



*coming and going:*

NEW YORK (Subway) PARIS (Metro) San Francisco (BART) Washington (METRO)



**To my mother and father**

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San Francisco, CA 94131

*coming and going:*

**PETER D'AGOSTINO**

**NEW YORK (Subway) PARIS (Metro) San Francisco (BART) Washington (METRO)**

## Preface

*Coming and going* represents a body of work (1977-82), concerning mass transportation and communication systems. These projects are explorations of mass transit, focusing on the *subway*\* as a system which interconnects a city, and the function of 'transit' as metaphor: as a conveyor of information and a vehicle for communication.

Within the context of a dialectical process, *coming and going* reflects my interest in the juxtaposition of personal and cultural codes of perception, language, structure, and ideology.

The publication of this book serves as the medium for completing my recent work *coming and going: NEW YORK (Subway)*, and to document the earlier works in this series.

I have provided the following outline in order to orient the reader to the structure of the book.

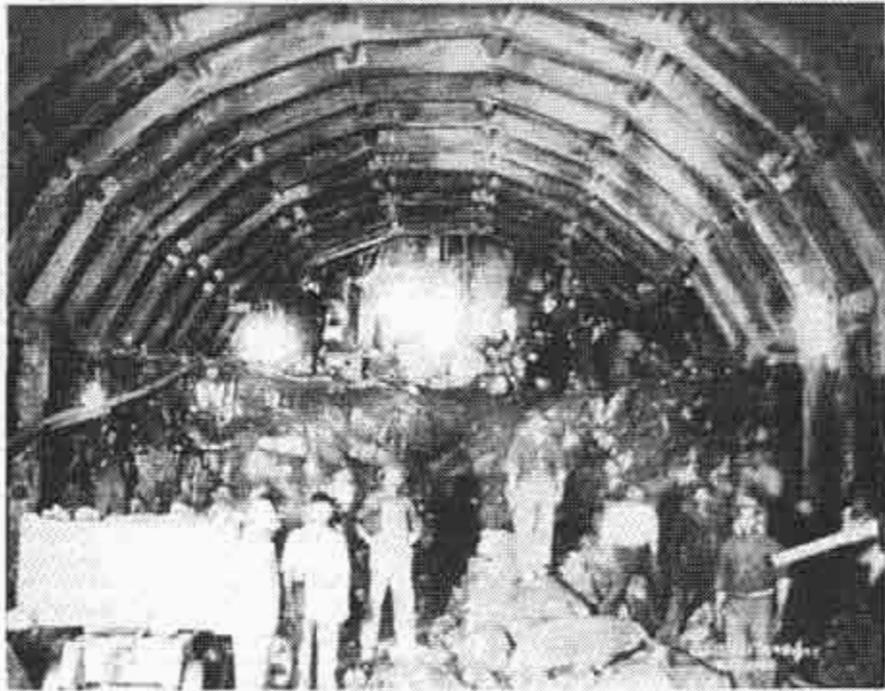
- Part 1 A new photo/text piece, *NEW YORK (Subway)* was designed from my 'working notes' of a video work originally intended as the concluding project in the *coming and going* series.
- Part 2 *PARIS (Metro)*, *San Francisco (BART)*, and *Washington (METRO)* were presented as video installations incorporating elements of the *stilled* image and written texts as an integral part of these works. Rather than serving solely as documentation, I have attempted to provide primary source material in order to give a primary reading of these works within the context of the book.
- Part 3 \**Coming and going: Angel Island* was originally presented as a participatory event, but served as a prototype for the later projects. The event incorporated a ferry ride shuttling to and from Angel Island and San Francisco. It was this cyclical system of transit that initially suggested the concept of *coming and going* to me.

## *coming and going:*

Part 1: TEXT	NEW YORK (Subway)	6
Part 2: VIDEO	PARIS (Metro)	34
	San Francisco (BART)	46
	Washington (METRO)	54
	Brechtian Dialectics Applied by Robert Atkins	62
Part 3: EVENT	Angel Island	70
	COME and GO: by Kristine Stiles	76
Appendix	Exhibitions/Publications	83
	Letter by Lew Thomas	85
	Acknowledgements	86

**“The subways themselves  
are a fiction, a text,  
whose meaning  
each reader (rider)  
constructs for himself.”**

**THE NEW YORK SUBWAY OPENED OCTOBER 27, 1904.**



# ABSTRACTION

How To Use This Map

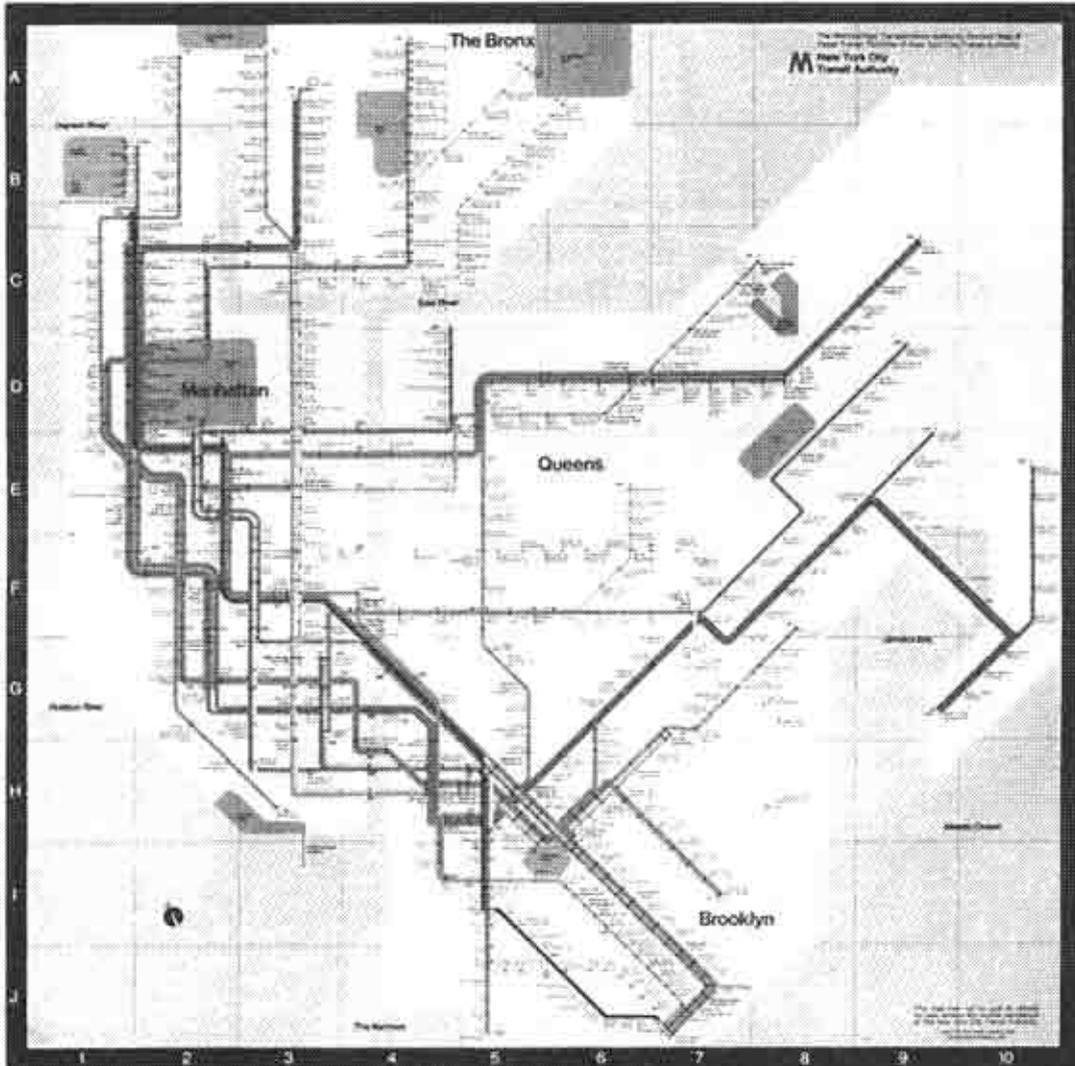
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MID

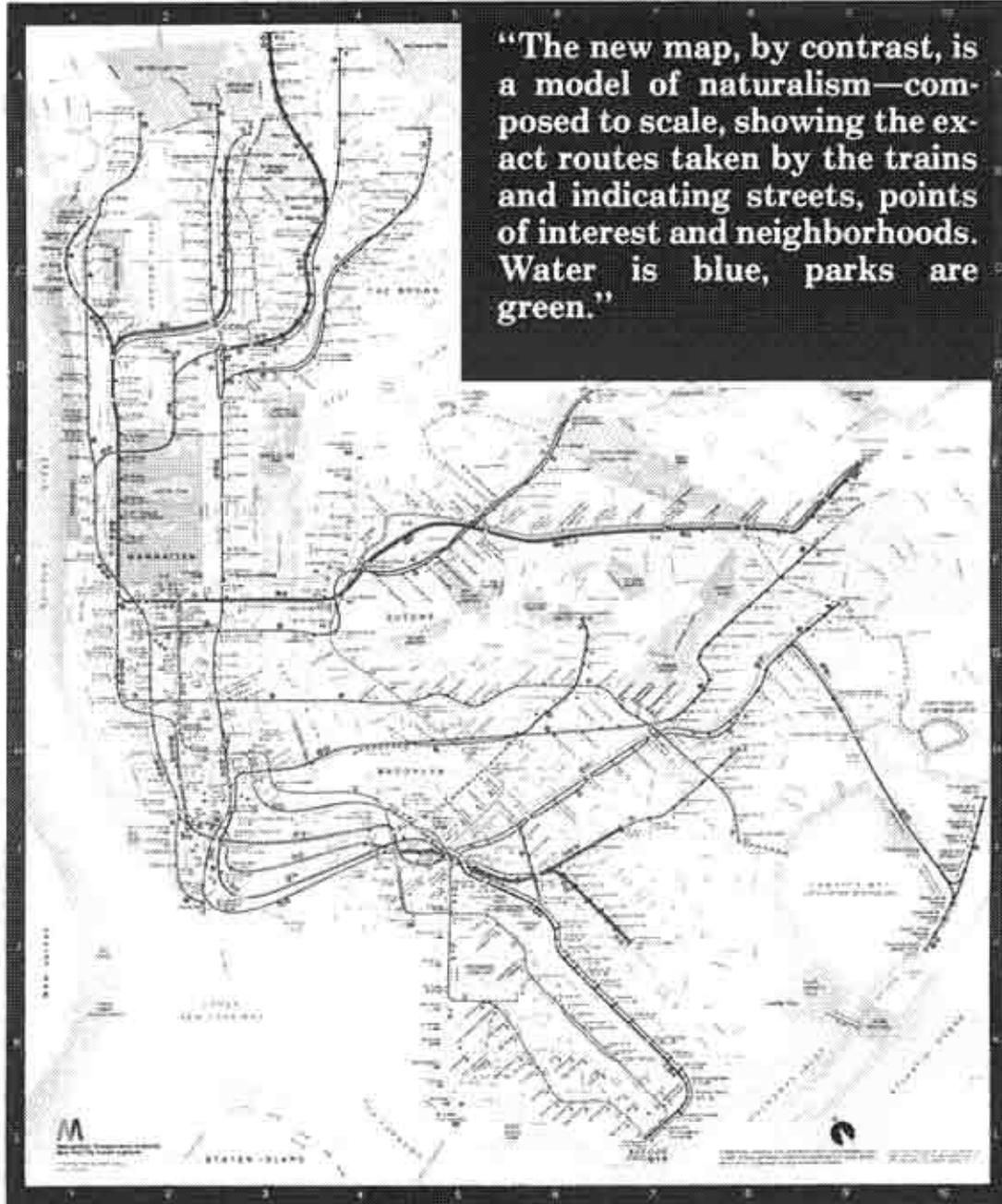
BMT

“The 1972 edition was a stylized schematic with no respect for verisimilitude: all subway routes were represented as vertical, horizontal or 45-degree lines, and virtually no geographic landmarks were indicated.”



# EMPATHY

“The new map, by contrast, is a model of naturalism—composed to scale, showing the exact routes taken by the trains and indicating streets, points of interest and neighborhoods. Water is blue, parks are green.”



For your greatest safety  
between 5am & 4am please  
board trains at the  
forward end of the  
platform.  
Thank you for your  
cooperation.  
New York City  
Transit Authority



PIE

DOWNT

WATCH

**OWN TRAINS**

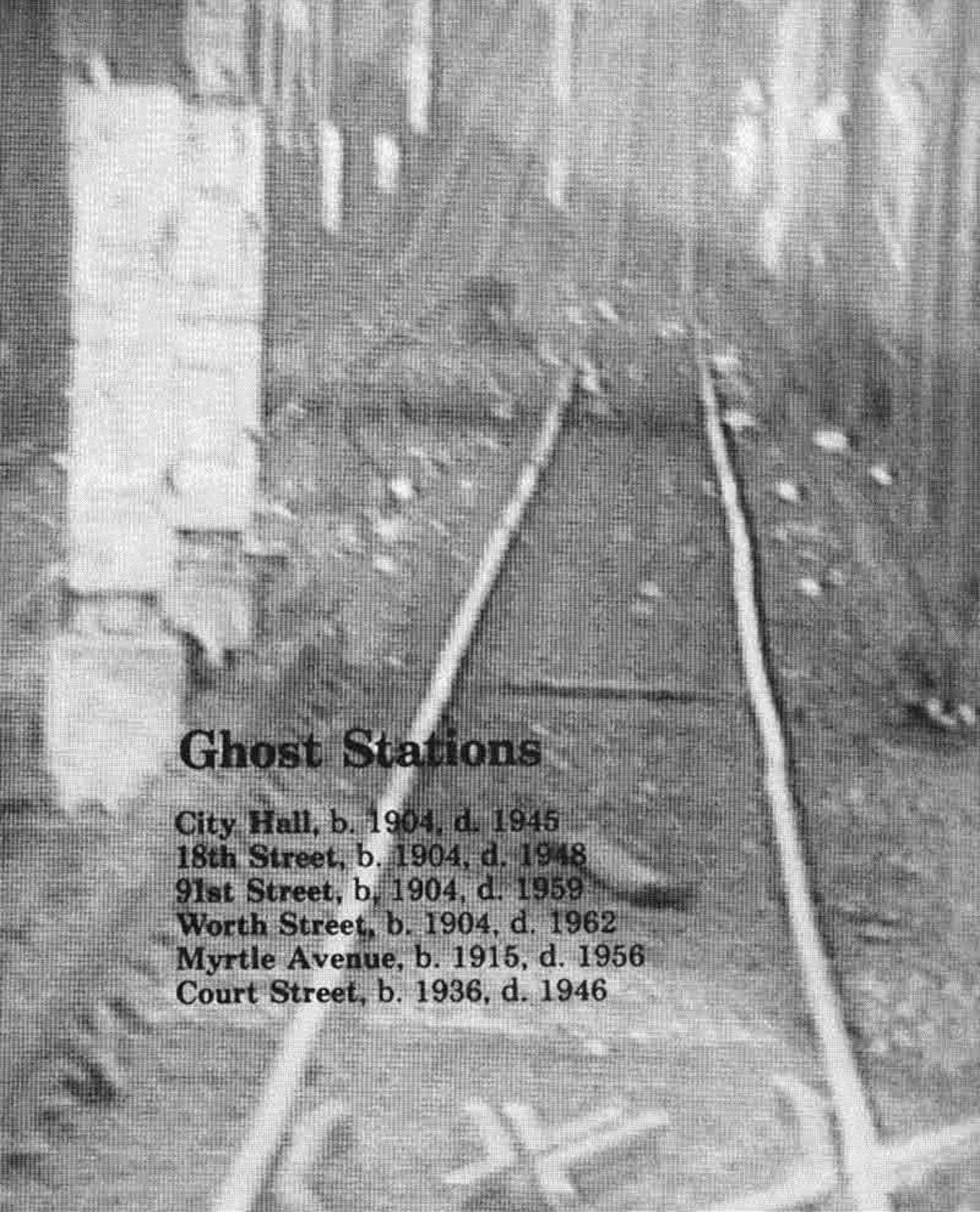
PID

**H YOUR STEP**

## Some Statistics

3¼ - 4 million people ride the subway daily on 828 miles of trackway (1650 miles of rail with 2 million ties) between 458 stations over 6 bridges and through 14 under river tubes. They pass through 2,800 turnstiles walk up and down 90,000 steps with 18,000 handrails.





