

## **Airports, from vital systems to nervous systems**

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### **Abstract**

International airports are increasingly understood as critical infrastructure: networks and assets of such vital importance that threats against them endanger the very functioning of a government or society. But airports are also urban places that must be policed. This chapter is about the tensions between counterterrorism and community policing in a major airport in the British Isles. As anthropologists interested in security and values, we engaged with airport police as expert counterparts and explored the cracks and fissures in the contemporary security-scape in an effort to elicit alternative discourses on security. The chapter discusses the ways in which airport police think about and experience the multidimensional space in which they work in terms. We note their reflections on community policing and the use of force, together with their desire to build upon local and tacit knowledge. We also show the ways in which their experiences intersect with and occasionally refuse counterterrorism-based approaches. As airport police grapple with knowledge of their complex and fast moving security milieu they are constantly reminded that international aviation corridors are vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Thus, the vital system becomes a nervous system in the face of threats emanating from the near future. This chapter is about engaged anthropological knowledge of the contemporary.

**Keywords:** airports, critical infrastructure, counter-terrorism, security, policing, experts

## The International Airport, from vital system to nervous system

Mark Maguire & Réka Pétercsák

### Introduction

Contemporary international airports are extraordinary places. They are, at one and the same time, aviation and transportation hubs, borders and centres of commerce, critical infrastructure and quasi-cities in themselves. As urban spaces, they have massive footprints and populations and are the focus of existing and future agglomeration. Heathrow Airport, for instance, covers nearly five square miles, some 80,000 people work there, and in 2015 it recorded 75 million passengers. Airports such as Heathrow, Roissy Charles de Gaulle, Dublin and Schiphol play vital roles in regional and national economies; they also stretch beyond their localities as component parts of the ever-widening circuits of global aviation. Indeed, European aviation faces a future of capacity shortfall as flight numbers are set to grow by over 50% during the next two decades. And, as more and more people work in or pass through airport campuses, the potential vulnerability of critical transit infrastructure presents one of the key challenges for global security. This chapter aims to explore the international airport from the perspective of security.

Airport security is a relatively new topic for anthropologists. In recent years, several scholars have written about contemporary airports (e.g. Chalfin 2008; Ferguson 2014). However, these efforts have yet to be fully integrated into urban anthropology, and urban anthropology has yet to fully embrace studies of critical infrastructure. But, before one embarks on an ethnographic study one needs to have clear sight of the research challenges and the exploratory equipment available. We are thus reminded of an early passage in *The Nuclear Borderlands* in which a weapons scientist responds to Joseph Masco's proposal to study Los Alamos with, 'How do you model a multidimensional, complex, non-linear system?' (Masco 2006:36). How, one might also ask, do we study a multidimensional infrastructure site that refuses to hold still for its ethnographic portrait? However meaningful and everyday for workers, neighbours and certain travellers, the airport is fundamentally a space of contradictions: there one finds intimacies and expansive imaginaries, secrecies and occlusions, fast-paced mobility, but also gates, barriers and bureaucracy.

To begin to understand the challenge of studying the contemporary airport, it is useful to return briefly to the first major effort to describe airports ethnographically, Marc Augé's inspirational yet inchoate *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (1995). Famously, *Non-places* begins by presenting the fictional travels of one Pierre Dupont, an executive journeying through Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport. Why the need to resort to fiction? Augé argues that supermodernity overwhelms the senses and the social sciences. Faced with the complexity of the modern airport, the anthropologist of the contemporary is 'doomed to methodological strabismus' (1995:117). In other words, they squint as they focus on an immediate place while also trying to hold supermodernity in view. But here, in contrast, we propose that clearer sight of the airport can be achieved by opening dialogues with experts who grapple with the complexities and limitations of their worlds.

We also push beyond Augé's theoretical intervention. *Non-places* is best known for a heuristic: the apparent contrast between a researchable 'anthropological place' and the partially occluded, super-modern 'non-place'. The former is taken to be the natural home of individual identities, unformulated rules, language and the organic local. The latter seems to denote fast-paced and non-local spaces suffused with contractual relations. Time and again, Augé raises and then collapses this apparent opposition in an effort to discover a researchable path through the modern airport (Augé 1995: 79, 84-85, 2000, 2004). Ironically, the anthropologist gets stuck at the airport security gates. You see,

To get into the departure lounge of an airport, a ticket – always inscribed with the passenger's name – must first be presented at the check-in desk; proof that the contract has been respected comes at the immigration desk, with simultaneous presentation of the boarding pass and an identity document. ... So the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he has give proof of his identity; when he has countersigned (so to speak) the contract. ... In a way, the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence. Checks on the contract and the user's identity, *a priori* or *a posteriori*, stamp the space of contemporary consumption with the sign of non-place: it can be entered only by the innocent (Augé 1995: 101-102).<sup>1</sup>

The challenge, in short, arises when ethnography meets security, when the object of inquiry is gated. But what if we approach these multidimensional security spaces by deploying a reformulated mode of ethnographic inquiry?

