Travel Stories

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In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called metaphorai. To go to work or to come home, one takes a “metaphor”—a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.

—Michel de Certeau

Regular flows of people, on streets, in subways, and in motor vehicles, define the city, as institutionalized air travel defines national, regional, and global linkages. Michel de Certeau offers a particularly elegant image of the multitude of ways in which language and narration are implicated in organizing our experiences of city life; explanations of our experiences in terms of narrativity and flows are themselves a symptom of the age. The century that began with the underground tunneling of subways ended with the new image of society cut loose from its groundings, disconnected, above the terrain or located in an imaginary space of pure computation. Looking back on the centuries just past, we understand the linkage of information and transportation (and their dark double, mass death)—the movement of messages as well as people and goods, the soft and the hard of social organization.

As a traveler I may be distracted or purposeful, but as an observer I am interested in the banalities of habitation and of travel—how we locate and know ourselves in situations of transport. As an artist I make most of my observations in relationship to my habit of taking pictures in transit. Photography can arrest the flow of transportation; yet that medium, whose mute simplicity allows me to circle around the subject, lacks the capacity to provide structural and historical explanations. Photography produces a spatial tableau from which the narratives—essentially temporal—that might bring it to life must be inferred. In this essay I attempt some of the necessary supplement.

Road travel is the basic, everyday mode of nonpedestrian transportation, primarily in motor vehicles on roads, streets, and highways. But air travel and its support systems have come to constitute the railroads of the sky, while the urban subways, or undergrounds, represent their domestication and entombment. These three modes or systems command my attention, but it is the “invisible visible” of air travel and subways that most intrigues me, and I am content to leave the apprehension of road life largely
Boy Travellers, Sleeping.
All photos: Martha Rosler.
Original images are in color.
to its many practiced observers.

To begin near the beginning of our narrative: In the nineteenth century the emerging networks of transport, starting with the canals and, decisively, the railroads, reconfigured the structure of the habitable world, changed people's experiences and expectations, effectively decreased distance, and almost palpably subordinated space to time. Time itself, along with labor power—quantifiable as “man hours”—was becoming commodified by the introduction of industrialized production, shaping all of daily life and livelihood and setting the preconditions for the roads (and subways) to come. In this revolution, Wolfgang Schivelbusch points out, the nineteenth-century railroad in Europe and America provided the middle classes with firsthand experience of the factory floor, hitherto reserved for the proletariat.5 As Schivelbusch tells us, the industrialization of travel produced the industrial traveler—first through architecture and physical space, next through the nature of the objects central to the process, and then through the conditions of rail travel itself. Travelers entered terminals through a classicizing façade, perhaps, but approached the mechanical mass conveyances via interiors that were the product of the aggressive new industrial engineering. The new means of travel, this new system, was unlike the earlier forms of ground transportation (including the stagecoach and canal boat) whose “organic” rhythms of movement carried people through the (more-or-less) natural contours of the land and water at a pace determined by human beings.6

The twentieth century, in normalizing mass transportation, reached backward to echo, with the development of the motor car and the cargo truck, that more organic mode of individualized travel close to the ground. But even that mode of transport, a challenge to the fixity of the rails, was itself industrialized at the production end. Car making became the benchmark for the development of the moving mass-production line, marking a great step in the progressive deskilling of industrial labor. The automobile fantasy, famously at the core of promises of personal freedom and happiness, also represents the achievement of a certain minimal social standing and settledness.

By the mid-twentieth century, automobile and, more important, truck travel had converted much of the landscape in America into a grand worker-and-military-delivery system more effective than that provided by its railroad predecessors. Although the cost of entry as a passenger rather than a vehicle owner may be minimal, the cost to suburban households, which generally own several vehicles, is escalating rapidly, and private spending on transportation outstrips that by the federal government, on roads and public transit alike, fivefold.7 That the transformation of the American landscape produced what is now the daily sight and experience of the nonurban world for hundreds of millions of
Americans hardly need be said.

The subway is part of the urban everyday, at base the triangulation between home, work, and leisure. The urban subway is characterized, like road and rail travel, by easy in-and-out access and, even more, by short journeys; it is local. But it represents the movement of the railroad (largely) underground, with its conversion of passengers into sentient cargo, unable and unprepared to control the travel vehicle. The airport, air travel, and their petty inconveniences are also accepted elements of modern life—which doesn’t make the experience of them any less dramatic a break with routine. Air travel brings with it tightly controlled—and heavily mediated—access and levels of security reflecting its conditions, which include: the high cost of equipment and operation, as well as of passenger entry; the consequently higher median income of the travelers; the longer “dwell time” of the captive audiences; the immense volume and value of goods carried; the traversal of national and regional borders; and the constant possibility of violent acts falling under the rubric of terrorism.

I have remarked elsewhere on the degree to which my experience of airports, and air travel, has brought to mind my childhood experience of the New York City subway system (an experience so woven into the fabric of the everyday that it was only after photographing air travel that I began to consider the subway as a worthy object of attention). The memory is evoked by more than the dim terminal corridors and the feelings occasioned by flight itself, oddly similar to being in a rail car hurtling through a seemingly featureless tunnel—under the ground or in intergalactic space. As a Brooklyn child I shared the common understanding that New York was the capital of exceptionalism, not to be looked for on any map but on another plane of being—it was an outsider’s gaffe.
or insult to invoke the city’s mere geographic presence or location. New York’s existence—especially for Brooklynnites—as a geographic and cartographic entity was irrelevant to the living of daily life. When moving through the city, going uptown did not call to mind “north,” and trajectory remained a matter of a series of movements and nodal points. There was no “spatializing photograph” or other image that would answer to this process.

I still experience subway travel this way. Nodes and transit time constitute the experience, displacing any holistic vision or schematic of the world I am traversing; I have trouble reconciling the two constructs of aboveground and belowground. If the subway emerges aboveground, the episode is a prized surplus, a visual fillip like the glimpse outside an airplane window. (For those who see it regularly, it is not much more than visual noise, or the “picture on the wall” already noted by nineteenth-century train travelers.) Viewed from a car, the visible world seems poised between the abstracted moving picture one sees from a train and a singular place I might at any moment enter. As a driver who has spent a lot of time driving within a hundred miles of the two coasts (having lived, I confess, in California for about a dozen years twenty years ago), I know the roads and city streets of the vast metropolitan areas as a story larger than I can ever understand, whose hard realities control me far more than I could like, despite my ability to decide where and when to enter.