## **Ghost Stations**

**City Hall, b. 1904, d. 1945**

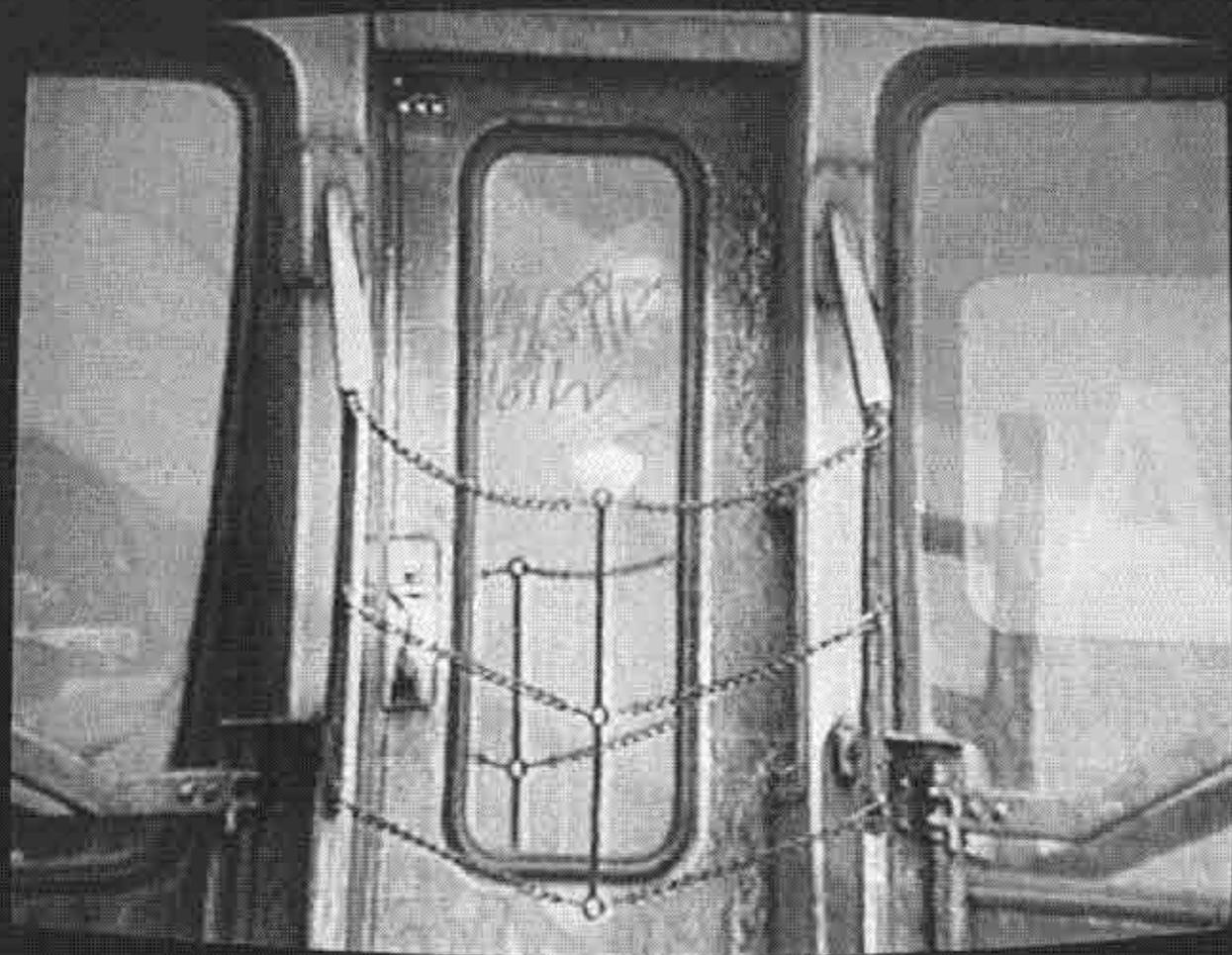
**18th Street, b. 1904, d. 1948**

**91st Street, b. 1904, d. 1959**

**Worth Street, b. 1904, d. 1962**

**Myrtle Avenue, b. 1915, d. 1956**

**Court Street, b. 1936, d. 1946**



**HAVEN'T YOU WRITTEN DRIVEL LONG ENOUGH?**

Find out how to wake up your writing, get your point across & enjoy doing it. Dec 5-7 Call Virginia Vance, 925-5566 or write: THE WRITING WORKSHOP, Hunter College, 182 Grand St., N.Y.C. 10013

**Mindy this is Wes**

lost your number - please call me (w) 741- 0784 (h) 362-2334.

**STRIP-A-GRAM®The 1st Erotic Telegram**

Ideal for all occasions. No full nudity. Male/Female  
"Say it naturally with a Strip-A-Gram" 212/599-3155

**Cer, All knees, no brains; you don't need her. tT**

**WE RODE D TRAIN TOGETHER WED 11/12**

about Midnite from 59th St to Bklyn. You went to Ave U, I read the News over your shoulder, would have missed my stop without you. I wish I had, I'd like to see you again. Contact vvp8257

**PAY YOURSELF TO LEARN NEW EATING HABITS!!!**

Weight groups forming now. INSTITUTE FOR BEHAVIOR THERAPY.  
Free Orientation Meeting: 212/ 686-8778

**FLORIDA ORANGES, TANGELOS, GRAPEFRUIT**

Tree Ripened. DEC. 13 Delivery

Navals sm. box (40-50) \$8.50; lge box (80-100) \$15  
Tangelos sm. \$7; lge \$12; Grapefruit sm. box (18-24) \$7; lge box (25-48)\$12  
Dec. 1 deadline: Mail payment to: Eltingville Lutheran Church  
300 Genesee Ave., Staten Island, NY 10312 or CALL 984-8830 9am-3pm

**Join the Indian people on a Long Walk for Survival**

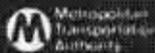
Meet Sat, Nov 22, 9AM, at the George Washington Bridge  
Walk to Central Park for rally at Sheep Meadow at 1PM.  
Call for more info: 212/598-0100

**JB-We know**

it'll be very hot in Mexico at Xmas & very cold in NYC, but isn't the important thing being where the REAL "warmth" is? We won't ask you to change your plans - we'd love to be in that warm weather ourselves. But at least let's have a "hot" NY's Eve together. You know WE CAN DELIVER on NY's Eve, so get over Chiquito & come back to your F. & FW'er

## HOW TO RUIN A PICKPOCKET'S DAY.

- 1** Use handbags that close tightly, and carry them securely.
- 2** Carry wallets inside coat or side pants pockets—never in back pants pockets.
- 3** Beware of loud arguments or commotion. Incidents can be staged to distract you while a pocket is picked.
- 4** If you're jostled in a crowd, be aware that a pickpocket might be responsible.
- 5** If your pocket is picked, call out immediately to warn the driver or conductor and everyone else that there's a pickpocket on board. Don't be afraid to shout.
- 6** Avoid crowding in the area of the subway car doors when entering or exiting. This will minimize the chance of losing your property to a pickpocket.





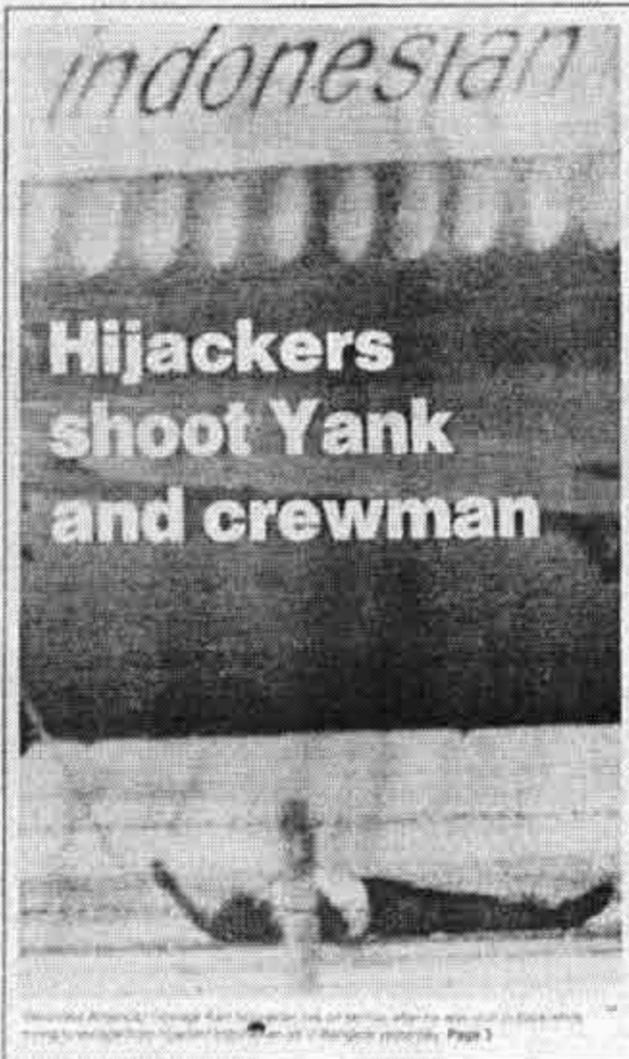
## A PICKPOCKET GLOSSARY.

- Breach** Side pants pocket.
- Bridge** Left or right front pocket.
- Cannon** Individual who removes property from pockets.
- Dick** Pickpocket detective.
- Dip** Placing hand in pocket or purse.
- Framing** Using two or more stalls to distract victim.
- Lush-worker** Victimizes sleeping drunks.
- Mark** Victim.
- Prat** Rear pants pocket.
- Stall** Accomplices of pickpocket who distract victim.
- Tip** A crowd.
- Whiz** Organized group of pickpockets.
- Wire** The pickpocket.

© 1980 Metropolitan Transportation Authority

⋮ ⋮

# DEATH ON IRT



## Yonkers man slain on subway

Page 2

## Crime Boss Funzi Tieri dies at 76

Page 2

## THE CRISIS IN POLAND

Marathon talks fail to avert strike

Page 3

## IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN

New series on battle against the IRS starts today on Page 5

City Taste: Trastevere, where the food is too fast / P.3  
I, Claudia: Paul Lynde may drop 'Enquirer' suit / P.5  
Two on an Island: Howard Stein and Tawn Christian / P.6

City Week Begins March 30, 1987

# Manhattan

# GRAFFITI

*Is the art world ready for it?*

By STEVEN MAGEE



The word 'graffiti' refers to the name given to the art form. This photo shows the artists who created it.

**T**HEY STARTED as outlaws, invading the subway yards by night, armed with fists full of magic markers and sacks full of spray paint. More than a decade later, the graffiti writers, as they call themselves, are still waging a guerrilla war against the MTA, which spends millions of dollars each year to erase their fanciful handiwork. Lately, though, the more ambitious writers have acquired a new, aboveground cachet, and a new audience for their efforts. With the encouragement of some influential gallery owners and collectors, the subway scrawlers are making a serious bid to be accepted in the art world.

On April 9, an exhibit of their graffiti paintings, "Beyond Words," opens at the Mudd Clynx gallery. graffiti writers also have participated in four New York alternative space exhibitions in the last six months. Some even a private

Yo Breat

WRITERS CREW PIECE  
TAG SURFACE TAG  
GING MOTION IN THE  
OCEAN A THROW UP

Hickey and Ski

A HAD PAKED  
BOGIE WASHED  
SNEAKY JUST NO  
PLACE GIRL  
MY BOYS CHILD  
REN THE  
YARDS CIA CRAZY  
INSIDE ARTISTS NSA  
NON STOP ACTION  
OTB OUT TO BOMB

Hickey, a quiet 36-year-old in his 15th year on the force, is slim as a rapier. Conrad Lesnewski is a garrulous, brawny 41-year-old in his 16th year with the transit police. They are the stuff that graffiti legends are made of, and rumors about them pass from one graffitist to another: Hickey and Ski have beaten up one writer, shot another, dangled yet another above the third rail with a metal flashlight taped to his mouth. Not so, the two officers say; what little time they've spent on anti-graffiti efforts of late has been devoted to building up extensive photo files that match tags and writers and developing a network of informants who can report on upcoming writers' parties.

"I've got to be busted," said one graffitist, "let it be by the top, by Hickey and Ski."





You found

TRUE

S.M.W. PROUD

[Illegible graffiti]

[Illegible graffiti]

d it.

