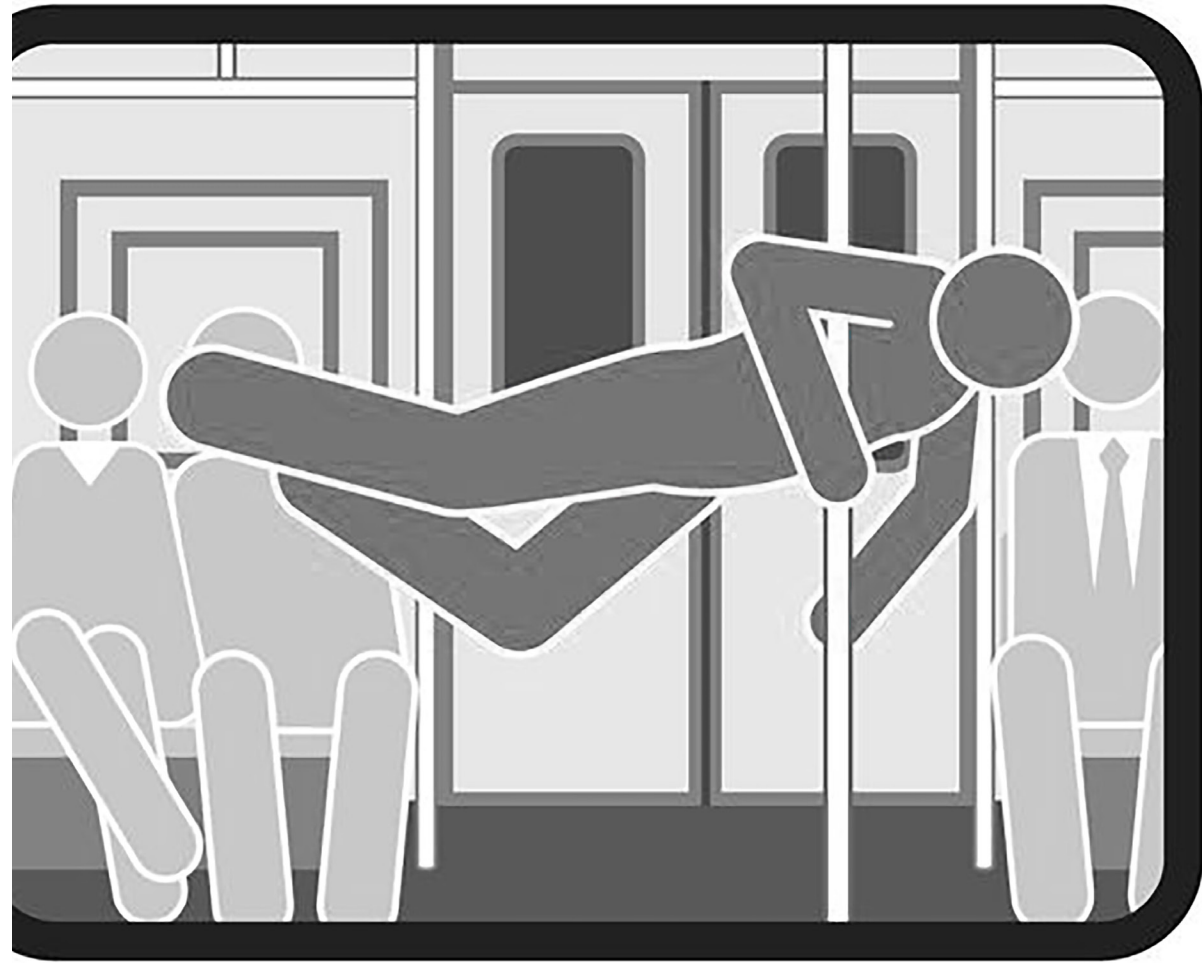


PROJECT II: SUBWAY BALLET Litefeet and the Black Spatial Imaginary

Stephanie McMorran



“If you see something, say something”. A not-so-alternate reality.

As the sun was coming up over the great city of New York, the glass of the Midtown skyscrapers turning a rose gold with the morning sun, New Yorkers were slowly coming to terms with the fact that their next mayor would be Curtis Sliwa.

Sliwa had been well-known for his work as a vigilante in the darker days of the city’s history. His campaign had been eccentric, to say the least, at one point attempting to nominate his favorite pet cat as deputy mayor. Clearly whatever he said resonated with people--privately, of course. Across the city, it was only the suburbanites out on Staten Island who consistently had the courage to state their opinions regarding DeBlasio’s policies, even if those policies

predominantly helped those living below 60th street, anyway.