The dialectic of freedom and control figures differently in different modes. The promise of escape is a perpetual selling point of air travel—for those whose livelihoods do not depend upon it. The urban underground rail system requires no lure other than necessity, for its sovereign role is to get people to and from work. Roads, those most physical of intrusions on the panorama, charac-

teristically speak of both escape and necessity. Road life has also reconfigured elements of the social landscape, its depersonalization suspending the common understanding of civility. On the subway, in the grip of necessity, in close proximity with strangers, most riders observe the well-studied subway etiquette of polite indifference toward fellow travelers first developed along with the railroads. But in one’s private car, where one is the navigator, not the passenger, aggressive, confrontational, and competitive behavior toward strangers is taken for granted—while the person who cut you off on the way into the parking lot will banter with you in the cashier’s line. Driving pits people against other vehicles and their drivers and against the various systems designed to catch them up in violation of the legally established rules of the road. The pressures of modernity that one might have hoped to escape by fleeing in one’s car—the tourism promoted to city dwellers in the earliest days of car ownership, when traffic jams were undreamed of and farmers organized against and sabotaged incoming roadsters—are recast in another mold. Rather than dreaming in the context of freewheeling tours of ennobling natural vistas, on the road motorists must now keep as close to constant attention (of whatever quality) as they are capable, a requirement that suggests the primitive or anachronistic state—one might say, underregulated condition—of this mode of transportation.

At present, nevertheless, these roads, like city streets and, no doubt, suburban ones, are being written into the web of information and control, not simply by means of old-fashioned radar sweeps and police patrols but by laser tracking, global positioning satellites, fixed cameras seeking traffic violations and other criminal acts, electronic toll monitors, and so on, thus joining airports and (as yet less intensively monitored) subways as surveilled spaces.
It is only on the ribbon-stretched highways of the American West that the tale of unfettered movement might still find its realiza-
tion. On the interstates one may still experience the abstract road, 
with its blank beauty of scrolling blacktop punctuated by serenely 
engineered bridges and overpasses; elsewhere the replication of 
shopping strips with the same few chain stores and motels makes 
the roadside, like the road itself, a modular affair. These stories 
of separation and differentiation are beginning to merge into the 
same story.

Flying and Riding
The distinctive systems of air and subway travel mirror each other 
insofar as each creates a population ever more closely watched 
and controlled. In their siting on the landscape, airports and sub-
ways are more like each other than like surface roads, for they 
each separate travelers from the sight of everyday habitation and 
commerce, forming what I above called the invisible visible. They 
also consequently coincide in their sharing of “subterraneity.” What 

is, however, the real condition of the underground is for air travel 
merely illusory, conjured by the dreams and desires that repress 
the fear of death. The subway can never escape the implications 
of being located in a pit. Belowground, everything changes— 
go ask Alice. Going down that hole, the traveler enters not only a 
place of possible assault—however unlikely it becomes, it is still 
much more likely in the subway than at the airport—but also the 
half-world of fantasies and fears, no matter how well repressed. 
The spaces underground can never be clean, never be other than 
contaminated—with others; with disease, vermin, and filth; 
with the remnants of past time. There is a rich literature of the 
basement and the undersea, not to mention the hidden nooks of 
the body, pervaded by the deadly and by death. Luckily, then, the 
subway train offers the possibility of a fairly quick escape, and its 
rocking and rocking along can, taken at their best, provide their 
own pleasures.

The subway’s barreling passage through its dark, narrow tun-
nels may call up the fantasy of flight, but in the system of actual 
flight the effort of the airlines is to deny the reality of flying, the 
focus of both desire and dread. Every place and space associated 
with flying provides a panoply of substitute experiences that 
serve to screen both anxiety and boredom. Airport spaces, never-
thless, like those of the urban subway, are real spaces. The feel-
ings evoked by these places may bear some similarities, but their 
look is inevitably different. Each has its particular infrastructural 
and decorative elements, noises and music, smells and sights, 
commercial outlets, advertising, and signage—and, above all, 
travelers and workers. Each system evokes worlds within worlds 
as people move through them in varying states of attention. Much
about air travel can only reinforce the perception of being in a place apart, a distinct locale in which many of the normal rules of social engagement are suspended, a perception heightened by the high stakes of various kinds of failure and the ever-present security procedures.

For practiced travelers, negotiating the subway system is a nicely honed skill based on personally acquired specific knowledges. Movement is directed to obvious purpose: in and out, up and down; to kiosks and benches or to specific spots on the platform chosen on the basis of the exits or transfer points at the stop at which you will leave the train. The story is: going to work, leaving work, going shopping, going to visit friends and family, going to the park. . . . For millions of travelers, any extra minute spent on a station platform is a moment wasted in exasperation, made perhaps more engaging (or the reverse?) by musicians of every stripe. Commuters may be pleased by the decorative schemes, including the splashy new ones, but only tourists can be enthralled by them. Again now, just beyond the millennial cusp and in the face of a declining economy, people are sleeping in the New York City subway, in cars and on benches, as in the 1980s. Once again, people traverse the cars asking for money; some new young breakdancers work the crowd again. Sometimes people linger for a few minutes in a nonplatform area to watch dancers or musicians or to buy a small item from an itinerant vendor. Underground, the spaces themselves do not call to mind the unseen hand that created them; they might well be caves retrofitted for train travel (the spooky romance of the catacombs).

Like most subway riders, as described above, I have learned to handle the compacted urban modernity that the subway represents: close collision with utter strangers kept manageable by personal
reserve and self-absorption, keeping my own counsel of looks punctuated by judicious homeopathic doses of practical camaraderie and exchanges of advice (the “face time” that is an elaborate ritual of looking and not-looking, of speaking and silence, of impassive generality and neighborly superficiality). These behavioral strictures, the hallmark of urbanity mapped out by Georg Simmel long ago, are so carefully coded in the subway because of the close quarters. They are not called into play at the airport, where the crowds are much thinner and the schedules more demanding; and spatial allocation on the conveyance, finally reached, is strictly and parsimoniously allocated.

At the airport I am fixed on one thing only: getting to the plane. The journey is trajectory; it is only with effort that I notice that I am in “a building.” Most travelers going through the airport are, like me, likely to be preoccupied with the task at hand. By and large, the airport—unlike the mall, to which modern airports are often compared—is not a “destination” (but see below). Instead, the airport is, like a railway terminal, a transit point where people must adapt to the demands of external, fixed schedules. But unlike a railway terminal, which has acquired a “building-like” fixity, a modern airport is most usefully thought of as a unified (if vexed) complex of roads, runways, and structures. The railway sits in careful relation to the city or town, while the airport is carefully severed from it. Many air-terminal buildings functionally end inside the plane, reinforcing the indeterminate feel of the place. With baggage and family to look after, people’s attention is apt to be caught, if at all, not by abstract elements of the building itself but by elements of finish or decor; the place itself is experienced more than seen. This directed (in)attentiveness is not so different from that quality of attention appropriate to the subway system.