9532

Emergency Brake





**“One morning Profane  
woke up early,  
couldn’t get back to sleep  
and decided to spend  
the day like a yo-**

**yo shuttling  
back and forth  
underneath 42nd Street  
from Times Square  
to Grand Central  
and vice versa.”**

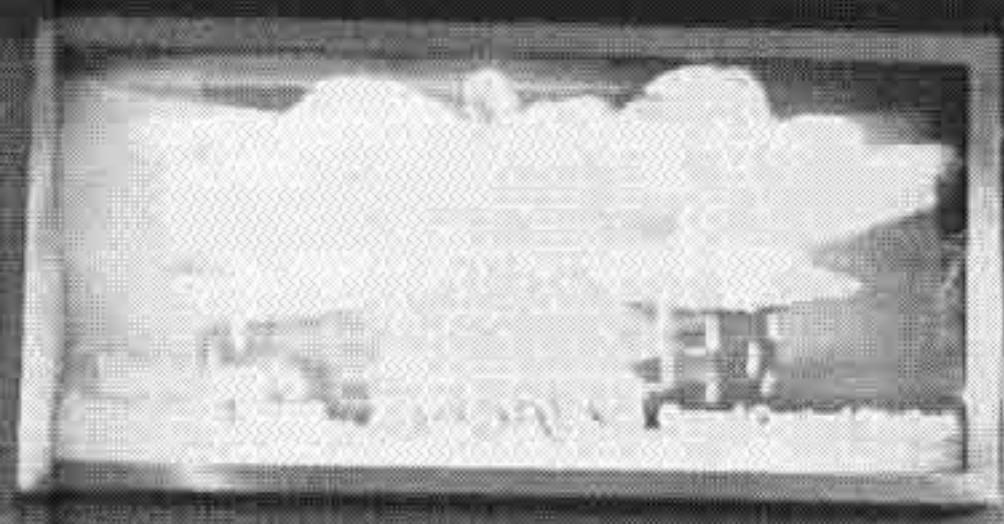


DOWNTOWN  
EXPRESS  
←  
GRAND  
CENTRAL  
42



DOWNTOWN  
EXPRESS  
GRAND  
CENTRAL  
42





**“No chit chat.”**

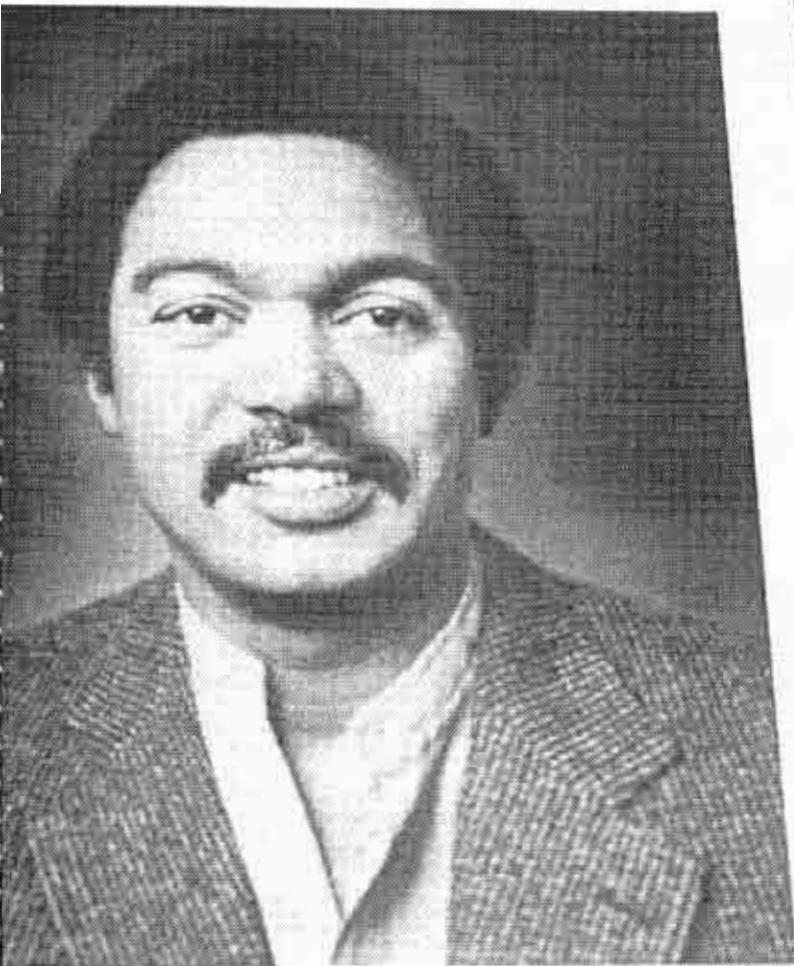
**“N**



**U.S. NEWS**  
and World Report

**We spare our readers u**  
**We spare our advertise**

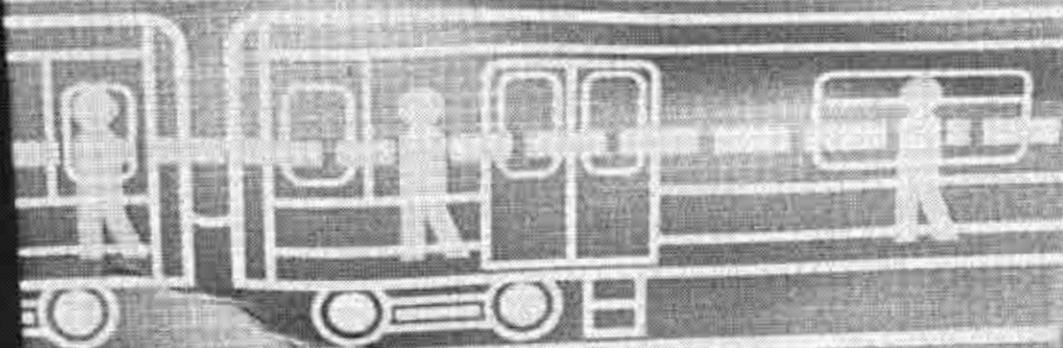
**o small talk.”**



**important news.  
rs unimportant readers.**

**“The extra \$13 billion spent on the X-M1 tank program through 1981 due to cost escalations would provide the money we need to rehabilitate our entire mass transit system over the next decade.”**

# Emergency Evacuation P



Subway tracks are dangerous.  
They contain 600 volts of  
live electricity and have other  
trains moving on them.

In the event of  
stay inside until  
or police oper  
you safely out

gency,  
ews  
d lead  
in.



**cedure**

- 1. Do not pull emergency cord.*
- 2. Listen for instructions.*
- 3. Calmly walk through train.*
- 4. Exit as directed.*

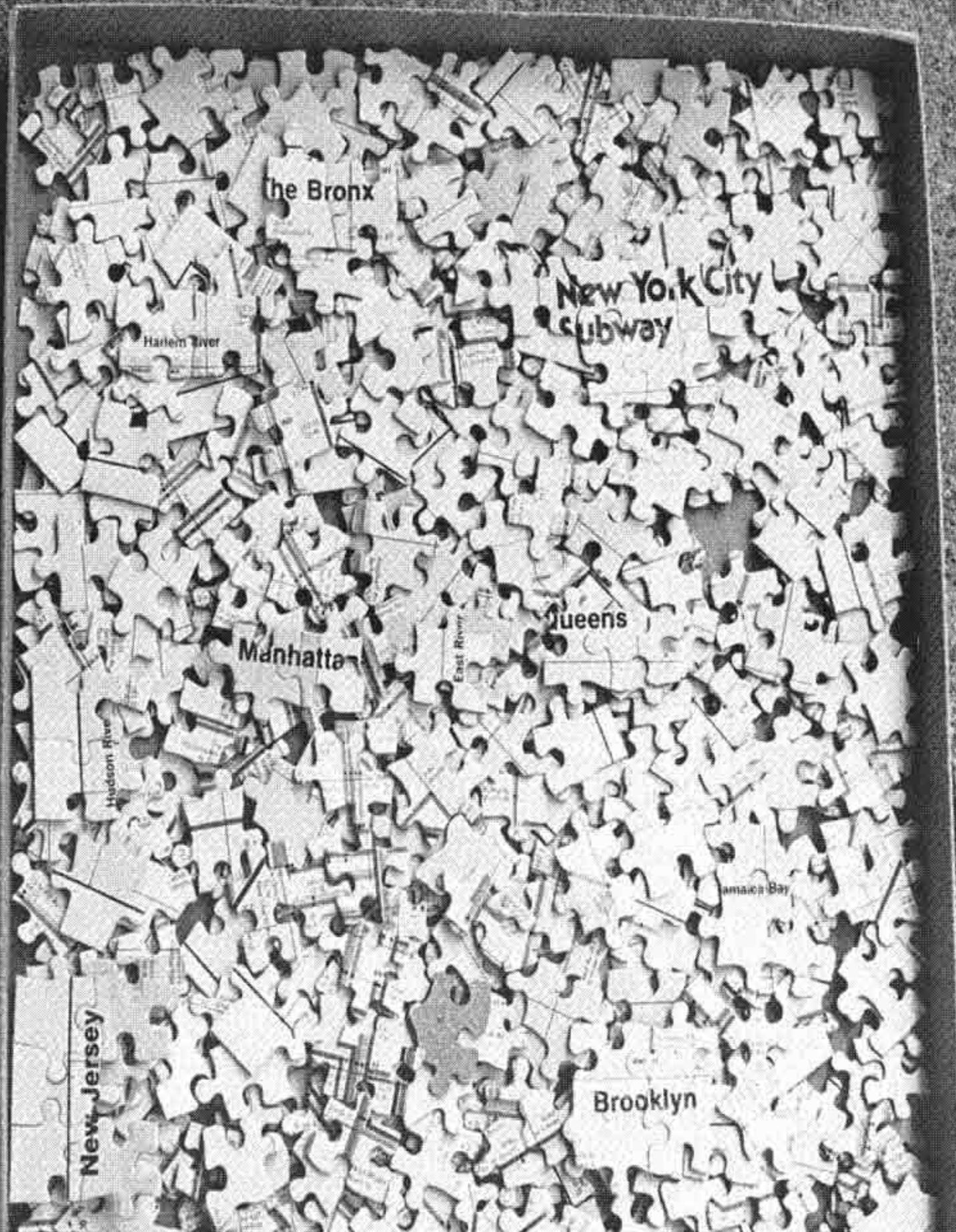


Do not climb through windows  
or down between cars. You are  
safer in the car than walking  
the tracks unescorted.



The New York City  
Transit Authority.

The dark at the end  
of the tunnel.



The Bronx

New York City  
subway

Harlem River

Manhattan

Queens

East River

Hudson River

Jamaica Bay

New Jersey

Brooklyn

**"IF THE IDEA OF UNDERGROUND TRAVEL  
HAS A BEGINNING, IT IS IN THE PRESENT  
OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL PAST. FABLES OF  
INDETERMINATE ANTIQUITY TELL OF IT:  
THE NAMES OF THE HEROES WHOSE  
ADVENTURES MAKE IT REAL SEEM  
ALMOST TO ENCOMPASS MYTHOLOGY  
ITSELF—ORPHEUS, HERCULES, THESEUS  
ODYSSEUS, AENEAS. . ."**

**Part 2 VIDEO**

*coming and going:*

**PARIS (Metro)**

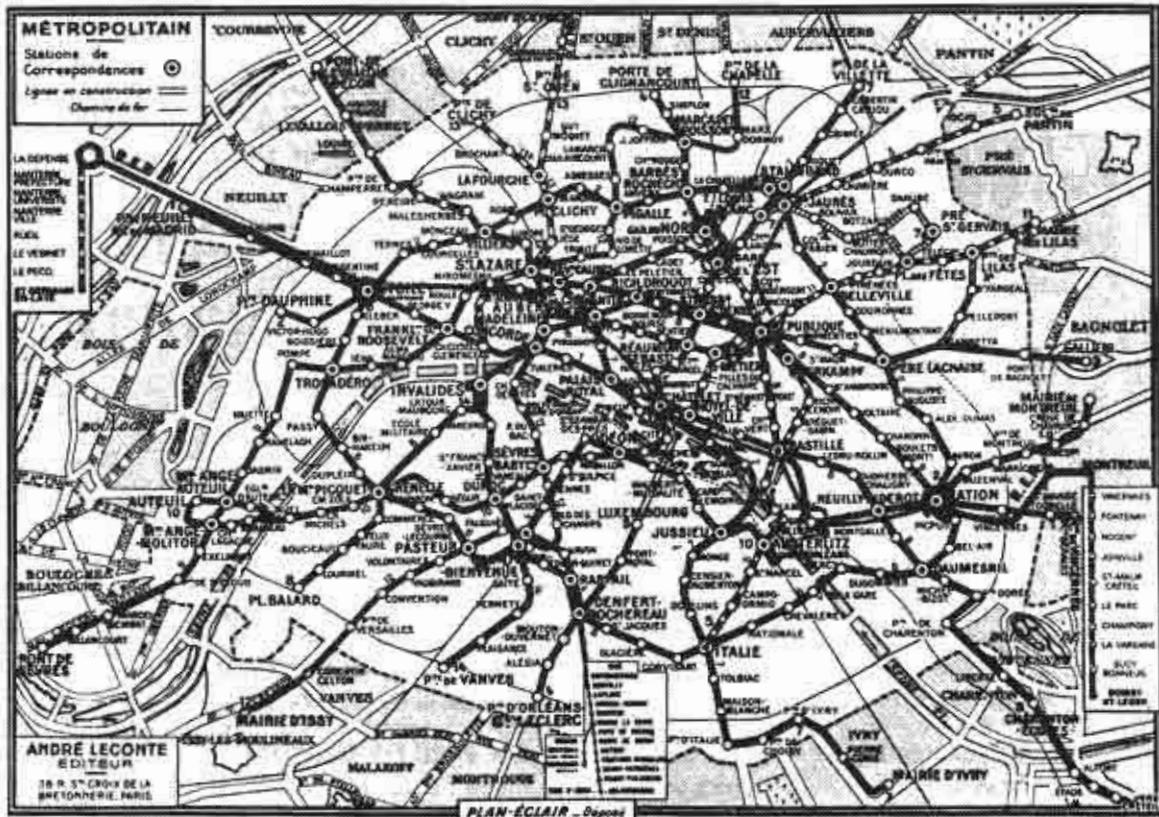
**San Francisco (BART)**

**Washington (METRO)**

*coming and going:*

### **PARIS (Metro)**

Originally shot in film from television surveillance monitors, this videotape follows a passenger's underground travel through various stops, transfers and connections in the Paris Metro. Aspects of ambiguity and confusion experienced in the Metro are juxtaposed with a linguistic parallel to the visual image: the etymology of the word 'metro.'



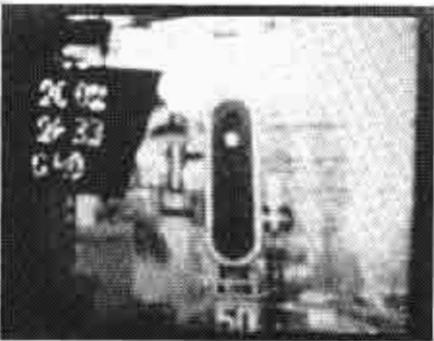
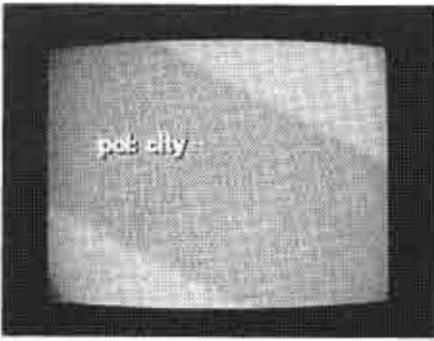
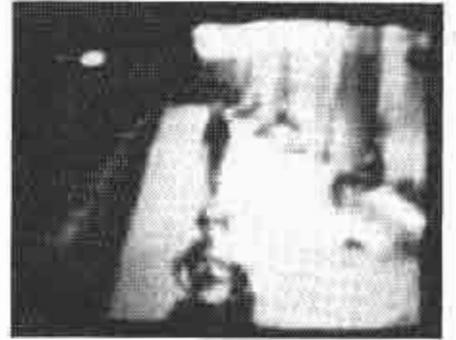
coming and going:

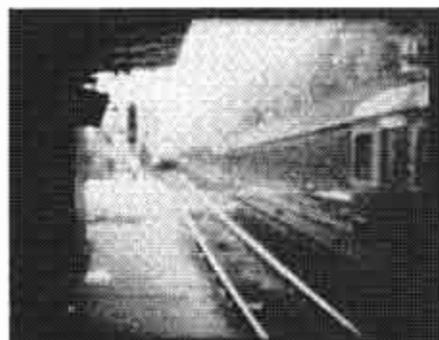
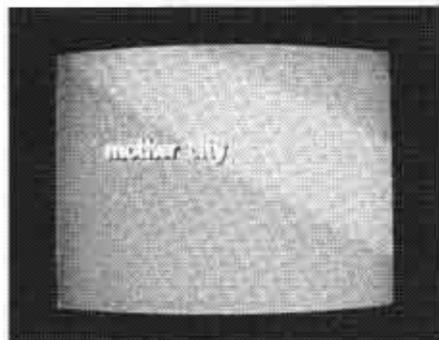
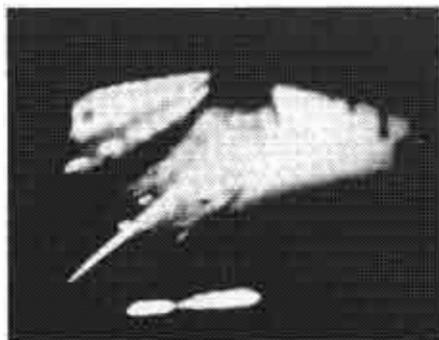
### **PARIS (Metro)**

*“Let’s take the word **Metromania**. If **metro** comes from the Greek word with the short ‘e’ you’re dealing with a madness for **measures**, that is **verse**, generally doggerel. However, if it comes from the Greek word with the long ‘e’ you’re dealing with the basic Greek word meaning **uterus**; and **Metromania** can be a madness of the uterus. So **Metromania** is an example of a homonym: two different words with the same spelling and the same pronunciation.*

*Let me give some other examples: How about **poly**; **poly** means **many** in **polygamy**—someone who is given to many marriages without taking the trouble to get a divorce. But, in **monopoly** you’re dealing with **poly**, meaning **sell**, because it comes from the Greek verb **poly**, meaning to sell—a **monopoly** is where there is one seller; and to add confusion let’s consider the word **metropolis**. **Metro** in that sense comes from a word that is very close to that Greek word for uterus that I was talking about, but only in this case it means **mother**. For the Greeks there is an etymological connection between the word meaning mother and the word meaning uterus. And, **pol**, in this case, means **city**. So **metropolis** is the **mother city**; and it’s a good word because it shows that **pol** can mean **many**, it can mean **city**, it can mean **sell**. And, **metro** can mean **mother**, **uterus** or **measures**; and when you add it all together, it is a source of confusion.”*