A year into the Sliwa administration, a young man wakes up in Brooklyn’s Marcy projects. He can hear the previous evening’s rats scuttling back under the hole in the wall. They’ll be back later tonight. He won’t. His friend’s mom won’t let him sleep on her couch anymore. Either get a job or get out. He hears talk outside of Mayor Sliwa’s new proposal.

“Yeah, Sliwa’s cutting welfare?”

“Really? That’s so, like, not progressive at all.”

“I know right. My yoga instructor was like, Sliwa’s cutting the welfare rolls and stepping up ICE presence and a lot of people are getting deported.”

Poles Are For Your Safety, Not Your Latest Routine

Hold the pole, not our attentions.
A subway car is no place
for showtime.

“That’s so insane.”

“I know. Do you want to get a pitaya bowl?”

“Totally.”

The young man hardly remembers the Dominican Republic--barely speaks Spanish-- but he knows he has no papeles. That’s what his mom had said to the officers before they put her in handcuffs and sent her back to the Dominican. He goes downstairs, past a homeless man sleeping in the stairwell of the housing complex. He lights a blunt and immediately regrets it. The hunger pangs he had hoped to try and pull through only become stronger. Sliwa’s administration has slowly been unraveling the welfare programs across the city. The Biden administration sent the city money due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but so far the city has yet to see that money. There are whispers that Sliwa and his appointees have been quietly pocketing it.

The hunger intensified by the marijuana, he quietly slips into the subway. Mayor Sliwa quietly enacted a law allowing citizens’ arrests in New York City--and in response to the Black Lives Matter Protests dramatically increased funding for the police, who lie waiting in army tanks stationed directly outside the Marcy projects.

His dream is to dance and attend Stuyvesant. Maybe even to go on to Julliard and join the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. He is part of a group of boys from different boroughs who used to make their living dancing on the subway, but due to the increased police presence and the rise in local vigilante groups it’s too risky.

The nearest Bravo is three stops away. Desperately hungry and with no money to pay the subway fare he hops the turnstile.

“Hey you. In the black hoodie. Yeah you. Come here.”
Really?

“Officer, I don’t have enough money to ride the train. I have no food--”

“No excuses. I’m writing you up for fare evasion. Pay \$100 or it’s two days in prison. I better see you in court.”

“But I--”

“No excuses.”

All of a sudden a deep southern-inflected voice boomed behind him.

“Excuse me officer. How much did you say the fine was?”

“You know him.”

“No. But I see a young brother struggling and I just want to help him out.”

The young man turned around to see a tall burly man with black sunglasses, his face hidden in a scarf, a black cowboy hat pulled over his forehead. He took out his wallet and pulled out a crisp \$100 dollar bill.

“Let’s make it \$200--”

Before he could finish, the man pulled out another \$100 bill. The officer snatched it out of his hand and shoved the \$200 dollars in his pocket. He left without another word.

“Are you hungry?”

The young man knew better than to take offers from strangers. Especially from someone so clearly eccentric.

“What do you do for a living, boy?”

“None of your business.”

The young man had managed to panhandle enough money to sleep on the subway. He had had no water, no food for two days and was fading in and out of consciousness when a tall burly man got into the car.

“You going uptown?”, he asked.

The young man responded,

“I guess so.”

They arrived in Harlem at 1:30 in the morning. The young man clutches a knife he keeps in his pocket just in case this guy is not to be trusted. They pull up to an old Harlem brownstone. Stepping inside the beautifully carved threshold, he is surprised to see someone at what appears to be a ticket booth.

“There’s a dormitory for all the kids upstairs.

The fridge is open and if you want you can sleep here anytime you want. Here is a diagram of how this house operates.”

“I am the proprietor of a subway line specifically designed to be a safe space for black performers to make money. The people on the Upper East side love it, especially because the last thing they want to do is go above E 96th to go listen to jazz in the evening. They’re also willing to pay top dollar for such a unique and edgy experience. Currently, I have everyone from graffiti artists to doo wop singers, but the main act is you subway dancers.”

“I made my fortune in real estate and was able to use my money to construct a line directly under all of my buildings. Here is a map of the route. It turns out that if you throw enough money at the Sliwa administration you can truly do anything you want.”

“Let me walk you through this house first. The top room is where our control room is located. We have a state of the art system which constantly tracks the location of the trans as they move throughout the city. The fourth floor is where the dormitories are located. And I can get you some fresh linens.”

