

**The Big Squeeze:
The Time and Space of Flight Attendants Since 9/11¹**

Drew Whitelegg

The Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life
Working Paper No. 32
2004

Introduction – A Dance to the Music of Time and Space

The 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington DC were followed by one of the most chaotic periods in the history of the aviation industry. Major international airlines including Swissair and British Airways have gone bust or faced serious losses. In the US, the top six scheduled domestic passenger carriers – American, Delta, United, Northwest, US Air, and Continental – have all entered or at least entertained bankruptcy. Traffic projections suggest that passenger numbers will not recover to 2000 levels until 2008: even then, overall revenue in the industry will have been cut by 20 percent (Sharkey, 2003). Even as the share price of US majors rose by 61 percent in 2003, these gains were from a “sub-basement” position (*Economist*, 2004).

This is the third major crisis afflicting airlines in the past twenty-five years. The effects of 1978 deregulation and the 1991 Gulf War were also severe (Tait, 1990; Tomkins, 1993). In fact, airlines were already facing a period of transition during the late 1990s and 9/11 merely increased momentum towards industry reconstruction. Certainly, the focus on cost-driven competitiveness and lean and mean carriers was not ushered in by the terrorist attacks.

Not for the first time, then, flight attendants have found themselves under pressure. As in previous recessions, carriers have sought both to reduce operating costs and to increase the extraction of surplus value from workforces – doing more with less, in everyday parlance (Capelli, 1985; Jennings, 1993; Harvey and Turnbull, 2002). In 2002, there were over 10,000 fewer flight attendants working in the US than in the year previous.² Those who remain have faced changes in their working conditions, often forced through with the threat of bankruptcy as an alternative.

This paper’s core proposition is that we are witnessing a deep-seated shift in the career path of flight attendants, with the profession’s potential as a job-for-life rapidly eroding. In the historical development of the industry, flight attendants who enjoyed the benefits of Civil Rights legislation and pursued full-time, long-term careers will come to be seen as the exception rather than the norm. The effect of industry restructuring will be the creation of an increasingly short-term, itinerant and temporary labor force that will have knock-on effects upon the ability of flight attendants to work and have a family.

My argument is constructed both chronologically and thematically. I first look at the impact of 1960s legislation, in which restrictive rules on length of service were abolished, and then go on to discuss post-deregulation and post-9/11 developments respectively. I then introduce some real flight attendants (names have been changed) and offer their stories as examples of the kinds of issues this group of workers now face. The conclusion will re-visit the core proposition and offer a tentative prognosis for the future.

The thematic construction revolves around the matrix of time and space. These coordinates are fundamental to the *process* of capital, from the constant drive to reduce turnover time and speed up circulation (Marx, 1976 [1867]) to the production of a geography of uneven development (Smith, 1984) and the production of space itself

(Lefebvre, 1974). The time/space matrix is the core site of negotiation and hegemonic struggle between capital and labor, at heart framed not just by the issue of who controls whom, but who controls whom, *where*, and *when*. As Thompson (1967) suggests, the rudiments of this battle have not essentially changed in two hundred years. Of course time and space are neither independent of each other. Nor are they absolute or external to human processes but are “contingent and contained with them” (Harvey, 1996: 53). For Massey, (1994: 3) “space-time” is a “configuration of social relations within which the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity.”

Emphasizing the interconnection between “socially produced time and space” (Downey, 2002: 6) allows us to re-think the central metaphor of the juggling act, which dominates much of the work and families literature. For instance, the cover of Harriet Presser’s *Working in a 24/7 Economy* (2003) features a couple balanced on a seesaw, juggling a clock, calendar, briefcase, frying pan, telephone, and baby. It’s a telling image, but a problem with this metaphor is that, unless one is very adept, juggling is performed while essentially standing still. There is little conception of the spaces involved in attempting to balance work and home. Similarly, Moen et al (2003) conclude that the contemporary pivot around which modern working families rotate is “about time”. Space barely gets a look-in, receiving not one entry in the index (despite a chapter on journey-to-work issues the book contains no maps). In much of this literature, families seem to exist in a temporal vacuum. There is little sense of the “life space,” at the core of social psychology, for instance (Levine, 1997). Nor is there much sense of space as important a structuring agency as time (Bourdieu, 1977).³

A better metaphor can be found on another book cover. Marshall Berman’s *Adventures in Marxism* (1999) is adorned by a peculiar, revved-up, dancing Karl Marx.⁴ By necessity, dance involves time – the beat of the music, the coordination of moves and rhythms throughout the song or composition. But it also involves space: I’ve yet to see a dance performed while standing still. By definition, dance involves the choreography of time *and* space, in a chronological movement across the geography of the dance floor. But, just as juggling involves the tension of the potentially dropped ball or knife, dance depends upon synchronicity – dynamic simultaneity, in Massey’s terms – to work effectively. Time and space need to be attuned if we are to avoid an untidy mess.

The thematic body of this paper, therefore, is the dance that flight attendants perform across their economic and social landscape. In this, they represent an extreme form of increasingly common contemporary work patterns in which temporal and spatial controls have become increasingly tightened (Hochschild, 1983; 1989; 2001; Harvey, 1989; Thompson and Warhurst, 1998). They operate within an often-chaotic juxtaposition of *where* they will be and *when*. They inhabit a world of rigid time planning and yet severe time disorientation, not to mention a perpetual fear of being late. They spend a good part of their lives arranging in which location they are going to be and yet experience intense physical and psychological *dis*-location. They oscillate between a heavily Taylorized work routine, in which certain tasks must be performed in certain sequences in an allotted period of time, and a highly unpredictable work environment which affords a good deal of personal space. After 9/11, especially, they blend humdrum

quotidian work patterns with a heightened consciousness of geo-politically inspired physical danger and threat.

In short, flight attendants dance an often-bizarre dialectical dance with time and space. And yet under current conditions they are increasingly out of step. A fundamental revision is taking place in the profession in which the spaces of these workers are increasingly squeezed.

From capital to labor...

The first US flight attendants – called stewardesses at the time – were nurses, hired by United in the early 1930s. They were initially utilized to promote the safety of civil aviation, and to provide reassurance and matronly assistance in the pre-pressurized cabin. After World War II, with the development of faster, pressurized airliners, companies began to use their flight attendants as marketing tools. This direction reached its zenith (or nadir) in the late 1960s and 1970s, as airlines such as Braniff, Southwest and National brazenly conflated the exoticism of the jet age with the sexual allure of their on-board crew (Omelia and Waldock, 2003).

Up to the 1960s, flight attendant profiles were fairly uniform. College educated, in their early twenties, conforming to strict height and weight regulations, and almost certainly white, stewardesses were portrayed by airlines and the popular media as “all-American gals.” Marriage, pregnancy and working beyond the age of thirty (sometimes thirty-two) were generally prohibited. Some airlines had no age limit specifically because it was assumed no stewardess would work beyond thirty. Carriers depicted the job as akin to a Swiss finishing school, from which young women would emerge with a set of skills that would make them more attractive in the marriage market. Indeed, a stewardess could always meet the man of her dreams on board; conversely, male passengers could be confident that the smiling flight attendant in front of them was both unattached and, by default, pure. With the marketing of the stewardess as sex object in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the arrival of such books as *Coffee, Tea or Me?*, the attraction of “purity” morphed into potential promiscuity.

With turnover rates up to the mid-1960s of 50 to 75 percent every two years, airlines did not expect stewardesses to last long in the job. Most left either to be married or because they were pregnant, or both (Rich, 1972). Despite the cost of training, high turnover rates suited the airlines. First, a regular supply of keen, young debutantes kept the workforce fresh, averted the dangers of burnout and suited airline marketing. Second, and of no less importance, a regular turnover of labor made it extremely difficult for flight attendant unions to organize effectively. Little continuity of consciousness existed amongst the workforce, and union officers themselves left on a regular basis. Though many airline flight attendants were unionized – Delta being a notable exception – they were often subsumed within pilot unions. It was not until the 1970s and the establishment of a more permanent workforce that they developed an independent voice (Nielsen, 1982, Rozen, 1987; Cobble, 1999).

Civil Rights legislation (most notably Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act) potentially turned the profession into a career (Lessor, 1984). A series of court cases brought by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) compelled airlines to drop policies terminating employment due to age or marriage. Men could also not be prevented from joining, a development that led to the changing of the name “stewardess” to “flight attendant” in the US. The 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act addressed the issue of returning to work on the same terms and conditions following childbirth, though some airlines had already allowed this. Weight restrictions were contested up to the 1990s (and still remain a gray area), though some airlines tacitly relaxed these with the adoption of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (Tyler and Abbott, 1998; Barry, 1999).

From the 1970s, flight attendants began to exert greater temporal controls over their jobs and, *de facto*, their lives. Rich frames this trend around an increase in personal choice: flight attendants could choose when to join the profession and when, and whether, to leave. Wider societal attitudes still constrained such choice, however. As Lessor (1984: 44) argues, the profession often became a “career extended by increments,” with flight attendants – especially if single – regularly telling themselves “I’ll just stay another year or two.” The point, however, is that staying on was now possible and, with more workers being hired due to jet-age expansion, the greater autonomy afforded by seniority became apparent to more people. As flight attendants accrued seniority, they could exert greater control of where and when they flew, according to their circumstances. “Many married stewardesses are able to fly turnaround flights that not only bring them home every evening but allow them to work half as many days as their nine-to-five sisters,” Rich notes (Rich, 1972: 13). “A stewardess, after all,” she continues, “has much more time to spend with her child than the mother who works at a nine-to-five job (22).”