In the subway the early decorative schemes, necessary to establish the credentials of the place, by the 1930s already seemed so very nineteenth century and were eventually forgone for the sake of stripped down functionality—only to be reinstated in the past decade in a few tourist-gathering nodal stations (hubs, in transport parlance) in Manhattan. The grandiose decoration of many European underground stations (one thinks, perhaps, of the Paris Métropolitain or Moscow under the Soviet system) may attest to novelty, civic pride, political boasting—like the great railway terminals of the era whose schemes they were attempting to bring underground along with the trains. The signaling of local efficiency and motive power was meant, no doubt, to represent the capacity of this technology to mimic the physically transformative role within the plan of the city that the railroads had accomplished on a regional, national, and international scale aboveground. The basic wall surface in the New York subway is tile; at the airport, where walls are even noticeable, it is wallboard, perhaps punctuated by glass.
The subway is in this way continuous; the terminal, modular.

If at the turn of the twentieth century it was the materiality of the subway that had seemed an important message, by mid-century a different story was required for air travel, where the specifics of the craft and the journey seemed to demand the implicit substitution of a different reigning idea—namely, dematerialization. The airport terminal has grown from hangars and sheds, much as railroad terminals developed out of trackside sheds. Rail-terminal design has not much changed (except through a terrible devolution), because few new terminals have been needed, whereas airport-terminal design is, relatively speaking, a growth industry. I bypass that fact for the moment, for as I have noted it is the terminals’ interior fittings of which passengers take note and which airport architects generally do not control—and these can be visually quite loud. A likely strategy for increasing the architecture’s effective visibility is to emphasize monumentality and to incorporate features that draw the eye up above the floor clutter. Gross architectural features are hard to miss: a showy atrium ceiling, a staircase or mezzanine, a long interior vista (perhaps with a moving walkway or a series of walkways). These are buildings without obvious “front doors,” always an unsettling condition for the comprehension of the place, for a building is a story that begins as we approach the entrance. Although the terminal façade is rarely seen or never seen—obscured by auxiliary buildings, parking structures, or ground transportation facilities or bypassed because the traveler approaches the building from another plane or from a rail system—the terminal silhouette and its roof line remain selling points in the design and commissioning phase.

Paris’s Charles de Gaulle can be taken to exemplify an airport in which the terminal architecture itself is the unremittingly grand
unified (and unifying) spectacle, a gigantic jigsaw puzzle in which all the pieces roll ever so nicely together, and in which each seems identical to all the others, with its interior ceiling/roof all of lustrous grey metal punctuated by strutwork or by a regularly marching pattern of holes. One of the consequences, however, for better or worse, is a monolithic and chilly seeming interior. Amsterdam’s Schiphol, in contrast, with its gambling casino, checkerboard floor, and colorful Lego pieces hanging from the ceiling, invokes the carnivalesque. The austere sensuousness of the sinuous curve in one; the visual delights of nursery forms in the other: these may be taken as two poles of airport design.17

The principles of flow that seem so compelling in architects’ models are rarely experienced as such by travelers. Instead we can characterize the dominant phenomenological tone as dislocation—dislocation in advance of relocation. In the airport, apart from the hustle, there is often a strangely aimless feel to the public areas; for many reasons there seems to be a fair amount of what I would characterize as rapid wandering. Considered apart from personal purpose, what do these people-collecting spaces signify? Continuity with life at the office building, perhaps, or the waiting room at the medical complex. One might propose that aside from high-profile or “signature” terminal atria—and perhaps even there—the spaces of the airport do not escape being read, and felt, as bureaucratic, abstract(ed) space, a degree zero of modular functionality that can be imprinted with the corporate swoosh in whatever version of minimalist upbeat presentation of corporate good taste is deemed appropriate. There is nothing comparable at most subway stations, too close to the railroad model on which they are based. (Besides, destination dreams do not figure in the wait for the subway train.)

Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, 1999.
Carroll Meeks, considering the history of nineteenth-century design of monumental buildings and especially of railway terminals, writes:

Corridors aspired to be tunnels, suggestive of the ones in which the railway bored its way through more difficult terrain. Again, proportion was significant; these galleries were made very long for their height and width. The tunnel was an inevitable shape for a train-shed, but it was not confined to them. It appeared in the corridors of monumental buildings. Sometimes the controlling idea was the open railway cut, not the tunnel; in that case the top lighted gallery was compressively high and narrow, as in the Manchester assizes. . . . Externally, the most conspicuous part of a building became its silhouette [with an emphasis on the roof line].

These corridors, long an ubiquitous modernist modular element of office life, have come to speak of bureaucratic control, not the race of a train through its tunnel. They represent, perhaps, an administered reality and symbolize a conflict of stasis and intangible movement dictated by an intelligence unconcerned with human comfort or capacity. Rush and wait: most visits to the airport require at least a brief wait, suspended animation in a seating area, perhaps a pocket among many pockets, off a main hall or arcade. This is the area of gate traffic and its associated seating, which seem, except in a few instances—Las Vegas, say, where there are slot machines right up to the departure gates—to take their place in such tubular megacorporate/bureaucratic corridors of personal effacement. We need these niches and nooks, small spaces with marginal walls and features—subdivisions punctuating the corridor miles, lessening the apprehension of anxiety-driven bustle.
Photographs of earlier moments of railroad travel show people dotted about the terminals, waiting for their trains, perched on their luggage. Surely present-day airport facilities are superior. Why, then, do so many of these terminals remind me more of prisons than of crystal palaces? Not, I hope, because I am stuck in the past—the beginning of the twentieth century, to be precise: the moment of apotheosis of the great rail terminals modeled on the steel-ribbed glass conservatory buildings of the mid-nineteenth century. I trace the success of the great railway terminals, first, to the visual comprehensibility of those spaces, their relative ease of negotiation and obvious access to trains and, second, to the sense of a broad and rather autonomous public rather than a controlled one. Unlike at the airport, the connections with faraway places at the railroad, as at the seaport, are visibly signified by the lines of steel stretching off to the vanishing point, as by the great ships moored on the waterfront. At the railroad station, melded with the city around it, the crowd is the ornament, and there is also less reliance (so far) on advertising light boxes as the presenting decorative scheme.

The wordless boasting of imperial capital in its grand terminals at the turn of the last century may account for these structures, but the complexity of feeling oneself moving within the “representative” space of that regime should not be belittled—directing the traveler’s attention outward to the democratic (fingers crossed!) collectivity at the present moment seems less totalitarian than cutting the individual adrift. At the airport there is no grand scheme other than functional efficiency impressed into the building, and national and regional identities are worn lightly if at all, crowded aside by the internationalized shops and the modules they inhabit. No matter how unified the building, then, as in the subway, there is no map, and no “grand narrative,” that will answer to the traveler’s experience.