*—from the videotape*

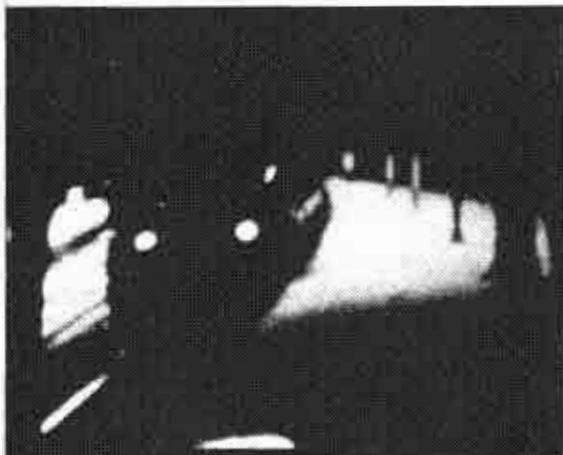
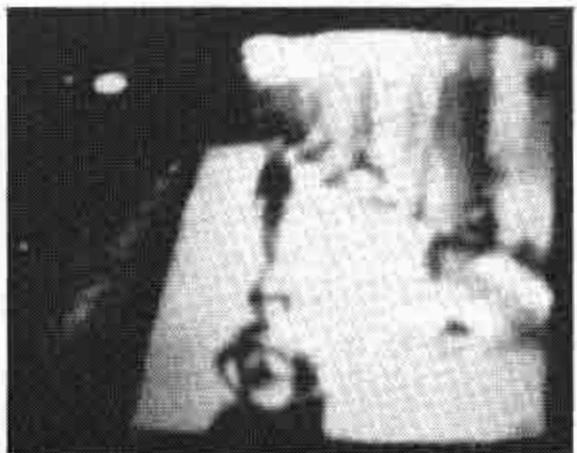




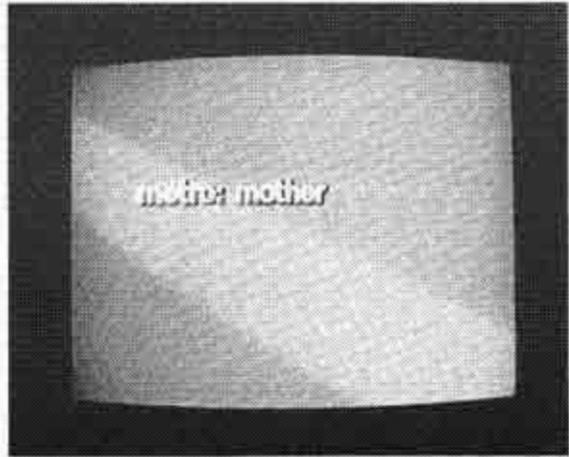
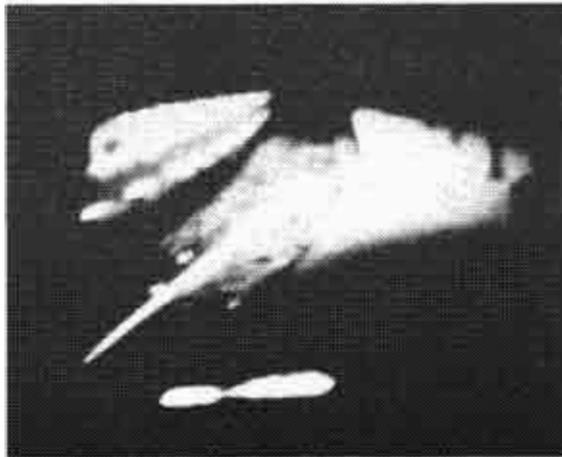
coming and going;

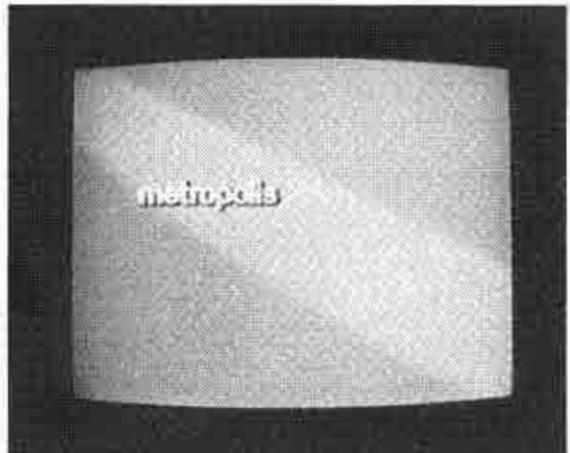
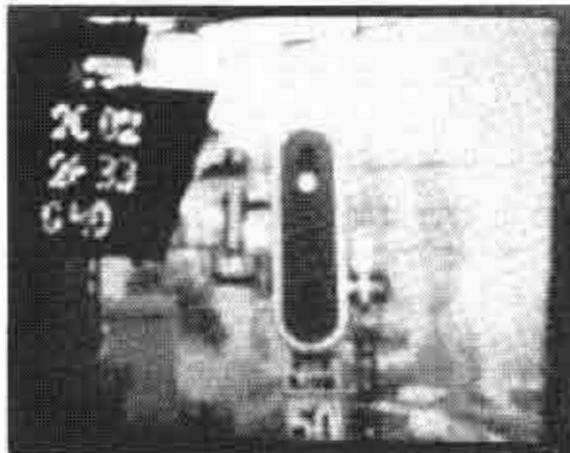
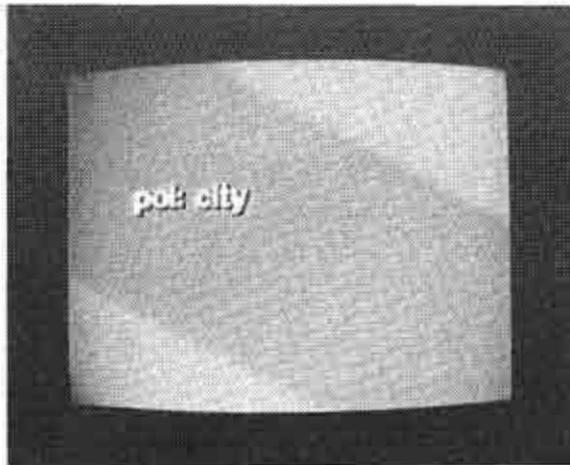
PARIS (Metro)

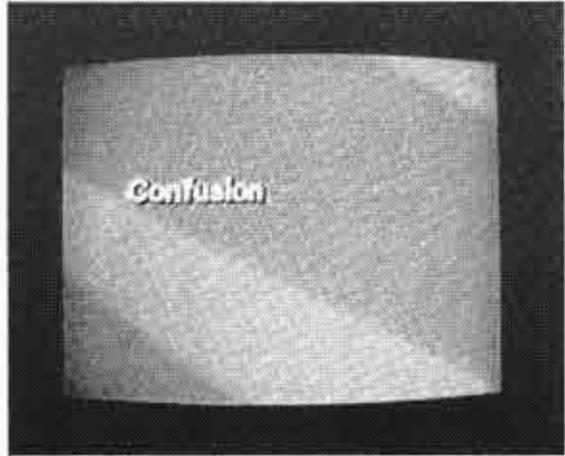
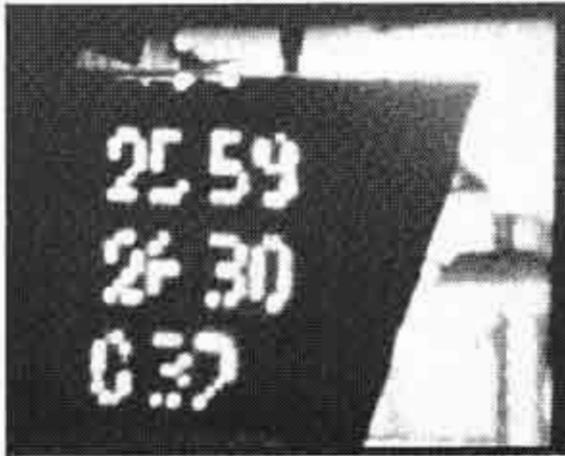
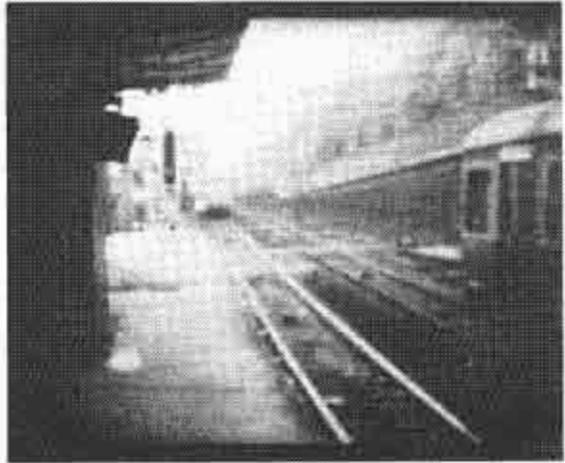
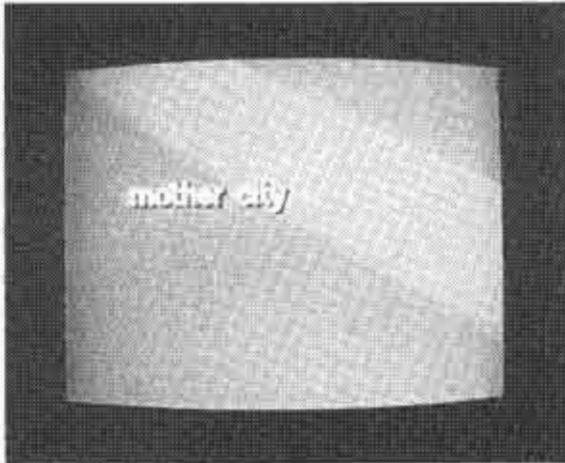
Peter D'Agostino

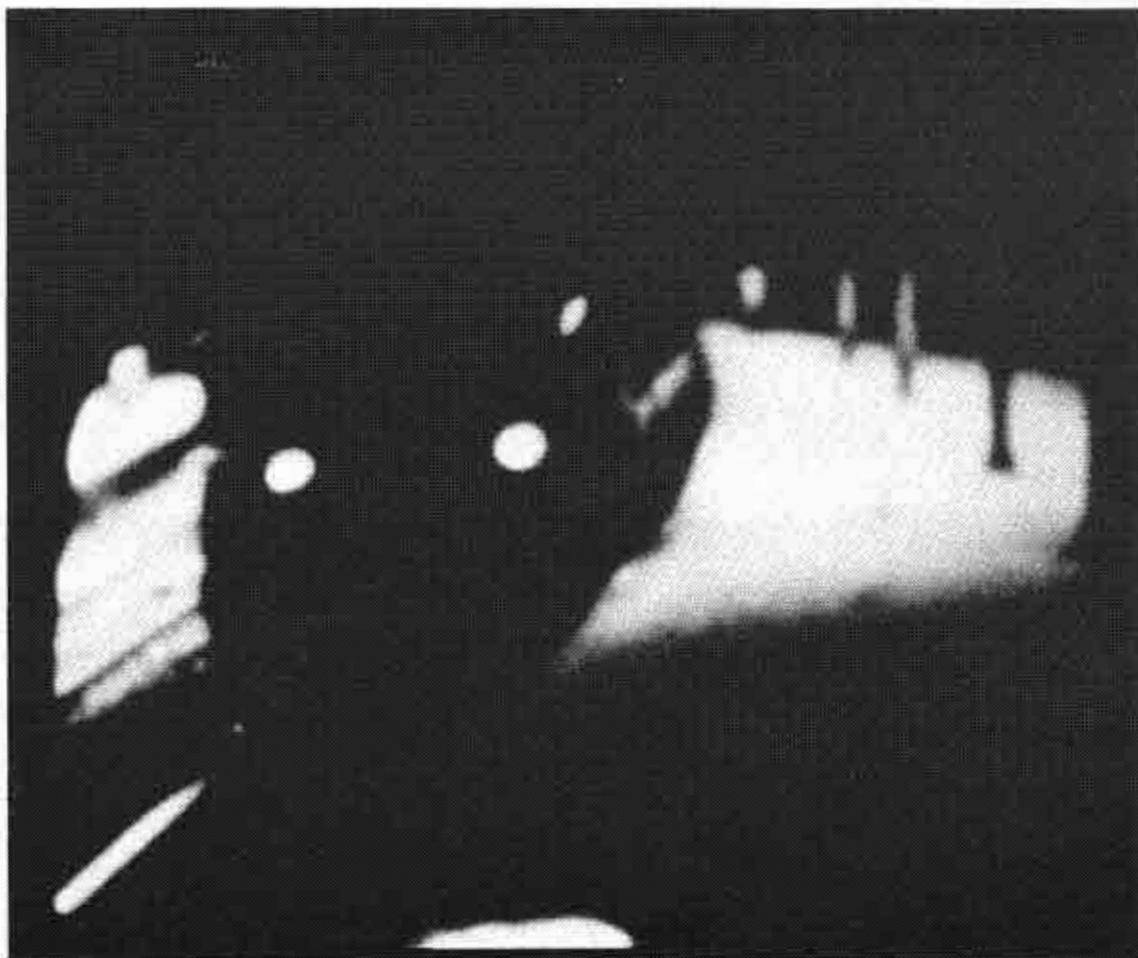


metro: measures [verse]









# Confusion

*coming and going*

## **San Francisco (BART)**

The general public and art community was invited to ride the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) from San Francisco's Civic Center to the Berkeley station.

The basic structure of the event encompassed the everyday experiences of the BART commuter: buying a ticket, waiting on the platform, boarding and exiting the train, etc. Within this context the broader framework of BART was investigated, from the inner workings of the system to the outside environment that parallels the underground route of the train. Functioning like an 'installation-in-motion,' observer/participants carrying portable video equipment with three TV monitors intermingled with other passengers traveling to Berkeley. Carried like luggage these monitors displayed videotapes which provided passengers with access to several layers of images and information related to the BART experience, including:

An automated ticket machine rejecting dollars as commuters attempt to buy tickets.

A car drive from Berkeley to San Francisco, crossing the Bay Bridge while the train travels in the tube beneath the bay.

A scene from the master control room shows the progress of the trains through the system, and the surveillance of passengers entering and exiting the stations.

A series of personal messages programmed on BART's electronic sign-system. These signs are used to announce train arrivals and destinations, display the time of day, and are usually programmed by intermittent advertisements.

My primary concern was the social activity itself and re-contextualizing this experience for the BART passengers. Keeping the theatricality of the event to a minimum was necessary to emphasize the work as experience rather than spectacle.