“We are currently on the first floor. All of the ticket money goes to you guys to fund your education. I don’t need any money. My buildings pay for themselves, especially in this economy. When all the rich people left, those strange buildings in Hudson Yards were perfect to reconvert into mixed-income housing--for some reason, the wealthier people have agreed to pay higher prices in luxury apartments in converted office buildings--to be fair, they have no idea that the apartments are overpriced, but I can discuss that with you later.”

“Downstairs is where you enter the subway. We can only let in 40 people at a time. As someone who is a proud member of the more vulnerable members of our society, I do not want to catch COVID-19! Restricting the number of people who can be down in the train also makes sure the price of admissions stays high, which means we can subsidize not only the artists who work down there, but can also help underprivileged schools organize day trips around the city.”

The young man is still wary but fascinated. He spots a pile of freshly cooked hotcakes on the side of the flawless, magazine-ready kitchen. The Invisible Man notices him looking at the food.

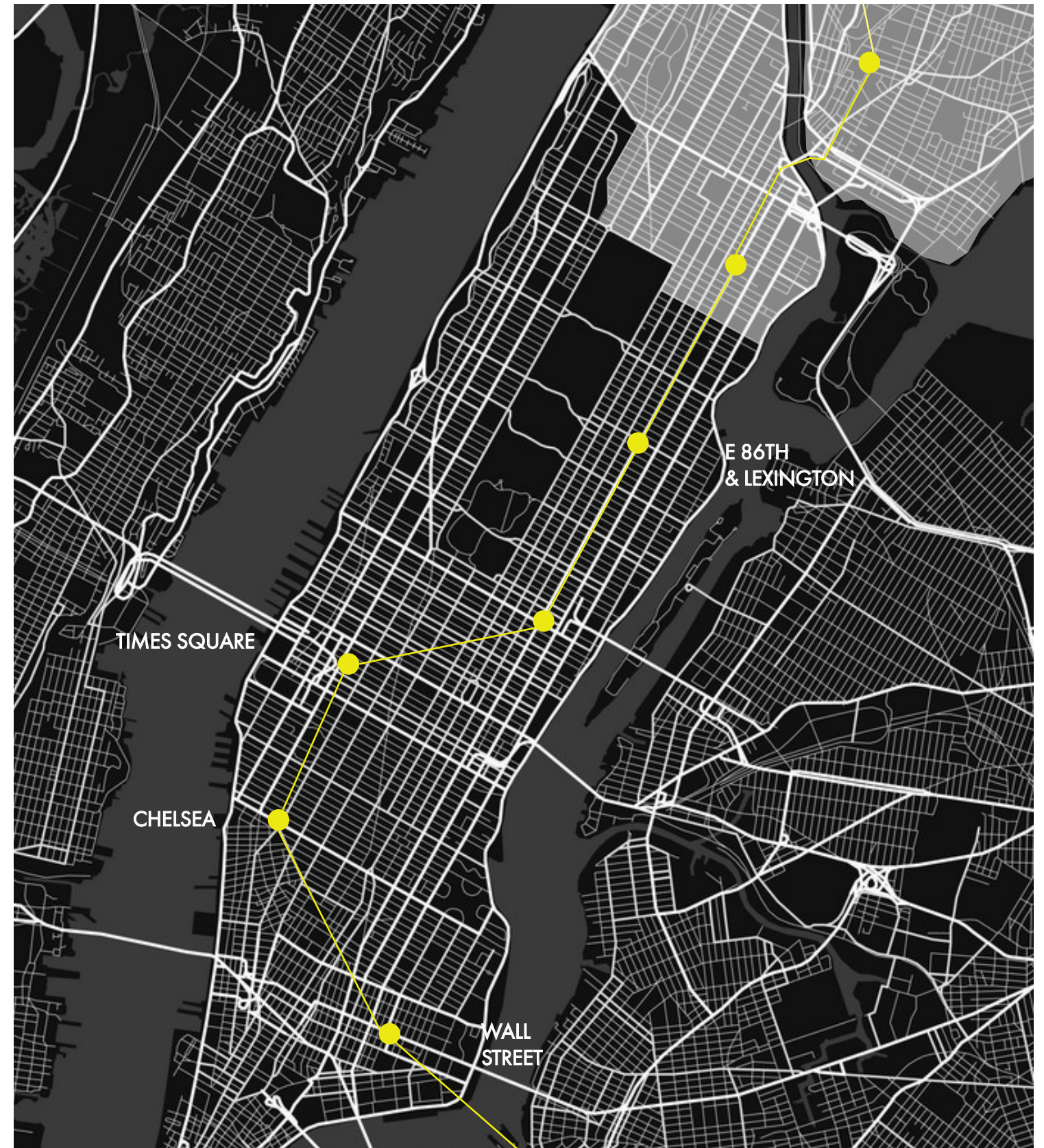
“Go ahead. That’s yours, everyone has eaten already.”

