling to Brisbane?", "do you mind if I open up your laptop?," "keep your passport open to your photo page") install themselves into the normalcy of air travel such that it truly is remarkable the extent to which eager, unquestioning submission has been produced.

Taking a chance, I ventured once more to the Northwest counter and again tried to gain entry, waving a printout of my on-line application. A different agent deemed me "in process." I was clear to Los Angeles. Then, at my transit at LAX the Air New Zealand agent said that my lack of visa was no problem, I could be processed for one on the spot. Waving *Politics at the Airport* like a talisman, I heaped praise on ANZ across the counter and vowed loyalty to them and their kind. Later still, almost precisely upon landing in Brisbane, I received an email from Dave Thom: "Willem, Visalink received your ETA application via fax...I double checked on the ETA website and received the following: please note you *already have* a current visa for travel to Australia." It allowed for multiple entries but prohibited work. Seemingly already on a given name basis with me, I wanted to meet Dave Thom in the flesh and express a vow to respect and honor all things Australian. I had now experienced the politics of security and control at airports and its manifestation in particular, personal, private emotions (Adley, 157).

There is much in the book that addresses the theme of sovereignty and the hard cut between friend and foe as the world lurches toward common templates for aggregation and disaggregation. For instance, Lyon concentrates on the mechanisms through which sanctioned global identity and mobility is screened and surveilled to order the world into "globals" who can move freely and "locals" who are confronted by obstacles denying them entry into the requisite speed category. Sovereign exclusions may be quite discretionary, and there is plentiful reference to Agamben and Bigo's "ban-opticon" (and one reference to Schmittian decisionism). In assessing the no-fly list, Bennett argues that its adoption is a consequence of the state's attempt to reassert its sovereignty (seen in terms of its "nodality, treasure, authority and organization" (71)) in the context of the limited availability of policy instruments. Indeed, I was reminded of Giddens' distinction between the capacity and reach of state authority when an announcement was made over the on-board p.a. system of NZA8 about an hour after take-off from Auckland and 10,000 kilometers from San Francisco: "Because this flight will be traveling into US airspace, the TSA is asking that you not congregate near the toilets during the flight."

In this book there is also reference to the question of cultural legacy, particularly following Walter Benjamin. Fuller explores the "movement and light" of the airport in terms of the arcade. The 21<sup>st</sup> century flier is abandoned to the "total incorporation of the manifold possibilities of a commodified network" (162). Fuller's essay is a fitting conclusion to the volume as it completes the trajectory that Salter noted in the introduction: from Foucault to Deleuze, enclosures to assemblages, practices to lines of flight. According to Fuller, the glass and steel, the windows that dominate airports are "vision machines. They replace the elements of actual location with a spectacle of virtual movement" (163).

Salter concludes his own chapter by reiterating that there is no teleology at the airport, rather it operates as a rhizome that problematizes mobility (23). I am not sure that this claim is supported, and if so, where, other than with reference to a selective body of social theory. On the contrary and as reflected in many of the chapters, much of the connecting tissue seems to be an ordering of mobility for capital and commercial flows. Global mobilities may or may not require that at particular sites private, public, state or market auspices or commercial or security interests are pushed out front, but whatever the look or feel, the filtering and differentiation is intended to maintain those flows within *and for* a version of legitimate governing authority.