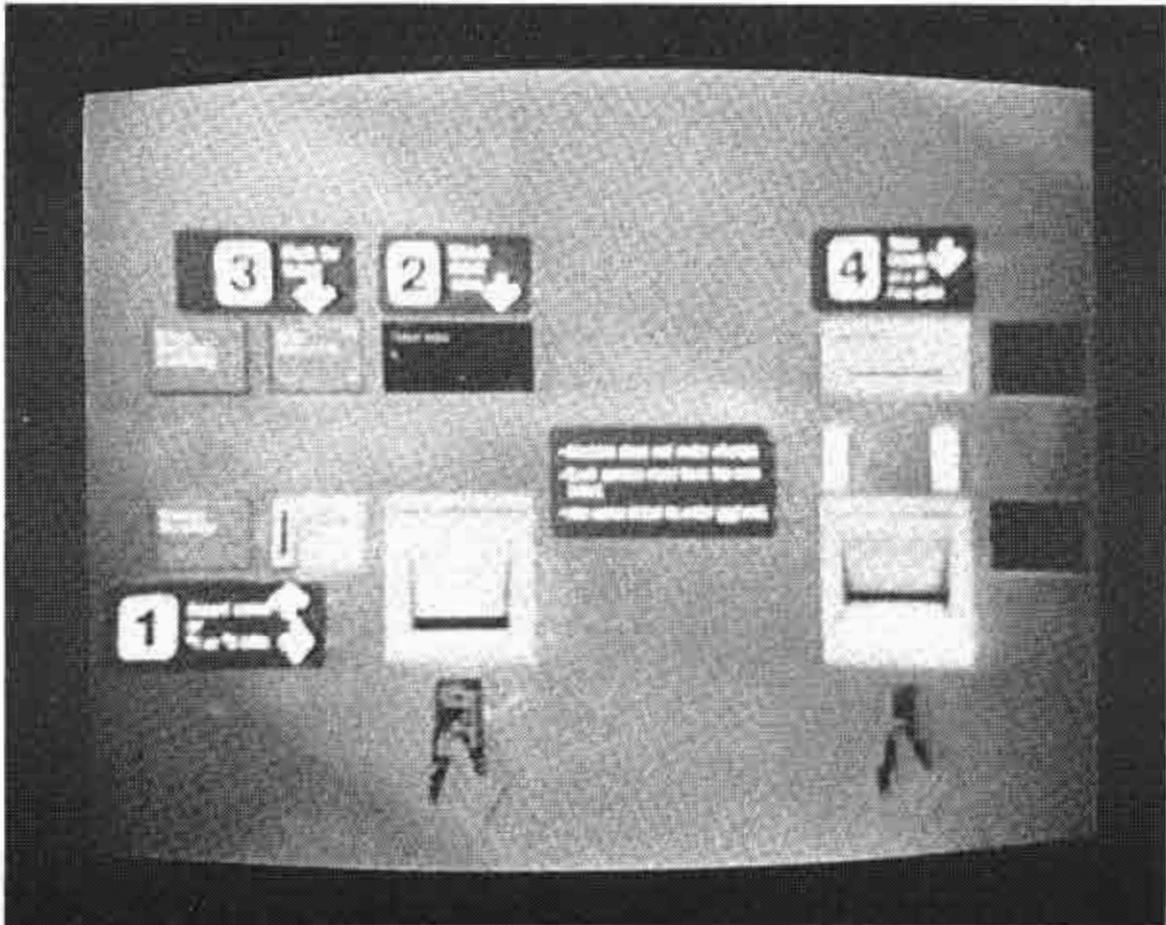
**Peter D'Agostino**  
"coming and going: BART"

BART from Civic Center, SF  
to Berkeley Station

Saturday July 15, 1978 2:00 pm



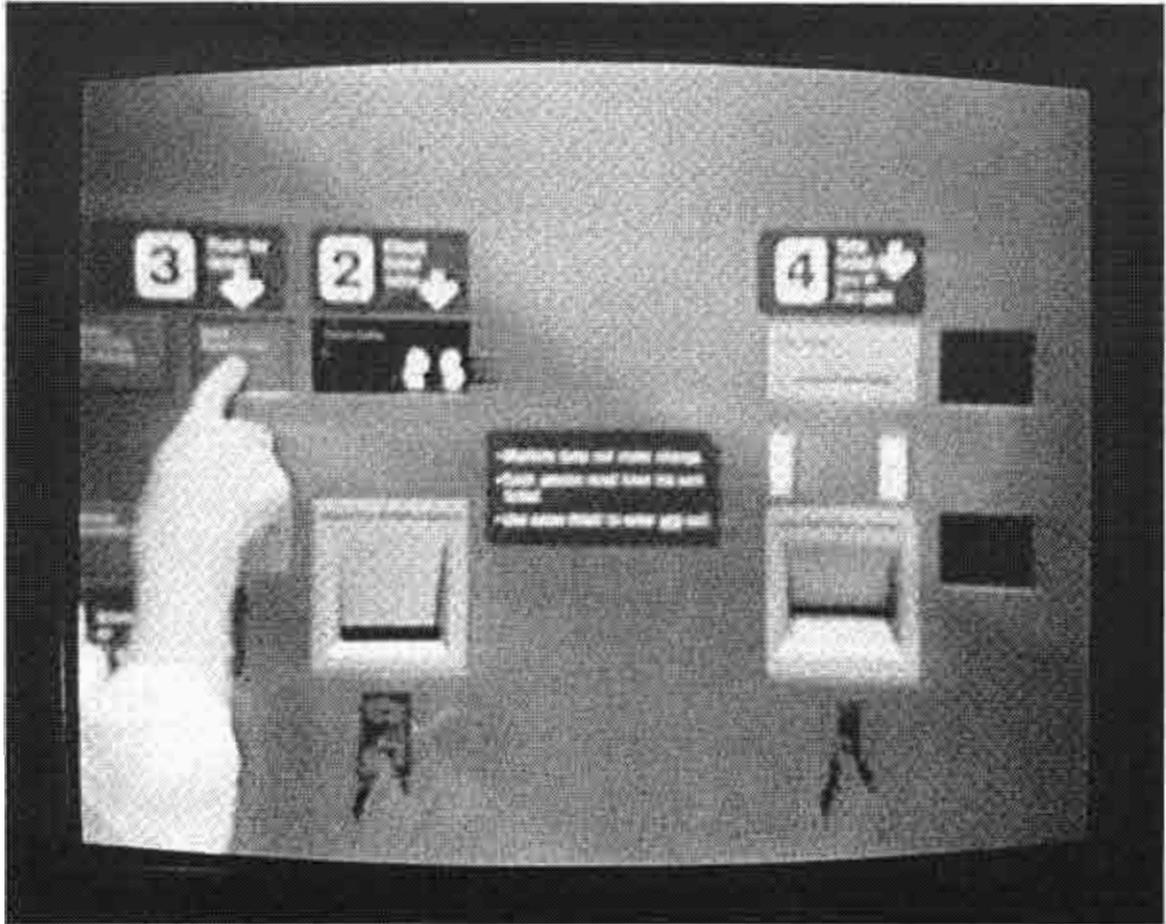
The Floating Museum/  
**San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**













*coming and going:*

## Washington (METRO)

Designed as a video installation for L'Enfant Plaza station, this work consists of three channels of video on three projection screens overlooking the platform.

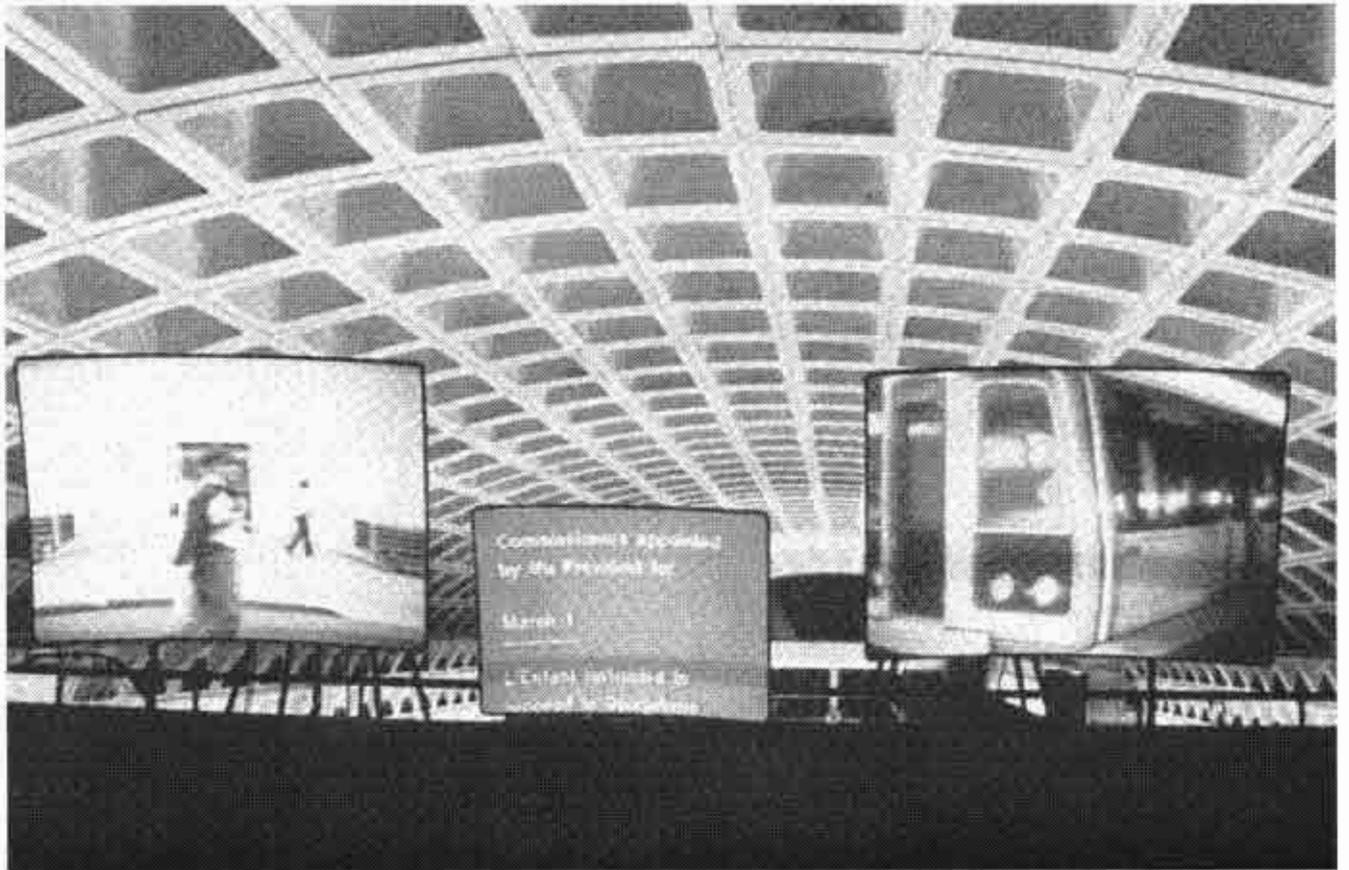
On the *screen to the left* is a modified travelogue of Capitol sites, including the White House, the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, and excerpts from a "Redskins" football game.

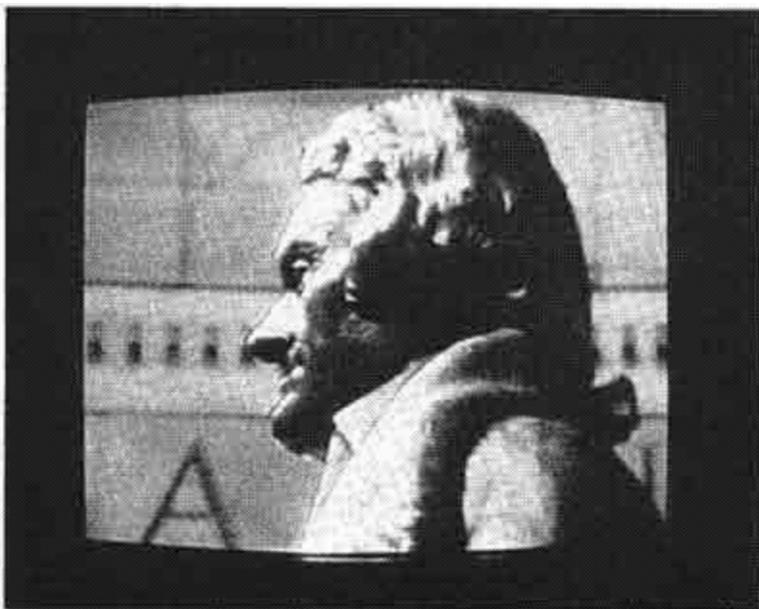
The *screen to the right* shows passengers boarding and exiting trains throughout the system from Airport to L'Enfant Plaza as viewed from television monitors within the METRO's surveillance system.

On the *center screen* is a continuously rolling text: a chronology of historical events that led to the design of the Federal City by architect Pierre L'Enfant. Conveyed through L'Enfant's correspondence with President Washington and Thomas Jefferson between 1789 and 1792, it summarizes the architect's attempts to implement his master plan and the bureaucratic controversy that led to his resignation and his historical obscurity.

(L'Enfant was not officially recognized as the city's original master planner until 1903.)

A separate soundtrack keys the visual images as they phase in and out of synchronous relation. The audiotape is composed of sounds from a METRO ride, music from the revolutionary period, a lecture concerning the politics of operating the METRO system, and a tour guide's brief comments on the history of the District of Columbia.





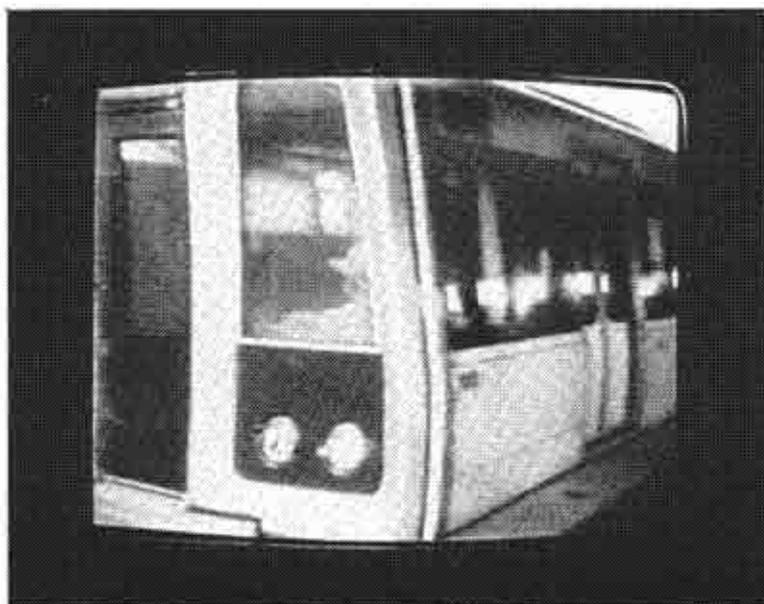
1789 September

---

*Pierre L'Enfant  
George Washing  
permission to pl  
Federal City.*

r 11

applies to  
ton for  
an the





**1789 September 11**

Pierre L'Enfant applies to George Washington for permission to plan the Federal City.

**1790 July 9**

*Residence Act* passed by Congress.

**1791 January 22**

Commissioners appointed by the President for the Federal District.

**March 1**

L'Enfant instructed to proceed to Georgetown "to survey the ground."

**March 11**

First Letter of L'Enfant to Jefferson describing the proposed site.

**March 28**

First meeting of Commissioners.

**March 29**

Washington's letter to Jefferson of March 31, fixes this as the day L'Enfant was ordered to "*have the whole surveyed and laid off as a city.*"

**April 10**

Jefferson wrote L'Enfant, "*I am happy the President has left the planning of the city in such good hands.*"

**April 23**

Commissioner Daniel Carroll announced to James Madison the appointment of L'Enfant.

**May**

*May and the first two weeks of June*, were taken up with intensive work on the *plan*, and its adaptation to the accidents of the site.

**June 22**

Probable date of *historic visit of L'Enfant to Mount Vernon and detailed discussion of the plan*. This was the first "Plan." It was somewhat changed in the final form.

**August 28**

Conference in Philadelphia—Perfected "Plan" presented and *accepted as authoritative* by President.

**October 19**

L'Enfant refused the Commissioners the use of the "Plan" [during the sale of lots]. They were greatly offended.

**November 6**

Washington rebuked L'Enfant *indirectly* through his secretary, Mr. Lear.

**November 21**

Daniel Carroll of Duddington and L'Enfant notified the President of the demolition of the Duddington House by L'Enfant.

The Duddington House incident is central to the conflicts between L'Enfant and the Commissioners. Daniel Carroll had begun building his house before the master plan had been drawn up. When L'Enfant decided that the same site was necessary for a major public square, he requested that Carroll build

on another site and offered to compensate him for the foundation which was already completed. Carroll ignored the request and continued building the house. Acting within the law, L'Enfant subsequently ordered the demolition of the house.

Daniel Carroll of Duddington and Notley Young were the leading property owners in the Federal District, and were both closely related to one of the Commissioners, also named Daniel Carroll.

### November 26

Commissioners ordered demolition stopped in absence of L'Enfant in Virginia where he had gone to purchase the Aquia quarries. On his return L'Enfant ordered the demolition completed.

### December 2

Washington *pointedly and directly* rebuked L'Enfant, saying, you remain *"only on condition you conduct yourself in subordination to the authority of the Commissioners."*

### December 6

L'Enfant *ably* defended his action to the Commissioners.

