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Borders as Infrastructure

The Technopolitics of Border Control

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4 Detection, Detention, and Design at the Airport

A Machine with Ever-Changing Wheels

At Schiphol International Airport's centenary in 2016, its architectural supervisor, Jan Benthem, made a clear case for air design.¹ "At the airport," he stated, "it is not about the outside, it is about the structures on the inside. It is a machine with ever-changing wheels, a transformation that the traveler ought to be aware of as little as possible."² Previously, in 1993, Benthem argued that "the biggest problem I faced while designing was that the terminal had to be a well-oiled machine on the one hand and a sort of living room where people felt at ease on the other, . . . creating a quiet, pleasant atmosphere where you don't see all the technology."³

The airport, one of the defining faces of the so-called global border regime, exemplifies a specific kind of technopolitics. It is one of the key locations where border control and migration management takes place. As such, airports and airlines play a crucial role in Europe's border infrastructures. Chapter 2 explained that border infrastructures (1) connect large-scale networks with local manifestations of borders, (2) select among migrants by organizing forms of circulation, (3) display a particular interplay between visibility and invisibility, and (4) can be movable entities themselves. At the airport, border infrastructures sort various kinds of migrants from ordinary travelers as they execute the visa policies of the European Union (EU) and act as gatekeepers. The result is that for a large part of the world population, traveling by airplane to Europe is impossible unless they have a specific visa, such as for temporal work, study, or tourism, or are able to apply for asylum. People that still seek to reach Europe, including refugees, are forced to take other, riskier routes over land and sea—chapters 5, 6, and 7 will describe this method of

travel in greater detail. From a policy point of view, they then are regarded as “irregular migrants,” a category that exists only because of the sealing of the airspace. Studying the role of the airport in shaping the European Union’s global border machine and global mobility infrastructure promises to reveal the inner workings of technopolitics and the relationships among the various functions attributed to border infrastructures.⁴

The control over Europe’s airspace emerges from various policies, including preclearance, carrier sanctions, visa policies, and coordination with buffer countries. Visa policies and blacklists of countries whose nationals require visas create a kind of “paper curtain.”⁵ Carrier sanctions support tight visa regimes. They require airlines to pay a fine for carrying aliens without valid passports or visas. All Schengen countries use these sanctions.

The role of airports in the technopolitics of Europe’s border infrastructures can again be specified by applying the concept of mediation. Airports mediate in three related ways. First, there is internal mediation at the airport, the distinction, selection, and connection of various forms of circulation, including border control, passenger flow, and migration management. Second, airports mediate among existing national, EU, and international legislation and regulations, such as the visa regime and policies with regard to airline carriers and the operational task of the airport itself. Whereas the former concerns mediation at the airport itself, the latter concerns the mediating role of airports in Europe’s border infrastructures at large. Third, the coordination between this internal and external mediation requires additional forms of mediation. To follow the imperative that was set out in chapter 3 (i.e., to detect the emergence of border infrastructures from the inside out), this chapter will start unfolding these forms of mediation by departing from the peramorphic mediations that take place at airports.

The notion of “peramorphic mediations” creates awareness for the transformation of borders and the ways that they connect and disconnect different spaces and situations. In some situations, borders act as objects or instruments of state power, other situations see borders functioning as networks (large-scale infrastructures to organize international human mobility), whereas borders also appear as a kind of worldview—a way of ordering reality. A technopolitical account of borders must acknowledge these transformations.

Three specific peramorphic mediations will be distinguished: design, detection, and detention. These mediations combine the related yet distinct

functions of managing passenger flow, ensuring security, controlling the border, and managing migration. The dividing lines between these functions are highly porous, not least because the technologies to produce and reproduce this permeability remain in constant flux. But with the notion of peramorphic mediations, we will try to follow them.

The architectural supervisor at Schiphol's centenary touched upon the notion of mediation by implicitly pointing at three aspects—namely, materiality, spatiality, and visibility. Together, they create an infrastructure in which Schiphol's three spaces of design, detection, and detention relate to each other. At the airport, various dividing lines are at work, most notably the ones that distinguish the spaces of design, detection, and detention where the governance of regular (and sometimes irregular) travelers takes place. Rather than seeing infrastructure as the outcome of clear-cut political decisions and human design, it will be shown that the inner workings of the airport fuel a dynamic interplay among the spaces of design, detection, and detention, where events are made visible or invisible and become related or remain uncoupled.

