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OCTOBER

47

Rosalyn Deutsche

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New York City*

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Krzysztof Wodiczko
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Rigorous Study of Art

*The Garden of Scopic Perversion
from Monet to Mirbeau*

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EMILY APTER, Associate Professor of Romance Languages at Williams College, is the author of *Gide and the Codes of Homotextuality* (Stanford, 1987). She is currently working on a book on fetishism.

ROSALYN DEUTSCHE teaches art history and theory at the School of Visual Arts, New York. She has written extensively on art and urban issues.

THOMAS Y. LEVIN is completing a dissertation at Yale University on the "social physiognomics" of the Frankfurt School. He is the editor and translator of *The Mass Ornament*, a collection of essays by Siegfried Kracauer to be published by Harvard University Press.

DAVID V. LURIE writes art criticism and studies law at Fordham University, New York.

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO teaches at the University of Hartford and the Cooper Union, New York. His *Homeless Vehicle Project* was shown at the Clocktower in New York City last winter.

Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City*

ROSALYN DEUTSCHE

The true issue is not to make beautiful cities or well-managed cities, it is to make a work of life. The rest is a by-product. But, making a work of life is the privilege of historical action. How and through what struggles, in the course of what class action and what political battle could urban historical action be reborn? This is the question toward which we are inevitably carried by our inquiry into the meaning of the city.

—Raymond Ledrut, "Speech and the
Silence of the City"

*Beauty and Utility:
Weapons of Redevelopment*

By now it is clear to most observers that the visibility of masses of homeless people obstructs belief in positive images of New York, constituting a crisis in the city's official representation. Dominant responses to the crisis assume two principal, often complementary, forms. They treat homelessness as an individual social problem isolated from the realm of urban politics or, as Peter Marcuse contends, "attempt to neutralize the outrage homelessness produces in those who see it."¹

* I am grateful to Robert Ubell for countless conversations during which many of the ideas in this article were developed.

1. Peter Marcuse, "Neutralizing Homelessness," *Socialist Review*, vol. 18, no. 1 (January/March 1988), p. 83. Marcuse's premise—that the sight of homeless people is shocking to viewers and that this initial shock is, subsequently, counteracted by ideological portrayals—assumes that responses to the presence of the homeless in New York today are simple, direct, almost "natural." It thus fails to

Because substantial efforts to deal with homelessness itself would require at least a partial renunciation of its immediate causes—the commodification of housing, existing patterns of employment, the social service policies of today's austerity state—those committed to preserving the status quo try, instead, through strategies of isolation and neutralization, to cope with the legitimation problems that homelessness raises.

Exemplary of the "social problem" approach is a widely circulated report issued in June 1987 by the Commission on the Year 2000. Obedient to its governmental mandate to forecast New York City's future, the panel defined New York as "ascendant," sustaining this image by pointing to the city's "revitalized" economy and neighborhoods. Conspicuous poverty and patent stagnation in other neighborhoods compelled the commission, nonetheless, to remark on the unequal character of this rise: "We see that the benefits of prosperity have passed over hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers."² But the group's recommendations—prescribing the same pro-business and privatizing policies that are largely responsible for homelessness in the first place—failed to translate this manifest imbalance into a recognition that uneven economic and geographical development is a structural, rather than incidental, feature of New York's present expansion. The panelists' own expansive picture required, then, a certain contraction of their field of vision. Within its borders, social inequities appear as random disparities; they disappear as linked phenomena. An optical illusion fragments the urban condition: "growth"—believed to occur in different locations at varying paces of cumulative development, but ultimately to unfold its advantages to all—emerges as a remedy for urban decay, obscuring a more integrated reality that is also inscribed across the city's surface. For in the late capitalist city, growth, far from a uniform process, is driven by the hierarchical differentiation of social groups and territories. Residential components of prosperity—gentrification and luxury housing—are not distinct from, but in fact depend upon, residential facets of poverty—disinvestment, eviction, displacement, homelessness. Together, they comprise only one aspect of the city's comprehensive redevelopment, itself part of more extensive social, economic,