### December 7

Explained action to President, excusing himself, proving he was *within his rights according to the agreement* regarding the adopted plan. Asked *that a line of demarcation be drawn between him and the Commissioners*. Washington turned the letter over to Jefferson.

### December 11

Jefferson made a very significant pronouncement that *"the will of the Commissioners cannot be the line of demarcation between themselves and their subordinates, that the President*

*had the power to draw that line"*—but that in L'Enfant's case the only *safe* thing was to *"submit him to the unlimited control of the Commissioners."* This attitude the President adopted.

### December 13

Washington repeated rebuke and used expression, "The Commissioners stand between you and the President."

### December 16

L'Enfant wrote out instructions for Roberdeau for winter work.

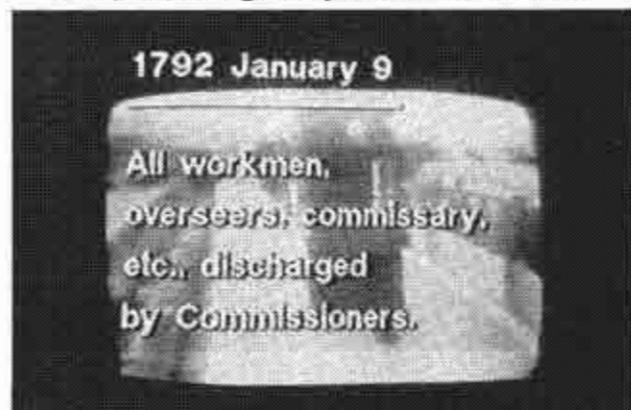
### December 22

L'Enfant wrote Commissioners regarding the house of Notley Young.

A month after the Duddington House was ordered demolished, L'Enfant also notified Notley Young that his house would be obstructing a major street, and that it would have to be removed within seven years. As the planned avenues and squares threatened to take other properties from relatives of the Commissioners, a conflict arose between the private interests of the commission and the grand scale of L'Enfant's plan.

### 1792 January 9

All workmen, overseers, commissary, etc., discharged by Commissioners.



### January 17

Washington wrote Commissioners fully approving this act of authority.

### January 17

L'Enfant sent memoir of 22 pages to President, prepared after his arrival in Philadelphia, outlining the work to be done up to 1800, giving estimate of all expenses. No attention was ever paid to this document.

### January 27

Roberdeau arrested and put in prison by Commissioners for continuing to follow orders of L'Enfant.

### February 6

Letters of Roberdeau intercepted or delayed. When news reached L'Enfant he wrote President imploring release of his overseer and in closing warned, ". . . *unless power to effect the work with advantage to the public and credit to myself is left me*" resignation would be inevitable.

### February 22

Washington wrote Jefferson that the "Plan" *should bear L'Enfant's name*. Ellicott had placed his own in lower right hand corner and L'Enfant's did not any where appear. This was never changed. The "Plan" was allowed to go forth to the world as Ellicott's production.

Ellicott, one of L'Enfant's assistants, was responsible for making a small scale draft of the original plan for engraving and printing. Since Ellicott signed this draft, his name, instead of L'Enfant's appeared on all the reproductions.

### February 22

Jefferson wrote asking L'Enfant if he would continue his services, since it had been determined that "whoever wishes for employment. . . *must apply to the Commissioners directly*, the President being decided not to meddle with those details."

### February 23

L'Enfant wrote at length of what the Commissioners had done to thwart his efforts (this he did in self-justification since so much stress had been placed upon their good-will); he explained why he had been forced to act as he had. He ended with the words, "If therefore the law requires. . . that *my continuance shall depend upon an appointment from the Commissioners*, I cannot, nor would I under *any circumstances submit myself to it.*"

### February 26

Washington sent his secretary to plead with L'Enfant but with the reiterated condition that he *submit himself to the Commissioners*. L'Enfant made the remark which was carried back to the President, "*I have already heard enough of this matter.*" This offended Washington.

### February 27

Jefferson wrote curt note of dismissal to L'Enfant.

### February 27

L'Enfant replied directly to Washington: "under the present, system" he could not any longer serve.

### **February 28**

Washington wrote L'Enfant for the last time.

### **March 9**

Proprietors petitioned President, through Mr. Walker, to restore L'Enfant.

### **March 10**

L'Enfant in mean time wrote Proprietors giving reasons for his withdrawal and offering excellent advice to guide them in future.

### **March 14**

Jefferson answered petitioners stating that L'Enfant's conditions were *dismissal of Commissioners or independence of them*" of which L'Enfant wrote, "no greater lie could ever be."

### **March 19**

Roberdeau went to Georgetown to settle accounts, etc.

### **March 21**

Second letter of Proprietors urging L'Enfant to reconsider.

### **April 1**

L'Enfant ended correspondence by dignified letter of appreciation, but one from which there could be no appeal.

#### **Postscript 1909 April 28**

Pierre L'Enfant died in 1825 and was buried on a private estate in Maryland. In 1909 an act of Congress finally gave L'Enfant the recognition he deserved as the Federal City's master planner and his body was reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery.



Chronology from *L'Enfant and Washington*  
by Elizabeth S. Kite, Johns Hopkins Press

**Brechtian Dialectics Applied**  
**Robert Atkins**

Peter D'Agostino's art is important for its dialectical representation of reality. I'm drawn to it because of its critical intelligence, austere beauty and social engagement—not surprisingly—but it is this dialectical approach which separates it from so much work produced by his contemporaries.

The representation of reality implies social engagement. Reality, in this instance, should be understood as a world viewed as a network of interlocking social systems—whether political, cultural or economic. Social engagement should be understood as the attempt to make visible these systems. Such a task is particularly crucial in a capitalist society that sanctions the possession of power by a corporate elite whose members act in concert, if not downright collectively, from behind an ideological smokescreen which asserts the sanctity of the individual. The psychological view tends to perpetrate this fiction. The sociological view tends to expose reality.

D'Agostino's view is invariably outward looking. He studied visual anthropology, among other things, at San Francisco State University. A *New Yorker* by birth, his mature art work began in San Francisco in an "avant-garde" atmosphere dominated by the performance output of then-emerging artists like Terry Fox, Tom Marioni and Southern Californian Chris Burden. While some of this work appeals to D'Agostino, in general, such subjectification could not be much further from his own interests or sensibility.

In order to present his outward looking view, D'Agostino creates what are essentially electronic collages. Snippets of reality or found materials are sometimes juxtaposed with D'Agostino's own footage or, as he puts it, "recontextualized." *TeleTapes* (1981), his most recent work concerning the transmission and reception of television information, reveals his fascination with subtle 'contextual shifts' (his term) and the process by which information is interpreted. The tape begins with the sound of a newscaster announcing that "Marshal McLuhan died today," while the viewer sees a billboard image of the Marlboro man. The relationship of word and image makes D'Agostino's perspective abundantly clear and challenges the viewer to formulate his own.

Unlike the majority of televised products, the more you look at D'Agostino's videotapes the more you get. The density of the work suggests his commitment to the dissemination of as much information as is aesthetically feasible. I'm reminded of Baudelaire's dictum that criticism must simultaneously allow the reader the largest possible number of intellectual options while forcefully advocating a single point of view.

Intellectual historian Paul Fussell has recently written of the virtual disappearance of the "travel book as a record of an inquiry and a report of the effect of that inquiry on the mind and imagination of the traveler."<sup>1</sup> The travel book and travel itself (which he sees as having been replaced by tourism), might be likened to the process of making art. Needless to say, the metaphorical journey has been invoked all too often in connection with all too many enterprises. In regard to D'Agostino's coming and going series of videotapes, however, it's difficult to imagine a more apt or economical description than that of "a record of an inquiry and a report of the effect of that inquiry on the mind and imagination . . ."

*Coming and going: Paris (Metro) (1977-78), coming and going: San Francisco (BART) (1978) and coming and going: Washington (METRO) (1979)* constitute the joint centerpiece of this series. The three take as their loose points of departure footage shot within the subway systems of Paris, the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, D.C. The Paris piece likens the confusion or ambiguity a passenger might feel to the linguistic ambiguity of the term "metro." The San Francisco piece examines the BART system inside and out and the geographical relationship of the subway to local topography and alternative means of transportation. The Washington piece moves from the METRO system itself to an examination of 18th century urban planning and the apparently eternal machinations of bureaucracy. In each case, documentary style source material is entirely "recontextualized."<sup>2</sup>

The *coming and going* series is as evocative as its title. Suggestive first of movement, its name conjures up resonant metaphorical images of the life cycle and the notion of something permanent underlying the flux of daily life. Augmented by the names of subway systems, one is warned in advance that these are neither travelogues nor soap operas. Conversely, one responds immediately to the notion of regarding daily life with the critical and adventurous eye of the "traveler" (in Fussell's terminology, which opposes such a view to the passive gaze of the tourist.)

If packaged tourism and armchair travel via art, photography, video or film, has resulted in the desensualization and appropriation of reality—a condition promulgated by and amenable to internationalizing corporate interests—then D'Agostino's work offers a restorative. Additionally it reflects his receptivity to alternative and fresh perspectives, especially the perspectives of anthropology, Zen and semiotics/structuralism (see below) to which he was drawn during his time in the Bay Area.

Clearly, D'Agostino regards transportation systems as systematic and ideological embodiments of societal relationships. By viewing them as equivalents of these relationships requiring decoding, he employs methodologies and ways of thinking garnered in part from long and fruitful, mostly photographically oriented collaboration with Lew Thomas and other San Franciscans pursuing structuralist/semiotic lines of inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

D'Agostino's *coming and going* series—actually much of his work—is a richly textured and transformed amalgam of these sources. Given that he is a mature artist possessing a distinctive and refined sensibility, the detailed examination of such sources or touchstones can, at best, provide a limited view, at worst a critical/pedagogical deadend. What has struck me most forcefully about D'Agostino's work is not its thoroughly assimilated sources, but an initially odd intuition that he and Bertolt Brecht essayed similar dialectical ends. Of course a veritable chasm of medium and moment separates them, but, in fact, an astonishing and rather specific congruence of ideas unites them.

Brecht (1896-1956), the German playwright is well known for such plays as *A Man's A Man*, *The Three Penny Opera*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Mother Courage* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. He is less well known for this theoretical writing.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the limitations of the inherently collaboratively the-

atrical form (Brecht wanted a new style of acting, directing and technical design to augment his writing), it seems that Brecht's thinking was realized far less fully in his plays than in his theoretical writing. (He was, after all, an artist—in addition to being, perhaps, an ideologue—and frequently expressed his frustration and inability to make theatrically concrete his thoughts.) Nevertheless, the radicalism of Brecht's theatrical experimentation is still immediately apparent to the theatre-goer and his work continues to nourish further experimentation.

He sought, above all else, to instill an attitude of critical detachment in his viewers. Reacting against the naturalistic approach pioneered by Ibsen and Strindberg and threatening to engulf 20th century European theatre, he hoped to eradicate what he regarded as the easy emotionalism and the over close identification between viewer and actor. Less emphasis on catharsis would both more authentically represent reality and promote social change. His aesthetic manifesto for an "epic" theatre is the *Organon*,<sup>5</sup> a pithy compilation of theory expressed in 77 paragraphs. His approach is best understood by focusing on the awkwardly translated *verfremdungseffekt* or "alienating effect."<sup>6</sup>

In the prevalent naturalistic theatre or theatre of illusion, it was impossible, Brecht felt, to establish a sociological or uninvolved "higher" viewpoint. Naturalistic convention dictated the tedious exposition of relationships within the framework of "natural" conversation. The "epic" theatre freed the author to do all sorts of things: Instruct characters to speak directly to the audience; reveal the play's conclusion early on thereby liberating the audience from distracting suspense; or entrust a narrator to comment on the action.<sup>7</sup> For his adaptation of Gorky's *The Mother*, Brecht had current food prices flashed against the stage backdrop when the cost of living was mentioned in the dialogue.

Such alienating effects mandated an audience as interested in being informed as entertained. Brecht, in his *Organon*, described the purpose of such devices, making it clear that they were to be regarded merely as devices: "The new alienations are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today."<sup>8</sup> This is the identical motivation fueling D'Agostino's urge to "recontextualize."

Given this similar motivation, it is perhaps not altogether extraordinary that D'Agostino's sensibility and purposes bear such resemblance to Brecht's. Like Brecht, D'Agostino abhors theatrical seduction which, for the artist working in video, means the elimination of fictional narrative and over lush imagery. Like Brecht, D'Agostino is didactic. Where Brecht limns characters who are fully drawn, but immediately recognizable social types or projects current food prices on stage, D'Agostino documents the history of architect Pierre L'Enfant's dealing with the new American government or the etymology of the word "metro."

Brecht, in the 19th century positivist manner derived in his case from Marx, considered himself a scientist and associated the non-scientific with the backward and the non-progressive. Although the American devaluation and suspicion of the hard and soft sciences militates against the use of such terminology today, D'Agostino's broad interests and art making activities suggest a similar orientation. His material sometimes seems to fall within the realms of conventional sociology or anthropology. And like a scientist he typically shoots footage with-

out preconceived ideas about the form a project might take, in his own words "generating texts" which might then be examined from a later and greater distance."

What, in retrospect, we can see Brecht was on to with his concept of alienation, was a basic fact of 20th century life—dissociation. The embodiment of the same impulse is apparent in Cubist collage and Einstein's theory of relativity. Meaning is relational, residing not in things, but in relationships by which things are conjoined or separated. When Ortega y Gasset wrote in 1925 that he doubted "that any young person today can be impressed by a poem, a painting, a piece of music that is not flavored with a dash of irony,"<sup>8</sup> he was not afforded a late 20th century perspective which suggests that irony has become the favored distancing (or alienating) mode by which the dissociating contradictions of the 20th century existence can be juggled or at least kept at bay. Brecht preferred—and D'Agostino prefers—to deal more directly with this concern.

D'Agostino's *coming and going* series is primarily about dissociation. In *coming and going: Paris (Metro)* this is made explicit. The etymological ambiguity of "metro" is spelled out. We are told that "metromania" can variously mean "madness for writing verse" or "madness of the uterus." We are told that "poly" can mean "many" or "to sell." Happily, we are informed that "when you add it all together, it's a source of confusion." Juxtaposed with quickly seen images of crowded platforms and trains, the definitions are repeated. Confusion wins out and form and content seem perfectly coupled.

*Coming and going: San Francisco (BART)* began as an event. The public was invited, under the auspices of the Floating Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, to ride free with D'Agostino on a round trip ride from San Francisco's Civic Center to downtown Berkeley via the underbay, subway tube. Monitors on the train showed footage of the identical route seen from the above ground vantage point of the Bay Bridge. *Coming and going: San Francisco (BART)* essentially duplicates this format.

The tape cuts back and forth between footage of a westward automobile trip across the Bay Bridge and an eastward journey via BART. Images of paying the bridge toll contrast with seemingly endless footage of a hapless traveler trying to insert money into a recalcitrant automatic ticket machine. The electronic elements of the subway system are scrutinized closely from the video monitor-dominated control room to the overhead message machines which both convey scheduling information and flash commercial messages at its captive audience.

Message systems constitute an important part of this tape. We see Lynette Taylor speaking and signing for the deaf participants in the event. The overhead electronic signs provide a constant reminder of the time, although D'Agostino has edited the tape non-sequentially so that 12:50, for instance follows 1:01. Additionally, he programmed the overhead signs with messages on the order of "Who is he? He is himself" or "Category P . . . and not P", suggestive of some new linguistic logic. Radio reports from the CBS midday news out of New York tell of the catastrophic fire in BART's underbay tunnel. Again dissociation is evoked by this collage of linguistic, information and transportation systems. The journey completed, the tape ends with a shot of United Nations Plaza in San Francisco and the sound of tolling bells which seem to recall less hectic times.



*coming and going: San Francisco (BART) Event*



*Coming and going: Washington (METRO)* consists of three "layers" of information: A chronology of Pierre L'Enfant's bureaucratic interactions with the fledgling American government seen mostly in a text comprised of letters between L'Enfant and George Washington; footage of the subway system itself including its control room and a narrated bus tour of the capital city.