This interplay is largely informed by the infrastructural compromises that mediate among the various tasks and services of the airport. The notion of "compromise" has a long tradition in politics and political theory, and this chapter explores one of its specific forms. The values and risks of political compromise can be approached from an ethical perspective.⁶ Compromise can also be seen as an indispensable tool in democratic deliberations.⁷ The approach that will be presented here is informed by a political theory of technology and aims to discover how the politics of the airport is organized internally.⁸

Infrastructural compromise in the context of borders and border management is concerned with the circulation and selection of people. As such, they mark moments where different movements are connected and come apart, at which some people are allowed to continue their journey and others are prevented from further movement. Instead of seeing compromise as morally acceptable or unacceptable—as a "second best" solution to specific problems or the outcome of negotiations between distinct actors—I conceive of compromise as an innovative means to bridge separate spheres. "A compromise suggests the possibility of a principle that can take judgments based on objects stemming from different worlds and make them compatible."⁹

Compromises promote “techniques of creativity” through which composite situations emerge and clashes are averted. The notion of “infrastructural compromise” helps us to understand the internal organization of the airport and how the machine with ever-changing wheels continues to select among different kinds of travelers in the political economy of international mobility. As such, infrastructural compromise echoes attempts in the governance of international mobility to present patchworks of information systems aimed at monitoring and control as a seamless web. Airports are infrastructural spaces in which risks of all kinds must be managed: from airplane security to baggage handling, from smuggling and migration to the prevention of terrorism.¹⁰ This management is concerned with the circulation of all sorts of elements: passengers, luggage, goods, and information, but also risk and uncertainty. To analyze this governance of circulation, spatial and aesthetic perspectives can be combined.

Schiphol International Airport is an international hub.¹¹ Since 2000, Schiphol has had between 400,000 and 500,000 flight movements annually. Passenger numbers rose from around 40 million in 2000 to around 60 million in 2015, and over 70 million in 2019. Since 2015, it has ranked between tenth and fifteenth in the world in passenger traffic. But for our purposes, more important than its size and role in the global network is Schiphol’s trademark concept of the AirportCity. Like Sky City in Hong Kong, Aviapolis in Helsinki, and Aerotropolis in Memphis, Tennessee, Schiphol’s AirportCity choreographs the commercial logics of the “airside.”¹² What makes Schiphol unique is that it has been selling this concept to other international airports since the 1990s. Not many studies of Schiphol International Airport combine a focus on the technical influence on policymaking with the social, more actor-oriented side of policymaking.¹³ As a corrective, this chapter elaborates on the dynamics of the infrastructural compromises at Schiphol.

Airports are often seen as symbolic of the two faces of present-day border traffic.¹⁴ On the one hand, the airport is an icon of globalization, embodying the free movement of people, money, goods, and information. On the other hand, the airport represents the restrictions that nation-states impose on the freedom of movement in a globalized world. In the opinion of numerous commentators, air passengers have become a “kinetic elite” that can move through the airport’s clinical spaces unhindered by distance, space,

or time.¹⁵ Meanwhile, irregular travelers are dealt with behind the scenes so as not to inconvenience regular travelers. But this picture becomes more nuanced when the dichotomy of elite travelers versus irregular migrants or insiders versus outsiders is tested across different spaces. The hierarchical spatial order of the airport often remains hidden, not only to the regular traveler, but also in the literature that portrays the kinetic elite as the heroes of globalization and the airport as an icon of a life without boundaries.¹⁶ For instance, the luxury network of airports, companies, and department stores has been termed the physical Internet—a seamless network where you can reach your destination with one click and buy whatever you wish with another click.¹⁷ But a similar logic of design imbues parts of the airport where detection and detention take place as well. Encouraged by a governance style that embraces myriad pilot projects and the European homeland security market, the management of mobility, security, and surveillance is often portrayed to passengers as a service.¹⁸ The treatment of different passengers and the relationships among design, detection, and detention reveals itself in a specific interplay between what becomes visible and what remains invisible once this service is delivered.

Considering the airport as infrastructure not only encompasses the large-scale technological networks of mobility, transport and security but the particular interplay between mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, connectivity and collectivity, the visible and the invisible. By exploring the various peramorphic politics that connects the spaces of design, detection and detention at the airport, it will become possible to distinguish the various “infrastructural compromises” that establish these connections.