Over a period of six months, from late 2015 to March 2016, we engaged in an ethnographic project on security in a major airport in the British Isles. To safeguard confidentiality and as a condition of ethics and access, we shall not name the airport or specific individuals. The project emerged from rich dialogues with counterparts in aviation security. Our conversations began at security innovation events focused on always-imminent global (read racialized) terrorist threats and the need for preparedness, often in the form of technological solutions in search of problems to solve. In defiance of a problematization that discursively assembled the play of counterterrorist heuristics and biases with new and often ill-suited technologies, we began to discuss the actualities of policing a contemporary international airport. It soon became clear that security knowledge and practice is deeply contested, at least in the case we intended to study. Therefore, we proposed using ethnographic knowledge as a collaborative problem-space (see Rabinow and Bennett 2007). For our part, we would document everyday policing experiences and tacit knowledge using a mix of observations and interviews. For their part, as an unarmed force, key personnel acknowledged the tension between their role as community police in an airport-city and their function as front-line security in the event of a terrorist attack on critical infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> We required extraordinary levels of access to gain knowledge of operations at different scales; they recognised in ethnography the potential for an open site for cultural reflection – historical and organizational, ethical and operational – wherein knowledge might develop to better understand community policing without constant resort to the threat of force (see also Holmes and Marcus 2005). We discussed a number of collaborations, and here we draw on our research on Abnormal Behaviour for Counterterrorism and Public Safety (ABCs), a specific and delimited effort to open counterterrorist policing to critical evaluation. ABCs closed off with an *in camera* presentation to airport police and members of the national police in April 2016, but our dialogues continue.

In the sections that follow, we describe the ways in which the airport is perceived, conceived and lived as a multidimensional, complex, non-linear system from a security and policing perspective. Because the major airport we studied was in the British Isles we can speak only to that very particular example, and, though mindful of comparative examples, our discussion is situated within the Euro-American aviation experience. Throughout this chapter we gesture to the perceived, conceived and lived, Henri Lefebvre's (1991) imbricated but open theoretical trinity, in an effort to open up the airport as 'actually lived and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time, the *habitus* of social practices' (Soja 1999: 119). We then turn to explore the roles of tacit knowledge and organisational memory in everyday policing and counterterrorism. Thereafter, we offer some reflections on the anthropology of security expertise in critical infrastructure.

## The Airport

Each airport has its own history and spatial attributes. Like many airports, the one we studied traces its history to an early twentieth-century military facility that was granted its present location on the outskirts of a major city in response to civil aviation demand. The first passenger terminal was opened during the 1940s and has since been listed as architecturally significant. The original building remains as offices, but it still evokes modernity and cosmopolitanism, though it is now dwarfed by newer terminals. The airport grew quickly in step with international aviation trends and was long tied to a major carrier. Thus, as a space of representation, and through a constant flurry of iconic moments, object and images, it became a representation of space amplified by what Benedict Anderson terms 'logoization' (Anderson 1991; also Lefebvre 1991).

It is important to recognize that many airports, though important as assets, are not in state control. The airport we studied was once in the hands of a semi-state organization, which was later broken up into distinct commercially focused authorities under specific legislation. This quasi-state space is important to understand as a locus of innovation. Historically, the airport belonged to a sector that has functioned as a laboratory for free trade zones, duty free shopping and even contemporary 'remote control' borders. Today, it is a truly multidimensional space: it is home to hundreds of companies and vendors, a private internal airport, an enormous bus terminal, and it is abutted by a Roma camp. It is the place of transit for over 25 million passengers per annum. It is, at any single moment, a city. One police officer had this to say: 'Everything that happens in the big bad world happens here. I'm talking about births, deaths, suicides; I'm talking about mental health issues; trips, slips, falls, injuries; I'm talking about crazy people trying to get airside; people with issues with airlines - ... people just wanting to make a point, absolutely everything' (Interview 2016).

These enormous changes that the airport-city has undergone are expressed in the historical consciousness of police:

Look outside for instance: the police station, you will see a police vehicle ... that looks like pretty much any other police vehicle. ... I suppose if you look at the way people are dressed even, like any police officer, and they behave like one, and drive a vehicle that suggests that *you are nothing other than what you are*. When I joined here in 1989 it was remarkably different [...], the majority of your role was static, so you were on static check points, checking IDs and you would have been doing the screening process, for instance, downstairs as well and various bits and pieces like that. So it was a very static,

security-based function at that time. So ... take it from there to now ... (Interview 2016, our emphasis).

Our project was precisely an effort to start with existing expertise, institutional history and tacit knowledge, and thereby to attend to how an airport is perceived, conceived and lived by those charged with its security. How, one must first ask, is such a multidimensional, complex, non-linear system held in the mind of a police officer? One senior officer expressed it thus,

In 2015 ... the airport itself had 25 million passengers ... the largest amount of traffic flow ... in any of its history. [We] safeguard civil aviation from actual and unlawful interference. So that's the overall terminology for all the staff that I deal with from a security perspective. That's the overarching goal, that's why we are here, and that's laid down in legislation from both ICAO which is the International Civil Aviation Organisation, through ECAC, the European Civil Aviation Conference, and then you also have the EU regulatory framework, and then you also have national legislation. ...

