

# SPACE TIME SOUND

CONCEPTUAL ART IN  
THE SAN FRANCISCO  
BAY AREA: THE 1970S

*By Susanna Foley*  
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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CHRONOLOGY BY CONSTANCE LEWALLEN

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# PETER D'AGOSTINO

**P**eter D'Agostino was born in 1945 in New York City, where he received a B.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in 1968. Moving to San Francisco in 1968, he did graduate work at San Francisco State University in art and anthropology, receiving an M.A. in 1975. Since an exhibition of slide-projection pieces at Quay Gallery in San Francisco in 1974, exhibitions of his work have featured videotape installations, often with photo stills and text. A multi-part project, "Alpha, Trans, Chung," completed in 1977 was shown at Cabrillo College, Aptos, California, 1977; Lawson de Celle Gallery, San Francisco, 1978; Artists Space, New York, 1978; and Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, 1978, where D'Agostino has taught since 1977. He recently completed a video installation for a two-way cable TV, "Proposal for QUBE," shown at the Long Beach Museum of Art in California in 1979, and is currently producing a broadcast tape for WGBH, Boston. He received National Endowment for the Arts Artists' Fellowships in 1974, 1977, and 1979.

**P**eter D'Agostino utilizes video as an important tool in his investigation of information perception. The time-based character of the medium enables him to layer sounds, words, and images in his structural analysis. In fact, he has used the video format to illustrate the information-processing properties inherent in cinema and still photography. He realizes these intellectually-based ideas in approachable imagery and reveals much about the cultural structures of communication.

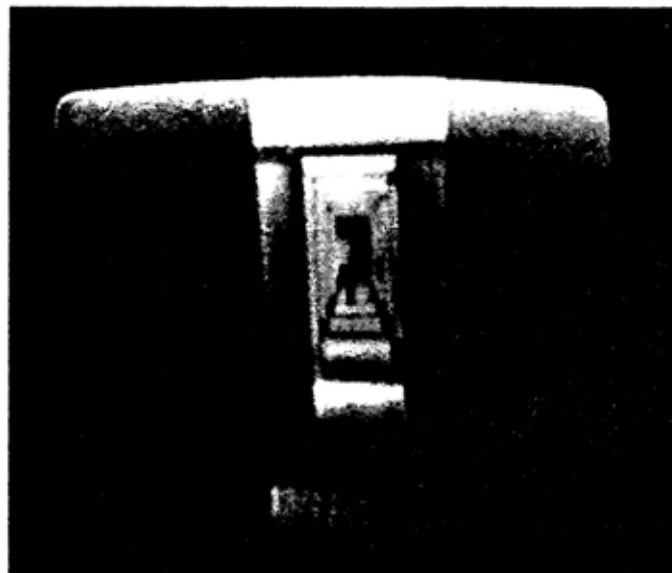
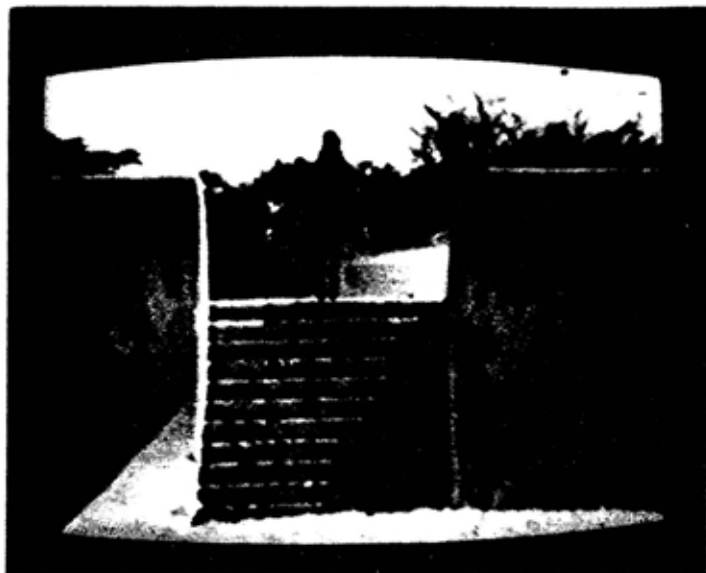
The exhibition space at 80 Langton Street opened on July 8, 1975, with a video installation exhibition of D'Agostino's exploration of three outdoor locations, the perimeter of each defined by a barrier. In the first segment of the videotape he walks around the outside edge of the gravel-covered flat roof of a building, aiming the camera down, which blurs the passing gravel. He occasionally raises the camera as one raises one's eyes when walking to get a sense of location. The tempo of this structure continues through the second part, a walk around a cyclone fence bordering an urban park and then across the Great Highway down the stairs to Ocean Beach. In the third sequence, however, he moves toward a camera fixed on a still objective. The sound as well, gravel crunching, the rising echo of freeway traffic adjacent to park and the ocean breakers, participates in the definition of space and location. In the gallery space where the tapes were shown he simulated the fence barrier with its accumulated trash.