Design, Detection, and Detention

While various scholars have conceptualized the intimate relationships between design, detection and detention, how do they intermingle at a specific airport? Instead of appearing as a border checkpoint, border surveillance and the monitoring of passenger flows and migration management take place via processes of selecting and filtering persons.¹⁹ These filtering and surveillance systems restricted to the location of the airport. They already start when people begin orienting on their journeys and buy tickets or arrange visa. The airport is deeply interwoven with urban life and society

as a whole.²⁰ Conversely, airports over the past decades have become cities in microcosm. While border control technologies may have penetrated societies at large, societies now find expression at the airport. Design, detection and detention are intertwined at Amsterdam's Schiphol International Airport.

Design: The Airport as a City

The peramorphic mediations of the airport have unfolded alongside evolving architectural developments. In terms of its architectural history, the airport originally reflected the railway station. In the early days of private air travel, comfort left much to be desired. Although an air ticket was considerably more expensive than a train ticket, the railways were able to provide passengers with greater luxury. It was only when the military management of Schiphol gave way to its operation by the City of Amsterdam in the run-up to the 1928 Olympic Games that serious attention was given to the facilities for travelers, giving rise to a new "station building."²¹ Nowadays, two different architectural traditions serve as examples: those of the city and the shopping mall.²²

The imitation of the shopping mall involves practical requirements of interior organization, as well as a specific program of logistics to enable circulation—and more specifically, efficient circulation. Circulation, or movement through space, not only concerns the logistics of architecture; the concept has currency in the political economy of space more generally.²³ The efficiency is not necessarily aimed at speed; it also needs to organize dwell time. As such, circulation and the airport experience that it brings forth is a compromise—one that unites the interests of airlines and shops. It balances the relaxed speediness required by airlines so that passengers can arrive on time for flight departures with the speedy relaxation required by shops so that people can buy things on the way.²⁴ The resulting political economy is played out in terms of aesthetic considerations and design largely concerned with "staging invisibility."²⁵ As such, the airport resembles the spheres that Peter Sloterdijk described. This can be illustrated with the idea and the technology behind the shopping mall.

The inventor of the mall, the Vienna-born architect Victor Gruen, saw it not just as part of the new city; the mall *was* the city. In the hermetically sealed shopping mall, the enemy—the open window giving access to the wild world outside—was neutralized, and the air deliberately cooled. The shopping mall environment was conditioned by what came to be called,

very appropriately, “air conditioning.” As the previous chapter showed, air conditioning is a central notion in Sloterdijk’s *Spheres* trilogy. In the closing section of the second part of the trilogy, *Globes*, he predicts that air conditioning would be the space-political theme of the coming era.²⁶ Air conditioning as we know it today was developed in New York in 1902 by Willis Carrier, who called it “man-made weather.”

The development of air conditioning and the ideas that came with it exemplify the struggle over comfort zones and life conditions as explained by Sloterdijk. The idea that not only buildings, but whole cities could be cooled had been floated as early as 1842 by John Gorrie, a physicist in Florida. Concerned about the effects of industrialization and urbanization on people’s health and living environments, he became obsessed with the relationship between well-being and temperature. He even developed early machines that probably operated in a local hospital (but the sources are not clear on this). However, Gorrie was not striving to create a place with a pleasant indoor climate simply for humanitarian reasons. He was also interested in the commercial angle, with the idea that air conditioning could expand the world of trade. Air conditioning offered the possibility of creating the conditions for shopping in a purified atmosphere. Gruen saw the shopping mall as a society based on order and authority. In his view, a certain amount of planning was essential for this complex society. By creating the optimal conditions for physical and mental welfare, the mall protected nothing less than life itself. Protecting the mall from natural and social enemies guaranteed our freedoms.²⁷

The history of the airport echoes Sloterdijk’s *Spheres* trilogy. This line of thinking resonates with the renovation of Schiphol International Airport between 1963 and 1967 by the Dutch designer Kho Liang Ie. Kho “created a sort of three-dimensional background for flows of traffic and for travelers who were walking, waiting or resting . . . He made the spaces clear and unambiguous, balancing the busy, fast pace of travel by introducing calm, open spaces, light and long-lasting reliability. His Schiphol did not use much color; the passengers brought that aspect along with them.”²⁸ Kho’s design, however, received mixed reviews: “National Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* described it as ‘science fiction,’ while *Het Vrije Volk* considered the visitors’ restaurant a ‘room for suicides’; critic J. J. Vriend referred to a transport factory, and *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* missed a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.” Some of Kho’s inventions nevertheless became signatures, especially