“What do the cars look like?”

The Invisible Man chuckles and goes downstairs into his basement office, lit by a single naked bulb and pulls out a few blueprints of the sketches. He doesn’t know what to think about the cars--they’re definitely different.

“I wanted to do something original. The doors are glass with polycarbonate windows. I also wanted to allow the car to be a canvas for the graffiti artists that I’ve hired. The MTA cars look too sterile. I miss the painted cars of the 1970s and wanted to bring that cultural practice back.”

The Young Man looks over some of the sketches.



Imagining a line that would run through majority African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods across the five boroughs through wealthy white areas such as Battery Park City and the Upper East Side. The thought behind this is to allow the dancers easier access to (potentially) better opportunities to earn money.

“This is the original and this is the new one. And this is a schematic diagram of the car moving through the tunnel that we’ve Constructed. Do you want to go down onto the platform?”

The young man shakes his head yes. Standing on the platform he can see a bit inside the car. The lights, the dancer, the djs...

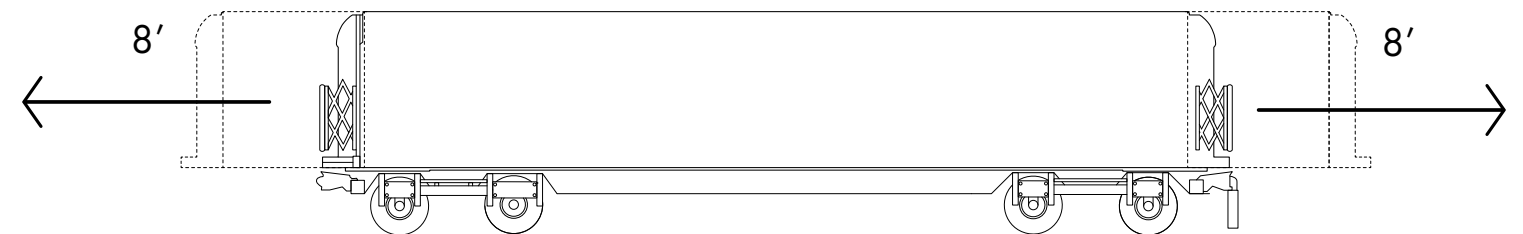
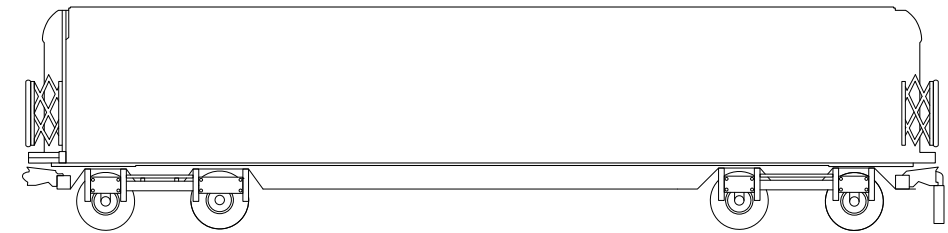
“I’m in.”
“You sure?”
“I’m sure. Let me eat first though.”
“Of course! Let me get you some W-2 forms...”
“I don’t have papers.”
“I see. Well we’ll fix that. I can sponsor you, of course!”

The young man trudges upstairs and flops onto the bed, his belly full. It’s quiet uptown and the bed linens are so soft. He looks forward to practicing with the other dancers in the morning.