An environmental piece, "Passages," sponsored by The Floating Museum on November 13, 1976, used the long corridors and filled-brick windows of a mid-nineteenth-century San Francisco fort, Fort Point, to contradict the viewer's experience of the space. Monitors in the dark window niches showed scenes of the view of ocean beyond the bricked-in window, and on a monitor at the end of the long corridor one viewed the space again as it would be seen going back.

Work in 1977 and 1978, a series titled "coming and going," analyzed physical movement through visual clues which define it. The last two works in the series focused

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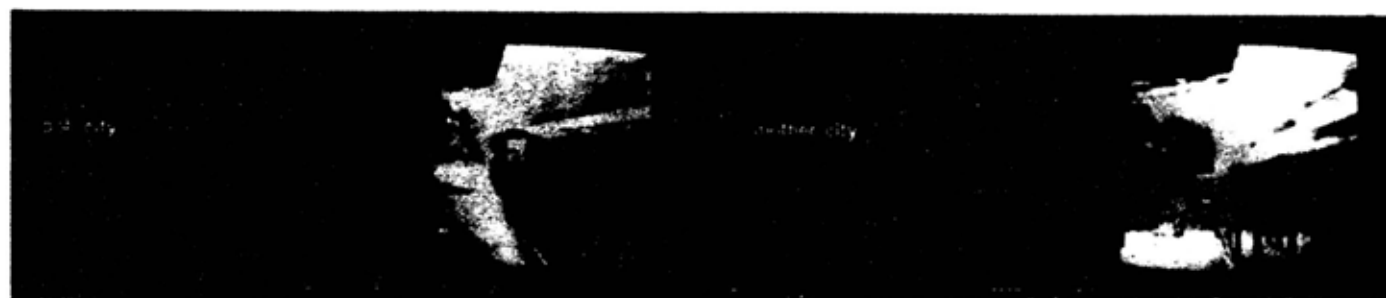
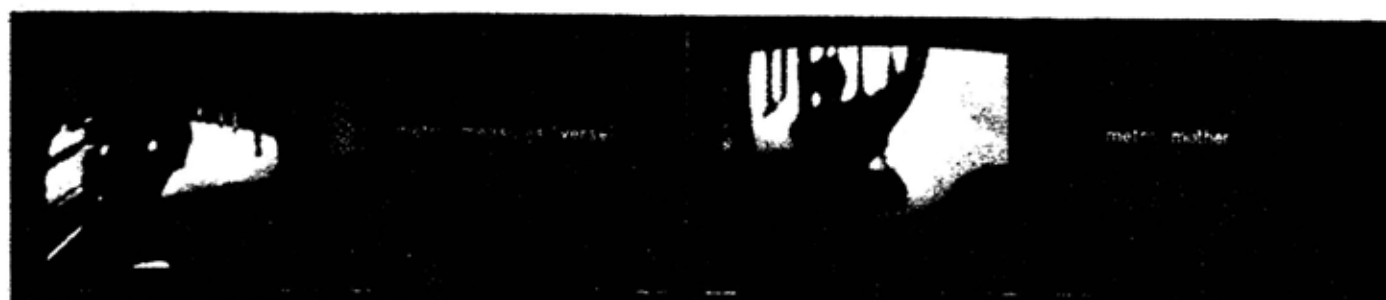
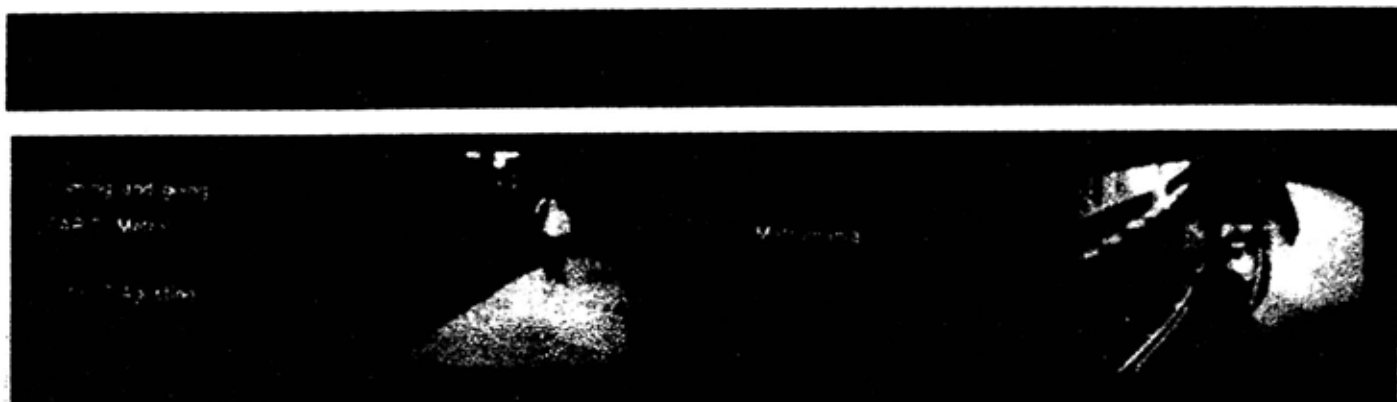
on the role signs and symbols play in our perception of a situation, using a familiar mode of transportation, the subway. In the videotape "coming and going: PARIS (Metro)" (1977), views of subway station platforms showing crowds hurriedly entering and leaving arriving trains are overlaid with a linguistic parallel of ambiguity and confusion in a discussion of the etymology of the word "metro." Numerous conflicting origins of the word make the study of it as inconclusive as the passengers' travel. Another piece, "coming and going: San Francisco (BART)" (1978), parallels two times and places: an eastbound subway trip under the Bay and a westbound trip in an automobile across the Bay Bridge above. These trips are structured by the many signs that define time and place to the traveller — the automated ticket machine at a station, messages on the station's