Yet flight attendants also exerted spatial control, too. In interviews, many who joined the industry at this point spoke of a wanderlust and expansion of horizons that would have been impossible in other jobs into which middle-class women were steered at the time (notably teaching). They implicitly collapsed the demarcation of the private and public sphere, exploiting a geographical mobility afforded to few of their female contemporaries (Whitelegg, forthcoming). In keeping with the mantra of the time “the personal is political”, they also embarked upon hegemonic battles over the control of the spaces of their own bodies, with challenges to and subversion of company regulations on appearance (Lett, 1980; Murphy, 1998). They also constructed an “occupational community” (Williams, 1986), subculture or supraculture (Volpe, 1984; Sullivan and Edman, 2004), constructing a space of camaraderie among a particularly close-knit group of colleagues.

Paradoxically, despite the opportunity to pursue the job as a full-time career, nearly all flight attendants interviewed for this paper that joined at the turn of the 1960/70s claimed to have only intended staying for two years at the most. There is little doubt that the “incremental career”, particularly for this cohort, became addictive. Spatial and temporal autonomy increased with seniority. Free or reduced travel costs for families created an individual geographical freedom and orbit hitherto reserved for the

highly affluent. For flight attendant parents, especially, the space afforded by the layover became treasured time: in interview, some talked about it representing their “sanity” (Whitelegg, 2003a). As flight attendants in the 1970s politicized and began to challenge the stereotypical Barbie Doll image of airline advertising, they had probably never been in a stronger position (Kane, 1974).

...and back again

“All that is solid melts into air,” Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* (1967 [1848]: 83). With hindsight, the seeds of destruction can be found in the very moment of flight attendant triumph in the 1970s. Civil Rights legislation represented the highpoint of Fordist “welfare capitalism” dominant since World War II, which predicated the protection of jobs through regulation and the fostering of high demand to match high production. Ironically, one of the main signals of the collapse of this system and its replacement with that of “flexible accumulation” (Harvey, 1989) occurred in the airline industry, with the passing of the 1978 Deregulation Act.

Deregulation removed barriers to entry, effectively allowing any airline to fly wherever it wanted (Bailey, et al, 1986). It introduced price competition, allowing airlines to charge what they liked on routes.⁵ The net result was the emergence – most short-lived – of new airlines, the collapse of others (most infamously Braniff, Eastern and Pan Am) and the merging of yet more (Delta and Western, Texas Air’s agglomeration of Continental, New York Air, People Express and Eastern).

Flight attendants – along with most airline workers – found themselves threatened by a resurgent capital-driven agenda whose only business model seemed to be predicated on cost cutting. Delta used its non-union workforce (save for pilots) to increase labor flexibility, while farming out local routes to its Delta Connection franchises, such as American Southeast Airlines (ASA) on lower pay scales (Whitelegg, 2003b). At Continental, Frank Lorenzo used Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection to negate all labor agreements, a policy he took to its extreme with the destruction of Eastern Airlines (Murphy, 1986; Saunders, 1992). Southwest Airlines, with its revered corporate culture, achieved labor flexibility in which flight attendants – though unionized – cleaned airplanes and facilitated rapid airport turnarounds (Muse, 2002). American Airlines introduced B scale pay for new hires, with a shallower wage scale gradient and fewer benefits (Reed, 1993; Petzinger, 1995). In sum, between 1979 and 1992 there was a reduction in entry-level real wages for US major carriers of over one-third; maximum wages dropped by 15% (Johnson, 1995).

The 1991 Gulf War impacted further on the profitability of most major carriers. Delta’s response was to introduce Leadership 7.5, in which unit costs (the cost of flying one passenger one mile) were to be reduced from 9.5 to 7.5 cents, partly through the abolition of the airline’s traditional no-furlough policy. Along with the usual intensification of work, which led to larger aircraft being serviced by fewer flight attendants, major airlines increasingly employed spatial solutions through globalization. In the 1990s they became engaged in strategic international alliances – with code sharing, equity swaps, outsourcing and labor pools – as well as the breaking down of a still-

restricted international aviation network, through open skies bilateral agreements negotiated between the US and individual nations.

Reducing costs took on an inexorable logic, whereby benchmark targets were determined by the cost structure of competitors. Inevitably, there was the danger of a “race to the bottom” (Blyton, et al, 1998) or a “zero sum” (Gittell, et al, 2003) in which respective companies attempted to undercut each other by forcing down remuneration rates. As the most consistently successful carriers during this period were the low-cost airlines, principally Southwest, these set the tone. United, Continental and Delta experimented with their own low-cost Southwest-style subsidiaries – none to great effect (Lawton, 2002). It was no accident that the decade saw bitter disputes between flight attendants and cost-cutting management, especially at American Airlines and, at a global level, British Airways (Whitelegg, 2003c).

Flight attendants were therefore facing difficult times *before* 9/11. The shock in the industry following the attacks was quickly superseded by the identification of a window of opportunity in which major airlines could take radical action to reduce their cost base. As Berman (1983: 95) has written, “catastrophes are transformed into lucrative opportunities for redevelopment and renewal.” In the next section, I discuss the specific developments that have recently affected flight attendants.

Fallout

By 2002, over 60 percent of Association of Flight Attendant (AFA) members, the largest union grouping in the US, representing roughly half of all flight attendants, were over 34 years old. More than one third were over 44. 81 percent were women (Corey, et al, 2003). Though no details of joining dates are available, the age profile (backed with evidence from individual interviews) indicates that many women now viewed the profession as a long-term career.

In the year after the attacks on New York and Washington DC, the AFA’s Employee Assistance Program surveyed its members in an attempt to ascertain their well-being. Among their respondents, 48 percent were married, 18 percent divorced and 33 percent never married. 60 percent had children, 20 percent ageing relatives and 20 percent both. 61 percent of respondents with dependents reported having to care for them on a daily basis (Corey, et al, 2003; AFA, 2003a; 2003b).⁶

The above suggests that flight attendants – like many other workers – manage competing demands of work and family. But, since 9/11, there is an additional problem involving heightened stress. Flight attendants’ own sense of space is being encroached upon and eroded by intensified time demands of airlines. The AFA’s findings include several salient statistics:

- 40 percent of respondents claimed they could no longer hold the same lines (a series of trips) as before
- 29 percent had their bid status changed
- 4 percent had their flight attendant base closed

- 9 percent had to change their commute to work
- 79 percent reported having had some change in their work patterns
- 55 percent said that changes at work were having a negative effect on their quality of life

Respondents to the AFA survey also indicated a whole range of health and safety related concerns, from being more jumpy at work to feeling emotionally numb. From concerns about air rage to worries about inadequate self-defense training, flight attendants suggest that the actual job itself has become more stressful and less fun, though – it should be emphasized – evidence of these developments existed before 9/11. Again, the terrorist attacks exacerbated a situation that was already in existence (Desrosiers and Emlen, 1997; Williams, 2000; MacDonald, et al, 2003; Ballard, et al, 2003; Heuven and Bakker, 2003; Lombardo, 2004).⁷

Up to now, flight attendants' career paths mirrored the American middle-class notion of deferred gratification (Ehrenreich, 1989). On joining an airline, workers went through training and then a period on reserve status. With the airline being able to summon employees to work at one or two hours' notice, reserve was understandably stressful. "You never knew where you were going to be and you never knew when they were going to call you," one ex-flight attendant told me. What was being expressed here was a lack of spatial and temporal autonomy: there was no control over the "where" and the "when".

After doing reserve duty, a period often described as a living hell, flight attendants earned some control over the where and when of daily life. The seniority system, in which bids for trips were allocated according to length of service in the company, provided flight attendants with an incentive to stay. Indeed, the geography of bidding was highly differentiated between popular "high-time" routes such as Atlanta-Tokyo and high maintenance ones such as New York-Orlando. Having got off reserve and being able to "hold a line" – a series of trips worked out in advance by the company – the aim of flight attendants was then to get *better* trips. This could only come through better seniority; though language qualified workers effectively jumped the queue.

According to the above figures, 40 percent of workers could no longer hold the lines they had previously, and the 29 percent had had their bid status changed. The value of these workers' seniority had been eroded as the pendulum of control has swung back in favor of capital. For the major airlines, the post 9/11 climate provided an unprecedented opportunity to denude not the principle of seniority but its entitlements and, ultimately, costs. The net effect was to shed the labor force of the very group of flight attendants – at the top of their pay scales – who had benefited the most from Civil Rights legislation and had pioneered the transition of the profession from stopgap to career.

Since 9/11 several measures have facilitated this shedding. Some major carriers have used incentives to get rid of senior workers. One airline added five years to a worker's age to bring them closer to full pension, if they agreed to retire. One-off severance packages were also used as a sweetener, as was the retention of full health and travel

benefits for retirees. Flight attendants in some cases were given only a couple of weeks to make the decision to leave or to stay. The other side of the sweetener coin was the suggestion by companies that such a deal would not be repeated: indeed, it was a worker's responsibility to retire because they would in the process a) save the company; b) save their fellow workers from losing their jobs; and c) save their own pensions, which would be lost if the company collapsed.

One company has since changed the pension plans of fellow workers from a straight defined benefit plan to a cash balance program. The latter penalizes senior flyers as it removes the number of years of service multiplier from the formula calculation. Cash balance pensions accumulate more quickly than under the former scheme and are also portable, both of benefit to junior and transient workers (Clarke, 2003). Another company has attempted to raise the health insurance charges of those workers who agreed to leave, resulting in legal action (Kesmodel, 2004). Unions, faced with the threat of liquidation, have been forced into signing wage concessions that have led to between 9 percent and 15 percent pay reductions at some major carriers. Workers under Chapter 11 bankruptcy are in a very weak position; those with no union at all are even weaker. Company lobbyists have also used the current economic contraction to push for legislation banning strikes in the industry (Goo and Downey, 2003).