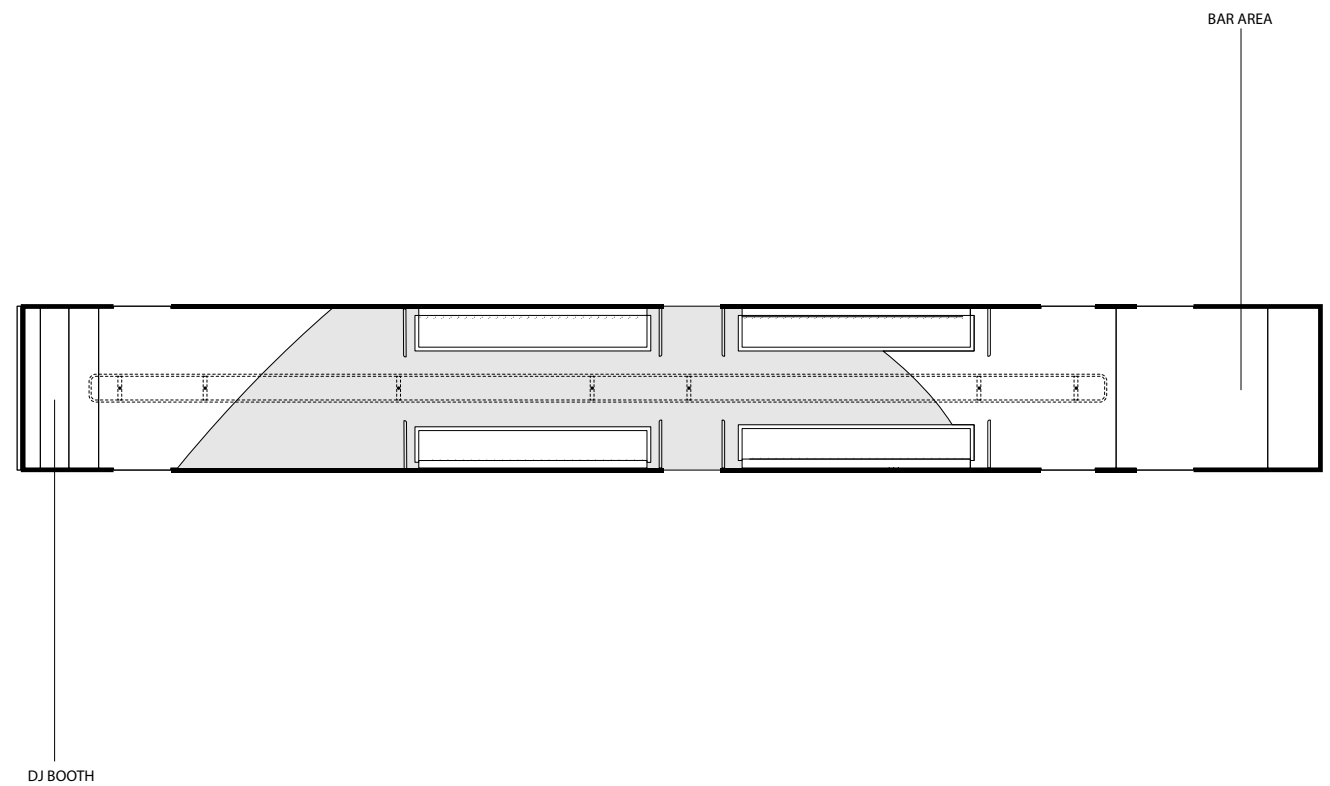
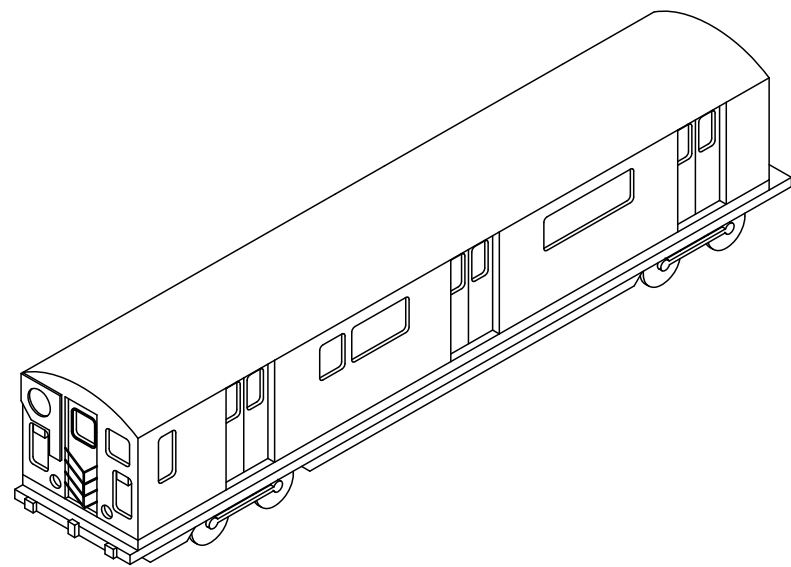