At the end of the day the role of the officer downstairs from a screening point of view is to make sure a gun, bomb or any item won't get through and the role of the airport police is a proactive policing role and then if something does happen they react to that and then solve the problem (Interview 2016).

In actual practice, then, this officer and his colleagues must bring together regulatory and contractual structures, spatial arrangements and the connections and relations of the everyday. Place and non-place interfuse, and experts acknowledge their own 'strabismus' (Augé 1995:117). As police busy themselves dealing with the great diversity of human behaviour in their daily lives, they are constantly called upon to look beyond the immediacy of interactions and foreground the protection of critical infrastructure from potentially catastrophic terrorist threats. Understanding critical infrastructure, or 'vital systems', is of critical importance to understanding airport security and, indeed, how much of contemporary urban life is governed.

### **The Airport as Vital System**

Today, important physical or virtual assets, systems and networks are increasingly configured as critical infrastructure. The term infrastructure draws its popular usage from networks of twentieth-century security installations, and security remains as the principle that defines what is and is not classified as *critical* infrastructure. The contemporary use of the term is illustrated by the USA *Patriot Act, 2001*, which identifies certain 'vital' systems and assets as those that underpin the economy, health, and security. The destruction or incapacitation of these systems and assets would therefore threaten the life of the United States. In Europe, a similar discourse about critical infrastructure marks off and seeks to protect 'vital societal functions' (Council Directive 2008/114/EC: 77). On both sides of the Atlantic, then, resilience and security preparedness are required to anticipate and meet any and all near-future threats. In short, the term critical infrastructure denotes a very particular way of understanding and governing in today's world.

Anthropology is now experiencing something of an infrastructure turn, with numerous studies focusing on the techno-politics and ontological dimensions of infrastructural projects,

from roads to telecommunications (see Larkin 2013). However, critical infrastructure is less well understood. The most insightful contemporary work on this topic is by Stephen Collier and Andrew Lackoff (e.g. 2015) who focus on 'vital systems security'. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, they propose that vital systems security has emerged as a 'general diagram of power that can now be observed in a range of national, transnational and global contexts' (2015: 20). They highlight the focus on the risk-filled near future through, *inter alia*, modelling of risks, vulnerability assessment, scenario building and preparedness planning. Their work is germane as one approaches a contemporary international airport, vibrating as it does in anticipation of terrorism. Of course, terrorist acts are unlikely and terrorists are rather elusive (and frequently racialized) persons. This means that security manifests itself less like a definable quality and more like an endless process: there can never be enough security to meet a potential threat, because there will never have been enough security should terrorists succeed. One might borrow from François Ewald (2002) here to describe an economy of future-oriented insecurity that turns on the precautionary principle – the principle that demands one prepare for potentially catastrophic future events by anticipating those events, and thereby protect institutions from future blame. The precautionary principle is central to how critical infrastructures are perceived, conceived and lived, and security thus names processes in which the emergency is business as usual.

But how do police officers actually secure airports against terrorism? Again, terrorism is rare and, in Europe at least, it is usually the result of actions by very specific populations, from far-right groups to separatists. Standing back, geographically and historically, one must also note the wealth of anthropological literature that attends to state-sponsored terrorism, which is the prevailing form of terrorism by any reasonable definition (see Sluka 2008). That said; modern Euro-American aviation security has come to be fixated on the threat posed by global Jihadist movements, which has given rise to efforts to secure against unknown persons prepared to lose their lives targeting civilians and critical infrastructure. The vital aviation system is now a truly nervous system. Contemporary airports therefore deploy numerous measures, from well known examples such as passenger pre-screening to high-tech and often secretive technologies (see Maguire and Fussey 2016). Police officers, then, often behave as 'specific intellectuals', interpreting world events and international responses, thinking and speaking from the perspective of their domain of expertise (see Foucault 1991: 109-134). They build scenarios, conduct joint exercises, engage in often very sophisticated training; however, they are all too aware that there is an absence of knowledge at the heart of efforts.

From an expert or specific intellectual perspective, terrorist attacks have a random quality. They are almost impossible to predict without advance intelligence that is made available to the right experts at the right time. Moreover, while one can train to improve general preparedness, the chaotic nature of specific attacks is evident to all. This is compounded by the fact that terrorists are often well prepared: they engage in counter-surveillance and may prepare secondary attacks against emergency or police responders. Security experts, then, must prepare for the improbable while scouring the near-future for possible threats. In this context, abnormal behaviour detection has arisen as a focus for counterterrorism, especially in the United States, Israel and several European countries. In the broadest sense, behaviour detection is based on enhancing the existing skills of police by attuning them to indicators of potential malfeasance. Anthropologists and other social scientists have been quick to criticise style of reasoning that undergirds abnormal behaviour detection, but policing experts, including the originator of the most widely used system, are

also sceptical about current efforts to apply loose theories (see DiDomenica 2011; see also Maguire 2014; Maguire and Fussey 2016).