If financial incentives have proved insufficient to unload senior workers, companies have squeezed flight attendants' temporal and spatial autonomy. The best example here is through base closures. Briefly, seniority exists across an airline's system, but it also operates at a flight attendant base. Some bases, for various reasons, are more senior than others – indeed, some flight attendants prefer to locate or even commute to a less senior base as it means they are able to hold better lines. If a junior base is closed, the knock-on effects are limited generally to those who had been domiciled there; if a senior base is closed, the effects can be catastrophic across the whole flight attendant network.

In late 2002, Delta Air Lines closed five bases, affecting over 1,000 flight attendants, at Chicago, Houston, New Orleans, Portland and Seattle (Associated Press, 2002). The latter two, especially, were senior bases, with many former Western Airlines flyers (Western merged with Delta in 1986). According to a company spokesperson, affected workers had three choices: transferring to another base (depending upon staffing needs); commuting to another base or taking a voluntary leave of absence. Transferring may be out of the question for senior workers with lives and families on the Pacific Coast; commuting means flying thousands of miles just to get to work. With less capacity in the system it means leaving earlier than previously necessary to ensure getting on a flight (most commuting flight attendants fly stand-by).

The inconvenience is not limited to those directly affected, however. If more senior flyers start commuting to another base city to work, flight attendants based in that city will find themselves being forced down the seniority ladder. In the case of one airline, many flight attendants that had previously been line holders have been forced back onto reserve. Some workers who have been at the airline for over ten years now find themselves on reserve status, not knowing "where" they will be and "when". It does not

take a genius to imagine the chaos this may cause with a flight attendant's personal and family life, especially when having children has been put off until a worker is able to hold a line, as is sometimes the case. This is a win-win situation for airlines. Either more expensive staff are forced off the books or a more flexible workforce is created. In fact, there is a win bonus: even if senior staff retire, the number of reserve flight attendants will go up because an airline needs a regular supply of flexible reserve labor at short notice.

Those flight attendants still working face significant changes in their conditions. For example, one airline has changed the rate at which pay is calculated, initially by removing maximum hour limitations and then blending base pay – a form of retainer – with flight pay – the per hourly rate.⁸ By its own admission, the airline states that those flying over 75 hours a week will have to fly more hours to make the same amount of money, while those flying under can actually make more money by flying less. One 53 year old worker told me that, under the new scheme, flying 90 hours (the maximum) would lead to a 3.9 percent pay cut; flying 50 would lead, pro rata, to a 13.8 percent pay rise. Though presented as a great deal, the effect here is again a bias against senior flyers, many of who will be flying up to the (previous) limit in order to maximize their pension (calculated according to the three highest yearly salaries). A consequence is to force workers to fly less and to institutionalize the job as a part-time profession. One major airline effectively categorizes its flight attendants as part-time workers to avoid commitments under Family Medical Leave Act regulations.

Along with changes in vacation and sick pay regulations, and greater use of computerized bidding systems, major airlines have also attempted to combat low-cost carriers though rejuvenating their own efforts in this market. For instance, Delta recently set up Song, initially to fly high-traffic routes from New York to Florida. Though a change of leadership at Delta may have reduced the enthusiasm for the low-cost offspring, certain aspects of Song's hiring methods may be indicative of future industry trends.

Song clearly attempted to create the kind of wacky corporate culture so successful at Southwest. Part of its mission was to revive the romance of jet travel which had become "boring and a hassle" according to Song's CEO (Kirsner, 2003: 4). Its flight attendants are given greater freedom to joke with passengers and to attempt to put the fun back into flying, though there is some evidence that the jokes are scripted (Thompson, 2003). Song's website boasts at least one approving e mail: "They were so kind, and funny! Had the whole plane laughing!" (Song, 2004). Flight attendants are therefore utilized as entertainers in the selling of on-board food and the making of amusing, irreverent announcements, often sending each other up like holiday reps. Indeed, flight attendants on the airline are called "song talents" and had to "audition" for the part, during which applicants had to sing, play a musical instrument or show they had a "special talent to ...be one of an exclusive group who will entertain our guests" (Song 2003).

Song's employees were drawn from Delta's existing pool of flight attendants, including those on the furlough list. The "Founders" offer, as it was called, was therefore

pitched at those with little seniority or with, at that point, no job at all.⁹ Workers who had taken voluntary leave of absence were not allowed to apply. One Song worker told me that she had worked at Delta for nine years and was still in the “high thousands” in seniority. At Song she was 150. Another, furloughed at Delta, was “over 19,000” while at Song she was going to be a line holder immediately. In other words, Song catapulted a specific group of workers into positions of spatial and temporal autonomy. Being a line holder “really changes your life tremendously because then you have predictability of your schedule,” according to a Song worker.

So Song “auditioned” a group of fairly junior – in terms of service – Delta flight attendants and gave them seniority they would probably never have reached at the mother airline. But it also hired them in conditions that differed from Delta. There were no restrictions to the number of hours flown (other than FAA regulations). Delta crew were not allowed to fly more than 90 hours per month: Song left it up to the individual. Of course, in effect, this meant getting by with fewer flight attendants, and led to a spatial and temporal intensification of the work routine. On average, Song’s flight attendants flew 85 hours per month compared with Delta’s 75 (Grantham, 2003). Song does not fly long-haul and so to make up hours flight attendants would have to do a greater number of take-off and landings (medically proven to be fatiguing in itself) as well as navigating the cabin more frequently selling meals. With 9% more seats crammed into Song’s Boeing 757s compared to Delta’s, and with cheaper junior staff, Song’s unit costs were 23 percent below that of its parent, and comparable to Southwest, Air Tran and JetBlue’s 6-8 cents per mile (Delta does not publish exact figures) (*Business Week*, 2004).

Second, Song flight attendants differed from Delta in being paid per actual flight hour flown as opposed to scheduled flight time. In other words, if a flight arrives thirty minutes early Song workers lose that thirty minutes pay. Also, Song flyers receive no base pay, unlike their Delta counterparts.

Last, and perhaps most important, an option for Song talents was to sign agreements that they would leave after a fixed period of time (two, three or four years). In return, they would be paid a bonus on leaving (JetBlue operate a similar scheme). The maximum remuneration period for Song talents was five years upon which Delta had to take them back if there was an opening, at the original Delta seniority. If Song folded in the meantime, however, the job at both Song and Delta would be lost.

Whether other carriers also implement such fixed-term contracts remains to be seen (they are more common among Asian carriers and European charter airlines). But the implications are enormous and point to a peculiar development in the profession. By default, airlines could be returning to the hiring mores of the 1950s, in which workers were expected to, and forced to, leave after a short period of time. Clearly Civil Rights legislation is still in force, and discriminatory hiring practices will be contested. But the image of the job is slowly moving away from a profession and back to that of a stopgap. Being a flight attendant may be part of a churning process whereby people change jobs with far more regularity. Hiring profiles of low-cost carriers enhance the “temporary” image of the position, though not necessarily restricted to young people. Some airlines

willingly hire (mainly women) in their forties and fifties who, having had a family, want to “have some fun”. This may bring a welcome mature worker into the fray: it also brings someone who is not going to reach the top of the pay scale and whose pension commitments will be limited, from a company point of view.

One further measure taken by major airlines is to deepen their reliance on regional carriers. These are either directly owned by a parent company, or contracted to fly certain routes on a fee-paid basis. Either way, regional carriers fly smaller aircraft at lower cost. At Northwest Airlines regional carrier, Mesaba Airlines, for instance, flight attendant pay tops out at \$22,500 per year, compared to \$36,000 at Northwest mainline. Flight attendant turnover at Mesaba is “extremely high” (PR Newswire, 2001). Turnover at regional and low-cost carriers has been historically high, partly as flight attendants move up to major carriers in the industry. However, at time of writing, these are the only carriers to be hiring, so flight attendants will effectively “get stuck” on lower rung airlines, on lower pay and more arduous conditions (though not strictly comparable, job strain and fatigue is significantly higher for domestic flight attendants than for international (MacDonald, et al, 2003)). Hiring at these airlines will become a buyers market – a perusal of flight attendant websites reveals that there is no shortage of applicants – which suits airlines concerned about costs.

At its most extreme, the new environment could be summed up by one disillusioned low-cost flyer: “it is cheaper to train [new flight attendants] than to keep them.” As Heuven and Bakker (2003) have argued, emotional dissonance is the major cause of burnout among cabin crew, greater than quantitative job demands and job control. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization – the two dimensions that are at the core of burnout – could become a handy way of maintaining a regular turnover of new recruits, a side effect of which could be concomitant weakening of trade union power among flight attendants.

Before returning to these points in the conclusion, I want to introduce the “real people in *Capital*” to borrow a phrase from Berman (1999). The following vignettes are the product of interviews with flight attendants conducted over the past eighteen months and give an indication of the range of pressures faced. They involve Sandra, a commuter; Carol, a senior flyer; and Janice, a junior flyer (all names have been changed). I spoke to each of them twice over the research period. Though they should not be seen as representative of the entire flight attendant body, their stories do chime with those of fellow workers. The selected segments of the transcripts have been left largely unedited to give an indication of a distinct style of discourse often found among flight attendants in whom the jumbling of ideas matches the meshing of time and space itself.

Tales from the Dancefloor

The Commuter

Sandra took part in a panel discussion held with other flight attendants in November 2002. I subsequently interviewed her in June 2003. She had worked for a national airline for 26 years and was based in Chicago. However, she lived in Atlanta

with her husband and 14 year-old stepson. She therefore commuted to work. The role of time and space is explicit in the following exchange, when talking about a trip to Japan.

Sandra: You get up there [Chicago] at 7:30 and you check in at 10:30ish and you take off at noon. Because international trips of course as you can imagine are bigger airplanes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: They require more time for briefing. The captain usually comes to the briefing to give the flight crew and overview of any turbulence that is going to be on route and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Sandra: But then you go on your 12-hour flight and you get in and arrival time in Tokyo is about 4:00 in the afternoon. So which is.