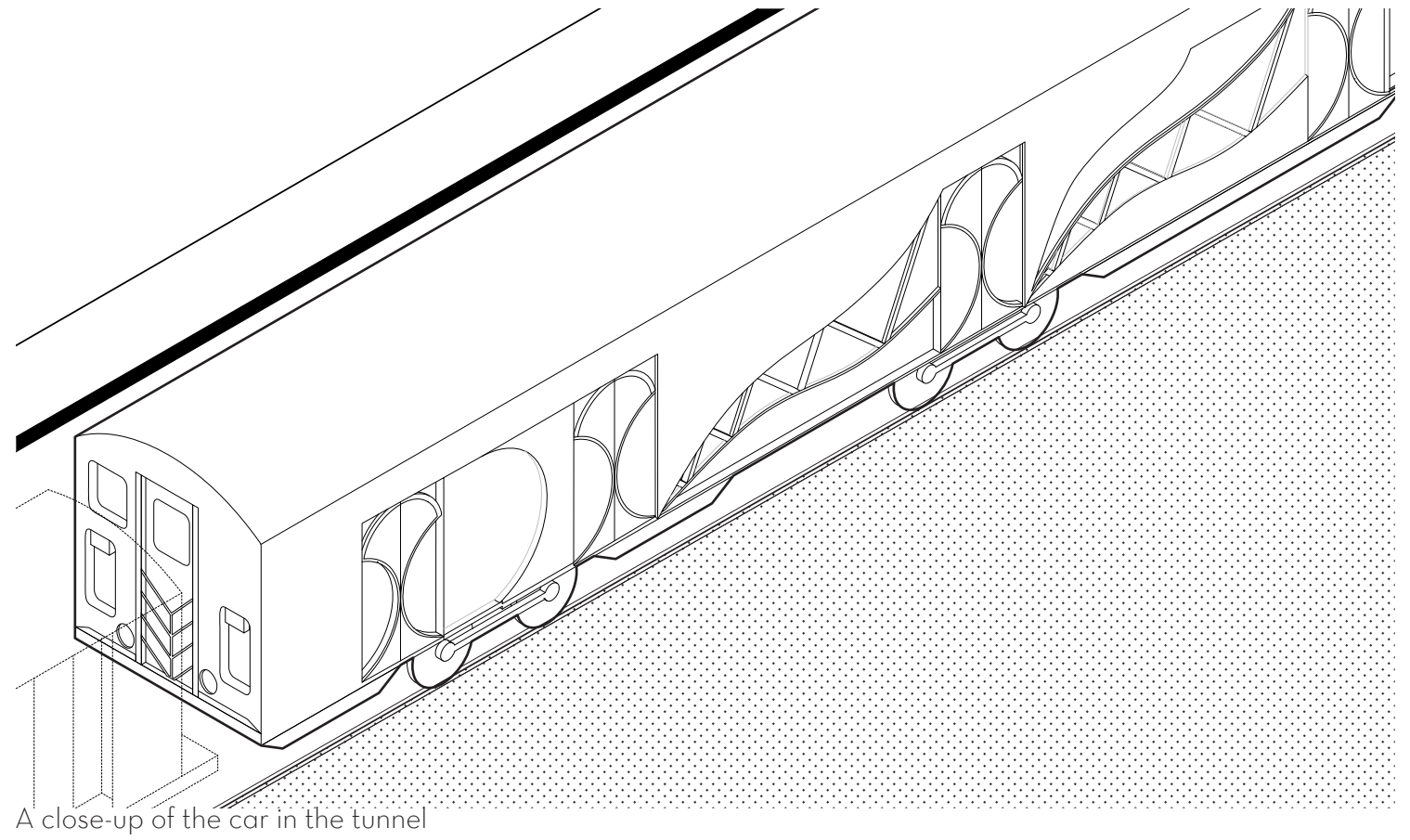
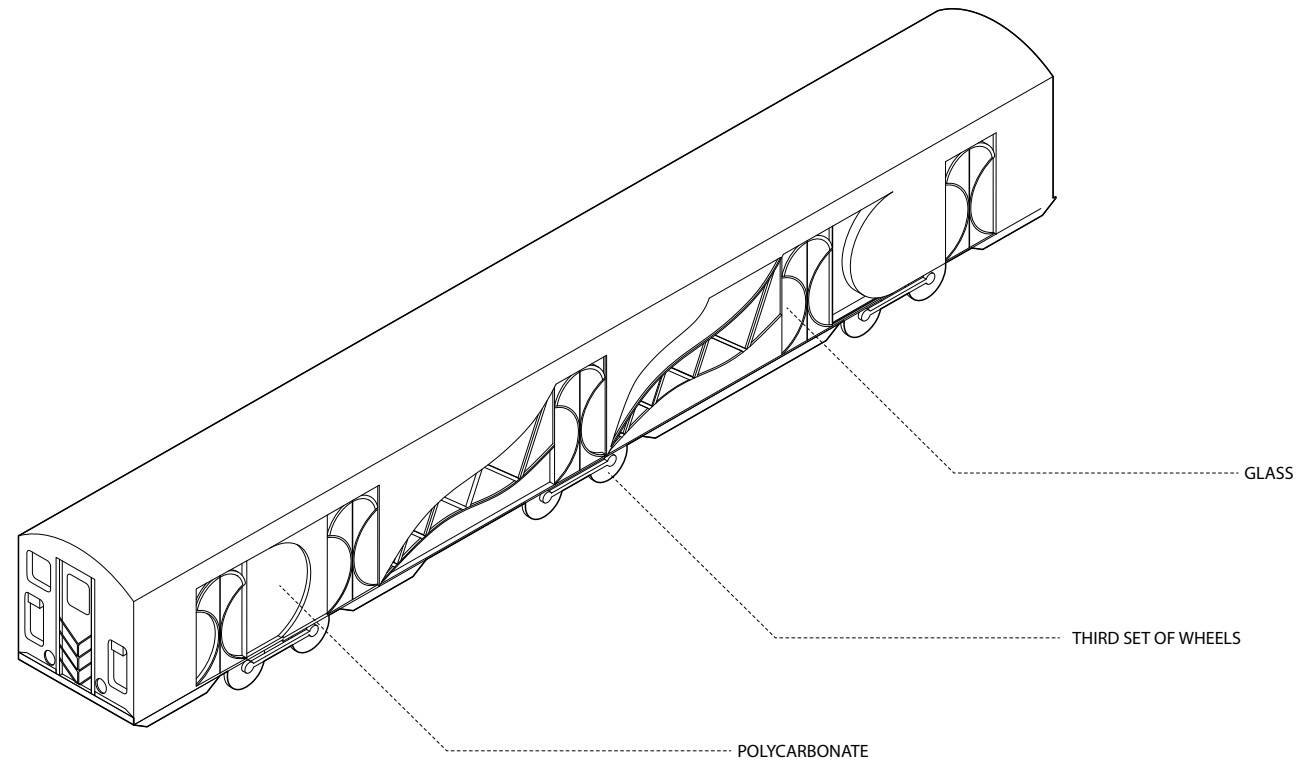
ONE MORNING...