In short, knowledge in the realm of counterterrorism is inherently doubtful. To 'recognise' signs of malfeasance means to know other human beings on some level and use that knowledge by deploying some evidential criteria. But this is far from straightforward. The problem is best captured by Ludwig Wittgenstein's reflections on mathematical evidence, 'expert judgement', and knowing the mental states of others:

Is there such a thing as 'expert judgement' about the genuineness of expressions of feeling? – Even here, there are those whose judgement is 'better', and those whose judgement is 'worse'.

Correcter prognoses will generally issue from the judgements of those with better knowledge of mankind.

Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through 'experience'. – Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip. – This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating rules.

What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words (Wittgenstein 1997: 277).

Wittgenstein calls our attention to what he terms 'imponderable evidence', which includes 'subtleties of glance, of gesture, or tone' (1997: 194). In the contemporary moment, as international airports attempt to secure critical infrastructure and enormous numbers of travellers against real or imagined near-future threats, abnormal behaviour has emerged as a specific problematization of human life itself. It is a curiosity of the contemporary moment that experience, tacit knowledge and imponderable evidence are the focus of so much attention in high-tech and multidimensional spaces like international airports.

In the following interview extract, two airport police officers discuss counterterrorism policing:

Officer A: So ... it's just being alert, and that's just knowing your environment, and being aware. But I could walk through that terminal for eight hours and be thinking about something else, how I'm going to cook the food tonight, and I wouldn't see anything. So it's about observation skills and it's about being aware. I will look. It's not so much a skill; it's out of an interest in doing it.

Officer B: In my opinion that's a skill!

Officer A: I will analyse nearly every person I walk past. A bit like you'd see in a sci-fi movie, where you see...

Officer B: Like *Terminator*?

Officer A: Exactly! [*Laughs*]

Officer B: When we're walking into arrivals, most people in arrivals are walking towards the car hire desk, walking towards the bank, walking towards ...

Officer A: Have a purpose.

Officer B: Have a purpose. They're looking at the screens. They're looking at the doors, where everyone comes out. You're business in arrivals is to meet and greet somebody

who's arriving. So, if somebody is looking everywhere else except for where people are coming out ... and they're actually looking at all the people, the same as we would be, then I'm thinking they are profiling who they are going to target: ... a behaviour out of the norm in that area (Interview 2016).

Counterterrorist policing aims to enable the flow of passengers, while filtering and reacting to abnormalities – behaviour out of the norm in a specific space. To analyse counterterrorist policing one must therefore attend to the multiple dimensions of an international airport as a security milieu. Clearly, one must attend to the *perceived*, the assemblage of historical, material and spatial factors, the rhythms of work, the collective production of the airport as an urban space.<sup>3</sup> One might also point to that which is *conceived* institutionally and ideologically, the formal knowledge, signs and codes that hang together in the discourse of airport security. And, of course, there are the affective and symbolic dimensions of *lived* space. Thus far, we have gestured towards Henri Lefebvre's trio of terms, the perceived, conceived and lived, to show how these different dimensions exist through their mutual interactions and are in a state of constant emergence. Lefebvre refuses to privilege material production or ideological formations over lived space because he recognises that, fundamentally, urban space creates a situation 'where *different* things occur one after another and do not exist separately but according to their differences. In this sense, [it] constructs, identifies, and sets free the essence of social relationships' (Lefebvre 2003: 117-118). What Lefebvre is pointing to here is the always-emergent quality of actually lived and socially created spatiality, *l'espace vécu*. Thus, when one polices the urban space of an airport one is policing the spatiality of social reality and the sociality of space; and one is surely attempting to police at a level that is hard to capture, experiential and sometimes imponderable.

Earlier in this chapter we quoted a seasoned police officer who reflected on his years of experience at the airport. He spoke of the apparent homogenisation of policing, indexed by a vehicle, uniform and protocols the rendered one 'nothing other than what you are'. But one cannot charge the contemporary with producing non-places policed by non-persons, even if one nervously configures the airport as critical infrastructure under threat. Mindful of the formal knowledge, protocols, signs and codes, this officer discharges his duties aware that he is very much reliant on intuition or, in more preferred terms, 'situation awareness'. Behavioural psychologists investigate intuition by describing a form of recognition, information retrieval induced by situational cues, or a sense of familiarity in a new context that conditions 'expert' responses (e.g. Klein 1998). Other scholars, especially those in the defence sector, prefer to think in terms of situational awareness, 'the perception of elements in an environment within a volume of time and space, the comprehension of their meaning and the projection of their status in the near future' (Endsley, 1988: 97). Undergirding the formal signs and codes of counterterrorist knowledge, then, we simply find intuition and awareness. The same officer recalled this illustrative and exceptionally dangerous terrorist interdiction:

[We were on a break] and en route to the ice-cream which we decided we were going to get in the petrol station we saw a car parked in an unusual place, and it was a [non local] registered vehicle, a single occupant, so it just doesn't sit right. So I clocked the registration as I was going past and I went and got into the station alright and [mentions the other officer] we went and got the ice-creams, and I called it in to the control and got it checked.