Interviewer: What time did you take off from Chicago?

Sandra: About noontime.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Sandra: At noontime. So it's four in the afternoon. You don't want to go to bed at 4:30 or 5:00 in Tokyo because then you'll sleep till midnight their time and you will be up all night. So, a lot of us try to stay on their clock. We try to automatically adjust to theirs. So, the pattern is usually try to stay up till at least 8:30 or 9:00 and then go to sleep.

Interviewer: Right.

Sandra: Then if you get up at 4:00 or 5:00 their time it's not so horrible.

Interviewer: Is it the next day?

Sandra: Yes! So you.

Interviewer: If you take off at 12:00 on.

Sandra: Let's just say Monday.

Interviewer: Monday and you arrive 4:00.

Sandra: Tuesday afternoon.

Interviewer: Oh, nice!

Sandra: So, you lose a day going.

(Laughs)

Sandra: And now we are going to take off on Wednesday to come home. So we take off on, no, we take off on Thursday to come home. So Thursday is a real long day. That's like a 40-hour day and our Monday is a short day like 18 hours.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: So.

Interviewer: Wow!

Sandra: So you are up a lot and you are up a long time on the first day and the last day. You just figure out a way to do it.

Sandra flew weekends, which meant leaving for Japan on Friday and returning on the following Monday. This gave her the “biggest bang for her buck” while she was gone: flying the least amount of trips for the biggest financial return. Though she claimed to have a freedom unmatched by other mothers, to the extent that some parents at school were surprised to find out that Sandra worked, she also expressed the feeling of sometimes being out of the loop regarding her son, especially when last minute things came up.

Like many flight attendants, Sandra found the rituals of homecoming important:

Sandra: Well John [her husband] is pretty good as far as I mean he usually makes... When we finish our trip in Chicago, I'm using Tokyo as an example, get in around 12:00 or 1:00.

Interviewer: Right.

Sandra: To catch a 2:00 or thereabout to fly from Chicago to Atlanta and then arrive here around 6:00 so by the time you get home it is 7:00 or 7:30. And he usually has, he usually waits for me for dinner.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. And Michael [her son] as well?

Sandra: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah!

Interviewer: Is that quite a big thing with dinner or?

Sandra: Yeah. Yeah. And he'll at least call when I get in the car and he'll say because he knows when the flight is due to land. And then he gives me a little time to get to my car and he'll start, "Well then where are you?" And I'll say, "I'm driving." And he'll say, "I know, but where are you?" And I'll say "all right I'm at the Stadium or I'm at the Capital or wherever."

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Sandra: And then he figures out whatever it is that he's cooking.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandra: And he knows so that we can eat right away. Yeah. And then we have dinner. You know he asks how the trip was and was anything eventful or uneventful happen. You know? I think only if something really interesting happened like you had somebody you know so worthy or famous. Or you know you had to, I mean even just administering oxygen and first aid and that kind of thing I mean he really doesn't really, I mean if you did CPR that day then that would be something that you would talk about. But we sort of catch up that way then you are so tired because you've been up for 40 some hours at that point.

Interviewer: When you get in, do you change or what's the?

Sandra: Oh, yeah!

Interviewer: You don't sit straight down to dinner or?

Sandra: No! In the uniform? No! I usually (Laughs) just, some people don't even bring the uniforms in the house because it smells like the airplane. You know? But I just change into something real comfortable and I eat and just visit with them and see what's going on. Then I shower and try to stay up again now, even though you wanted to go to bed straight about 8:00.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: You really try to stay up till about 10:00 or 11:00 so that you are re-acclimated right away because the next day when the alarm goes off at 6:00 or 6:30 you've got to get moving. Now I know that some people say, "oh, well I don't do anything the next day. I can hardly even get out of bed." I don't know if I'm lucky or what. I just couldn't sit around and say wow maybe I'll just do a load of laundry. The laundry is going. The dog has been fed. You know and kids are at school. I'm sort of right back into it and like I said I don't know if I'm lucky or. Probably I am it's just that I've got a decent level of high energy or something, you know. But I know some people are really lethargic the next day and I'm tired. I'm not as top form as she might be but you are right back into it. I think for those of us who have been flying for so long like I said unless it's something that is really outstanding that happens we really don't talk about that much.

These rituals are a vital part of the readjustment process as Sandra moves from the mode of work to that of home. Yet despite her (and many other interviewees') claims to not bring the job home with them, there is a point in the build up to the next trip when Sandra would begin to become worried about not making her sign-in in Chicago. As she was commuting she would leave herself enough of a cushion to make sure that she did not miss it. This required getting the first flight out on her airline at 6:00 in the morning, which required getting up at about 3:45. She would spend the day before her trip "watching the weather" to see if it would be necessary to fly up the night before and stay in a hotel. "That is always kind of something that you sweat it out as well," she told me.

Sandra's airline eventually went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy and reduced capacity on its system. One of the flights it cut was the early morning Atlanta-Chicago service. Instead of occasionally having to fly up the night before, Sandra was forced to fly up the night before in order to fly to Japan or other Far Eastern destinations. So "her Monday" as she put it, instead of being Friday, increasingly became Thursday. A four-day trip suddenly became a five-day trip and, if there was difficulty in getting on a flight back

home, six days. There is the option of flying to Europe, but, as these are shorter trips, this would entail flying every weekend, instead of only three a month.

For Sandra, the trade-off between free and intensified time and space became imbalanced. This was expressed, implicitly, when talking about the relationship with her son. It is to be remembered that Michael was a stepson, and Sandra indicated on several occasions certain insecurity in this position, even though she had been part of his life since he was a baby.

Sandra: As far as the guilt in my situation I think I felt badly because Michael would say. He's always called me Sandy since he's been little. And he would say, "Sandy, aren't you going to be at my game, mom, on Friday?" I said, "No! I'm won't be able to be at your game on Friday but I might be able to catch the one on Sunday night." You know?

Interviewer: Right.

Sandra: Or something like that. So he's really a maybe more so than other kids that don't deal with that. Okay, now like he wants to know who's picking me up from the school and I think I told you his school is not too far from here.

Interviewer: Right.

Sandra: He just wants to know that because as, I don't know, that our life is chaotic. It's sort of organized chaos. It's kind of like okay we've got a lot going on but who's on first and who's on second.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: And I think Michael maybe is more of a scheduling hound than other kids his age. He's almost 14.

Interviewer: That's fascinating.

Sandra: Because he said, "who's going to pick me up? Daddy or you?" And "who's taking me to practice tonight and now wait a minute. When do you go to work again?" And he's so excited that I'm on this leave. And he's so excited when we're on vacation.

Interviewer: Wow! Yeah.

Sandra: Because as you go along and you continue to I mean as you gather seniority as you accrue seniority you accrue vacation days. And so our vacations I mean we really can almost stretch them into a month off or three weeks off.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: So our kids always want to know "when's your next vacation or when are you off?" "How long are you off for? Well for six days. "All right, let's see. So that means that you go to work next Tuesday?" And so they know that you are theirs until next Tuesday. And so I don't know maybe they are even more appreciative of you. It's not so dependable that you are going to be there. It's not so ho-hum that you are going to be there but it's more exciting maybe for them?

When I met Michael one time, I jokingly asked him what it was like to have a mom as a flight attendant. He paused and then said "confusing." His concerns about who, where and when were aggravated by 9/11 and worries about safety. He attended a guidance counselor at school, who he told, "You know I really don't like it that my mom is a flight attendant."

Sandra: And she came to me when I was working in the library and she said, "You know Michael is so respectful and blah, blah and he is a little concerned about things."

Sandra also expressed concern about safety herself, though not at the thought of terrorism, as she considered a repeat of the 9/11 events "very unlikely".

Sandra: And then the first time we flew on a pass after that he said that "I kind of nervous. This is the first time I've flown since then." And I said okay you'll be fine. Because I've always thought that our airline was a very safe.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: Good airline that they put standards here and we always went above and beyond what we had to. I mean if they said that you had to have a level 8 or you had to change tires or changes engines after so many miles. We always did it way before that. So I always felt that we were working with a really good airline.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: A very safe airline. Now, this whole bankruptcy thing really you've got to ask yourself you know if they can save money are they going to go above and beyond? I mean I don't think they are going to skip on safety. I mean they but it does concern me, which is part of my whole reason to kind of...

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Sandra: I mean I'm not saying that I think that our airline is not a safe airline. I just think that if you are running out of money are you going to get new tires on your car? But if you have tons of money we've always been like the top dog.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandra: And now we're kind of, well, its kind of unraveling...

She continues:

Sandra: So, I super appreciate time in Atlanta because I love it here. And you know I've flown 26 years so do I want to fly anymore? Um, especially in this day and age.

When I interviewed her, Sandra had taken an unpaid leave of absence to consider her future. One year later, she had still not returned to flying.

The Senior Flyer

Carol, 55, had flown for a national carrier for 32 years. She was based in Atlanta, where she lived with her son, who was about to graduate from high school. She had a daughter at college. Her estranged second husband still played a large part in her son's life. She flew up to the maximum hours allowed on her carrier – 90 – and was “worn out”.

Carol: You do a lot for your kids. I love my kids to death but it is the biggest challenge on a single salary. I hope to retire in seven years. I couldn't afford to retire when all the others did what with the kids at college [her airline offered a lucrative post 9/11 package which many senior flyers took]. When I started I thought I'd be doing this for five years. You're talking about guilt. I'd be angry on the way to work. Any working mother will tell you this. You do feel guilty but I was the supporter. It probably bothered me a lot more than it did them. That's all they have known.