electric sign system, the freeway exit signs above the highway. While D'Agostino analyzes perception thematically in human experience, in form the videotape itself is a comment on cinematic structure as it develops information perception.

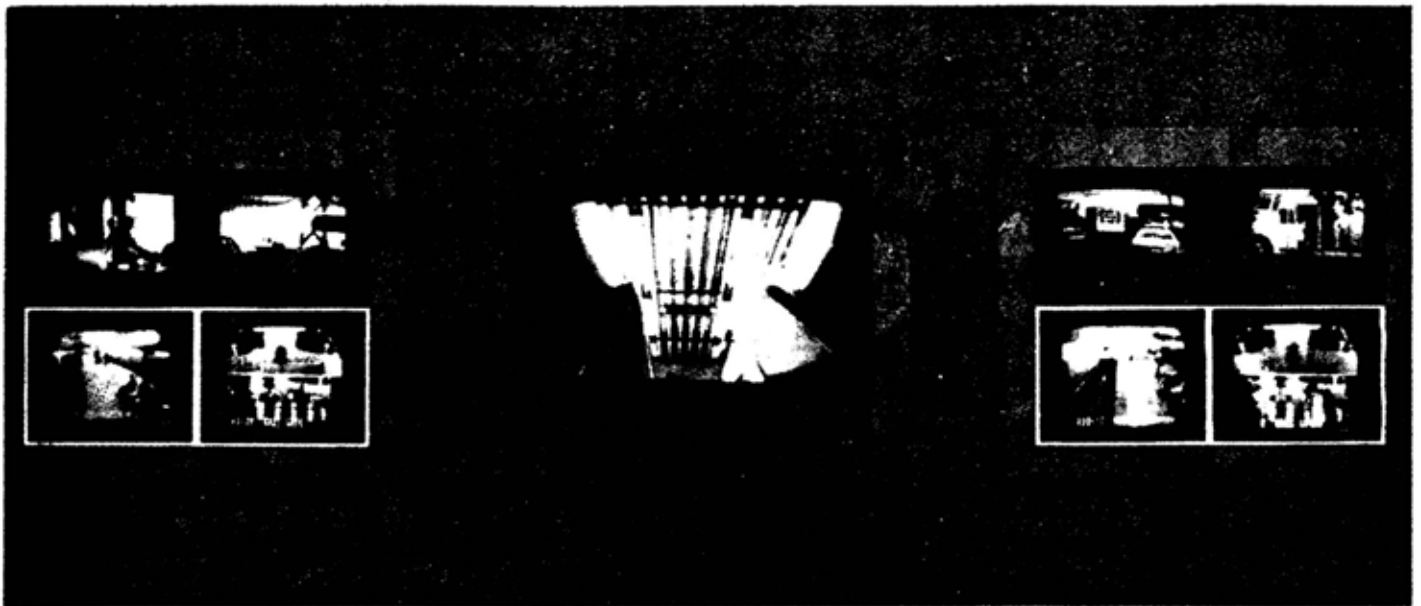
Interest in semiotics (the theories of signs and symbols in language) led D'Agostino in 1976-1977 to make a three-part video and photographic analysis paralleling syntactical structure in film, video, and still photography: "Alpha, Trans, Chung." How does the medium change meaning when the same image appears on film, video, or in a photograph? As subjects for his study he chose films representing three film techniques: montage (Jean Luc Godard's *Alphaville*, 1965), novel (Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Trans Europ Express*, 1966), and documentary (Michelangelo Anto-