So we collected our ice-cream, waiting for the information to come back, so I said, 'Look, before we go and do what we're supposed to do we'll do another circuit and come back around and see if the car is still there'. So the information still hadn't come back, but we pulled in behind the car, questioned the driver. [...] Eventually the information did come back and it said, 'Approach with caution, possibly armed'. And we were engaged at that stage so it was too late to do anything about it. ...

I had to find out where he [*the driver*] was from, and particularly with the level of threat that was in the back of my mind. ... I said, no, don't engage with this guy, I backed off, brought him to the station, searched him, did our protocol, called the police and handed him over. So an armed unit came to approach this guy. ... I was only going for an ice-cream, you know. I didn't even get to eat the shagging ice-cream: it melted (Interview 2016 [our interpolations]).

From the excerpt, it may seem that luck is a determinant factor in successfully identifying terrorists at petrol stations. It is, however, spatial experience and familiarity that allows the officer to trust his expert intuition. The process through which they acquire the necessary skills within a domain of expertise nevertheless leaves us with further questions. Diverse experiences, unrepeatable processes stored in memory amount to a pool of knowledge that naturally seems difficult to transmit other individuals. In other words, to borrow yet again from Wittgenstein, 'Can one learn this knowledge?' (Wittgenstein 1997: 277) Another officer reflected on this question:

When I started here there was a 12-week training programme and you get the best training you can get. The guys at the time would have been top of their mark in what they did. ... Well, then, so you do your training... and then you get dumped in the job which is totally different, right, because you're taught one thing and then the reality is totally different, because there's other complexities involved in it. But, you're given the basic skills to be able to deal with everything. But, then, no single situation is the exact same. So, it's up to the individual to learn from experience, from others, as well as your own thought process. (Interview 2016)

Although formal training may facilitate the creation of common meanings and thus ease communication, tacit knowledge remains indispensable, though it often evades, elides and exceeds communication. Commenting on the gap between tacit and communicable knowledge, Michael Polanyi observed, 'The gap between the tacit and the articulate tends to produce everywhere a cleavage between sound common sense and dubious sophistication' (1958: 94). But one should not be surprised by the apparent gap between the codified and communicable and an individual or social experience that emerged in a local context, an experience gathered through experiential learning or apprenticeship. In our study, this web of experiences uncovered a learning-space, an engagement platform designed for mutual apprenticeship. The officers' attunement to the gains from tacit learning anticipated our invitation as storytellers and educators. Throughout our investigations we noted that the same sensitivity to human experience that enhances collective memory may also help rewrite the code of conduct for policing, leading to a more meaningful organisational approach to policing through engagement with values. We shall sharpen this point in the conclusions. For now, we aim to explore the soft underbelly of airport policing, the tacit and experiential knowledge that police

articulate as safety rather than security and as community policing rather than measures to protect critical infrastructure.

### **Community Policing the Airport**

Especially since the events of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, international airport security excites the public imagination and is often the subject of media comment. High-tech systems and intrusive processes frequently saturate public discussion. But, actual airport security milieus are constituted in rather different ways. For instance, airports are reluctant to roll out new technologies in case they interfere with the flow of passengers or shopping experiences. Although it is still a remarkable technological achievement, international aviation has become a routine matter for many populations and is an incredibly safe and potentially pleasurable journey. It should not be surprising, then, that the experience of policing an airport is often similar to policing a high street or shopping mall rather than a vulnerable critical infrastructure site. As we have shown, the configuration of international airports as vulnerable vital systems demands that they be policed as potential terrorist targets. But, as we have also shown, the lacunae in counterterrorist discourses and practice mean that detecting near-future threats is really a matter of spatial and tacit knowledge, and expert judgements about what is often no more than imponderable evidence. Take the discussion of abnormal behaviour detection in the above section, or extract from one police officers remarkable story of foiling a terrorist attack while on a lunch break. What these discussions tell us is that counterterrorist policing rests upon and draws from a much broader form of policing. To illustrate, the following extract is from an interview in which counterterrorist policing is discussed – an extract that could just as easily refer to community policing:

[Picture] walking out of here, and walk back on the route to where I met you. There was somebody lying down on the bench in that coffee shop. And I'm thinking: why are they lying down? Well I'll just leave them there, and the next time I walk past they're still lying down. A cafe or restaurant isn't the place where somebody tends to be lying down. But we mightn't react first time around. It's not a case of me looking at you and going, I don't like the look of him, and going over saying, 'Sorry Sir, but what are you doing here?' It's not like that, but something may trigger: you might have seen the person before, there might be something, a habit that somebody has. I keep using the word experience, but that's what it is, – how they look at you, they might not want to make eye contact with you. Now we have to be extremely mindful in an airport that we are dealing with a lot of different nationalities and a lot of different cultures. So, if someone doesn't want to look at you it might be a cultural thing that they don't want to look the police in the eye, because in some countries the police are quite aggressive, so you don't engage (Interview 2016).