The Forgotten (Redirected Imaginaries)
Despite the banality of the space, the anxiety of the real here makes its return, for the distractions at the airport—the dissimulations about place and space; the invocations of the virtual community of commodity signs, of worldwide headlines and sports events via CNN; the liquor, the ice cream, and the hamburgers; the reduction of all destinations to just another destination—all are meant to keep at bay the boredom and anxiety that are experienced most acutely in relation to air travel. All modern modes of transportation, of course, whether roads, railroads, subways, or air flight, bring an element of threat. Once modes of transport left “nature” behind—once the railroads made speed and dislocation a common experience of transportation, radically affecting the durée—transportation called death to mind. Rail travel, today
regarded in advanced industrial societies as on the whole benign, because outmoded or routine, was understood from the earliest days to be a dangerous undertaking. Thomas Creevy, an Englishman, wrote in 1829: “It is really flying, and it is impossible to divest yourself of the emotion of instant death to all upon the least accident happening.” In 1933, as the railroads were beginning the process of dematerializing into sky routes, National Geographic Society president Gilbert Grosvenor offered a paean to air flight. In “Flying,” he writes: “It took nearly three centuries to cover our country with roads and tracks on the ground. In little more than a decade some 28,000 miles of airways have been plotted and largely marked along their routes with lights and signs.” Grosvenor happily concludes, “Speed, beyond any doubt, is man’s chief reason for riding in airplanes.” By this time, marketing and crowd control had rendered unacceptable the reception of rapid travel as abnormally dangerous and fear-provoking.

The mind managers, indeed, have been at work from the earliest days of commercial passenger flight, for proponents of commercial air transport were well aware that passengers in this new railway system of the air had to be kept pacified, in a state of near-cargo; panic and misbehavior could jeopardize all. As the pretensions and privileges of upper-crust “clipper class” air travel were giving way to the logistics of developing a mass flying public, danger as a theme was already banished. No more Thomas Creevys to cite. Now, anxiety and “panic disorder” have been regularized as individual psychiatric conditions manageable by drugs and exposure or desensitization therapy.

Among the many boasts about “these elevated railways of the sky” and the experiences they afford, Grosvenor offers in his 1933 article that “most air travelers to-day are bent on business: they are doctors, lawyers, bankers, editors, merchants, engineers, salesmen—in fact, the same classes who ride the railway trains. . . . Work as you fly is the rule of . . . busy executives. Most planes are equipped with table [and] typewriter.” Today the plane, once sold as a flying office or a commodious cruise ship (a point not surprisingly also emphasized by Geographic’s Grosvenor) is now refitted as a bus (or at best a hybrid of office and bus). It has been reimagined as a cross between the hospital and the nursery, with discreet hints of the bordello, all symbolized by the figure of the female flight attendant. (For the business class, the work station is not so much the selling point, but the comfy bed, the classy food, the quality entertainment, the cushy arm-chair seating.) Infantilization, a prime tactic of the consumer society, has been usefully marshaled in administering the tight space aboard the plane.

The denial of the reality of air travel, high-altitude rapid movement within a thin-skinned metal container, in favor of a dream of service,effortlessness accompanied by food, drink, and canned
televisual entertainment, was inevitable—overdetermined. The normalization of the airport’s built environment itself constitutes an implicit denial of threat. Contradictorily, the thronging crowds in a chaos of travel itineraries within those structures have long since had to submit to the regimentation imposed by militaristic security measures and the frequent if fluctuating preoccupations with malevolent but hidden agents of catastrophe.25

While municipal authorities exhort underground travelers to stay alert and mind their manners, the guardians of air travel want only to lull travelers to sleep, actually or metaphorically—through distraction. (If subway riders crave distraction, they read, talk, or listen to porta-music; the distractions available in automobiles are myriad, and some are dangerous.) The higher the “class” of service in and around the plane, the more baroque the forms of distraction and the more likely to be accompanied by professionalized personal attention (but as the taxi driver remarked, flying first class doesn’t make you any safer in a crash). In general, anxiety, annoyance, and boredom are better replaced by more positive attractions, provided primarily by food and personal TV monitors on the plane. Leave it to JetBlue, the “low-cost carrier” with a few lucrative routes, including New York to Orlando in central Florida (en route to Disney World), to offer passengers only down-market packaged snack crackers26 and basic but individualized television in lieu of meals and movies, all served in comfortable, couch-leather seats. What could be more humdrum? In the terminal normalization is signaled by the shops and even more potently the visual blips of the advertising program, from light boxes to immense billowing advertising banners—all of which subordinate the directional signage but do not hide the armed patrols.

Dwell Time
Dwell time in local transportation does not exist. Waiting for the subway or bus is a trial not to be tolerated, only endured. It has no value, although the hundred-and-fifty-year-old habit of reading associated with closed-car public transport offers a handy pastime. Many airport travelers, managing their possessions and their energies, are content to sit and wait in those ad-hoc-seeming airport seating areas, reading or, increasingly, talking on cell phones or working on laptop computers. But airport managers and retail lessees wish to turn airport dwell time into a familiar swell time, converting the experiential paradigm from the urban “station” or terminal to the suburban mall. The seating is designed to discourage sleeping (and thus to ward away homeless “interlopers”), although sleeping is a common activity at major transit hubs (Frankfurt again, Madrid, and Vienna, for example). But this is not the dwell time that interests the airport.

Generally speaking, if the operative principle of air travel, as I’ve suggested, is distraction, its other face is boredom. The long-held intention to turn the airport into a destination—present since the beginning of commercial flight—has moved from a promise of the sublime, the magnificent, and the modern (great engineering feats! new architectural forms! the miracle of flight, with jet planes approaching and landing, taxiing and taking off! loud noises! hurrying people!), which wore itself out not long after mid-century, to a more mundane, civilization-bred allure of the shopping arcade, turning the place into a mixture of Kafka’s castle and some upscale shopping mall you’ve never wanted to visit. At Saarinen’s TWA terminal at Idlewild Airport (now John F. Kennedy International), entering travelers were greeted with the sight of aircraft on the other side. With the shock of the new associated with flight long dissipated, the sight of planes, of the apron, of runways, has become less a matter of grand gesture than a minor option, as “the spectacle” foregrounds other forms. The runways and planes are not visible at many airports, particularly at the gates. In some, such as Heathrow, authorities are outright nervous about too much attention to the apron and the field (with terrorism in mind). Those vaulted glass roofs in current vogue offer an expanse of sky as metaphor for the plane traffic we no longer necessarily care to view, a fully abstract metonym for the journey, but nothing to hold your attention for long. The light they bring in can be taken as representative of the impulse toward dematerialization . . . and a bow to Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus, one supposes.

At great European hubs such as Frankfurt, the arcade plan has long been instituted, with every variety of shop, from hairdresser to erotic peepshow to a new indoor mini-amusement park à la Minnesota’s Mall of America; Vienna, Barcelona, Heathrow and Gatwick, Zurich, and Amsterdam, are just a handful of the many
shopper-hungry terminal complexes. It has been harder to establish the airport as a shopping destination in the United States, in part because of the inflated, desert-oasis pricing of even everyday items at U.S. airports and the plethora of easily accessible local shopping opportunities. The United States has few grand hubs associated with cosmopolitan cities; and perhaps most important, getting to most airports, poorly served by public transportation, is made unattractive by heavy road traffic. But the BAA, which controls the large British airports, also runs Pittsburgh’s airport and has reconfigured it, with a lot of hoopla, as a shopping arcade.²⁸

I have difficulty working up interest in the idea of going to a shopping mall from which to board a plane. As an itinerant artist—a business traveler but not a corporate traveler—I suffer from too much business travel in coach class since the institutions that pay my fare generally have nonprofit status. I resent seeing people with business-class tickets queuing on special lines from ticketing to security, boarding first, carrying on oversize pieces, and enjoying comfortable seating while I ingest wretched food and worry about blood clots. (In large subway stations, in contrast, stopping to take advantage of shops and services is an unremarkable, often unplanned, part of the daily routine.)