the yellow signs on the ceiling. These signs guided passengers to their destinations. Other services, facilities, and all other nonflight information were marked by green signs.²⁹ The use of glass and the installment of “lines of sight” connected the inside to the outside and, while maintaining a clear boundary, allowed passengers to view the planes waiting on the airstrip.³⁰ Lines of sight generate “both a regime of perception and subjectivity and a set of practices by which the lines of discrimination and partition are concealed.”³¹ Inside the airport, time, space, and air were managed in such a way that the airport-as-mall could flourish. As a result, the airport is to globalization what the shopping mall is to the city—a comfort zone for consumers who can have everything they want without having the feeling of crossing a border or leaving its cozy, indoor space.³²

The airport follows the logic of the city, but it also works in reverse—the present-day city follows the logic of the airport. The mall, and in its wake the airport, ended the idea of public space as developed in the nineteenth-century European city.³³ With a historical center full of squares, cafés, and public buildings, this kind of city symbolizes the public space of which demonstrations, discussions, riots, and boisterous laughter—in short, noise and activity—form an integral part. But the contemporary city has diminishing regard for this classic, fundamental pattern. In an essay in *The Observer*, J. G. Ballard (1997) states that at airports, we are no longer citizens with civic duties, but rather passengers for whom all destinations can, in theory, be reached. Following the system’s rules, we travel light. According to Ballard, airports have become discontinuous cities whose inhabitants are constantly in transit but largely happy. Ballard likes airports because they show no trace of kitsch or false nostalgia. He expects that the airport will become “a virtual metropolis whose faubourgs are named Heathrow, Kennedy, Charles de Gaulle, Nagoya, a centripetal city whose population forever circles its notional center, and will never need to gain access to its dark heart.”³⁴

Writers who saw the airport as a triumph over history welcomed Ballard’s essay. But many missed the irony concealed in Ballard’s words.³⁵ In his work, the hard, gleaming outer wall of hypermodern architecture often appears in contrast to the violence, lust, and anger that roar through the city’s veins. But whether this sense of irony exists for everybody is doubtful. The architect Rem Koolhaas, for instance, enthuses about the only ideology that remains after postmodernism—that of the superlative. There

is no longer competition between styles, only between scale. Big, bigger, biggest—hence the title of the Koolhaas's illustrious book: *S, M, L, XL*. Koolhaas focuses on form and size, and he rarely comments on who should be responsible for the interior organization, strategy, and management of such a space. In this sense he embraces the description of the airport as a “non-place.”³⁶ The image of a nonplace has been criticized repeatedly for obscuring “the complex pictures of power relationships that are enacted at airports through controlling, sorting and surveilling movement of people, things and data.”³⁷ Instead of simply—and ideologically—reproducing the notion of a nonplace, Ballard creates an awareness of the intermingling of design with other practices.

Detection: Social Sorting and the Surveillance Mosaic

The experience of showing proof of identification at the checkpoint in exchange for access to the gates can be seen as a person transforming into an unchallengeable position as a passenger in the process of departing.³⁸ However, “in the post-9/11 era, “unchallengeable” is no longer an accurate description of the departing passenger’s position. Rather, the passenger remains suspect, so long as they remain within or near a securitized airport, on an airplane, and on or near a tarmac.”³⁹ Remaining suspect at the airport is a sociotechnical affair par excellence. Mobility management, customs and safety, security, and surveillance policies to prevent crimes, smuggling, terrorism, and illegal border crossings are carried out by myriad public and private professionals. Their work is structured by technological policies described in umbrella terms as “smart borders,” such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the Visa Information System (VIS). Prevention on the spot is accomplished by using technologies such as body scanners, introduced after the al-Qaeda bombing attempt on Northwest Airlines Flight 253, an international passenger flight from Schiphol International Airport to Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, on Christmas Day 2009, and “a range of technologies, such as a [closed-caption television] surveillance system . . . ; iris-recognition and other types of biometric scanners; over a hundred metal detectors; fences; and a range of other devices.”⁴⁰ More than 10 percent of all private security personnel in the Netherlands work at the airport—3,500 private security guards in the employ of the three leading security companies in the country (G4S, Securitas, and Trigion) and a host of smaller, specialized

companies. At Schiphol, “security is negotiated between all involved partners in a Platform (‘Security and Public Safety Schiphol’) that was set up as a response to terrorism, of which the goal is to reach an ‘integrated approach’ in which public and private partners make use of the same means and technology, each for its own specific goals and responsibilities.”⁴¹