Carol flies “On Board Leader” position, which gives her an extra \$6.00 an hour. In 1996 she began to fly international for the first time, partly for the better money and also because many of her friends were doing so. Flying leadership position restricts her choice of destinations: generally she flies lower-time trips such as London, Manchester, Dublin or Paris.

Her main concerns were the changes that were being planned at the company, parts of which took on the form of rumor, and parts of which she didn't understand:

Carol: I think a lot of things are going to start changing in August. They said, because we usually bid for our vacations like this month and they are postponing it until August and I asked the supervisor the other day, I should of never asked the question because she cornered me for 20 minutes. Because we know they are going to do some stuff to us with everything that is going on.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Carol: I mean they are going after the pilots first. And you know, I think what they are going to do is like preferential bidding which a lot of airlines does that and we don't want it. But.....

Interviewer: How does that work?

Carol: Well you put in the computer like what days you want off, what.... How... What... What hours you want and blah, blah, blah. And they just run it through the computer and they just give you, give you, you know. I know Northwest does it. But they tried to do that with us before and we just went um no, but I think that's coming. I also think that they are going to change our vacations. We have managed time out, now, but they punish us for taking it, because...Because they put it on like our sick days or something. Which is not right. So I think they are going to do away with that and they are just going to take days off of your vacation if you have like a, you know, like my mother was sick, say in the hospital.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Carol: And I've got to go down there. And I think also they may start limiting our swaps to two a month which is so stupid because it's all automated. But they say 80% of flight attendants swap trips. Well a lot of it's the junior people...Because they can't hold and they can do move ups or swap.

Interviewer: Yeah..

Carol: So, I don't, you know, I think is just something that's coming. We all do. So, and we also heard that they are going to offer one more retirement package and it's going to be seven years, full medical. Well, see they've changed the retirement. I just got this; I mean we knew this was coming too. In seven years from now in 2010 as of June our final average earnings because what we get is 60% of our highest three consecutive years of flying in the past ten.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Carol: And so, after 2010 they are not going to do that anymore so anybody that's, you know, well we kind of grandfather in at our seniority. And if you stay to say 65 it's either that or a cash payout well I'm sure my final average earnings. But what worries to me is they have the right to terminate it, change it and I'm afraid they may go down to like 40% and I will be 62 in March before that June of 2010 so I'm right there. I was telling my friend I said, "You know, if they offer this because they've got the full medical." But see I would have the medical but my kids wouldn't plus I've got to go find something else to do.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Carol: There is just no way! But we are all worried that if you know you don't take it you don't know what's going to be in store. So, but I mean I just can't, I'll be there for a long time. But a lot of people will take it with medical.

Interviewer: You think? Yeah.

Carol: A lot of people.

Even if some of Carol's fears turned out to be speculation (in fact the pension changes and preferential bidding were true) the uncertainty over the future is disabling. One other flight attendant put it thus: "It's very stressful to be under the impression that you will have a completely different future ahead of you." Even though Carol's children were adults (her son turned 18 in 2003) she was still responsible for them, especially through matters such as insurance. And the time pressures were evident at home as much as at work.

Carol: And in some ways because they don't need you as much. But, it's like, on my layover I write.... This is the way it is. I write down everything I need to do on my four days off.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Carol: I have to because I can't remember much. (Laughs) I mean I just have to and so you know, I kind of know what I've got to do like last week one of my days off I was on the phone for four hours trying to get insurance, car insurance, because I had canceled mine. Because I had had two wrecks and Cindy [daughter] had had two wrecks. So, that took up one whole day, you know. I knew I had to do that. It's like I've been trying to paint the computer room since November and you know I've gotten it most done. I've ripped the carpet up, I've got to get new carpet in there and I need to finish painting the stairwells, the back stairs. Well I got around to doing that. You know? (Laughs) I mean it's just like there's always

something, you know. But I try to get as much stuff as I can get done when I'm home. I really do. So I don't, it's not like my down time is at home. It's more my layovers. You know I can give myself a facial. You know, just watch CNN or whatever, get out, walk, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Carol: I mean it's always run to the grocery store, run this errand, do this, do that! Aaahh! (Laughs) It's overwhelming sometimes. Sometimes I think, "I don't want to come home!" (Laughs)

Interviewer: (Laughs) Oh, wow! Yeah.

Carol: I mean you know, because there is just always something and these kids used to they don't do it now but they used to. I would come in the door and they would be right here (pointing at something). "Momma can I do this and can I?" And they know how tired I am when I come in. And you know they wouldn't even let me put my bag down and they were just, "mmmmmmmm", I said, "don't ever ask me if you can do something." Because I'm so tired I'll probably say yes and I need to think about it, you know. So they finally quit that but I mean I would just meet them at the door and there were like, "rererereree". You know? (Laughs) I said, "I need to sit down and have a glass of wine."

During one interview, a fellow flight attendant arrived and joined in the conversation. I was immediately witness to the unusually strong camaraderie that often exists among this profession.

Interviewer: Now I've two flight attendants together. Now this is what I'm fascinated by as well is the whole thing with like jump seat therapy. (Laughs) It's true. Because this sounds to me the most extraordinary thing that I've ever heard and every single flight attendant brings it up. They say you get told things and I know you've told me things but I mean I'm just.

Carol: Yep. You learn somebody's life history.

Friend: Like you know Denise [another flight attendant with the same airline]?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Friend: And Martin [her husband]. I mean....

Interviewer: Oh, you know Denise?

Friend: Oh, yeah. Very well.

Carol: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Friend: But you've known these people since you were 21. And now you are in your 50's and you might not see each other all the time or call each other on your days.

Carol: Yeah.

Friend: But I mean we're very bonded that group.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Friend: And we know everything that is going on in everybody's lives and we are very open with each other and we're probably two of them.....

Carol: And you might not see them for a year and you fly with and pick right back up where you left off.

Friend: No and you pick right back up. You know like walking out of the room and coming back in and starting the conversation.

Carol: Conversation. Yeah. It really is.

Interviewer: Wow!

Carol: It's just kind of. That's unique.

Friend: Well how many people stay up all night together and you know and you are not supposed to read or do anything just sit there like a little mindless...

Carol: Idiot. (Laughs)

Friend: You know, idiot. So all you have to do is talk.

Carol: Yeah, that's right.

Friend: That's kind of like being a group in an office.

Carol: Yeah, it is.

(Laughs)

Friend: It's crazy in that office.

(Laughs)

Carol: It is [company name] therapy?

Friend: [Company name] therapy. Well it's better vent and get it out.

Carol: That's right.

Friend: Like I said, "women may give ulcers but we don't get them."

(Laughs)

Carol: That's right. You know women will talk about their families, their kids, their feelings.

Friend: They will talk about anything.

In exchanges like these, work for Carol represents a safe space beyond – and as an alternative – to the home. I have explored the value of this space elsewhere (Whitelegg, 2003a). The problem for Carol is that its value is in danger of being eroded. This is partly due to the job's changing profile. Older flyers detect a qualitative difference in their more junior colleagues.

Interviewer: What about [relations] between you and say the people that came in the late 80s and that because I've talked to some of those?

Carol: And even 90s, totally different.....

Friend: Oh, a totally different work ethic.

Carol: Oh, yeah, totally different.

Friend: I mean.....

Interviewer: In what respect?

Friend: Like when I started.....

Carol: They don't work as hard. I don't think.

Interviewer: Sorry?

Carol: I don't think they work as hard.

Friend: They, when I started now if there was someone our age and they were very, people that are our age now. I mean, but I was new I mean they were old enough to be our mothers. They were probably 35 and we thought they were really old.

Carol: Yeah.

Friend: And you know.....

Carol: Yeah. They were in that.....

(Laughs)

Friend: You know it was yes ma'am, no ma'am, you know what would you like me to do now? Now, just their attitudes, the well we don't have, it's like a kid. "Well we don't have to do that." Well what do you think you are getting paid for? You know and they're just like it's like, they act like they are doing a favor to the passenger..... To you, too it's kind of.....

Carol: It's different. Not all of them are like that.

Friend: No, not all of them are like that. But.....

Carol: It's totally a different work ethic, I think.

Friend: Yeah.

Carol: I don't know if it's because you know my parents were in the depression.

There is also little optimism in the air regarding the future:

Interviewer: How do you think the industry is going to change then for you flight attendants?

Carol: For the worse not for the better. (Laughs)

Interviewer: I mean here's a question. I mean because people say to me, well you know if it's so bad why don't you go join Jet Blue or Air Tran?

Carol: Who would want to start over at this age? (Laughs) Gosh no. We're hanging in for the duration. No matter what it is...

Friend: Well, but um it's been a great job. It's been a great life.

(*They say this together*): It's been a great ride!

(They all laugh)

Friend: And it's just been

Carol: Oh, it has.

Friend: It's just very sad how it's changed but you know that's every industry. That's the world. And you better flow along with it.

Carol: Or you are going to get left behind.

Friend: Or you can sit and stay upset about this forever. It's not going to change anything.

Carol: That's right.

Friend: If we were just 10 years older.

Carol: I would be out of here. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Really?

Carol: Well yeah.

Friend: Oh, yeah. Yeah. If you didn't have your. If your kids were grown, if I hadn't cashed in my 401K in when my husband was sick, you know. But then things are different.

Carol: Well no, you can't.

Friend: But things happen in your life. And you deal with them as they come.

Carol: And they have purpose. Yeah.

Friend: You can at that point in time.

Carol: Yeah. That's exactly right.

Friend: Hey, let's face it we're going to live forever, why would you want to retire now. Because you are going to be starving and living under a bridge and eating cat food if you don't keep working.

Carol: With a tin cup. That's right.

Friend: But I think we have a way of just letting things flow and that's the great thing about this job. You don't take work home.