Multiple viewpoints are carried to new extremes, here. The mellifluous voice of the narrator intoning such lines as "how skillfully L'Enfant uses natural features in laying out his complex systems of streets and avenues" contrasts sharply with the tour guide's vernacular and the cacaphony of the subway punctuated, metronome fashion, by the tone signalling the closing of train doors. Conflict is embodied in the content of L'Enfant's correspondence with the bureaucracy and made visible, as well, in the fast paced visual zigzagging between views of surface and subterranean Washington.

*Coming and going: Washington (METRO)* is both the most accomplished and the most dense of the **coming and going** works. Some of this density stems from its origins as a three monitor installation presented in the L'Enfant Plaza METRO station under the aegis of the Washington Project for the Arts. Instead of a single tape, the installation consisted of three different tapes. A five minute tape of the travelogue (repeated four times) played on one monitor, the tape of the L'Enfant correspondence (ten minutes repeated twice) played on a second monitor and the subway footage (seven minutes repeated three times) played on the third. The juxtaposition of tapes, of course, changed constantly. This juxtaposition and the compression of the three tapes into one attests again to D'Agostino's recontextualizing impulses.

*Coming and going: Washington (METRO)* is also, in any form, a mind boggling, informational overload. The abundant quantity of information contrasts starkly with the cool, analytical quality of presentation and the ostensibly impersonal subject matter. One senses that like Brecht, D'Agostino wants to push audiences conditioned by the lackadaisical pace of so much broadcast fare into an active, critical viewing posture. (His recent **Proposal for QUBE**, a response to Columbus, Ohio's *ersatz* two-way television broadcasting experiment, testifies to his long standing interest in the literal communication potential of the video medium.) With D'Agostino's work, the viewer is forced to confront this overload he normally tunes out.

"Confront" is a term often on D'Agostino's lips. We discussed it once and it suggests to him a process of "dealing with" something obscured by history, conventional thinking or, in Brecht's terms, "that stamp of familiarity." The task, then, for D'Agostino, Brecht or any artist is to present a clear and analytical picture of the world which promotes critical thought and action.

The dialectic approach is ideally suited to such ends. By representing reality as contradictory and dissociating, but subject to the patterns and processes of nature and culture, it can be grasped and grappled with. The art which emerges from such a perspective is inherently political. As Brecht noted in his *Organon*, "Society cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring classes. Thus for art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group."<sup>10</sup> Perhaps no more succinct formulation of D'Agostino's fundamental concerns is possible.



coming and going: Washington (METRO) Installation

#### NOTES:

1. Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between The Wars* (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1979) p. 39.
2. Recontextualization is, as I have mentioned, central to D'Agostino's thinking. *ALPHA, TRANS, CHUNG* (1976-77) is probably the most direct, mature expression of this interest. *ALPHA* examines photographs from Godard's *Alphaville*, *Trans-Europ Express* analyses Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europ Express* via videotape and *Chung: 'Still' Another Meaning* takes off from Antonioni's *Chung Kuo*. The last film is in itself, a fascinating case of context determining meaning. What Westerners viewed as a flattering portrait of China, the Chinese found offensive.
3. D'Agostino's involvement with Thomas dates back to 1976 and includes such works as *Photography and Language* and most recently *Still Photography: The Problematic Model* (1981, both NFS Press, San Francisco).
4. Finally translated into English *en toto* and published in 1963 as *Brecht On Theatre*, trans. John Willett, Hill & Wang, NY.
5. *Kleines Organon Fuer das Theater or Little Organon for the Theatre* (1948).
6. Martin Esslin suggests that "alienation effect" possesses "unfortunate emotional overtones" and the the French term *distantiation* is more precise. See Martin Esslin, *Brecht, the Man and His Work* (Doubleday Anchor, NY, 1960, revised edition 1971) p. 132.
7. *Ibid.*
8. John Willet, *op cit.*, p. 192
9. Quoted in August Becker, *Concepts of Irony With Special Reference to Applications in the Visual Arts* (unpublished dissertation, Columbia University, 1970).
10. John Willet, *op cit.*, p. 196

**Part 3: EVENT**

*coming and going:*  
**Angel Island**

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*coming and going:*

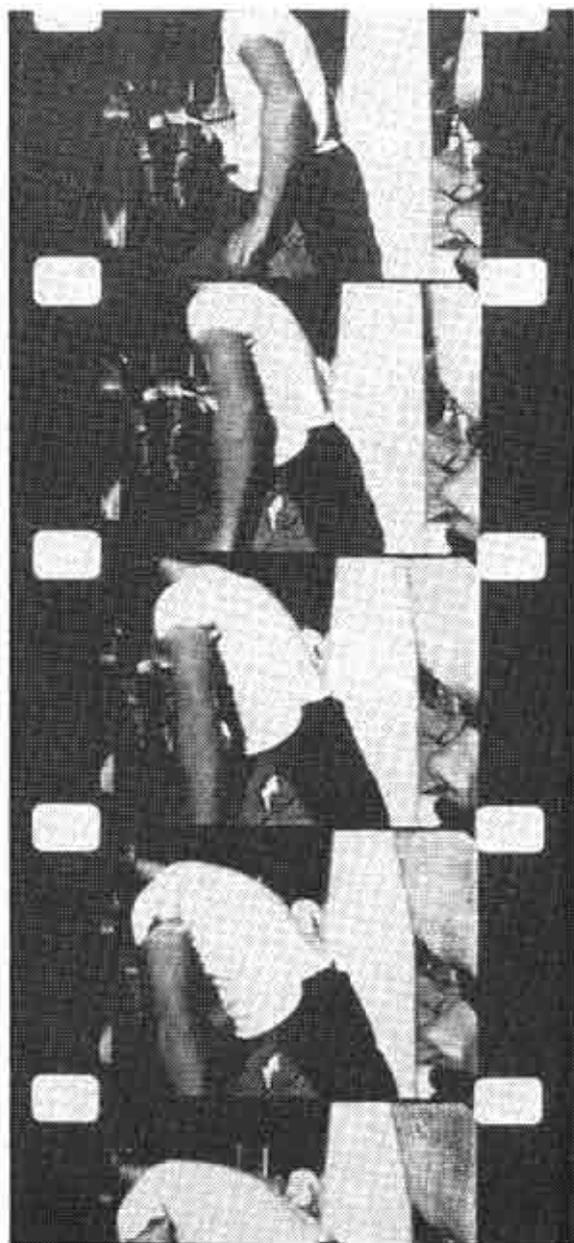
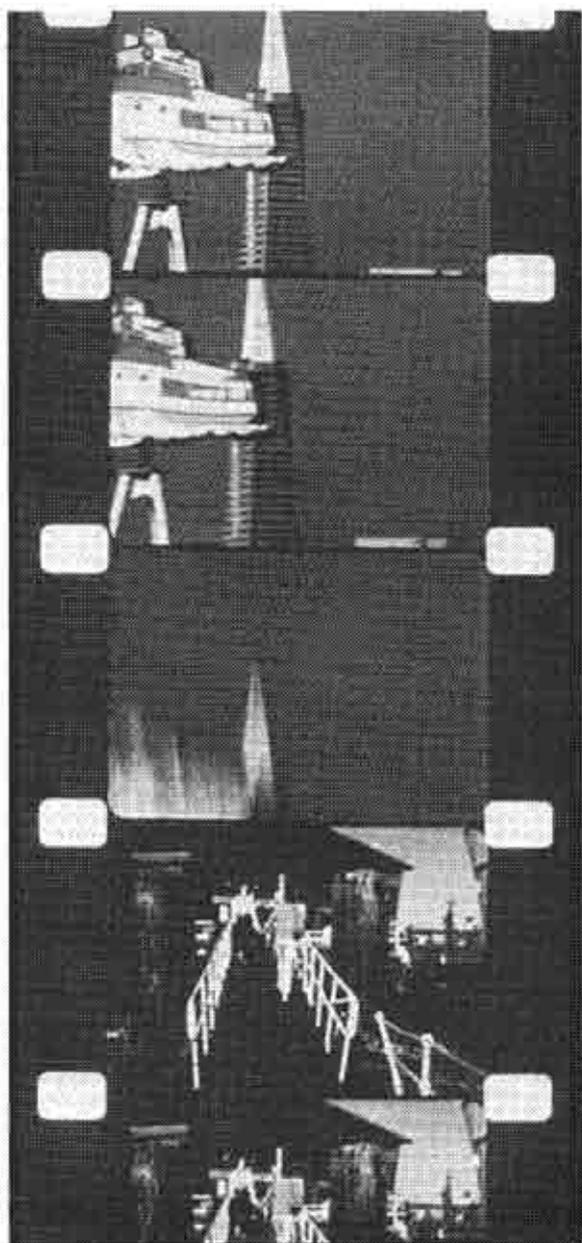
### **Angel Island**

This event was one of a series of site projects curated by Suzanne Foley as part of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's presentation of America, 1976, a Bicentennial exhibition. I was looking for a situation in which a social activity (in this case, the ferry ride) could serve as a vehicle for investigating the nature of experience as art. I selected Angel Island, a public park in the San Francisco Bay, because I had made a film there in 1974. This film became the 'score' for the subsequent event.

*Coming and going: Angel Island will result in an edited version of a 3 minute film D'Agostino made of a walk from the top of Mt. Livermore on Angel Island, to the ferry and back to San Francisco. On Saturday, October 29, 50 people will be given segments of the film and will retrace the walk in reverse. Each will find the place where the segment was taken and then return the strip to D'Agostino, who will splice the strips together in the order in which he receives them. Both the original film and edited version will be shown at 3:30. Participants will meet at Pier 43½ in San Francisco at 11:30 a.m. for the noon ferry to Angel Island (and return on the 4:30 ferry).*

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Exhibition announcement.









**COME:** 1b: to move toward  
or enter a scene of  
action or into a field  
& of interest whether  
partly physical or  
wholly ideal

**GO:** 14a: to come to be:  
BECOME, b: to un-  
dergo a change or  
transformation.<sup>1</sup>

Kristine Stiles

Basic to Peter D'Agostino's art is a continual exploration of three phenomena: origins, receptions (in the sense of receiving, taking possession or getting; harboring and reacting through response) and transformations. Selecting aspects of "observable" reality (as manifest in "facts" and events), he creates works which serve to mark with signification the transit relationships between these three points.

In effect, he continually produces works which objectify that which is transitive, visualizing it through structures incorporating spatial elements in sequence, quantity and number, through language as symbol and through the juxtaposition of real and illusory perceptions. His metaphors seek to stay movement occurring between approach and recession, that synaptic juncture in which meaning resides and connects to recognition producing knowledge.

Taking an "instant" photograph and watching it develop on a television screen can be a slow and tedious process. What seems to be quick in one medium can appear to take an unbearably long time in another...<sup>3</sup>

Given his obsession to still the meaning laden moment in its ephemeral transit between things and experiences, the photograph with all its subsequent technology (film, video, broadcast television, etc.) serves him by allowing him to "freeze-frame" his observations and intuitions, to re-structure information to function as parable, and, at its best, to provide insight through example and ostention.

In 1977, Peter D'Agostino realized an event, *coming and going: Angel Island*<sup>4</sup> which incorporated a completed film, an illusive performance, an installation in which the original film was reconstructed and an activity in which the public participated. Regardless of the numerous formal elements, *Angel Island* was an unobtrusive, modest artwork in which complex, rich associations and experiences were linked with very simple procedures. However, because of its totally unpretentious character and formal simplicity, coupled with a confusing context of simultaneous events,<sup>4</sup> *Angel Island* has not received the attention which it deserves.

*Angel Island* itself is a national park located in the San Francisco Bay. There D'Agostino shot what he called a "home movie" with his future wife, Deirdre Dowdakin, in May 1974. It documented their walk from the top of Angel Island to the ferry dock and then crossing the San Francisco Bay back to the city. However, throughout the day, they attempted to

create the impression that they were walking toward the top of the Island rather than away from it. The film was shot at variable speeds progressing from a highly animated 2 frames per second, until they arrived at their destination (San Francisco) where the timing returned to 24 frames per second or the filmic "real time." From beginning to end, the *Angel Island* film sustained a texture of temporal reversal, observational reversal and durational variation. Time was literally reconstructed to appear to be the past of a future-oriented activity.

Three copies of the film were made: the original, 100' or 3 minutes; a second and third copy which were cut into 50, 2' strips without regard for sequencing. The cut-up sections of the third film were then placed into 50 small film cans with the following notation taped to the tops of the cans:

COMING AND GOING: Angel Island  
The EVENT is synonymous with the LOCATION  
LOCATE  
PERCEIVE  
VERIFY  
Angel Island: GOING AND COMING

The second film was mounted in plexiglas and exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (as part of the exhibition, *America, 1976*), along with some photo-enlargements of the film's frames.

Invitations were sent out requesting to meet at the Angel Island Ferry, Pier 43½ at noon on October 29, 1977 where a maximum of 50 passengers would receive one of the small tins in which a segment of the original film lay. The film itself functioned as the "score" to the EVENT and Peter requested that people verify the "reality" depicted in their 2' strip.

The object was to find, become conscious of and absorbed by authenticating the representation pictured in the 2' film strips: to pair image to reality, through experience. Once this immersion into the artificial (film-image) was corroborated with the natural (the actual places depicted on Angel Island), the two were once again collapsed into a single experience, PERCEIVED and VERIFIED, then the participant would, return the 2' film strip to Peter who would re-edit the film in an old bike shed near the Park Headquarters on the Island. The final edited film was determined by the number of people who participated and the sequence in which they returned with the film. At the end of the day, the original footage and the newly edited film were shown in the bike shed.

Ideally, the film would be edited in the reverse order in which it was filmed. Logic: The ferry would be the first images verified while the places that were a greater distance from the grove (eg: the mountain top) would take longer to locate and return... The system I used to edit the Angel Island film was a totally arbitrary procedure based on the time it would take the participants to "verify" the "reality" of the images depicted... Real life followed film image—changing the order and structure of the film. The theory and reversal of film experience to real life and back to film is the most important aspect of the work for me.\*

By mapping the contradictions, reversals and convolutions of "knowing" and "imagining," Angel Island wove the real (a participant's primary experience) and the artificial (the original film and its reconstruction as secondary information) back and forth over the behavioral terrain of the participant. As a container metaphor, this artwork functioned as a prototype through which a complete ontological metaphor for "meaning" and its construction could be understood. Peter had placed human beings at the center of form where the ultimate issue of "relationship," both to things and to events, is central to the creation of "meaning."

Happenings and activities function as systems which, when entered into and played out, provide us with an expanded knowledge of the life issues upon which they are based.<sup>7</sup>

The "life issue" at stake in the Angel Island work is the re-unification of perception with action which will lead to responsible awareness and conduct.

Angel Island was used as a metaphor through which one way of conceiving a phenomenon is demonstrated in terms of another:

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.<sup>8</sup>

So, the spatial directions requiring "verification" and designating the location as "synonymous" with the "event," instructed the participant to begin ordering information so that the body would be physically ori-

ented through the creation of boundaries. As human beings, our material existence imposes a perception of that which is "in" and that which is "outside" of us, projecting that "in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces."<sup>9</sup>

But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries... There are few human instincts more basic than territoriality. And such defining of a territory, putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification.<sup>10</sup>

When Peter required the individual to participate in the re-construction of experience by objectifying images which he had already seen and then shot with his camera in the film, he asked the participant to quantify and re-contain things—trees, houses, landmarks, a bend in the road, flowers, etc. By so quantifying, he established a ground upon which perception could order relationship between the concepts of "me" and "it"—or the ontological experience of "in" and "out," the orientations which determine reality. The "event" itself was then conceptualized as the "location" (in the way that Peter's instructions required) so that all of the participants actions within this event could be transformed into objects—could be objectified, understood as metaphor and thereby distance the process of conceptualization from experience providing a symbol through which experience could return to understanding. This is precisely the way in which the notion of "aesthetic distance" functions; and in this way, Angel Island, while being a participatory activity became simultaneously an aesthetic object.