This continuous form of remaining suspect has often been described as “social sorting.” As theories of social sorting, classification, and categorization in the context of migration and mobility policy point out, inclusion/exclusion is too bold a dichotomy to do justice to the nuanced groupings and mappings that take place. Instead, a point of view is required that transcends a priori ontological opposition by emphasizing that individual persons and groups of people are assembled as a consequence of new policies and technologies. The space of detection not only transgresses the practices of border control, policing, and security, but also stretches the concept of surveillance itself. The use of risk management technologies and the combination of biometrics with other databases, prescreening, profiling, and dataveillance, along with increasing datafication, have led to a politics of possibility and the performance of preemption.⁴²

While the creation of insiders and outsiders and the selection processes of social sorting, classification, and categorization have often been described in ontological terms, they also contain aesthetic and spatial aspects. With the concept of “the mosaic,” it becomes possible to point to the “piecing together” that takes place in security and surveillance policies “of otherwise contingent life signatures.” The resulting prophylactic profiles tend to transform the space of detection: “the contemporary border is not merely a site of technology where bodies become inscribed with code, but rather it becomes the sovereign enactment of possibility.”⁴³ This politics of possibility was exemplified in 2014 with the introduction of the first so-called smart camera. The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee started a test at Schiphol with smart cameras that detect abnormal behavior by travelers. This may include clearly deviant behavior, such as wild arm gestures, but it also has more subtle deviations, such as someone who leaves a suitcase behind. The Marechaussee aimed to use this technology to trace criminals and prevent attacks.⁴⁴

The presence of approximately 3,500 cameras and the aim of creating a seamless passenger flow make Schiphol an ideal test lab for artificial

intelligence applications. In 2018, the TRESSPASS project started at Schiphol. TRESSPASS elaborates on the idea of risk-based security checks. It offers a framework for modeling risk, as well as a systematic approach of quantifying risk. TRESSPASS is based on a set of indicators that can be measured across all tiers of the Integrated Border Management program.⁴⁵ At Schiphol, TRESSPASS applies deep learning instruments. According to the director of VicarVision, one of the companies involved in the project, instead of using facial recognition technologies, and in accordance with Louise Amoore's notion of the mosaic, TRESSPASS interprets a person as a "collection of pixels."⁴⁶

The notion of the "mosaic" is likewise applicable to the apparatus that composes these risk assessments and pictures of potentiality, as well as to the organization and the interior design of the airport itself. Far from being a nonplace, the airport is a space of potentiality, where an aesthetic ontological politics of possibility is at stake—one that is intimately connected to the program of design and the architectural and technological development of Schiphol. At Schiphol, the so-called trusted travelers use the Privium service program—a public-private partnership of the Schiphol Group and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which allows these travelers, for a fee, to use an iris scan to accelerate their crossing of the border. The Privium Club Lounge is reserved for passengers to make their wait more comfortable.⁴⁷ Irregular migrants are led through various locations, of which the detention center is the most iconic, as we will see next. But the detention center, too, is a less singular entity than it appears at first sight, and it is better understood through its composite parts and visual representations.

Detention: The Space of Exception

The detention center has come to exemplify contemporary forms of exclusion. In the short film *Seamless Transitions*, the British artist and technologist James Bridle explores three architectural spaces that are part of the immigration system of the United Kingdom (UK). One of them is the Inflight Jet Centre in Stansted Airport. The center houses people who are to be repatriated because they have not been granted asylum and have now reached the end of that process. The deportation center is unphotographable for reasons of security, secrecy, or law. So how did Bridle manage to portray it? According to Bridle, he "had to acquire planning documents

and satellite photos, interview academics and activists, and read the reports and accounts of those subject to their machinations. Working with Picture Plane, an architectural visualization firm, we recreated the three spaces as [three-dimensional] computer models."⁴⁸

