

# Subway Stories

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**Alon Chitayat**

Animishmish Studio / ITP  
animishmish@gmail.com

**Jeff Ong**

ITP, New York University  
jeff.ong@nyu.edu

Alon Chitayat, Jeff Ong



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*Subway Stories*, © 2013 Alon Chitayat and Jeff Ong. Photo © 2013 Roy Rochlin.

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**Description**

*Subway Stories* is an interactive storytelling installation first presented at New York University. The experience begins with a projection of an animated subway car. The train is filled with passengers—illustrations of real-life commuters drawn on subway rides across New York City. A physical “conductor’s box” gives users control of where the projection is focused. One handle controls the train’s speed, and the other handle controls the camera zoom. The audience hears the thoughts and sounds of the passenger in focus. Zooming into specific characters triggers their “stories”—audio narrations recorded to capture the inner lives of each passenger.



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### Artist Statement

Over five million people ride the subway in New York City every day. Crammed shoulder to shoulder, face to face, and every position in between, subway rides are seemingly “interactive experiences.” Despite the close quarters, riding the subway is often an isolating experience; one of the last frontiers where phone service is largely absent, leaving its inhabitants to their own thoughts, conversations, music, etc. Like a horizontal elevator, passengers anxiously wait for their stop, acutely aware of their temporary neighbors. *Subway Stories* looks to reconcile this isolation through the power of storytelling. The project is rooted in hand-drawn illustrations of real people commuting in and around the city. Moving from drawings to an interactive storytelling environment, our artistic translation of the everyday subway ride is not meant to create an entirely new reality. Instead, our task with *Subway Stories* is to bring a familiar experience—listening and imagining and creating stories for commuting neighbors—to the audience for explicit consideration. Interactive technology provides the tools for translation. Combining physical controls with audio/visual feedback creates an immersive, alternative subway environment that audiences can enter and exit at any point. The project bypasses the socially unacceptable act of voyeurism (i.e., staring at/eavesdropping on a stranger) in public space. This subversion allows the audience to explore the inner lives of these passengers without consequence or hesitation.