Carol: Yeah.

Friend: When you leave it's over.

Carol: It's over.

Friend: So you do have a lot of time off where let's face it people in the real world they are working like 60 to 70 hours.....

Carol: Yeah.

Friend: Per week. They are married to their job. When they are not at their job they are bringing work home.

Carol: They are workaholics.

Friend: They think about it all the time. They have to be.

Carol: I know.

Friend: That's the way of the world. You and I would...

Carol: I would never survive out there.

Friend: We would die.

Carol: Yeah, we would. (Laughs)

Friend: We would. Or we would be just living at Waffle House for the rest of our lives. Do you really see yourself teaching school?

Carol: No

Carol was still flying with the same carrier, one year after the final interview.

The Junior flyer

Janice had flown for a national carrier for five years. She was based in Atlanta, where she lived with her husband. They had no children yet, though Janice's hope was eventually to fly part-time and have children. Following 9/11 she took one of the leave packages on offer and got married. She had recently started flying again. Her main fear was that she would end up on reserve again, having only recently become a line holder:

Janice: I spent three years on reserve. I'm in the bottom 1,500 on the seniority list and base closings that are going on are senior bases. My goal is to be on auxiliary, with kids, but I'll end up back on reserve with the furloughs that are going through. I don't really have marketable skills and so I'll end up back on reserve.

She was explicit in her dislike of being on reserve:

Janice: On reserve you get treated like a second-class citizen even though you are the backbone of the airline. You have no control over how much money you make. And it is very hard for my husband. He doesn't like me flying, or being gone. I call him after every flight.

Her low seniority meant she flew trips that hardly match the glamorous image of the profession. When I spoke to her, she was a flying a month of night turnarounds between Atlanta and Denver. This involved leaving in the evening, Atlanta time, and flying the red-eye back to arrive in Atlanta early morning the next day. It is an exhausting trip, though fairly popular with mothers, who can leave the children with spouses and be back in time for breakfast the following morning to take over parenting duties (where sleep falls into this equation is anyone's guess). She flew trips on a common "three on, three off" schedule. Much is made of the flexibility that this affords, but Janice implied that there is less to the free time than may be supposed.

Janice: I fly three on, three off. So I'm tired. When it comes to days off I only get one fun day. On Day 1 I sleep, to recover from the trip. On Day 2 I have fun. And then on Day 3 I have to do all the chores in preparation for the next trip.

Interviewer: So the upcoming trip impinges on your free time then?

Janice: Yes. Before a trip I am busy. I dread it, you know, the night before. I'm tired of leaving. And all of a sudden you hate the job. And you go for a while like this. And then all of a sudden you love it. There is a lot of time pressure, and you don't sleep for nerves.

There was a difficult period at home following Janice's return to work. Her husband, she claimed, "doesn't really understand" what it is like to be a flight attendant in terms of jet lag and fatigue. Despite Janice telling him "not to call her" when she was away, he invariably did, and it would "drive me crazy". Equally, on coming home:

Janice: Getting in, the first thing I do is take a shower. You have to wash the airplane off you. I try to leave it all in the shower. But you do take the job home with you. You are a vegetable for the rest of the night. He says I'm anti-social but I just want to be *home*. These are precious times, you know, to sleep in one's own bed.

There were several ways in which Janice's attitude to the job was markedly different from older colleagues. One was the way she has learned to "play the system" at a relatively early stage in her career. There are various tricks and means through which a flight attendant can lighten her or his load, and Janice suggested that she used these without too much compunction.¹⁰ The argument is not that older flight attendants do not play the system, but that loyalty to the company was longer lasting than the five years Janice had been there. She also hinted at the friction between younger flyers, especially on reserve, and "older international flight attendants". These were "nasty" to junior people in Atlanta. "All they want to do is eat," she adds.

There was also a difference between the relationship between home and work. Though she may express "love" for the job, occasionally, Janice did not appear to revel in the camaraderie and alternative spaces afforded to more senior flyers. Jump seat therapy – the process through which complete strangers pour their life stories out to each other – was an obligation:

Janice: You can't not join in with Jump Seat Therapy. You have to talk.

The job was "lonely":

Janice: For me it's all about getting home. It's not so much about service anymore. It's more about getting there and back. It's a different job since 9/11.

When I interviewed her one year later, Janice's fears had come true. The base closings had pushed her down onto reserve status. She chose to fly "ready reserve" as opposed to "call-in" (in which you are effectively released at parts of the day) as it meant that she could at least guarantee weekends off with her husband. However, with a new bidding system being introduced, even this was unlikely in the future.

Janice: Well you know they're starting a new bidding system in July so I won't be dedicated reserve, I'll be on reserve 9 days instead of 18 so I'm thinking anything can be better than that. So I'm gonna give that a try but it will work out that I'll never see another weekend or holiday again for sure.

Interviewer: Really?

Janice: Oh yeah, definitely not.

Being back on reserve had had a significant impact on her life. She claimed that she was only hanging on at the job because of the possibility of working part-time (auxiliary) next year.

Janice: That's the only reason I'm staying. I'm just waiting for that.

Interviewer: The auxiliary?

Janice: Yeah. Cos this whole reserve thing I mean it's put everything on hold you know. We gonna wait, we can't have, we wanted to start having kids but I'm not doing it on ready reserve.

Interviewer: Really?

Janice: Yeah, so...

Interviewer: You're actually that clear cut in your decision making then?

Janice: Uh huh

Interviewer: Really? Wow.

Janice: I mean I'm not going to do it. You know, you got a call at 2 o'clock in the morning with a baby. No deal. I mean it's hard enough just the two of us. I can't imagine. Girls do it all the time.

Interviewer: Would you have had kids sooner then?

Janice: If I was holding a line we would probably be having them about now, or trying to have them about now.

I asked Janice to describe what it was like being on reserve.

Interviewer: Give me an idea of a week on reserve in terms of your home life.

Janice: Oh, that's where my husband is so frustrated cos I'm usually on call Monday through Friday or Monday through Thursday. So, well I'll start with Sunday night or Sunday all day. Your last day, this isn't just me this is a lot of us, your last day – you only have 2-3 days off usually. Your last day is barely a day off because all you do is check the computer to see what you are doing the next day. So all day I'm on the computer checking. So you're on the computer checking all day, you're trying to, Sundays I'm trying to get the whole house cleaned, clothes washed, the grocery shopping done, checking the computer, checking the computer.

Interviewer: Sorry to butt in but when you say checking the computer you're checking to see if you've been assigned a trip yet?

Janice: Yeah

Interviewer: So how long in advance can you be assigned a trip on reserve?

Janice: Well they work open time at noon so any time from noon until whenever until 2 hours before they need you, you know?

Interviewer: And so what time do they stop needing you?

Janice: Well I go off duty at midnight so Monday at midnight. Like tomorrow I'm relaxed today because I already know my trip, I have standby tomorrow from 4pm to 8pm. That's when you have to go to the airport and wait in the lounge in case they need you. But they usually assign that early in the morning so I checked this morning before I came to meet you, now I know, now I can plan my day. I mean now that I know what I'm doing. I get really um, I'm ok if I know what I'm doing but most of the time because I'm ready reserve they don't assign me something, so you don't know what time to go to bed. I don't know if I should wash my hair before I go to bed or if I'll have time to wash it in the morning. So I mean, you lay...I can't sleep. I can't sleep if I don't have a trip, it's probably my personality.

Interviewer: Yeah, sure.

Janice: But I can't sleep. I wake up a lot looking at the clock. You just don't know what to do, I mean do I need to pack? Do I need to have food to take with me. I mean it gets old, you know. So usually they'll have, so they'll call me Monday sometime, I'll usually get out of bed super early to see if I have a trip.

Interviewer: What time is super early?

Janice: I usually wake up at 6, which may not be super early for you

Interviewer: Yeah, it is

Janice: Because I can't sleep, you know. And usually there's nothing there but I'll sit at the computer all day looking and just about at 5pm or 6pm when you're like there's nothing coming, they'll call you. And you've been up since 6am like an idiot and you know they'll send you on an all nighter. So you'll be up for 24 hours. But my hard time is between 3.30 and 6.30 when traffic is so bad I freak out about being called.

Interviewer: Where do you live?

Janice: Sandy Springs. And you've got two hours to get there in the traffic.¹¹

Interviewer: That's cutting it fine in the rush hour isn't it?

Janice: I'll be packed, hair done, make up done, uniform ready to go, so if they call me I just put it on and go.

Interviewer: You jump in the uniform and drive?

Janice: Yeah. Sometimes at 3.30 if they haven't called me sometimes I'll actually drive to the airport and there's a new mall there with a Target and I'll just hang out there till 6.30 and drive home.

Interviewer: Just in case they call?

Janice: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow.

Janice: So Sundays are crazy.

Interviewer: Well thank god for cell phones

Janice: Sure. But then I'm paranoid that those don't work. Cos they scare you. They're looking for any reason to fire anybody, you know?

Interviewer: Really? That's an extraordinary thing to say. I mean so you've really got that in the back of your mind?

Janice: Yeah. They're saying if they were to call me and I don't answer I would get a failure to be available. They're saying if you get 3 of those in your career they're gonna fire people now. I mean I used to not care. When I was on ready I would do everything but now it's at the point where it matters if you keep your job.

The hostility Janice noted previously (and to which Carol and her friend alluded) between flight attendants was still present.

Janice: We get frustrated as junior flight attendants with senior flight attendants hearing them complain because they complain that they can't swap or they're not getting the line they want you know and I'm like at least you can decide how much money you're going to make, what time you're going to get up, you know, where you're going to be tomorrow night. So we get a little frustrated. It's a lot of junior against senior. It's a lot of hostility between the two.