A young man is heading to his first day of school at Stuyvesant. He is about to graduate first in his class and has decided to attend Harvard on a full scholarship to study Architecture and Dance. He is on the train that has given him so much, as another line has been developed to include all of the specialized high schools in New York. After 5 years of Curtis Sliwa, the city has decided to move in a more progressive direction, but the secret subway under Harlem is still going strong. It’s a beautiful day in May as the train rumbles past the buildings of downtown shining rose gold in the morning sun.

THE END.



In order to accommodate the stage, a typical subway car would be expanded 8 feet in either direction to not only give the dancers room but also to accommodate a DJ Booth and bar area.



Old and New Car.

Plan View of Proposed Subway Car

MTA

Control Room/ Administration

Dormitories

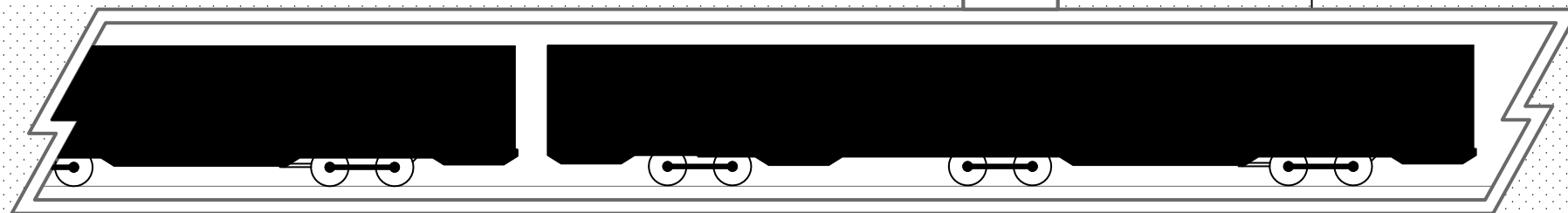
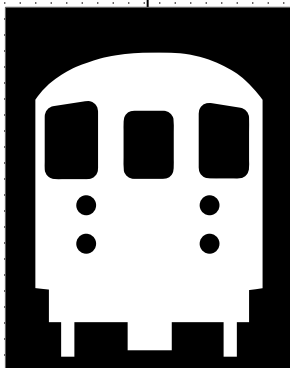
Dance/ Practice Rooms

