



TSA Communication

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TSA Communication is a project that alters the airport security experience, inviting the government to learn more about passengers than just the contents of their carry on bags. Messages are cut into thin 8.5" x 11" sheets of stainless steel designed to comfortably fit inside airline carry on baggage. During the x-ray screening process, the technology normally designed to view the contents of a traveler's baggage is transformed into a communication tool for displaying messages aimed at airport security. The content of the plates varies from flight to flight, but includes "NOTHING TO SEE HERE", an image of the American flag and the TSA's (Transportation Security Agency's) mission statement as listed on its website, "I AM THE FRONTLINE OF DEFENSE, DRAWING ON MY IMAGINATION TO CREATIVELY PROTECT AMERICA FROM HARM".

The project stems from the artist's interest in changing his role in the dance of airport security from a passive participant to an active one. Traveling with the plates has become a normal part of the artist's travel habits and he has taken the plates through airport security checkpoints over 20 times in China, the United States, France, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Italy, and Austria. Interactions with airport security are recorded with a hidden video camera. The main intention of the project is not to antagonize airport security, but rather to create a situation which seeds discourse related to personal freedoms, freedom of speech and the role of security.

TSA Communication also attempts to inject conversations related to personal freedoms into the larger context of online popular culture. Humor and a polished design aesthetic are elements employed by the artist as a means towards reaching a wider online audience than just those interested in art and activism. While one portion of the project revolves around the interaction of the artist and the security agent, another critical element involves the interaction between the online documentation and the reaction of the audience on the web. TSA

Communication has received hundreds of comments on top 100 blogs such as BoingBoing (<http://boingboing.net>), Gizmodo (<http://gizmodo.com>), MAKE (<http://blog.makezine.com>), Kottke (<http://kottke.org>), and even the blog of celebrity rapper Kanye West (<http://www.kanyeuniversecity.com/blog/>).

Online discussions surrounding the project have reached as far as the Transportation Security Administration's own web blog, titled *The Evolution of Security*. This blog thread received 195 comments, primarily from security workers, making it one of the most discussed posts on the TSA's website. While the hidden video camera records airline security agents reactions to the project in the real world, comments on the TSA website record agents' reactions in an online (and semi-anonymous) environment.

TSA Communication is ongoing research, activism, and performance that aims to give citizens an active voice in the theater of security.