She continues:

Janice: It's the lack of control, you know before it was like oh look where am I going tonight this is so exciting but now it's like where the hell am I gonna, where am I sleeping, when am I gonna be home. My dad says it's because I'm married but I don't think it is, I think it is that at seven years you just want to know what you're doing. It's not exciting anymore. When can I wash clothes? When can I go to the store? It might just be my personality but I'm fine just as long as I know what I'm doing. I'm, I just need to know where I'm going, you know. Like tomorrow, where am I going to be sleeping? What do I need to pack? Where am I going? What time am I gonna be home, you know? It just gets. It was fun, I mean the first year where am I going but like now its your up in the air and its where am I *going* (sarcastic).

In the above paragraph, Janice uses the word “where” eight times. She continues:

People always ask me what's your favourite destination, what's your favourite flight and I say the flight home. I say the last flight of the day, that's my favourite flight. I don't even look at layovers I just look at how long they are and if I'll get enough rest.

One of her final thoughts was this:

Janice: I wish that I hadn't become a flight attendant but what are you gonna do now?

What are we to make of these stories? There is a temporal dimension to each of them: Sandra had to spend more time commuting to and from work, and was therefore left with less time at home; Carol could not retire for another six years, though she worries that by then her pension will have decreased in value; Janice feared being placed back on reserve, spending most of her time worrying about being summoned to fly anywhere with two-hours notice.

But they are also spatial. For Sandra and Janice, the fear of not getting to work was spatialized: Sandra had to fly a thousand miles to get there; Janice “freaked out” about getting through the traffic and so, even when not needed, drove to a mall in the airport vicinity just in case. The more onerous commuting schedule left Sandra with less space for herself and her family; for Carol, the trip itself provided space both among her co-workers and during the layover. Sometimes, she didn't want to come home. Conversely, Janice's space was to be found at home, perhaps especially on “Fun Day 2”. It is salient that meal times, a view endorsed by many other interviewees, became an important *space* for family interaction.

Most important, however, these stories are about the *relation* between time and space. The balancing act involves the search for equilibrium between the two, otherwise called autonomy, and is in fact a site of negotiation and hegemonic struggle. And for Sandra, Carol, Janice and a host of other flight attendants, it is the erosion of autonomy that figures highest in their concerns for the future. Flight attendants' goals at the end of the rainbow were a balance between time and space. They are now increasingly faced with an imbalance: as companies extend control over time, the spaces of flight attendants are being eroded.

Conclusion: The Last Dance

The notion of being a flight attendant as a career is increasingly doomed. Or rather the career will be significantly different. Current projections suggest that low-cost carriers and regional airlines are likely to account for nearly half the US airline market by 2015 (*Air Transport World*, 2004). For a reduced fare, passengers are increasingly likely to forsake service even on international flights. The hub-and-spoke route networks, through which major companies captured passengers and achieved economies of scale, are likely to become increasingly redundant as passengers opt for point-to-point services. Smaller, more powerful airplanes will fly these routes, often with only one flight attendant.

Congress recently passed – at the AFA’s instigation – a bill that will require all flight attendants to become certified as safety professionals. This measure brought them in line with pilots and mechanics. On the one hand, it may make workers less disposable; on the other, it makes them potentially more itinerant. Flight attendants already shift carriers, moving from small to large. A federal safety certificate could increase sub-contracting of flight attendants. If all that is needed to secure work at short notice is a nationally recognized safety certificate, one could see the rise of “supply” flight attendants in a similar way to supply teachers, though this will obviously be strongly resisted by unions.

The impact of safety certification is difficult to predict, but other developments suggest that labor is not quite down and out. For a start, there is no reason why low cost carriers should be union free. Both Air Tran and Southwest, for instance, have union recognition and both have been involved in protracted contract disputes. Air Tran’s attempt to introduce a fixed-term contract was firmly resisted. In Europe, while Ryanair remain staunchly anti-union, easyJet, the other main low-cost flyer, recently recognized the main UK cabin crew union. Equally, flight attendants also won a great deal of public sympathy and empathy following the horrific events of 9/11, which has helped unions re-focus their emphasis on the workers being safety professionals as opposed to drink sellers (though this did not stop Song and Hooters Air trying to bring hilarity and outright sexism, respectively, back into flying).

Unions are of course beneficial to companies on occasions, not least in the attempts by union officials to dampen down grass-roots militancy. Indeed, there have been several recent moves to switch union representation at airlines by rank-and-file workers. Flight attendant unions are not high up in the food chain of industrial muscle in the industry. As one international union official told me: if flight attendants don’t turn up, the airline will just get more flight attendants; if the food or fuel doesn’t turn up, that plane doesn’t fly.¹²

However, the power of labor may be challenged by the changing profile of flight attendants. If they feel that their autonomy is being reduced and that the compensatory spaces of the job are being squeezed by greater time demands, flight attendants may not hang around too long. Sandra was unlikely to return; Janice would only stay if she could work-part time; Carol wanted to leave and was only staying for her pension. With

changing demographics and pension schemes that no longer reward longevity of service, the number of Carols is likely to diminish.

In their place will come a group of workers with less emotional investment in the industry. Company loyalty (in both directions) will become extinct. Flight attendants will jump between companies as and when possible, or they will leave for other jobs. Two demographic groups are likely to emerge. One will be college leavers or workers in their early twenties, who will use the job as a stopgap, similar to the baristas in Starbucks examined by Klein; the other will be older workers who have raised a family and want to “have fun”, as one termed it in interview. Neither group will view the job as a long-term career, nor will they become so addicted to the job – because of deteriorating conditions – that they will change their mind. If they stay ten years it will be because of lethargy, not love, or lack of opportunities elsewhere. The future is summed up by one worker on a flight attendant website:

Contract work is fine for some, but I want a career! It seems like many of the airlines are looking for ways to make that less and less of a possibility for their front-line employees.¹³

Of course, flight attendants mirror many employees in the US, and across the world, who have found the notion of job-for-life increasingly redundant. The temporal and spatial jumbling of flight attendants is merely an extreme form of a pervasive condition. Like many other workers, in their dance with time and space flight attendants worry that someone is speeding up the tempo. Indeed, the music may be turned off altogether. In the big squeeze of the airline industry, dance-floor delights are being increasingly transformed into musical chairs.

References

AFA [Association of Flight Attendants]. 2003a. “The Impact of the September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks on Flight Attendant Well-being.” Paper prepared by the Employee Assistance Program, Association of Flight Attendants, Washington DC.

AFA [Association of Flight Attendants]. 2003b. “Selected Results From a Survey of Flight Attendants’ Post 9/11 Views About Their Jobs and Careers.” Paper prepared by the Employee Assistance Program, Association of Flight Attendants, Washington DC.

Air Transport World. 2004. “Industry is Rebounding, FAA Says.” March 26. At www.atwonline.com/indexfull.cfm?newsid=4012. Visited March 26.

Associated Press. 2002. “Delta Downsizing.” October 30.

Bailey, Elizabeth; Graham, David and Kaplan, Daniel. 1986 *Deregulating the Airlines*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

- Ballard, Terri; Corradi, Laura; Lauria, Laura; Mazzanti, Clelia; Scaravelli, Giulia; Sgorbissa, Federica; Romito, Patizia and Verdecchia, Arduino. 2003. "Integrating Qualitative Methods into Occupational Health Research: A Study of Women Flight Attendants." *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 61: 163-166.
- Barry, Kathleen. 1999. "Lifting the Weight: Flight Attendants' Challenges to Enforced Thinness." *Iris*. 38: 50-54.
- Berman, Marshall. 1983. *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*. London: Verso.
- Berman, Marshall. 1999. "The People in *Capital*." In *Adventures in Marxism*. London: Verso, 79-90.
- Blyton, Paul; Martinez, Miguel; McGurk John and Turnbull Peter. 1998. *Contesting Globalization: Airline Restructuring, Labour Flexibility and Trade Union Strategies*. London: International Transport Workers Federation.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory and Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Business Week*. 2004. "Cute New Planes, Same Old Problems." March 1.
- Capelli, Peter. 1985. "Competitive Pressures and Labor Relations in the Airline Industry." *Industrial Relations*, 24: 316-338.
- Clarke, Susan. 2003. "Changes May Shrink Nest Eggs." *Orlando Sentinel*, January 5.
- Cobble, Dorothy Sue. 1999. "'A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm': Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women's Service Jobs in the 1970s." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 56: 23-44.
- Corey, Kristen; Galvin, Deborah; Cohen, Marcia and Bekelman, Alan. 2003. "Impact of the 9/11 Attack on Flight Attendants: A Study of an Essential First Responder Group. Paper prepared by the Employee Assistance Program, Association of Flight Attendants, Washington DC.
- Desrosiers, Alyce and Emlen, Arthur. 1997. *Airlines, Flight Attendants, and Dependent Care*. Portland State University.
- Downey, Gregory. 2002. *Telegraph Messenger Boys*. New York: Routledge.
- The Economist*. 2004. "Silver Linings, Darkening Clouds." March 27: 67-70.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1989. *Fear of Falling*. New York: Harper Collins.