Peter D'Agostino, "The Walk Series," 1975. Still from videotape "The Beach Walk" in video installation shown at 80 Langton Street, July 8 - 19, 1975. Photo: Peter D'Agostino

Peter D'Agostino, "Passages," November 13, 1976, Fort Point, San Francisco, sponsored by The Floating Museum. Still from videotape; walk-through video installation.



Peter D'Agostino, "coming and going: PARIS (Metro)," 1977, stills from videotape in video installation, in *Space/Time/Sound—1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, December 21, 1979 – February 10, 1980.  
Photo: Phillip Galgiani

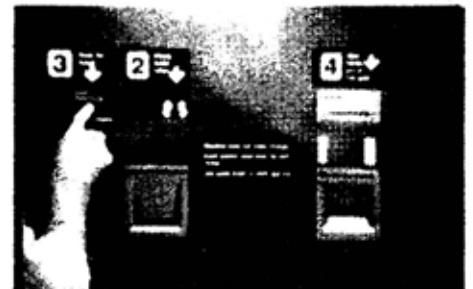


nioni's *Chung Kuo*, 1973). The piece consisted of photographs and videotapes which functioned as "metastructures," paralleling the inherent structures of their filmic sources, and which serve to interrelate photography, film, and video.

D'Agostino's mature work developed in San Francisco after his move from the East Coast in 1970. He left to live and teach in Ohio in 1977 but returned often to make new pieces (for example, the videotape on BART in July 1978) or for exhibitions of his work. His initial interest in structure grew out of his manipulation of light to define planes of physical space in a room. Video added the dimensions of time and sound, so that through situations in the "Walk Series" (1975) he described spaces defined by barriers through movement of the subject or the camera and the

changing sounds. In slide projections, "Paradise regain'd, Paradise lost" (1976, in *The Annual*), he began investigating the meaning of images as symbols in context — does meaning change when context changes? This led to his use of cinematic structure to address these semiotic issues in the piece "Alpha, Trans, Chung" (1977).

Because of this procedure of objective analysis D'Agostino's work has more affinity with a general, widespread approach in conceptual art than with a distinctly San Francisco Bay Area expression, which in the work of other artists personalizes structural or systemic inquiry. D'Agostino's work, particularly "Alpha, Trans, Chung," relates to the interest in structural analysis of artists who work in varying media nationwide and in Europe.



Peter D'Agostino, "coming and going: (San Francisco) BART," 1978, stills from videotape in video installation, in *Space/Time/Sound—1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, December 21, 1979 – February 10, 1980. Photo: Phillip Gaigiani

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## 1971

**Peter D'Agostino.** "64 Projections." Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco, January 26, 1971. Private screening. Projection piece dealing with projected light in various environments. D'Agostino began work on "64 Projections" in the fall of 1969. This screening was followed by subsequent studio showings through 1973.

## 1973

**Peter D'Agostino.** "Wall I (for Einstein's Birthday)." MOCA, San Francisco, March 14, 1973. Tape shown during one of MOCA's Wednesday afternoon Free Beer meetings at Breen's Bar.

**Peter D'Agostino.** *Projections*. Quay Gallery, San Francisco, June 26 - July 20, 1973. Slides and film of studio wall projected against similar areas of the gallery. Included performance, "Wall II," June 26.