Erewhon/Nowhere
The epithet “nonplace” is often hurled at airports and some other sites of physical transit, presumably because of their blankly generic features and physical disconnection from the cities they serve. Technological optimists do not necessarily see “nonplaceness” as negative, preferring to think about the giddy dislocations that human beings of all ages and societies seek and which are symbolized by the carnival and the opium pipe. The idealization of this function as fully determining form is impossibly reductive and self-referential, of course. But there is, nevertheless, a degree to which most travelers deeply desire not to think of the airport as “a place”—a desire that interferes with the destination fantasies of airport managers. People do not want to pay the place too much mind, in keeping with the general modes of reception of the system of flight—which, like most other technologies of daily life and, especially, systems of transportation, tells a more powerful story as a unitary whole than any of its components.²⁹ In short, the exuberance of flight has been for many, especially nonbusiness-class, flyers replaced by annoyance, and for many flyers, regardless of flight class and social class, by the denial of catastrophic physical risk.

There appears to be a social need to deny the airport’s realities, removing the whole sticky subject from consciousness. The airport’s role as nowhereville also gets plenty of support from where it actually is: nowhere (at the suburban margins, in a pasture,
cornfield, or rice paddy, in a swamp, and so on)\textsuperscript{30} and from how
it is predominantly outfitted (modular office complex). Time, the
regularized time of transport schedules, quite efficiently effaces
place. I have remarked on how this outcast (cast out from the city)
place of transitions calls forth the submerged subterraneity that
resurfaces as fantastic allegorical relations between the building’s
tubes and internal spaces of the body or of mythological other-
worlds and underworlds. We constantly deny place simply to
enact a place in what we perceive to be placelessness. But how
this separation fantasy affects the politics of public life is not
always appreciated.

There is another element of shopping malls aside from shop-
ing that infects the airport: the illusory nature of the public
areas, organized to be as discontinuous as possible from the social
life of the surrounding society. This discontinuity is maintained
not only in its physical dimension—distance—but also applies to
the willful exclusion of the nonbuying public and the diminution
of the diversity of social life connected to the space. And most
particularly it presupposes that political discourse identified with
the public sphere is inappropriate in such a setting. The message
of controlled interior spaces unified in function and similar in
visual aspect is that the entire “world” of the airport is a functional
monoculture organized around the principle of physical move-
ments of crowds and mental diversion of individuals (which as
we have seen tends to be centered on eating and shopping) in which
the only appropriate messages, no matter how conveyed, are
commercial or directive.

Landmark litigation in the United States has brought some air-
ports—and some shopping malls—under the free speech provi-
sions of the U.S. Bill of Rights,\textsuperscript{31} but the return of political speech
in verbal or symbolic dimensions is not to be taken for granted,
and the logic of the isolated transit space militates against it. Of
course, none of this applies to subways, and ephemeral elements
of political speech are effected in major subway stations fre-
quently enough; but that is by and large unnecessary, since the
public street lies above. The militarized condition of the airport,
at a moment of high external threat to U.S. territory, includes the
suspension of civil liberties, and the greater the perceived danger,
the more the public colludes in and even preemptively demands
the suspension of these rights, including freedom of speech and
movement, especially for those perceived as “others” in the body
politic.\textsuperscript{32} That racial and ethnic profiling has long been robustly
practiced at airports around the world may have escaped the
indignation of U.S. civil libertarians and people of color, but a
more likely conclusion is that when applied to foreigners it
enjoys widespread popular support—in fact, it is now demanded
by a nervous America. A traveller’s anonymity in other modes of
transportation, including the subway, bus, train, and car, already
giving way in the face of automated fare cards and toll markers that
record one’s progress if not one’s identity directly, is under sporadic
pressure from advocates of identity cards (a commonplace in
Europe, perhaps, but anathema to many in the United States)—or
face- or eye-recognition devices—invoed as a ready solution
during periods of high perceived danger posed by outsiders.

Danger and Crisis
The undulating level of militarization of commercial flight and of
airports is a response to the anticipation of violent attacks on air-
craft and terminals—a different threat from the specter of death
as a result of accident or error that is inherent in the undertaking
itself—and this threat, as we now know, will not dissipate soon.
There was a buzz about the vulnerability of the New York City
subway to terrorist attack beginning in the 1970s. At that moment
cities themselves had become marginal to the narratives of
American life, and New York had experienced financial collapse
and receivership. Its subways, suffering fantastic levels of dis-
investment, won representation in books, movies, and the popu-
lar mind as the seamy underside of a generally dangerous place.
(The streets and roads were unspeakable as well.) A kind of essen-
tialism of place (type) informed the general point of view to the
effect that that’s the way it is in the modern urban locale, where
the inner city has engulfed the whole. New York City’s fortunes—
and that of the subways and roadways and other elements of the
infrastructure—revived in the 1990s, thanks to the Wall Street
industries so deeply embedded in the national economic boom,
and thanks to a general return to city living of professional and
managerial sectors (the newly dubbed yuppies).

New York City Subway, 2002.
Fear of terrorist attacks on the city and its subways and nodes (tunnels and bridges) was revived, briefly, after the underground bombing of Manhattan’s signature World Trade Center towers in 1993—an attack I first learned about standing on a subway platform wondering aloud why the service was disrupted—and the murderous sarin-gas attacks in the Tokyo subway carried out by the apocalyptic Aum Shin Rikyo cult in 1995. But New York’s economic revival—with tax revenues sufficient to rebuild the subways and the police force, combined with the national decline of crime—rewrote the story of city and subway life and risk and helped turn public attention elsewhere, until the horrific attacks of September 2001 that changed the New York City landscape irreversibly and imposed a pervasive unease on a world situation whose outlines cannot yet be clearly seen.