Schiphol's detention center is at the airport's original location, an area now called Schiphol East. When people are judged not to have a valid right to stay and are most likely to be sent back to where they came from, they will be held as irregular migrants. Considered so-called illegals, they will spend their time before deportation in a temporary detention center (usually the cellblock at Schiphol East). To deal with these cases, there is a judicial complex with a court, a district public prosecutor's office, an office of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, and a cellblock that consists of a detention center and a deportation center. These centers were made possible by the Drug Smuggling (Emergency Measures) Act of 2002 and were initially intended only for drug couriers, known as "mules." Illegality per se is not a punishable offense under the criminal code; rather, it is an administrative offense. Nevertheless, illegals are also detained in these cells. The fact that these people have not committed any punishable offense does not afford them any advantages. In these centers, there are several people in each cell, even sometimes families with children. The facilities are generally worse than those in regular prisons, and the regime is stricter; access to doctors and lawyers is limited and there are fewer possibilities for visits or psychological help. In contrast to other prisoners, foreigners in detention are not allowed to work and have no right to either training or education. Boredom is widespread, but complaints are few; there is a widespread fear of saying the wrong thing, which could seal one's fate.⁴⁹ The detention, which can run to several months, is no fun. For comparison, to be placed behind bars for longer than six months in the Netherlands generally requires a serious crime.⁵⁰

Detention is a specific and extreme example of the visible-invisible distinction. What was hidden from the public eye became national news on the night of October 27, 2005, when a fire broke out in the detention center in Schiphol East. Eleven detainees were unable to leave their cells before the fire reached them, and they perished. Apart from the event itself, two specific aspects of the news coverage and the subsequent investigation into the causes of the fire add a further layer to our understanding of the interplay between the visible and the invisible.

First, the notion of “illegals” appeared troublesome, not only because illegality is a slippery legal and administrative category, but also because the news items initially paid more attention to the fact that three illegals who had tried to escape were arrested in the vicinity of the complex over the course of the morning than to the people who died.⁵¹

Second, the investigation into the causes of the fire became a political lightning rod. The investigation by the Dutch Safety Board concluded that “the Detention Centre Schiphol-Oost was insufficiently prepared and set up for an outbreak of fire”; that both “the main directorate of the DJI [the part of the ministry responsible for detention centers] responsible and the Site Manager were insufficiently critical in their assessment of the fire safety”; and that “the Municipal Council of Haarlemmermeer [formally, Schiphol is part of the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, not Amsterdam] discharged its role insufficiently.”⁵² The investigation also produced a meticulous visual reconstruction of the event that became infamous for its dramatic musical accompaniment and its accusatory style. What is interesting from the point of view of aesthetic ontology is that the visual reconstruction reproduced the material, spatial, and visual repertoires that shaped the center in the first place.

In this light, the airport is anything but a blank space. It is not a nonplace where citizens become passengers, a place where urbanism swings free of social, cultural, and historical structures. A highly specific aesthetic ontology sets the tone and determines the interior organization of the airport. In a way, the detention center places migrants both legally and physically outside the normal order, where the limits of the law are tested and sometimes transgressed. This speaks to the argument that Europe’s migration policies create “states of exception,” of which the migrants who are detained in centers are an example.⁵³ Architectural projects, such as by Koolhaas, can create smoothly operating zones for living, working, traveling, and shopping only if everything disagreeable to the urban consumer is excluded. In that sense, the detention center is the counterweight to the sealed areas of the airport, but also of other cocoonlike places like shopping boulevards, urban promenades, theme parks, and shopping malls.⁵⁴ In the era of globalization, the airport further advances what shopping has done to the city: open spaces must be viewed with suspicion and replaced by a soothing, comfortable climate sealed off from unpredictable forces. Although the “states of exception” argument is powerful, it is also important to underline that the

several spaces that regard migration policy are not entirely separate. The previous analysis suggests that there are much closer ties between what is considered open and closed or visible and invisible.

The following chapters, which analyze the hotspot approaches in Greece during the migrant crisis of 2014–2016, will also explain that registration and detention centers may create states of exception, but they are part of a network of policies, institutions, and technologies; and they form a very mobile border infrastructure. As at the airport, as explained here, the various spaces of migration and border policies connect and disconnect and are part of a kind of border carousel.