M(cCann), C(ecile) N. "A Mingling of Time and Place." *Artweek*, July 21, 1973, p. 3.





# 1974

**Peter D'Agostino.** "Passage: Performance." Fort Point, San Francisco, December 14, 1974.

*La Mamelie Magazine: Art Contemporary*, 1:4, Spring 1976 (Special Performance Issue), p. 27 (ill.).



# 1975

**"80 Langton — An Alternative."** *Artweek*, May 3, 1975, p. 7 (ill.). San Francisco Art Dealers Association warehouse renovated to provide alternative exhibition space for non-object art. Independent committee set up to screen artists' proposals for pieces they wished to present in the space.

**Peter D'Agostino.** *The Walk Series*. 80 Langton Street, San Francisco, July 8-19, 1975. Video installation. First event at 80 Langton Street, an alternative space initially sponsored by the San Francisco Art Dealers Association. By the middle of 1976, it became an independent space with a focus on temporal and non-object oriented art forms. In the "Walk Series," developed over the previous two years, D'Agostino followed mapped-out boundaries in three locations familiar to him.

Photo documentation. *Artweek*, July 12, 1975, p. 3.

**Peter D'Agostino.** *Projects and Sources: 1965-75*. Lone Mountain College, San Francisco, July 22-26, 1975.

**Information Show.** SFAI, June 20 – August 3, 1975. Informal and changing exhibition which included videotapes by George Bolling, Peter D'Agostino, Terry Fox, Joel Glassman, Paul Kos.

**The Annual.** SFAI, September 12, 1975 – August 27, 1976. Catalog published with illustrations. Coordinated by the SFAI Artists' Committee who invited artists to create pieces for one week each in a rented storefront space at 16th and Folsom Streets, San Francisco. Members of the Artists' Committee: Tom Marioni, Barney Bailey, Terry Fox, Howard Fried, Paul Kos, Stephen Laub, Bonnie Sherk. Fifty-three artists participated including Richard Alpert, Fred and Judy Auda, Dianne Blell, Kathan Brown, Kevin Costello, Peter D'Agostino, Paul Forte, Joel Glassman, Suzanne Hellmuth, Suzanne Lacy, Masashi Matsumoto, Linda Montano, Jock Reynolds, Nina Wise, John Woodall. January 30, Motion (Joya Cory, Suzanne Hellmuth, Nina Wise), seven day improvisation; April 2, D'Agostino, "Paradise regain'd, Paradise lost."



# 1976

**Peter D'Agostino.** "Paradise regain'd, Paradise lost." The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Downtown Center, May 3-8, 1976. Video documentation of performance at SFAI Annual (see September 12, 1975).

Photo documentation. *Artweek*, May 1, 1976, p. 24.

**Moebius Video Show.** San Francisco Art Commission Gallery (Capricorn Asunder), September 22 – October 22, 1976. Catalog published. Presented by the San Francisco Art Festival. Included Ant Farm, "Media Burn"; Peter D'Agostino, "Door/Bowl, Bulb, Back/Door"; T.R. Uthco and Ant Farm, "The Eternal Frame"; Joanne Kelly, Darryl Sapien, Skip Sweeney, Irv Tepper.

**Video Seminars.** La Mamelle, Inc., San Francisco, September 28 – December 1, 1976. In cooperation with Lone Mountain College, San Francisco. Televised on Cable TV Channel 8, San Francisco. Series included: Willoughby Sharp, "Vicarious Encounters," September 28 – October 7; Peter D'Agostino/Lynn Hershman and The Floating Museum, November 17; Terry Fox, videotapes, November 24; David Ross, December 1.

**Photography and Language.** La Mamelle, Inc. and Camerawork, San Francisco, October 22 – November 21, 1976. Organized by John Larkin, Carl E. Loeffler and Lew Thomas. Seven hundred eleven works by one hundred eighteen artists including Priscilla Birge, Geoffrey Cook, Peter D'Agostino, Hal Fischer, Stephen Laub, Jim Melchert and Donna-Lee Phillips. The color works were exhibited at Camerawork and the black and white works at La Mamelle, Inc. Thomas, Lew. *Photography and Language*. San Francisco: Camerawork Press, 1976. Essays by John Brumfield, Geoffrey Cook, James Hugunin, Robert Leverant, Harley W. Lond, Donna-Lee Phillips, Sam Samore, Allan Sekula, and a bibliography.