The fact that counterterrorist policing rests on broader forms of policing shows an absence of agreed practices and even evidence at the very core of counterterrorist discourse. But, illuminated differently, this suggests that the possibility of critique is already present in hegemonic counterterrorist discourse. Stated simply, if counterterrorist policing looks a lot like community policing, why not simply engage in better community policing? This question does not just relate to airports because community policing is in the foreground as we think about policing and violence and urban life more broadly.

In the airport we studied police were unarmed and a concept of community policing held great power. In the course of interviewing numerous police officers formally and informally, conversing with them in staffrooms and at training events, and shadowing them on patrol, we noted that their preferences for the values associated with community policing were reflected in language, with 'safety' often being preferred to 'security'. To illustrate, one senior officer says,

I've asked our guys to recognise that we have been doing this for fifty odd years. And we are the experts in how this, in marrying the two things, commercial concerns, with people's concerns, with legal, with security requirements. ... The role of the police officer is to make sure that can they get into the airport. Do they know where they are going? Are they safe while they are in the airport? Do they have a feeling of safety? Do they know who to contact if there's a problem? You know you will see lots of the incidents, you can get the stats you know: six, seven thousand incidents we go through in the year. Two thousand of them could be medical incidents. ... How many times can you say, someone was dead and you saved them [...]? We want to be the community police, like you would have in a village (Interview 2016).

Another senior officer added texture to this sensibility, showing that community policing is a discourse:

We would preach a community-based policing approach here, but whilst it's the correct approach I think for what we do, but community to my mind, the traditional community, if you like, is relatively static. ... There would be a certain element of it transient, but people passing through and spending a little bit of time, come to shop and then going away, but the vast majority of the community-based policing approach in [*mentions his hometown*], for instance, would be the knowledge of the people that are there and interaction with the stakeholders, the community, the key people around the place, and organisations, etc, and it is quite static, whereas here the very nature of our business here, the core of our business is transit and as a result we have a huge, ... you could look at all the passenger numbers ... we've had between 25 and 28 million passengers ... if you're defining community they are not part of your community, but they are part of who we deal with (Interview 2016).

It does seem strange to propose community policing an international airport – surely an airport is far too mobile and multidimensional, a non-place even? But while police recognised problems when deploying the term they do not read community narrowly, as a relationship-based synonym for 'the people' (see Williams 1976).<sup>4</sup> Instead of imagining a static population described as the community, they imagined the space of the airport as the community. Moreover, the concept of community policing is itself far from neutral. Rather, it dates to Sir Robert Peel's emphasis on patrols, prevention and contact with local people when establishing London's Metropolitan Police in 1829. Before that, policing had a multiplicity of meanings, including colonial order maintenance.<sup>5</sup> When it came to policing London, according to historian G.A. Minto, Sir Robert was fortunate because, 'he had in a manner of speaking, tried it on the dog. The dog was Ireland' (quoted in Breathnach 2002: 29).

There is a long line of social theorists who offer critiques of the law-making and law-preserving violence of spectral 'ordnances' and policing (see Benjamin 1978; Derrida 2002; c.f.

Comaroff 2013). And there are those commentators who imagine that all policing everywhere can be unmasked to reveal the primary violence of the state. Recent ethnographies of policing do focus on violence, surveillance, occupation and Othering, but anthropologists also acknowledge the voices in ‘communities’ calling for better laws and even more enforcement (e.g. Han 2013; Fassin 2013a). Commenting on ethnographies of policing poor and marginalised urban neighbourhoods, Didier Fassin calls attention to the experimental possibilities of community policing based ‘on the creation of relationships with the population in contexts of peace, where familiarity surpasses estrangement and acquaintance replaces hostility’ (Fassin 2013b: 386). Here, mindful of the knotted histories of community policing in different jurisdictions and especially in contexts of urban marginalization, we simply wish to point out that community policing in an international airport brings many contemporary debates into sharp focus. The airport is expected to be high-tech critical infrastructure constantly vibrating in anticipation of near-future threats. The airport is not expected to be a site in which securitization is being redefined by experts interested in alternatives. Here we briefly explore alternative discourse on arms and the use of force.

We opened dialogues on community policing by challenging police officers to think about a future in which they might be armed, a matter that was raised repeatedly in media and policy discussions in the wake of the Brussels terror attacks of 2016. Surely those inside the security sector would cease upon any opportunity to expand their roles or even ‘militarize’? Below is an illustrative discussion:

Officer A: Look, if a person keeps insisting, and they are not listening to you and they are not being reasonable, then you may be forced into action, even just forcibly removing them, because there’s only so many times you can say things and there’s only so many times you can say them ...