Immense capital investment in every element of the system, including a long-term refurbishment of public areas, brought back masses of travelers to the subway, including me. I am most intimately acquainted with the sections of the subway system in Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn and Queens. I began photographing in the subway just as the capital campaign was about get underway, and very soon the gloomy, grimy, antediluvian ambiance of dim, gum-studded, urine-soaked horrors of concrete platforms and graffiti tagged and scratched cars turned into that of a tremendous construction site. Revivification has affected everything: platform walls and floors, stations corridors, tracks, rolling stock. I have been especially struck by the subway system’s appearance and suggestive tone during this long-term transition. Passengers walk past areas hung with splattered plastic sheeting or boarded up behind reused plywood painted with hieroglyphic symbols and schematics, past multitudes of construction workers laying
wall tiles or big granite floor tiles, fitting pipes, or working on the tracks. The visible subway workforce of motormen and conductors and token-booth clerks has been augmented by legions of these other subway workers and contractors over a period of several years, with the projected result being a built environment belowground more closely resembling the newer, often better maintained, underground systems around the world.

Although airports are also often a building, the difference is palpable. Construction zones, whenever possible, are carefully segregated from passenger zones (because they can be). Interior building sites are characterized by giant spools of cables and neat stacks of wallboard and other clean materials, often fronted by neatly finished temporary walls hung with perky apologies promising big changes afoot. (Exterior construction is often of gigantic scale and naked in its rawness and inconvenience.) Everything is routed through the public-relations mill. The subway, in contrast, only minimally employs public-relations happy talk to appease its inconvenienced customers.

The constant crisis of capacity that characterizes each and every transportation system, at least in the United States, results in a perpetual state of physical disarray; most urban roads and interchanges are snarled by reconstruction efforts, some of unbelievable proportions; otherwise they are in an advanced state of decay. Airports and access roads either are being rebuilt or they are embroiled in a community struggle to prevent the building of new runways and the development of new flight paths. Railroads, insufficiently subsidized (if at all), drive people into private cars and cargo loads into trucks traveling the same roads and streets. And roads, multiplying or widening and bringing more people in ever-widening circles outward from central cities (urban sprawl),

Vienna Subway, 1980s.
creating another turn in the cycle of undercapacity and its consequences, produce a nightmare of ugliness and pollution, as well as inconvenience for those who use them. And so on.\textsuperscript{38}

**Checkpoints and Choke Points**

The pitfalls of law enforcement for motorists are known to all. In the subway, the police presence, despite the state of heightened alert, has become far less obtrusive as crime has dropped, and the mood has lightened along with the restructuring of the environment. But surveillance and control are built into the fabric of airport operation, from the paratrooper patrols at many European airports (a response to the armed attacks of the 1970s and 1980s) to the many checkpoints that mark each traveler’s journey.\textsuperscript{39} This interferes, if only minimally, with the feeling of passenger ease. The implicit promise of safety is mitigated by the visibility of the countermeasures that airport authorities and airlines take. Sporadically, airport security measures of various kinds are reinstalled, but like all war measures these tend to be cut to the pattern of the war previously fought. Baggage is screened by hand and X ray, and, after the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, by a new generation of very expensive high-tech scanners for plastic explosives, but there seems little that can be done by technological or human screening to prevent determined assassins and hijackers from attaining their objectives with primitive weapons and a slight change in tactics.\textsuperscript{40} Absolutely thorough screening would paralyze a system in which every entrant is by definition a (high-)paying customer. The story here, as ever in respect to what has come to be called terrorism, is that nothing about transportation is safe. As always, the fear of invasive (and “rhizomatous”!) lethal threats from “outside” fuels the intractable fear of accident or negligence (or divine retribution for the hubris that is air travel).

Threat that lies outside the ordinary, which we prefer to ascribe to nature (earthquakes, hurricanes, forest fires, even asteroids), is, at this writing, credibly also laid at the door of disciplined terrorist squads, a threat that joins transportation systems to the built environment. A decade of quiet purged fear of hijackings from the travel story for U.S. flyers, but the use of hijacked planes as missiles to destroy the World Trade Center towers and attack the Pentagon (and target one other, indeterminate but probably governmental site) completely rewrote this story, for the near term at any rate. The prospect of terrorism leaves every person shaken, for the overarching effect of terrorism is terror—a cascade of doubt and loss of confidence in self and routine—to which advanced societies are in some respects far more vulnerable, united by networks more highly developed and tightly woven, than less developed, less integrated systems.\textsuperscript{41} These attacks that brought down symbolic physical structures also halted systems of information
transmission and—in the case of the Trade towers—shut down multiple systems of transportation and other infrastructural elements while people trapped on the commandeered planes used their cell phones to try to summon help or to say good-bye to family members. Mobile capital was used to destroy fixed capital. The symbolic status of the targeted buildings was due to their actual centrality as terminal hubs of capital and of military command,\textsuperscript{42} staffed by tens of thousands of people. As high-profile architectural “facts,” they were icons for these complex systems in the eyes of people around the world.\textsuperscript{43} An immediate “collateral” effect of the event was a slump in the stock market and instant economic stagnation; another was the financial precariousness of the airline industry caused by the sudden surfacing of the (repressed) fear of flying.\textsuperscript{44} The shock to the U.S. worldview brought to mind Adorno’s “rhythm of total destruction.”

Fear of flying has also led to a renewed emphasis on forms of ground transportation, although these—especially subways, tunnels, and bridges—bring their own terrors.\textsuperscript{45} The likelihood that the events of September 11 were perpetrated by an organized international network of terrorists has changed the story for all transportation and information systems.\textsuperscript{46} One only has to recall the Tokyo subway gas attack to realize that a similar story might have a much worse ending under other circumstances.\textsuperscript{47} The men convicted for the bombing of the Trade towers in 1993 reputedly had plans to bomb one of New York’s two vital, heavily used road tunnels under the Hudson River. The infrastructure of advanced industrial societies is as vulnerable as Hollywood has often dreamed. The narratives of all of daily life, as well as national life—the “picture” of reality, to change metaphors in midstream—were rewritten for those of us in the United States by the surprise attacks that did succeed here, making it all but impossible for me to tell this story without wishing for a crystal ball.

Then I took the V train, I did it with a cell phone and a number in Jersey, I did it standing by a lighthouse in Maine. . . . hurling through those subterranean tunnels, visiting the labyrinth that runs under the world which everyone pretends is not there.\textsuperscript{48}

Rereading my first sentence, I defined the city by flows of people and air travel by movements of conveyances. Global capital (symbolized by the Trade Center) and the least connected of city neighborhoods, as well as the air-transport system, the roads, and the subways, are staffed, run, and inhabited by human beings, with material lives. The separations these systems impose are blurred by their being bound to the matrix of everyday life or by the obviousness of the choices involved (such as the purchase of an inexpensive versus an expensive car) or by their ephemerality as people
pass from one mode of action to another (they get on and off the subway or train, for example, in the course of other daily activities). We also ignore the identical materiality of the conveyances, their supporting infrastructure, the fixed architectural entities that mark our departures and destinations, the natural world—and, inclusively, the people who tell the stories of living.

