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Airways

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There is no other human activity that emits as much CO2 over such a short period of time as aviation, thereby significantly contributing to the acceleration of global warming, releasing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

As an artist and former air traffic controller, I am interested in the profound impact of the air travel system on the natural environment and other species - as bodies on the ground and bodies in the air. Bodily movements are key in unearthing encounters and entanglements of animals and infrastructure, as a terrain of mobility-in-action that is normally difficult to portray or represent. Most recently, due to the global spread of a coronavirus, worldwide air travel disruption has resulted in significant changes to the usual rhythm of flight, with humans effectively becoming de-centered and reconfigured within a broader ecological/multispecies system.

My paper will discuss a recent collaboration between myself, a musician (Micah Livesay) and mathematician (Chris Batterton) that resulted in the creation of an immersive video/sound installation (Airways 2020), which aims to show the environmental impact of aviation and more broadly ways in which the atmosphere is permeated at every layer by technologies of communication, transportation and scientific research. By using the mathematics of quantum wave superposition based upon aircraft movement data in New Zealand, the installation draws attention to the mathematical and statistical models playing essential roles in evaluating the effects of human activities, while also questioning and stretching the sensorium through animated renders and a musical score. Drawing upon creative synergies between artistic and scientific thinking, 'Airways' reworks dynamic acoustic exchanges (humans and birds) alongside processes of calculation /computation to better our understanding of habitat connectivity and entanglements of species/human/non-human systems and networks.