Officer B: But in saying that, it would be very unusual for the likes of ourselves ... to go to a situation and for it to kick off. The reason I say that is ... well, that it has already kicked off and that’s why we’re going to it. But whether they’re crazy, violent or whatever, we’re usually able to talk somebody out of something. ... But if they’ve refused you know that this already potentially dangerous situation is going from passive resistance to active resistance, and it may turn into aggressive resistance. ...

*The officers discuss a former colleague who seemed to be poor at deescalating situations.*

Officer A: Wrong attitude, big ego ... People can feel powerful in a uniform; and the more things you start putting on your uniform, you start turning into *Iron Man*. ... You know, the last thing I’d go for is a firearm. ...

Officer B: The last thing I’d go for is a pistol or a gun. ...

Officer A: Firearms, I’d never want to use or have them ... Besides the threat level doesn’t warrant us having firearms. ... But can [*call*] the armed unit. If something does happen, like Glasgow, or any of the attacks that have happened over the last number of years, whether it be Australia, Indonesia or France ... (Interview 2016).

Again, rather than ethnography being doomed by ‘methodological strabismus’ (Augé 1995:117), we find police discussing the room available for community policing while feeling the walls close in under pressure from counterterrorist discourse. As specific intellectuals, they can debate the key issues vigorously, reflect on the factors conditioning the debate, and pursue

important lines of thought with broader applicability. Take for example the following comment:

But I think ... if you're looking at an unarmed force then we are not ... we're not policing, we're policing by consent, we're policing to uphold law and order, to prevent, to make sure the place runs properly, not by force. So I would term ... [us] a service, that is what I look at because you are providing a service and you can't go out there and dictate and state waving guns around and saying, 'Okay, everybody over here', or 'Everybody over there', you're doing it ... you certainly have ... the only power you have is a legal power, only authority. So you're doing it by consent and I think in a community-based approach people need to understand why you're doing ... by inclusion, so that's why, that's where the community-based approach comes from. It's the best approach for any unarmed force (Interview 2016).

There is certainly something recursive in this police officer's position: to be an unarmed force requires a community policing approach in order to establish consent and thereby remain an unarmed force. No doubt, this position will be vulnerable should a catastrophic terrorist attack occur. However, it is also clear that the here and now of consent and inclusion are foregrounded instead of precautionary and securitarian styles of reasoning. What's important to underscore here is that in actual practice, just as accounts of counterterrorist policing can see similar to community policing, it is possible to read events in very different ways. In the extract from fieldnotes below, which concludes this section, we point to how a 'threat' can be constructed as such, or be policed in such a way as to leave human dignity intact.

'No sign,' said John (pseudonym), one of the police officers we 'shadowed' as part of our research in a major international airport in the British Isles. 'I'll chat to the lady at the desk,' he said, gesturing to a corporate information booth, 'that's where the call came from'. We moved on. Later, a driver approached us at one of the bus drop-off points: 'Are you guys looking for a young guy in a blue jacket?' He didn't wait for a reply. 'Well, he's after running towards arrivals.' One minute later we saw him at the arrivals waiting area with his back to us. He had a small bag over one shoulder, and he held a white card at waist level with a something scrawled on it. He attempted to stop a young woman as she passed the waiting area. She increased her pace and began speaking on her mobile phone. He seemed to give up and returned to his former position. John approached, stopped parallel with him, rocked on his heels, looked down at the young man, and suggested a 'friendly chat'. Two female officers arrived and stood ten yards away, engaging each other in conversation. The young man let the white card he was carrying drop to his side. It simply said 'Sweden'. A short while later, John processed the incident, offered to contact the young man's relatives or social services, but eventually had to caution him to leave the airport campus. 'It's a shame,' he said, 'You see, he says he's waiting for his girlfriend from Sweden ... but, well, he can't remember the flight number, or the date ... or her name. He wrote it all down, but he lost the piece of paper. He keeps stopping women to ask if his girlfriend is on their flight. He's sure she's coming and he doesn't want to miss her. He's been around here before. On the other side of the card he has 'Copenhagen' written (Fieldnotes 2016).

The brief but tragic vignette about a troubled young man momentarily caught in the security spotlight may seem trivial in the light of the 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks. But it is by no means trivial as it points to how the stuff of everyday life for police can be, in precautionary terms, rendered as a threat and responded to accordingly or approached from a community policing perspective. Striking a balance is a matter for institutional values, and management ethics and ethos, but it is also a matter for police in their everyday experiences, from how they interact with the public to ‘the judgements of those with better knowledge of mankind’ (Wittgenstein 1997: 277).

## Conclusions

‘You can resume your flight whenever you like,’ they said to me, ‘but you will arrive at another Trude, absolutely the same, detail by detail. The world is covered by the sole Trude, which does not begin, nor end. Only the name of the airport changes’ (Calvino 1974: 128).