At certain moments we see the way in which the story tells us, and we become transfixed. Some have imagined that the terrorists’ other target that September consisted not of another governmental site but of Hollywood movie studios, the factories of American-made fantastic narratives that are overlaid onto the “real” stories of very different lives elsewhere. After the bombing of the Trade Center buildings, as people abandoned air travel by the millions, thousands of people made “pilgrimages” to the Trade Center site—to ensure that the story told on television had its counterpart in the resolidified realm of the real. The crisis turn to authoritarian leadership and military might creates newly visible working-class heroes (firefighters, rescuers, police, flight attendants, military personnel) who, in the old, familiar story are fetishized for making life safer or more comfortable for those more economically fortunate.

Most accounts of air travel—as distinct from the discourse of airport planning, design, and construction—privilege the business traveler, and favoritism is encountered at every step from ticketing to check in to baggage allowance to boarding to on-board seating and service—fare-class perquisites highlighted by the attention brought to this array of special treatment by the present crisis. The increasingly institutionalized prerogatives of wealth and “ticket class” faintly mirroring the widening separation between rich and poor are unabashedly celebrated in the aircraft
as in the ocean liner it copies in this alone. But this takes place in
the face of the burgeoning coach-class ridership, which must be
addressed in a way no steamship line had to take into account.
The pragmatics of the air travel—and cargo—system aside, from
considerations of siting, chemical and noise pollution, ground
links, local service versus hub service, short hops versus long
hauls, pricing, and, finally the access to planes and services in
and through the terminal, we need a step toward a phenomenol-
ogy of air travel. And this not for the classy traveler but for the
unclassified nobody, the ordinary atom in the system.
Notes

Sections of this article were partly rewritten after the attack upon and destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Although security and fear were central themes of this essay, the particular way in which they were addressed required some revision, painfully reviving the so-far-inseparable connections of information, transportation, and “mass death” to which the essay originally referred.

1. Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 115. I am using de Certeau’s narrativity as a heuristic device and remain grateful to Jorge Mestre for reminding me of this article.

2. The two have been associated forever, of course, but the continent-wide expansion in the United States and industrial development in Europe required well-established modes of transmission vital to economic and political life and national identity. An interesting image of the changing terms of dominance in this linkage is suggested in Jane Tanner, “New Life for Old Railroads,” New York Times, 6 May 2000: During the rush to install fiber-optic cable for the expected boom in communications technology, one location of choice was along railroad tracks, and railroads themselves have set up telecom businesses to take advantage of it and to make up for the stagnation in railroad business. A pioneer in such a venture was Southern Pacific Railroad, which created both Sprint and Qwest. Other companies leased rights along railroad rights-of-way to lay their cable. The prospect was so tempting that by 2001 there was a glut of optical cable capacity and related telecom companies faced bankruptcy.


4. I am ignoring the other domesticated form of in-city railroad travel, trams and trolleys, primarily because they were extirpated in the United States by the combined maneuvers of the automobile and road-construction industries.


6. Schivelbusch, “The Industrialized Traveller,” 181; in terms of structure, of course, canals are by definition artificial cuts in the landscape.

7. Stephanie Mencimer, “The Price of Going the Distance,” New York Times Magazine (April 28, 2002): 34. Mencimer also writes that despite the steady decline in real-dollar gasoline prices in the U.S., the private cost of transportation in some areas has risen as much as fifty percent over the past decade. “[I]n most parts of the country, people now spend more on transportation than on medical care, education, clothing and entertainment—combined.” In several regions, she continues, people spend more on transportation than on housing—because suburbanization requires huge expenditures for cars, insurance, and so on.

8. Here one must prepare oneself to make the necessary revisions, whose contents are not fully predictable, relating to the new fears injected into the system by the present heightened state of alert.

9. This portion of the present essay has not been revised. Surveillance and control are presently greatly ratcheted up because of the attacks of September 11, 2001; but as the many subsequent missteps have shown, the ideal of total control is an unreachable fantasy, limited not only by the ingenuity of saboteurs but also by the staggering cost and inconvenience that thorough screening would entail. Because those screened are paying customers, the decision always cuts to the side of allowing entry, even to those who arouse intense suspicion, as witness not only the absurd case of the so-called shoe bomber, jihadist Richard Reed, but also a large proportion of the successful hijackers of September 11.

10. See In the Place of the Public: Observations of a Frequent Flyer/An der
Stelle der Öffentlichkeit: Beobachtungen einer Vielfliegerin (Ostfeldern: Cantz, 1998), in which this and the other issues I outline below are explored in more detail. Rights of Passage (New York: New York Foundation for the Arts, 1997) addresses, on a smaller scale, some questions relating to road travel.

11. New York’s relation to bodies of water was still important. If its moment as the greatest national port was declining, part of the city’s narrative was still its role as symbolic portal to America, crystallized in the Statue of Liberty facing across the ocean to the Old World. We recognized the city’s locale as primarily a group of islands but declined to recognize that the borough of Brooklyn was located on Long Island, which was seen as a long stretch of exiles, beaches, and irrelevancies. Questions of geographical siting rarely entered the discourse of daily or public life, and maps of the subway or of the city were not widely available (what we would do with them?). Even now, in leaving an unfamiliar station, I have to marry a plan of the city streets to what I know of the subway’s route in order to figure out which exit to head toward, and I am often wrong. In a related vein, I observe that what differentiates an elevator ride from a ride in an as-yet-nonexistent teleporter is simply that, whereas the principle of teleportation requires action at a distance, I have a pretty good idea of the principle of the elevator and can visualize its simple rectangular enclosure; most of my subway trips are too complicated for that.

12. The subterraneity of the New York subway, however, in a calculus of effects, has reversed its valence with respect to dirt and contamination, from positive to negative. Systems like the London underground, the world’s first (1863), brought the dirty clouds of steam railroading below ground while shielding travelers from the choking dirt and chaos of the city streets above. The first New York subway, dreamed into existence by publisher and inventor Alfred Ely Beach, operated as a pneumatic tube with air-drawn cars; the movement of clean air fulfilled Beach’s promise of true insulation from the filth of street transport. The subway system—which harnessed and yoked the nascent technologies of mining, tunneling, fixed-rail and road building, surfacing, drainage, structural support, air exchange, illumination and electrification, modular seating, refuse collection, platform and car cleaning, vending services, and policing, combined with bathhouse and palace ornament, and preeminently, mastery of human flow patterns in tight spaces—began as merely a hole in the ground. It was so like any other hole that Alfred Beach could in 1870 complete his short demonstration subway in lower Manhattan in secret, in under two months’ time, and spring it upon an astonished city. Secrecy was necessitated by the implacable opposition of the city’s political boss, William Tweed, who wanted to retain control over lucrative transportation initiatives. Beach’s subway, soon forced out of business, was modeled on pneumatic letter and package transport, and he used the proposed construction of such a tube as a ruse to win a license. However, the completion of his project was blocked, and the subway was shut down; pneumatic delivery of mail ceased as well. When a newly built New York City underground subway, in others’ hands, was reopened in 1904, it was as a specialized passenger vehicle—unlike virtually every other conduit in human history. It became a worker transport system with all cargo functions lopped off, testifying to a city fully engaged in industrial production and industrialized leisure.