Fischer, Hal. "Photographers Using Language." *Artweek*, November 6, 1976, pp. 1, 14 (ill.).

**Peter D'Agostino.** "Paradise regain'd, Paradise lost." The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Downtown Center, May 3-8, 1976. Video documentation of performance at SFAI Annual (see September 12, 1975).

Photo documentation. *Artweek*, May 1, 1976, p. 24.

**Community Art Radio 1976.** KPFA Radio, Berkeley, California, October-November 1976. Sponsored by La Mamelle, Inc. Coordinated by Peter D'Agostino, Carl E. Loeffler, and Larry Nimmer. Audio live performances, pre-recorded tapes and call-in pieces by the listening audience. Richard Alpert, Bay Area Dadaists, Hank Bull, Center for Contemporary Music (Mills College, Oakland), Ken Friedman, Terri Hanlon, Helen and Newton Harrison, Doug Kahn, Jim Koch, Fletcher Kopp, John Lanzzone, A. Lucier, Jim Melchert, Tommy Mew, Stephen Moore, Mel and Gloria Nimmer, Patrick Ready, Lew Thomas, Peter Van Riper, Western Front, Heather White, Bob Wilhite, plus innumerable anonymous "call-in" works.

**Peter D'Agostino.** "Trans-Europ Expressed." 80 Langton Street, San Francisco, November 5, 1976. Video and photographic dialogue using frames from Robbe-Grillet's film "Trans-Europ Express." Also shown in part at SFAI, January 1977.

Fischer, Hal. "Cinematic Signs." *Afterimage* (Rochester, New York), Summer 1978, pp. 38, 39. Describes development of "Alpha-Trans-Chung" by D'Agostino.

**80 Langton Street Documentation: The First Year — 1975-76.** San Francisco: 80 Langton Street, 1976. Thirty-four postcards documenting events from opening through May 15, 1976.

# 1977

*Assembling: A Collection of Otherwise Unpublishable Manuscripts, #7.* Brooklyn: Assembling Press, 1977. Contributing material by Richard Alpert, "Women: On Our Way '74" and "Stretch," Kristine Stiles "Trans-Europ Express/Expressed," article on Peter D'Agostino.

*80 Langton Street.* San Francisco: 80 Langton Street, 1977. Documents events at 80 Langton Street from May 21, 1976 to April 30, 1977 with illustrations.

*La Mamelles Magazine: Art Contemporary.* 2:4, 1977. Complete listing of La Mamelles's exhibitions and performances for 1976, publications for 1975-1976, and televised video and radio programs for 1976. Performances (in chronological order) by Susan Wick, Margaret Fischer (sic), Futurist Synthetic Theatre (catalog published), Soon Three (Alan Finneran), Phil Deal, Stefan Weisser, Ishi Sharpe, Paul Cotton (see April 23, 1976), Paul Forte, T.R. Uthco (see April 26, 1976), Nina Wise, Hesh Rosen, Motion: The Women's Performing Collective/Jock Reynolds (see May 21, 1976), Carl E. Loeffler, Kevin Costello, Woofy Bubbles and Mister E., Dana Atchley, Norman Gould, Willoughby Sharp, Terry Sendgraff, Peter Wiehl, Martha Wilson, The Bay Area Dadaists,

Richard Kostelanetz, John Adams, Virginia Quesada, Linda Montano (see November 9, 1976), The Registry, Richard Newton, Joseph Rees, Mark Gilliland, Geoffrey Cook with Dadaland, Richard Alpert (see November 26, 1976), Don Button, John Stascak, Anthony Gnazzo, R. Pritchard et al., Carlos Gutierrez-Solana. Also includes "Chung 'Still' Another Meaning," by Peter D'Agostino.

*The Second Annual Photo-erotica Exhibition.* Camerawork Gallery, San Francisco, January 15 - February 14, 1977. Included Peter D'Agostino's "Trans" photographs. See also *Eros and Photography*. Ed. Donna-Lee Phillips.

San Francisco: Camerawork/NFS Press, 1977, p. 86.

**Douglas Davis.** *Two Cities, A Text, Flesh, and the Devil.* Viacom Cablevision, San Francisco, and Southern California Institute of Architecture, Los Angeles, May 19, 1977. Presented by the Long Beach Museum of Art and The Floating Museum, San Francisco. Co-directed by David Ross and Peter D'Agostino. Performance in each city simultaneously cable cast in the other.