For the first time in human history, more than half of the world’s population now resides in urban areas. The challenges faced by cities are enormous, and in their masterful *The Endless City*, Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic identify one of the key challenges as understanding the ‘intangible yet vital issue of security’ (2007: 43). Matters of security and urban space are cast into stark relief in the contemporary international airport. But, though things are changing, anthropological studies of airports remain locked out, empirically and theoretically. Empirically, there are enormous challenges in studying a contemporary airport, especially issues of access. This is compounded by theoretical challenges. As shown by Italo Calvino’s *Trude* and Marc Augé’s *Non-places*, the international airport has come to stand for the contemporary and its capacity to overwhelm the writer or ethnographer. However, it is possible to engage with multidimensional and complex spaces, even security spaces, by reformulating ethnography as a creative problem-space for anthropologists and for expert counterparts. This is what we set out to achieve.

In the spirit of Henri Lefebvre’s open and interacting trio of the perceived, conceived and lived, we set out to show how the contemporary airport can be critical infrastructure vulnerable to terrorism and, at the same time, a complex urban space that must be policed by consent. Indeed, over six months of ethnographic engagement we showed that counterterrorist policing systems such as abnormal behaviour detection are reliant on a soft underbelly of tacit knowledge, experience and imponderable evidence (knowledge this is, of course, never fully separable from broader ideological formations and styles of reasoning, including hierarchies of gender, ‘race’ and class). Therefore, undergirding counterterrorist policing we find the elements of a powerful critique. Moreover, because the international airport we studied is policed by an unarmed force, the values of community policing prevailed and offered a powerful critique of force by members of a police force. But to conclude, we wish to offer some note of caution about concepts and approaches that we may have seemed to valorise.

What becomes of ethnography after the ethnographic ‘project’? Numerous scholars have reflected on this issue, especially those working in engaged ways with poor, marginalized and urban communities (e.g. Iversen 2009). Daniel Goldstein (2012) built a legacy of engaged projects and community building when studying security in urban Bolivia; other anthropologists have co-produced archival projects, such as, for example, Elizabeth Povinelli’s collaboration with the Karrabing Indigenous Corporation. But what happens when the archive

contains not just sensitive information but also security knowledge? There are numerous challenges here and we conclude by isolating just a few of them. Firstly, it is clear that anthropologists may get greater access to security institutions by working with experts as counterparts, but access engenders responsibility. In interviews and observations, we noted moments during which cultural diversity and gender differences were dealt with well but articulated poorly. We offered cultural awareness and diversity training as part of ongoing airport education initiatives. Indeed, this task was made easier having recorded real life examples as part of our work. However, secondly, the responsibility to attend to existing knowledge is one shared. Many contemporary organizations realise that in the effective discharging of their duties they need to capture experiences, cases, examples, and tacit knowledge. In short, they need ways to manage knowledge. Thus far, disciplinary discussions of studying spaces of security such as airports have focused on access to these multidimensional spaces. In the future however, ethnography will likely have to deal with its second life, as the institutional memories of others produced through ethnography.

Together with our expert counterparts, we identified the need for human-centred knowledge sharing practices that enhance collective expertise and help disseminate best practices in community policing. As a result, we wondered about the way to approach knowledge management in a meaningful way. Of course, other disciplines and domains have developed their own literatures on knowledge management, especially in the corporate sector where intellectual legacy can be attributed monetary value. We will spare readers the details of current corporate practices for storing, re-sharing and ‘leveraging’ organizational memory. It is sufficient to point out that technocratic solutions abound, including ready-made software programmes that are sensitive neither to problem nor to context. At this point, anthropologists may have another role to play in their own ethnographic research. Because anthropological analysis is needed to render material such as observations, interviews with leading experts, strategies, official documents, etc. as ethnography, what will happen to that material if boxed and if the only key remains with the anthropologist? The question can be answered by anthropologists working even more closely with experts on active organisational memory. But is the discipline prepared for this, or is it willing to engage to such a degree? Spaces like critical infrastructure and matters such as security are fundamental to how anthropology attends to contemporary urban life, but those sites and subjects insist upon disciplinary reformulation.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> He confesses that all along his project was an effort to understand *non-lieu*, a French judicial term denoting the recognition of innocence.

<sup>2</sup> Armed police are called in the event of a major hostile situation and, under specific protocols, special military forces may also be deployed.

<sup>3</sup> And lest we forget, airports are designed with crowd flows in mind: they are machines for producing certain types of normal behaviour (see Maguire 2014).

<sup>4</sup> As Raymond Williams observed in *Keywords* (1976), historical uses of the term community vary considerable, but in the twentieth century it became a 'warmly persuasive word' with a 'polemical edge'. He notes, 'What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term (Williams 1976: 76).

<sup>5</sup> In Michel Foucault's Collège de France lecture of 29 March 1978 he proposed a brief genealogy of 'police', noting the different meanings attached to the term prior to the nineteenth century. In seventeenth-century Germany it denoted 'visible order and manifest force' (Foucault 2007: 314) and thereafter it became tied to statistical knowledge and the right application of the forces of the state, with a 'police state' denoting a correct use of policy, from

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inequalities to health provision, such that 'police is basically concerned with society' (ibid. 326).