Not only did Angel Island establish a complex metaphorical structure, but Peter organized the process of references to create what is linguistically known as metonymy,<sup>11</sup> or one thing which *stands for* another, as a referential device, unlike metaphor which *replaces* one thing for another. The "contiguity" between the participant and Peter became the metonymical structure through which a direct and binding connection was established between "Maker" and "Receiver" and through which then "Maker" became "Receiver" and "Receiver" was transformed into "Maker." In other words, Peter de-emphasized his own "subject-self," shifting his presence into a subordinate role and thereby leaving the field of action/creation open to the spectator to become "Maker."

By directly connecting art practice, through action, to life experience, Live Art expands the communicating mechanism of symbolic representation. Live Art "actions" link life "events" to and through the other like a conduit.<sup>12</sup>

The event he built included activities which were the performance of normal human pursuits, occupations and recreations.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of this essay, I claimed that the roots of all of Peter D'Agostino's work were entwined with problems relating to "origins," "receptions" and "transformations." These activities led away from the origins toward receptions captivating the spectator and transforming him/her into natural metonymical extension/continuation of the origins both in form and content. In this way, "viewing" (objectifying) became "doing" (subjectifying) and the traditional distance between subject/object dissolved into mutually shared symbols. These symbols leave us at the crucial apex of meaning in D'Agostino's work, that area which he concretizes "transit."

Of utmost significance here, is the way that he constructed an artificial form which had woven into its design all the signals for reciprocity, that relationship in which responsibility and involvement occur. For, as soon as he had filmed himself and Deirdre during their Angel Island sojourn, cut up the film and distributed it as an "object-map-signal," they lost their significance as "subject," and no longer real bodies in space and time, they became devices for signifying someone/something else, physical presences referring forward to someone/something absent. We, the participants, were "someone" absent; our experiential movement-realization-discovery became the "something" and the content was the absence which we filled. Content, set free from the original subject in/by Peter, was re-embodied (literally) in us, the participants. Peter then became the observer, deconstructing his own control for a time<sup>14</sup> in an exchange with the new status of the spectator as "Maker." That maker-participant then reconstructed the chain of correspondences leading back to the source in layers of exchanged perception which reinforced the same play of forces primarily experienced as the behavioral, body-boundary to which I referred earlier in this essay. The spectator literally embodied the "transit" where meaning resides, filling the absence, we spectators turned participants became content.

Although Peter's presence was clear and essential throughout the entire event/installation/illusion-performance, he never allowed himself to dominate. Rather he became the unarticulated force through which others moved in relationship while *they* articulated the event. By locating the activities in familiar practices, he had set a conventional, non-threatening arena through which the usual inhibitions accompany-

ing the pressure to participate in an "art event" naturally dissipated. The individual set free to enjoy his/her own natural processes, could and did become aware of his/her own perceptions as they connected and related to the general format of the event. The phenomena acknowledged were simultaneously seen as image-experience-object to be verified from the film as well as personal "projection" (a subtle play on the act and structure of filming itself). Emotions and thoughts located in the seat of the personally familiar were liberated from that private mind to expand into a public, shared adventure. Immanent in the piece, Angel Island, was the facility for generating cooperation. The spectator became part of, contributed to and exchanged information not only with Peter but with the other 50 participants.

Ostension is one of the various ways of signifying, consisting in de-realizing a given object in order to make it stand for an entire class. You ask me, "How should I be dressed for the party this evening?" If I answer by showing my tie framed by my jacket and say, "Like this, more or less." I am signifying by ostension... I am offering to you a model... I am not only picturing a given behavior, I am in fact eliciting a behavior, emphasizing a duty, mirroring your future. In (Roman) Jakobsonian terms, my message is at the same time a referential, a phatic, an imperative, an emotive—and, it is aesthetic.<sup>15</sup>

It is the culturally shared base of images, values and forms which makes "primitive" art cohesive, that community of symbols upon which the artist may draw to express his/her own creativity. Just the opposite exists in our world where few common traditions are collectively shared and one must search, not so much to express his/her individuality but to find, and then re-create, an image which may be communicated and understood universally. The relative impossibility of ordering or inventing such a ubiquitous symbol in the plethora of our contemporary information overload is what gives rise to the "genius" who is able to discover that "universal" and thereby link us. However, it is precisely this twist which elevates one creative perception above another, lifting it in the public imagination to the plane of "genius." This divides us again, and reinforces that "subject" or "signature" at the basis of our divided society. So, rather than seek to invent "universal symbols" perhaps the practice of ostension holds the greater possibility of creating a rich and cohesive collective practice in our technological existence.

... if one agrees to define communication as an exchange as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response, and thus of a *responsibility* (not a psychological or moral responsibility, but a personal, mutual correlation in exchange) ... (then) we must understand communication as something other than the simple transmission—reception of a message.<sup>18</sup>

The clarification of the "transit" between reciprocating movement, reality and illusion is the clear meta-

phor for communication which D'Agostino's art sets as an example. Through it, and during our participation in its creation, we learn to see, but also *be* cooperative in shaping a micro-milieu. This may function as symbol for the creation of shared values. "If we understand communication as something other than the simple transmission/reception of a message ..." (in Baudrillard's words), then *Angel Island* accomplished much towards the demonstration of a method for exchange, for dialogue, for communication.

I have attempted to explain the way in which Peter D'Agostino constructed *coming and going: Angel Island* in a self-reflexive tri-partite structure which wove back and forth over itself and the participants a tightly interlaced system of correspondences. This may best be demonstrated by the following chart:

MEANING Relational	CONTENT Conceptual	FORM Material
<i>origins</i>	<i>self (ontological perceptions regarding the placement of the subject in the world of things)</i>	<i>Peter</i>
<i>receptions</i>	<i>other (objectification perceptions placing the self in relationship to those things by way of boundaries and the limitations they impose)</i>	<i>Participant</i>
<i>transformations</i>	<i>relationship (the connections established between these boundaries and the "transit" from self to others)</i>	<i>Event</i>

I have used the word "transit," the synaptic signifying relationship, to describe the ephemeral value and meaning inherent in Peter's work. Not only the media with which he works (photography as the primary structural tool), but the formal architecture of his pieces collaborate to reveal the fundamental necessity and existence of "relationship." When he is rational and explicit, he refers to "two-way communication" as the issue at the heart of his experiments and his art. When he is his most subtle, intuitive and evocative self, Peter metaphorically creates images and aspects of "transit" which allow the spectator to enter into and perform in a free space whereby they determine what communication is for themselves. In this "everyones-land," the "transit" between origins and transformations becomes reception. Receptions set the context for meaning, understanding and content in life and between human beings.

## NOTES:

1. Partial definitions of "come" and "go" were excerpted from *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, Unabridged Edition. These two verbs incorporate a wide experiential range to which I could have referred at great length in this essay. However, for the sake of an introduction to *coming and going: Angel Island*, the physical and "wholly ideal" fields of action, in which being, becoming and undergoing change or transformation, suffice to locate the reader in the domain of Peter's magic.
2. Suzanne K. Langer quotes Karl Britton's *Communication: A Philosophical Study of Language* (1939), pp. 204-206 on "facts" in her *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Third edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 268. For my purposes, I will accept his definition in this essay to define "facts": "A fact is essentially abstract but *there*. It is what is, an object of attention, of discriminating awareness, in present events. A fact, is that, in events to which we make a learned and discriminating response determined in part by the understanding of statements . . . . But the fact which shows the proposition to be true is that in events to which I make a response that has the same structure as the proposition . . ." As we will see in this essay, it is the proposition of a structure of events which the participants respond to by creating a similar, mirror (reversed) structure which leads them to understand the "fact" and subsequent "truth" not only of the art event itself but metaphorically of a certain aspect of experience and communication within it.
3. Peter D'Agostino, *TeleGuide: Including Proposal For QUBE*. Dayton, Ohio: Wright State University/Contemporary Media Study Center, Dayton, 1980, p. 9.
4. The *coming and going* series includes: PARIS (Metro); San Francisco (BART); Washington (METRO); and Angel Island. All of these, with the exception of the Angel Island piece were public installations of videotapes.
5. With the consent of the selected artists, a group of women artists staged a series of simultaneous performances at the *America 1976* project sites. The performances were done in conjunction with the Floating Museum, under the banner of (*H)Errata* or the error of excluding Her. They were a protest against the SFMMA's failure to select any women to exhibit in the *America 1976* projects and "to correct the practice of overlooking and undervaluing women artists." The sudden appearance of additional activities during *coming and going: Angel Island* shifted some of the public's attention to the performances, although the premise and underlying structure of the event remained intact.
6. Peter D'Agostino from unpublished notes on *coming and going: Angel Island*.
7. Kathy O'Dell. *Allan Kaprow: The Artist As Educator*, an unpublished Master's Thesis, The University of California, Berkeley, 1982.
8. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
10. *Op. Cit.*
11. The word "metonymy" here is used in the sense that Roman Jakobson described it in *Fundamentals of Language* where he discusses aspects of metaphoric and metonymic structures in the light of word associations. Jakobson explains that the similarity between two constitutive units (and any unit small or large) is established by the similarity between the position and semantic content of these units. The structure of a sequence in which the relation between the constitutive elements is a relation of similarity is called *metaphoric*. On the contrary, when a sequence of elements is organized on the basis of a relation of contiguity, its structure is *metonymic*. That is to say that both aspects of the connection between these elements is a connection of contiguity. Contiguity clearly implies that the elements have no other relationship than proximity or juxtaposition.
12. Quote is from the introduction to my unpublished doctoral dissertation, *The Destruction In Art Symposium (DIAS): A Metaphor For Twenty Years of Live Art and Its Socio-Political Significance*, in progress at the University of California, Berkeley.
13. Certainly these kinds of activities and the generation of events in which the banal, daily procedures of people are transformed into significant and symbolic-laden metaphors is indebted to Allan Kaprow's "Activities" and his articulation of the "ready-made" routine.
14. The deconstruction of artistic control in Peter's work has been strongly influenced by two sources: Umberto Eco's concept of the "open text" and Alain Robbe-Grillet's concepts of "order and disorder." The "open text" extends certain possibilities to the audience who then makes decisions upon ways in which they will interpret or re-construct those possibilities into meaning. Robbe-Grillet's definitions of "order," or structured, established power, and "disorder," or personal, individual creation, are often found in the way that "order" is assembled in Peter's work to be dis-assembled by the reception, possession and re-order (disorder) of the spectator. This practice functioned clearly in the *Angel Island* artwork.
15. Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review*, 1973, p. 108.
16. Jean Baudrillard. *For A Critique of The Political Economy of The Sign*, St. Louis, Missouri: Telos Press, 1981, pp. 183-84.

# Appendix

## *coming and going:*

**Angel Island**, event, October 29, 1977; installation, *America, 1976*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, September 16-November 9, 1977.

**PARIS (Metro)**, installation, June-July, 1978

**San Francisco (BART)**, event, July 15, 1978

*Global Space Invasion*, The Floating Museum/San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

**Washington (METRO)**, installation, October 26, 1979; *ArtSite*, Washington Project for the Arts.

### **EXHIBITIONS:**

*Concepts*, Ohio Wesleyan University, September-October, 1978.

*Continuous Video*, Washington Project for the Arts, January-February 1979.

**Peter D'Agostino: comings and goings**, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, April 5-22, 1979.

**Video-Roma: The First Decade**, Italian Television (RAI), Summer, 1979.

**Projects XXIX: California**, Museum of Modern Art, New York, September 20-November 6, 1979.

**PARIS (Metro)**, Ohio University, Athens, October, 1979.

**Generative Issues: A Common Ground**, Wright State University, Dayton, October-November, 1979.

*Sound*, P.S. 1, New York, September 30-November 16, 1979.

*Ithaca Video Festival*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse; The Kitchen, New York; Media Study, Buffalo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Northwest Film Study Center, Portland; and other locations; traveling exhibition, 1979-80.

**Space/Time/Sound - 1970's: A Decade in the Bay Area**, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, December 21, 1979-February 10, 1980.

**Video: Time and Space**, College of Architecture, Barcelona, May 5-11, 1980.

**Peter D'Agostino: coming and going**, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, November 29, 1980-February 1, 1981.

**Peter D'Agostino: A Selection of Work 1977-1981**, The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance, New York, February 2-27, 1982.

*Text/Picture Notes*, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, NY, May 14-September 8, 1982.

**Paris Biennale**, Le Grand Palais, Paris, September-October, 1982.

#### SCREENINGS/LECTURES:

1978 Artists Space, New York; Antioch College, Yellow Springs.

1979 Santa Barbara Museum of Art; Video Free America, San Francisco; Contemporary Media Study Center, Dayton; *Conference on Visual Anthropology*, Temple University, Philadelphia; *Retrospective Screening*, Athens Video Festival.

1980 University Art Museum, Berkeley; School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

1981 Anthology Film Archives, New York; Boston Film/Video Foundation; California Institute for the Arts; New School for Social Research, New York; Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia.

1982 The Kitchen, New York; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; The Donnell Library, New York; Fort Mason Foundation, San Francisco.

#### PUBLISHED DOCUMENTATION:

San Francisco (BART): *High Performance*, December, 1978.

PARIS (Metro): *Still Photography – the Problematic Model*, edited by Lew Thomas and Peter D'Agostino, NFS Press, San Francisco, 1981.

*Space/Time/Sound - 1970's: A Decade in the Bay Area*, by Suzanne Foley, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, distributed by University of Washington Press, 1981.

#### ARTICLES, REVIEWS:

Atkins, Robert, "Space Age Art from BART," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, August 3, 1978.

Stofflet-Santiago, Mary, "Global Space Invasion," *Artweek*, August 12, 1978.

Forgey, Benjamin, "A Chance to Watch Video Art," *Washington Star*, February 9, 1979.

Wooster, Ann-Sargent, "Voice Choices," *Village Voice*, October 18-23, 1979.

Tarnpol, Paula, "Metro's on Video," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1979.

Atkins, Robert, "Eastern Exposure," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, November 22, 1979.

Brown, Ellen, "Subway Systems Surface at CAC in Video Works," *Cincinnati Post*, April 5, 1979.

Iskin, Ruth E., "Social Functions of Video," *Artweek*, December 29, 1979.

Ross, Janice, "Extracts of a Decade," *Artweek*, January 26, 1980.

Risatti, Howard, "The Fifth Annual Ithaca Festival," *New Art Examiner*, February, 1980.

Stofflet-Santiago, Mary, "Space/Time/Sound-1970's," *Images and Issues*, Summer, 1980.

February 12, 1979

Peter:

I've been thinking a lot about your work, especially the new pieces involving transportation *coming & going*. It occurs to me how it evolves the code and metaphor from the "prisoner" to the "passenger."

- A. In transportation: transposition, translation, transition.
- B. Identity as it is dramatized in one strain of literature emphasizes the problem of the prisoner/trapped, on trial, guilt, alone/ Hemingway, Kafka, Proust, Sartre, Van Gogh.
- C. Identity as a problem of translation and transportation/ Antonioni (*The Passenger*); Joseph Conrad (*Lord Jim*); Gauguin, Robbe-Grillet, etc.
- D. If one aspect of contemporary art is the attempt to deal with the signifier in opposition to content and meaning, it would seem to me that your work as it evolves from film, video, and "still" photography constantly parallels the movement of the signifier in its attempt to follow the phenomena of change exemplified in pieces like the METRO, BART, etc., in so far as units of identity are transported in systems of production and communications.
- E. It is also becoming very clear to me that "photography & language" is not simply another fashion in art, like *Pop Art* or *Art & Language*, etc. Indeed, photography & language is not only interchangeable because of advertising, licensing, & information, it is our reality at every point in the contemporary world.
- F. And I think you are dealing with one of the most advanced issues in art at this time or what constitutes the aesthetics of change and movement in our world.

If I could get the time I would like to do an essay on your work framed around the image of the *passenger*.

I wanted to get these items to you because I have been thinking more and more about your work and the complexities it expresses.

Will talk to you later.

Your friend,

Lew Thomas

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*coming and going*

**PETER D'AGOSTINO**

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