*Data 27.* (Milan), July - September 1977. Bay Area art and artists are featured in this issue. It contains articles by Lynn Hershman, Carl E. Loeffler, Judith Van Baron and documentation of pieces by Lynn Hershman, Suzanne Lacy, Darryl Sapien, Bonnie Sherk, and Irv Tepper.

*The Annual.* Fort Mason, San Francisco, June 5 - August 28, 1977. Catalog published. Coordinated by members of the SFAI Annual Committee, chaired by Jim Pomeroy and including Richard Alpert, Barney Bailey, Steve Davis, Howard Fried, Steve Laub, Barbara Rogers, Irv Tepper. Forty-eight artists included in schedule of events (Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Patricia Kelly, Reese Williams, and others), installations (Peter D'Agostino, Michael Brewster, Alan Scarritt, Lew Thomas) and exhibitions of painting and sculpture (Nicholas Africano, Jane Bowman, Susan Hall, Mark McCloud, Pam Scrutton, Richard Yoder, and others).

***Global Space Invasion: Phase I.*** San Francisco and Europe, May 1977 – May 1978. Presented by The Floating Museum. Mary Baker/Debra Rapoport/Susan Wick, Peter D'Agostino, Suzanne Lacy, Natasha Nicholson, Darryl Sapien, Reese Williams. Each artist traveled to a country in Europe and worked individually and collectively to create new works relating to that country. They returned to make a final work about the experience (see *Global Space Invasion: Phase II*, July 7, 1978). Several artists did performances at the Week of International Performance, Bologna, concurrent with Arte Fiera Di Bologna, June 1-6, 1977. D'Agostino, "Alphaperformed," video performance; Sapien, "A Bridge Can Also Be a Work of Art," first performed in Jessie Alley, San Francisco, May 7, 1977.

***Installation and Performance Pieces: Golden Gate National Recreation Area.*** San Francisco Bay Area, October 15 – December 9, 1977. Organized by SFMMA in conjunction with *America 1976*, a bicentennial exhibition organized by the United States Department of the Interior. October 15, Dennis Leon, untitled installation, Oakwood Valley, Marin County, constructed rope lattice in the landscape; October 22, Mel Henderson with Joe Hawley, "Surf Line," Ocean Beach, San Francisco, light performance at night with searchlights, balloons and sheets of polyethylene; October 29, Peter D'Agostino, "coming and going: Angel Island," participants made new film by assembling strips of D'Agostino's filmed trip from top of mountain on Angel Island to San Francisco via ferry; November 12 – December 9, Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds, "3 Over Par,"

Golden Gate Promenade, San Francisco, three structures created as a physical and perceptual extension of the Fitness Parcourse.

***Bay Area/Tokyo Exchange.*** 80 Langton Street, San Francisco, October 25 – November 12, 1977. Co-curator for Japanese artists, Stephen Moore. Co-curator for Bay Area artists, Bonnie Martin-Anderson. Video, graphics, installations. Richard Alpert, Mary Ashley, Stephen Beck, Peter D'Agostino, Phillip Galgiani, Suzanne Hellmuth, Judy Moran, Bill Morrison, Manuel Neri, Jim Pomeroy, Jock Reynolds, Darryl Sapien.

***Cityscapes Video Week: Works by Peter D'Agostino, Ronald Shelton, First Generation Video, Lynn Herschman, Banana Productions.*** The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Downtown Center, October 31 – November 3, 1977.

***"Video Free America: Spearheading San Francisco Video Art."*** *Videography*, November 1977.

***Peter D'Agostino. Alpha, Trans, Chung.*** Cabrillo Gallery, Cabrillo College, Aptos, California, November 1-23, 1977. Videotapes, slide projections (1976-1977). Explores relationship between still photos and motion pictures. Performance, November 1: "Alpha" relates to Godard's film *Alphaville*; "Trans" refers to Robbe-Grillet's film *Trans-Europ Express*; "Chung" refers to Antonioni's *Chung Kuo*.

# 1978

**D'Agostino, Peter.** *Alpha, Trans, Chung/A Photographic Model: Semiotics, Film, and Interpretation.* Dayton, Ohio: University Art Galleries, Inc., Wright State University, 1978. Contains commentaries, illustrations, biography and bibliography.

