

Architectures of Mistrust

Suspect, Sense, Regulate, Repeat

Dinçer, D.; Önal, G.; Tona, G.

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Architectures of Mistrust: Suspect, Sense, Regulate, Repeat

Dirim Dinçer, Gökçe Önal (Delft University of Technology)
Grazia Tona (Eindhoven University of Technology)

Institutionalized suspicion toward border-crossing bodies is increasingly systematized by the security models of complete situational awareness. This hyper-surveillant regime relies on the seamless interoperation of inspection technologies and architectural design to manage, contain, and exclude those bodies at borders. This paper focuses on airports as one such space of mistrust and asks: how do surveillance technologies and architectural design converge in the practices of regulating borders? We respond by examining the architecture of Amsterdam Schiphol Airport as a ‘suspicious infrastructure’ (Simon Noori 2022) that continuously adapts itself to the state-of-the-art technologies which sense, inspect and organize mistrusted, human and more-than-human bodies *en route*.

Our argument begins with a media-elemental analysis of three sensing technologies typically deployed in airport screening: millimeter wave scanners, X-ray scanners, and CCTV. By mapping the interaction of bodies and machines, we show that inspection is a function of multiple sensing operations, each of which targets a different bodily component and results in a different bordering performance, ranging from

channeling and sorting to excluding and detaining. Examining the architectures of these interactions – gates, corridors, fast tracks, airport courthouses and detention centers – we argue that the airport integrates multiple levels of situational awareness by differentially regulating movement through architectural proximities, thresholds and features.

The conclusion presents a material-discursive framework for architectures of mistrust by weaving the operational and physical components of border control at the airport. We discuss the border(s) at the airport as a performance of interoperability between machines and architectures, where machines render bodies actionable data and architectures regulate them by reinforcing the logic of inspection. Accordingly, we formulate architecture not only as an infrastructure that accommodates surveillance, but also as an agent complicit in the construction of suspicious subjects. We thereby expand the definition of suspicious infrastructures through a performative reading of border architectures.



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Editors
Teresa Stoppani
George Themistokleous
Ellie Nixon

Scientific Director
Teresa Stoppani

Editorial Director
George Themistokleous

Design
Ark / para-sight

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Teresa Stoppani
George Themistokleous
Ellie Nixon

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