- Fight Back!* 2003. "Airline Industry in Tailspin. Spring. At www.fightbacknews.org/2003-2-spring/archives.htm
- Gil, Avishai. 1990. "Air Transport Deregulation and Its Implications for Flight Attendants." *International Labour Review*, 129: 317-331.
- Gittell, Jody, Von Nordenflycht, Andrew and Kochan, Thomas. 2003. *Mutual Gains or Zero Sum? Labor Relation and Firm Performance in the Airline Industry*. MIT Sloan School of Management Working Paper 4298-03.
- Goo, Sara and Downey, Kirstin. 2003. "Airlines Aim to Make Strikes More Difficult." *Washington Post*. January 7.
- Grantham, Russell. (2003). "Delta's Song All Tuned Up For Battle." *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 9.
- Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, David. 1996. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, Geraint and Turnbull, Peter. 2002. *Contesting the Crisis: Aviation Industrial Relations and Trade Union Strategies After 11 September*. London: International Transport Workers Federation.
- Heuven, Ellen and Bakker, Arnold. 2003. "Emotional Dissonance and Burnout Among Cabin Attendants." *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 12: 81-100.
- Hochschild, Arlie. 1983. *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie. 1989. *The Second Shift*. New York: Avon.
- Hochschild, Arlie. 2001. *The Time Bind*. New York: Owl.
- Jennings, Mark. 1993. "Surviving the Cuts." *Airline Business*. December 28-29
- Johnson, Nancy Brown. 1995. "Pay Levels in the Airlines Since Deregulation." In Peter Capelli (ed.) *Airline Labor Relations in the Global Era*, Ithica: ILR Press, 101-115.
- Kane, Paula. 1974. *Sex Objects in the Sky*. Chicago: Follett.
- Kesmodel, David. 2004. "UAL Labor United Over Move." *Rocky Mountain News*, January 16.

- Kirsner, Scott. 2003. "Song's Startup Flight Plan." *Fast Company*, 71: 98-104.
- Klein, Naomi. 2001. *No Logo*. London: Flamingo.
- Lawton, Thomas. 2002. *Cleared for Take-Off*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lessor, Roberta. 1984. "Social Movements, the Occupational Arena and Changes in Career Consciousness: the Case of Women Flight Attendants." *Journal of Occupational Behaviour*, 5: 37-51.
- Lett, AlexSandra. 1980. "Coffee, Tea and Dignity: Knocking Down Employment Barriers 37,000 Feet Up," *Perspectives*, 12: 4-11.
- Levine, Robert. *A Geography of Time*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lombardo, David. 2004. "Online Study Researches Aircrew Stress Level." At www.ainonline.com/issues/03_04/03_04_onlinestudyp41.html Website visited on April 10, 2004.
- MacDonald, Leslie; Deddens, James; Grajewski, Barbara; Whelan, Elizabeth and Hurrell, Joseph. 2003. "Job Stress Among Female Flight Attendants." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 45: 703-714.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. London: Polity.
- Marx, Karl. 1976 [1867]. *Capital*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin.
- Marx, Karl. 1967 [1848]. *The Communist Manifesto*. Translated by Samuel Moore. London: Penguin.
- Merrifield, Andy. 1999. "A Dialectical Urbanism." Book review of Marshall Berman, *Adventures in Marxism* (Verso, 1999). *The Nation*, November 4.
- Moen, Phyllis (Ed.). 2003. *It's About Time*. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Murphy, Alexandra. 1998. "Hidden Transcripts of Flight Attendant Resistance." *Management Communication Quarterly*, 11: 499-535.
- Murphy, M. 1986 *The airline that pride almost bought: the struggle to take over continental* New York: Scholastic Library Publishers.
- Muse, Lamar. 2002. *Southwest Passage: The Inside Story of Southwest Airlines Formative Years*. Austin: Eakin Press.

- Nielsen, Georgia. 1982. *From Sky Girl to Flight Attendant*. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Omelia, Johanna and Waldock, Michael. 2003. *Come Fly With Us: A Global History of the Airline Hostess*. Portland: Collectors Press.
- PR Newswire. 2001. "Northwest Airlinck/Mesaba Airlines Flight Attendants Fight for Equitable Wages." August 5. At www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m4PRN/2001_August_5/76982591/pl/article.jhtml
- Petzinger, Thomas. 1995. *Hard Landing*. New York: Times Business.
- Presser, Harriet. 2003. *Working in a 24/7 Economy*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Reed, D 1993. *American Eagle: the Ascent of Bob Crandall and American Airlines*. London: St. Martins Press.
- Rich, Elizabeth. 1972. *Flying High: What It's Like to be an Airline Stewardess*. Revised Edition. New York: Stein and Day.
- Rozen, Freida. 1987. "Technological Advances and Increasing Militance: Flight Attendant Unions in the Jest Age. In Barbara Wright (ed.) *Women, Work and Technology*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 220-238.
- Saunders, M. 1992. *Eastern's Armageddon: Labor Conflict and the Destruction of Eastern Airlines*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Sharkey, Joe. 2003. "Major Changes Foreseen in Air Travel." *New York Times*, October 7.
- Smith, Neil. 1984. *Uneven Development*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Song. 2003. "Song in the Cities." At <http://www.upgradebuddy.com/docs/song.html> Visited April 26, 2004.
- Song. 2004. Airline website compliment board. At www.flysong.com/song_and_you/compliments/index/jsp. Visited March 2, 2004.
- Sullivan, Bobbie and Edman, Jeanne. 2004. "Flying Partners: Evidence for a Global Supraculture Composed of People Who Fly For a Living." Paper given at Society for Cross-Cultural Research conference, San Jose, CA February 19.
- Tait, Nikki. 1990. "Painful Predicaments of the High-Flyers." *Financial Times*, 19 November.

Thompson, Edward. 1967. "Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism." *Past and Present*, 38: 56-97.

Thompson, Sandra. 2003. "A Hip-Filled Flight Experience Recalls the Days of In-Flight Elegance." *St. Petersburg Times*, November 29.

Tomkins, Richard. 1993. "Dinosaurs on the Runway." *Financial Times*, December 8.

Tyler, Melissa and Abbott, Pamela. 1998. "Chocs Away: Weight Watching in the Contemporary Airline Industry." *Sociology*, 32: 433-450.

Volpe, Joan. 1984. *Study of Flight Attendant Subculture*. Report prepared for the Employee Assistance Program, Association of Flight Attendants, Washington DC.

Whitelegg, Drew. 2003a. *The Lights are On; I Must be at Work: Aspects of "Home" in the Lives of Flight Attendants*. Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life, Working Paper 25.

Whitelegg, Drew. 2003b. "Sowing the Seeds of Globalization: Delta Air Lines, 1970-1995." *Transportes, Servicios y Telecomunicaciones*, 6: 86-103.

Whitelegg, Drew. 2003c. "Touching Down: Labour, Globalisation and the Airline Industry." *Antipode*, 35: 244-263.

Whitelegg, Drew. Forthcoming. "Places and Spaces I've Been: The Geographies of Flight Attendants." *Gender, Place and Culture*.

Williams, Claire. 1988. *Blue, White and Pink Collar Workers in Australia: Technicians, Bank Employees and Flight Attendants*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Williams, Claire. 2000. "A Pain in the Neck: Passenger Abuse, Flight Attendants and Emotional Labour." *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety, Australia and New Zealand*, 16: 429-435.

¹ Research for this paper was funded by the Alfred. P Sloan Foundation and was carried out between 2002 and the present at the Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life, Emory University, Atlanta. The basis for much of its content is a series of interviews conducted with flight attendants and trade union officials. Over fifty interviews have been conducted, as well as one focus group and one other panel. Flight attendants have been married, single, separated, divorced, male, female, white, black, gay, straight, parents and non-parents. I have also interviewed at least one flight attendant who began work in every decade from the 1950s to the 1990s and representing the following airlines: Delta, United, American, Song, Continental, Air Tran, Northwest and Atlantic South East. I would like to express my gratitude to all who gave their time to be interviewed. Any mistakes of interpretation are mine alone. THIS WORKING PAPER IS NOT TO BE CITED WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR.

² According to Bureau of Labor statistics, there were 115,750 flight attendants in 2001, up from 111,170 in 1998. The most recent available figure is an estimated 104,360 for 2002.

³ For an excellent counterpoint see the opening section to *Family Revival: Salem Camp Meeting*, a film directed by the MARIAL Center's Bradd Shore and shot by Scott Edmonson. The combination of clocks charting the rush-hour commute as two families try to negotiate getting their kids to school and themselves to work across the jammed freeways of Atlanta underscores the dialectical relationship between time and space.

⁴ The brilliant Andy Merrifield first pointed this out to me and made great play of it in his review of Berman's book in *The Nation*. See Merrifield (1999).

⁵ Despite the rhetoric of free marketeers, the state continued transfer payments to the industry through the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), contracts with airline manufacturers, chartering of aircraft for military use and, following 9/11, direct handouts.

⁶ The response rate for the initial EAP survey was low. Only 9 percent of the 51,906 members responded (n=4,676). Follow up contacts were made with the 2,299 of the non-responders, from whom 1,597 replied (response rate=69.5%). The information is supplemented by an interview with Heather Healy of the EAP division, AFA, conducted in Washington DC in January 2003.

⁷ My knowledge of these matters and the changes in the profession has been greatly enhanced by telephone and e mail conversations with the following: Terri Ballard, Kathleen Barry, Alyce Desrosiers, Leslie MacDonald and Bobbie Sullivan. Again, mistakes of interpretation are mine.

⁸ These limitations were set by the airline and were within FAA regulations.

⁹ The absence of flight hour restrictions (other than FAA) did attract some senior flyers who could maximize their pension accordingly.

¹⁰ To protect both Janice and her fellow workers, I shall not list them here.

¹¹ Sandy Springs is a northern suburb of Atlanta, about 25 miles from the airport. Freeway congestion in the Atlanta metropolitan area is among the worst in the nation.

¹² Unions are in an invidious position in the airline industry. Subject to Railway Labor Act legislation, they may only negotiate with individual companies as opposed to at the industry level. This therefore ties workers' fate to that of the company itself and makes them more likely to accept cuts in an attempt to save their carrier. Losing their jobs would send them to the bottom of the seniority list at an alternate carrier, as well as destroying their pensions. For this argument see *Fight Back!* (2003).

¹³ This section of the website was not password protected, but out of respect to the forum and workers involved, it will remain anonymous.