**Peter D'Agostino.** *Alpha, Trans, Chung.* Lawson de Celle Gallery, San Francisco, January 3-28, 1978. Exhibition of photographs 1976-1977. Concurrent with *Alpha, Trans, Chung* exhibition of slides and video projections at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio. Shown at Artists Space, New York, December, 1978.

Fischer, Hal. "Cinematic Signs." *Afterimage* (Rochester, New York), Summer 1978, pp. 38, 39 (ill.).

**The Floating Museum.** *Global Space Invasion (Phase II).* SFMMA, July 7 - August 20, 1978. Catalog published. This series of exhibitions and performances marks the last event of The Floating Museum. Exhibitions: July 7-23, *Return of Global Space Invasion (Phase I)*. Organized by Mimi Roberts. Documentation of original *Global Space Invasion* (see May 1977) in addition to new work by artists involved, including Peter D'Agostino, "coming and going: PARIS (Metro)." July 7-23, *Problematic Photography*. Organized by Hal Fischer, Lutz Bacher, Peggy Fox, Meyer Hirsch, Kevin Noble, Al Nodal, Donna-Lee Phillips, S.W. Samore, Cindy Sherman, Lew Thomas. July 7-23, *Underground Comic Artists*. Organized by Spain. July 25 - August 8, *Motion: The Women's Performance Connexion*. Organized by Jan Bright and Kathy O'Dell. July 25 - August 12, *Revolving Sites*.

Organized by Marsha Bailey and Grazia Gunn. European artists in San Francisco. August 9-20, *Exposures*. Organized by Ann Meredith. Catherine Schear with Mary Main. Multi-media exhibition of non-traditional artists. Performances: The Bleedend Theater at the San Francisco Art Commission Gallery, Capricorn Asunder; The Bureau of Common Sense, Paul Cotton (Trans-Parent Teacher's Ink.), Peter D'Agostino, Wendy Dalton, Suzanne Lacy, Motion, Darryl Sapien, Peter Wiehl, Reese Williams, Nina Wise.

D'Agostino, "coming and going: San Francisco (BART)," performance event, July 15, and "coming and going: PARIS (Metro)," installation of videotape and photo-

graphs illustrating how the signs and signals of a system inform us of its structure. Sapien, "Crime in the Streets," Adler Alley, San Francisco, performance about survival in the city. Nina Wise with Joya Cory, Terry Fox, Jim Tyler, "Yellow Duck and Tonka Beans," ritualistic improvisational performance using movement, sound, language.

Stofflet-Santiago, Mary. "Global Space Invasion." *Artweek*, August 12, 1978, p. 6 (ill.).

Ross, Janice. "Global Space Performances." *Artweek*, August 26, 1978, p. 4 (ill.).

McDonald, Robert. "Urban Drama in an Art Context." *Artweek*, September 9, 1978, p. 15 (ill.). Describes Sapien's performance.

Fischer, Hal. "Reviews: San Francisco." *Artforum*, November 1978, pp. 80-81. Review of Global Space Invasion generally and Sapien and Bleedend Theater performances.

*High Performance*, December 1978, pp. 34, 35 (ill.). Documentation of D'Agostino's July 15th performance on BART.

# 1979

*Act-Reference-Modification.* Video Free America, San Francisco, September 16 – October 4, 1979. First in a series of mixed media exhibitions. Second group shown at La Mamelle, San Francisco, November 20 – September 25, 1979. Included Lutz Back, Geoffrey Cook, Peter D'Agostino, Paul Forte, Donna-Lee Phillips, and Sam Samore.

*Space/Time/Sound — 1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area.* SFMMA, December 21, 1979 – February 10, 1980. Exhibition documenting performance and installation pieces from past ten years by twenty-one artists, through photo documentation, installation and videotape: two new performance pieces by Terry Fox and Linda Montano presented. Artists and pieces included

Peter D'Agostino, "coming and going: PARIS (Metro)," (June 1977, black and white videotape, 8 minutes) and "coming and going: San Francisco (BART)," (July 15, 1978, videotape, color and black and white, 23 minutes. Installation with videotapes, two monitors, photographic documentation): Terry Fox.

Ross, Janice. "Extracts of a Decade." *Artweek*, January 26, 1980, pp. 1, 20 (ill.).

Ross, Janice. "Terry Fox — Sounds and Movement." *Artweek*, February 16, 1980, pp. 1, 16 (ill.).

Stofflet-Santiago, Mary. "Space/Time/Sound — 1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area." *images & issues*, Summer 1980, pp. 12-14 (ill.).