Infrastructural Compromises and Aesthetic Politics

The analysis of the distinct yet related spaces of detection, detention, and design resonates with the infrastructural characteristics of the airport. Schiphol International Airport houses both arms of government and private companies. Guarding and monitoring the border are the responsibility of the state, carried out by customs and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee. But the infrastructural space is run by the Royal Schiphol Group, a company that also manages the airports of Rotterdam and Lelystad, as well as Terminal 4 of John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. JFK International Air Terminal LLC (JFKIAT) is the operator of Terminal 4 at John F. Kennedy International Airport. Founded in 1997, JFKIAT is owned by Schiphol USA Inc., a US affiliate of Amsterdam based Royal Schiphol Group.⁵⁵ At Schiphol, distinctions are drawn between those who have a right to stay in the country, for shorter or longer periods, and those who have no such right. But the process of social sorting does not function as a simple sieve; it rather composes mosaic pictures. Composing these pictures leads to overlapping functions and spaces, as well as collaboration between myriad public and private professionals concerned with mobility, security, and surveillance. As such, there is an intimate relationship between restricted and unrestricted spaces, strategies of inclusion and exclusion, tasks performed by government bodies and private firms, and the Crown Lounge at Schiphol and the euphemistically named *grenshospitium* (border hostel) at Schiphol East. The airport thus distinguishes between restricted and unrestricted spaces, between places where traveling should be a seamless and immaculate experience and places where the border has a strong physical presence.

The unstable relationship between what is visible and invisible, accessible and inaccessible, is defined via interactions between various requirements and aesthetic ontologies. The airport has myriad spaces that lack an overarching principle. The airport's technological organization can be understood only from the inside out. The planning and daily workings of large infrastructures depend on interventions by all kinds of human and nonhuman actors that relate the macro to the micro scale and vice versa.⁵⁶ The absence of a bird's-eye view has important sociotheoretical and political implications. One of these is that every perspective is constructed because there is no natural vantage point. Another is that without a view from above, no map can claim to be complete. Contrary to what is often claimed for the panopticon, surveillance does not take place from a single vantage point. Instead, it combines all kinds of local and regional networks via interoperability. The circulating information is then carefully reconstructed into representations that create situational awareness, which call or do not call for action.

The most obvious way to proceed from here would be to claim that the airport has multiple ontologies, with the different (though related) practices of design, detection, and detention being driven by different material, spatial, and visual infrastructural logics. Although the statement holds true to a certain extent, a more precise way to grasp the underlying relationships among these spaces is to identify the different peramorphic mediations at work. Design at the airport is not just a cover-up operation to mask processes of detection and detention. Detention is not just the extreme outcome of a selection process. Instead, design, detection, and detention generate different processes of mediation. The compromises that must be reached to facilitate passenger flow management, security policies, border control, and migration management, to combine security policies with service polices, speediness with relaxation, open spaces with closed ones—all of these point to the coming into being of various infrastructural spaces.

At this point, we need to delve deeper into the notion of "compromise." A compromise is a way to bridge tensions among different worlds. A compromise can be a regulation or an institution; for instance, paying attention to workers' rights can be seen as a compromise between the industrial and civic worlds.⁵⁷ But can compromises also express themselves in infrastructural innovations? Wildlife crossings such as underpass tunnels, viaducts,

fish ladders, and amphibian tunnels can be seen as infrastructural compromises between economic considerations of mobility and ecological considerations of keeping habitats connected. The Eastern Scheldt storm surge barrier in the Netherlands is an infrastructural compromise that uses sluiceway-type doors, which allow saltwater marine life and local fishing behind the dam but can be closed when weather conditions require it.

Like the storm surge barrier, doors play a mediating role at the airport, physically as well as metaphorically. Revolving doors in particular exemplify a compromise in the governance of the AirportCity—a compromise between the control of the circulation of people and the regulation of the inner climate of the airport—revolving doors ease interior and exterior air pressure differences and help regulate the climate in air-conditioned buildings; the first patent was granted to the *Tür ohne Luftzug*, or “door without draft (of air)” in 1881. Revolving doors also serve as a metaphor for how areas of the airport relate to each other. The spaces of design, detection, and detention all set different kinds of borders that control the movement of people. But how are these spaces mutually organized? The metaphor of the revolving doors suggests that there is no transcending organizing principle at work, but rather an immanent logic of bordering that connects as well as separates the three spaces. The atmospheres of detection, design, and detention become “co-isolated,” as Sloterdijk would describe it.

The emerging spaces do not demarcate opposite functions, but rather follow an aesthetic movement in the sense of a specific political interplay between visible and invisible. The aesthetic politics of the airport allows a specific distribution of the sensible.⁵⁸ Through these aesthetic processes and compromises, spaces are connected and unconnected. Rather than being functionalist domains, design, detection, and detention designate specific spaces where a certain reach is exercised.⁵⁹ The infrastructural constellation of Schiphol International Airport comes close to that of an interstructure—a concept and an entity that receives shape while circulating within and through the peramorphic politics of the AirportCity.