Performance Space

Entrance to House/ Box Office

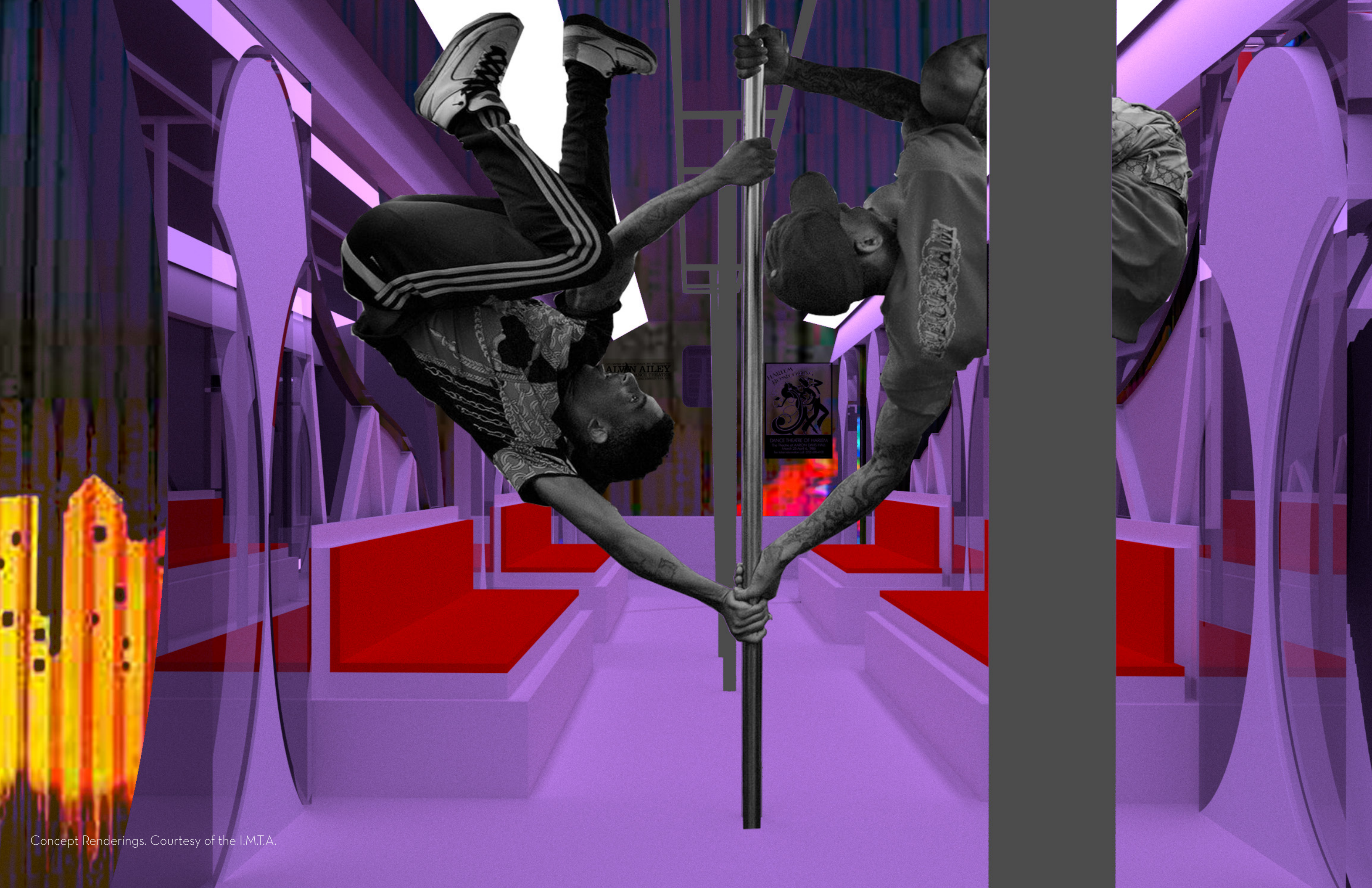
Office of R.J. Ellison
Entrance to Subway

IMTA





REX
NEXT PERFORMANCE AT



Concept Renderings. Courtesy of the I.M.T.A.



Concept Renderings. Courtesy of the I.M.T.A.