14. Following Walter Benjamin and others, we may note that this is the state in which all architecture is experienced. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Illuminations, trans. Harry

15. Typically, a new mode refers back to an earlier scheme to establish its legitimacy and temporal presence. In the case of transport vehicles, the earlier references were to coaches and ships and the subway could only aspire to railroads and trolley cars. Rail stations called to mind Roman public buildings and other classicizing forms, and so on. But after a quarter century of the historicizing model in New York, the city itself—in an ultimately successful effort to quickly introduce new rail lines that would drive the privately built and privately held ones out of business—foresaw decoration in favor of “utility.”

16. In the 1990s, a number of artists were commissioned to design tile and mosaic murals and other works for stations, not all of them in Manhattan.

17. I have never seen the late-century grand airports of the Far East, including Norman Foster’s brand new Chep Lap Kok Airport in Hong Kong.


20. Grosvenor, 585. That which was accomplished with speed and which brings the possibility of speedy movement has also brought an element of structural order and perhaps, implicitly, safety.


24. As I have remarked in In the Place of the Public.

25. I will, of necessity, take up the question of security in more detail below.

26. JetBlue offers those little cheese and cracker sandwiches, the kind that WalMart sells in twelve packs for $1.75, as does its eerily named counterpart and competitor SpiritAir, but without the comfortable seats or seat-back monitors.

27. Business-class travelers and other frequent flyers pay to join “clubs,” modeled on English gentlemen’s clubs—restricted suites with a range of amenities centering on telecommunications facilities and free beverages and perhaps including shower facilities—discretely located behind four walls and a guarded door and often fitted with stage décor such as paneled walls and marble-mantled fireplaces.

28. What has fallen out of favor can also be reintroduced as new. At Frankfurt, a vast site that also incorporates on its far side the shimmering mirage of the mighty U.S. airbase Rhein-Main, there is a fairly new or reconditioned viewing mezzanine outdoors on a terminal roof along with some other amusements to match the children’s park inside.

29. Aside from the communities enraged over noisy overflights, the social forgetfulness about the local airport makes it difficult to oversee and challenge the environmental effects of these entities, which are considerable.

30. To restate the obvious: Unlike subways, roads, and railroad terminals, located in the city downtowns they serve, the typical airport is likely situated out of town because of the ordinary dangers posed by airport operation, from environmental degradation to traffic to noise (not to mention the prohibitive cost of in-town real estate for such space-gobbling facilities).

31. I don’t know how other countries handle the question of political speech at airports and other terminals, but I can’t recall a single instance aside from a few major U.S. airports where any was in evidence. The exclusion of political speech from railroad terminals is not terribly problematic, since it may be deployed on the sidewalks outside. A recent New Jersey court case (2001), not political in nature, nevertheless touches on access and on the public-space argu-
ment. A local shopping-mall executive attempted to deny access to clubs of elderly “mall walkers” (deemed too old to be reliable customers) and lost the case brought by the walkers.

32. In the immediate aftermath of the attack on the United States in 2001, protestant fundamentalist preachers Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, appearing on television, famously laid the blame for the attacks at the door of the American Civil Liberties Union and campaigners for gay rights (New York Times, 14 September 2001).

33. The city was put in a position of trying to institute fiscal-retrenchment policies by dramatically lessening public-sector expenditures, a remedy not so very different from that imposed by the International Monetary Fund on Third World countries.

34. This view is reflected in such films as The Taking of Pelham One, Two, Three (1974).

35. Police forces are beefed up at difficult times in New York as everywhere, but they do not look like full-fledged paramilitaries. I have, in contrast, seen heavily armed, riot-geared police-dog patrols in some European subways, such as Frankfurt’s and London’s, especially in advance of expected “football hooliganism.”

36. This is the text as it stood before 9/11/01: “Fear of terrorism too was revived, briefly, after the underground bombing of Manhattan’s signature World Trade Center towers in the early 1990s. But public attention has turned elsewhere, at least for the moment, and even ordinary subway crime is perceived to be ‘under control.’ Immense capital investment in every element of the system, including a continuing and welcome refurbishment of station public areas, and other changes, have brought back masses of travelers to the subway, and movement below ground is largely free of fear of assault even without a visible police presence. The drumbeat of caution no longer sounds continuously in our ears.”

37. Not to dwell too long on the matter of the New York City subway system, but the introduction of an electronic ticketing system that allowed bus/subway transfers increased ridership, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the burgeon of the fine arts, moviemaking, advertising, and, briefly, dot-coms, contributed to the general improvement in the city economy. The national crime rate, at the same time, experienced a dramatic, though somewhat inexplicable, across-the-board decline.

38. Inevitably, this cycle of growth and obsolescence calls to mind the basic principles underlying capitalist development.

39. Except those privileged few traveling on private jets, who often may bypass even customs checks. Since September 11, the sales of private jets have risen noticeably.

40. Witness once again the absurd story of the disheveled and taciturn would-be “shoe bomber,” Richard Reid, well after the institution of highest-alert status.

41. Regular, reliable high-speed transportation creates suburban living and urban sprawl, of course, but even the regularization of clock time was not accomplished until the railroad made unified, coordinated scheduling necessary. The redundancies of information systems do not provide an acceptable model for losses in human lives in advanced industrial societies, as ideological terrorists well know.

42. The city’s emergency command center, the Secret Service, the FBI and CIA, and the Port Authority Police Force, all had offices in the WTC towers.

43. In the case of the Trade Center, the buildings’ symbolic freight was greater outside the country than for New Yorkers, who tended to think more of the Empire State building and the Chrysler Building as architecture worth symbolic
status as representative of New York City.

44. The essential role of this industry, and the power of its lobbyists, was signaled by the enormous welfare package for the airlines passed immediately by Congress.

45. Aside from the terrorist threats to ground-transportation infrastructure, there is the danger of accidents. Ordinary road travel has a terrified high cost, as everyone knows; about forty thousand people are killed each year on U.S. roads. Several critically important Alpine road and train tunnels have experienced catastrophic and incapacitating explosions over the past couple of years. One of these, the Mont Blanc tunnel, recently reopened in March 2002, after a closure of nearly three years duration. Although train disasters, like ferry disasters, are a repetitive feature in so-called Third World countries, near the close of twentieth century the premier German high-speed, high-tech train, the ICE, also experienced a devastating and humbling crash, and England has suffered five fatal crashes in six years on its privatized and sadly deteriorated rail system.

46. The greater the number of entry points or portals into areas deemed sensitive—which includes national borders—the more difficult it is to control, especially when the travelers are not in regularly scheduled movements and conveyances.

47. Twelve subway-goers died and many were felled by the gas in that attempt, but future attempts might well be more lethal. As far as we know, however, only Washington, D.C. has installed a system to detect elevated levels of toxic chemicals, and this very recently.