Transformative Technopolitics

This chapter has examined infrastructural compromises in the context of mobility, security, and surveillance at the AirportCity through an aesthetic and spatial ontological lens. Infrastructural compromises were examined in the three distinct but related spaces of design, detection, and detention

where passenger flow management, security policies, border control, and migration management take place. The analysis suggested that the notion of infrastructural compromises can shed light on the specific interplay between the visible and the invisible at the airport. Instead of being clear-cut dichotomies, what is open and what remains closed are intimately related and often appear in the form of compromises, combined actions, and composite pictures. Security and service, speed and relaxation, regular travelers and irregular migrants, and suspects of legal and administrative offenses are materially, spatially, and visually divided and connected. Far from being a nonplace, the airport allows people, goods, capital, and information to circulate while offering spaces in which innovative compromises can arise—infrastructural compromises that peramorphically connect the distinct spheres of the airport in order to support its internal governance within the political economy of international mobility.

The notion of peramorphic mediation emphasizes that technological networks—be they small or large scale, local or transnational—are constructions and compositions; they not only build on existing spatial-temporal-material conditions, but themselves shape novel infrastructures. Notions such as “European” or “global” all too easily assume a preexisting structure or relatedness that must be created first. Border control technologies and infrastructures here are no exception. Notions such as “the global border regime” all too easily assume that spaces of circulation are somewhere out there, spread out across the globe, waiting to be visited. However, this portrayal is misleading.⁶⁰ The search for the technopolitics of border infrastructures must pay attention to the composition of specific border configurations and the differences among various locations and spaces where control and selection take place.

The study of Schiphol International Airport shows that the construction of a global border regime requires all kinds of local, spatial, and architectural arrangements in order for airports to function as gatekeepers in international mobility. The technopolitics of border infrastructures at the airport can be conceived as a configuration of infrastructural compromises to bring together various functions of the border and to regulate different aspects of mobility. As such, airports are crucial centers of coordination and circulation in international mobility.

It might seem a big step to go from airports to border control and migration management on the Greek Aegean Islands. The next two chapters will describe the efforts of the European Union to execute border surveillance in

the Aegean during the so-called migrant crisis of 2014–2016, and how border infrastructures to some extent traveled with the migrants who arrived there. Although it is hard to imagine a larger gulf separating the designed spaces of Schiphol and the reception and registration centers in Greece, between the luxuries of international flights and the dangerous and humiliating crossing of the sea from Turkey to Greece with the help of expensive and often unreliable smugglers, both passages and passage points are part of contemporary border infrastructures. Moreover, as the introduction to this chapter emphasized, airports are directly related to border crossings on land and at sea, as the visa regimes of European states executed by airlines do not allow certain nationals to board without meeting additional requirements, thus forcing them to take other, often more dangerous, routes.

Still, it is a leap from Schiphol International Airport to the islands of Lesbos and Chios, to which we turn in the next several chapters. Although the management of passenger flows may seem a far cry from the management of international migration, there are some underlying similarities. In a sense, the international coordination of the monitoring of human mobility is not unlike the monitoring of air traffic. But of particular interest, for the purposes of this book, is the workings of technopolitics. Like airports, European borderlands and borderseas are increasingly seen as spaces that should be brought under control. The “crisis” jargon that peaked in 2014–2016 and the extraordinary measures taken in its wake undoubtedly reflect a sense of taking back control. The particular forms of border control practiced in Europe today reveal the political preoccupation with governing international mobility. Like the construction of a global border regime, border surveillance in Europe on land and sea aims to collect, connect, and coordinate information about human mobility to attain an overview, although border infrastructures are far from a seamless web in practice. In the meantime, border infrastructures are turning local and regional places into areas under surveillance, a process perhaps most prominent in the European Union’s hotspots. And needless to say, the moving, expanding border affects people and organizations, whether they be migrants, state agents, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or local volunteers.

To detect the specific technopolitics of border infrastructures at work on land and at sea, the next few chapters will again approach these infrastructures from the inside out. They will pay attention to the genealogy of technologies and the politics that have encouraged their development, but they

will also examine border infrastructures—configurations of people, politics, and technologies—as moveable entities. The emphasis on movement also harbors a conceptual issue: namely, that the dichotomy of human mobility/border stability is misleading. Instead, these chapters will sketch the compromises among international mobility, border infrastructures, and politics, in which the constituting parts not only respond to each other, but tend to travel together as well.



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Source: Henk Wildschut.