recognize that current experience of beggars and "vagrants" by other city residents is always mediated by already-existing representations, including the naming of such people as "the homeless" in the first place. The form and iconography of such representations not only produce complex, even contradictory, meanings about the homeless—the object of the representation—but also, in the act of constituting the homeless as an image, construct positions in social relations. It is necessary to alter these relationships as well as the content of representations of the homeless. Despite its limited understanding of representation—a subject which, however, it importantly raises—Marcuse's description of official attempts to neutralize the effects of homelessness and the author's own, largely successful, efforts to counteract these neutralizations are extremely valuable. This is especially true now, when the Koch administration and the media seem determined to depict the homeless as predators, to encourage New Yorkers to refuse donations to street beggars, and to create the impression that city services exist to serve the needs of the poor and homeless.

2. *New York Ascendant*, report of the Commission on the Year 2000, New York, Harper and Row, 1988, p. 167.

and spatial changes, all marked by uneven development. Consequently, redevelopment proceeds, not as an embracing benefit, but according to social *relations* of ascendancy, that is, of domination. Consensus-oriented statements such as *New York Ascendant* disavow these relations, impressionistically offering proof of growth side-by-side with proof of decline; both pieces of evidence acquire the appearance of discrete entities. But today there is no document of New York's ascendancy which is not *at the same time* a document of homelessness. Whether such documents are municipal reports, landmark buildings, or what we call public spaces, they exhibit an ambiguity as to their meaning.

Faced with the instability pervading New York's urban images, the second major response to homelessness—the neutralization of its effects on viewers—attempts to restore to the city a surface calm that belies underlying contradictions. To legitimate the city, this response delegitimizes the homeless. Last spring, Mayor Koch demonstrated the neutralizing approach while speaking, fittingly, before a group of image makers, the American Institute of Architects, convened in New York to discuss, even more appropriately, “Art in Architecture.” Answering a question about Grand Central Station—landmark building and public place—Koch, too, underscored the dual signification of New York's urban spaces by directing his listeners' attention to the presence of the homeless who now reside in the city's train stations:

These homeless people, you can tell who they are. They're sitting on the floor, occasionally defecating, urinating, talking to themselves—many, not all, but many—or panhandling. We thought it would be reasonable for the authorities to say, “You can't stay here unless you're here for transportation.” Reasonable, rational people would come to that conclusion, right? Not the Court of Appeals.³

The mayor was denigrating the state court's reversal of an antiloitering law under which police would have been empowered to remove the homeless from the public areas they currently inhabit. But even had police action succeeded in evicting the homeless, it is doubtful that it could have subdued the fundamental social forces threatening the station's aspect as an enduring symbol of New York's beauty and efficiency. Deprived of repressive powers, however, Koch could only protect the space by ideological means, proclaiming its transparency, in the eyes of reasonable people, to an objective function—transportation.

To assert in the language of commonsense that an urban space refers unequivocally to intrinsic uses is to claim that the city itself speaks. Such a statement makes it seem that individual locations within the city and the spatial organization of the city as a whole contain an inherent meaning determined by the imperative to fulfill needs that are presupposed to be natural, simply practi-

3. David W. Dunlap, “Koch, the ‘Entertainer,’ Gets Mixed Review,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1988, p. B4.

cal. Instrumental function is the only meaning signified by the built environment. What this essentialist view systematically obstructs — an obstruction that is actually its principal function — is the perception that the organization, shaping, and attribution of meaning to space is a social process. Spatial forms serve the needs of particular societies. Seen through the lens of function, however, spatial order appears instead to be controlled by natural, mechanical, or organic laws. It is recognized as social only in the sense that it meets the purportedly unified needs of aggregated individuals. Severed from its social production, space is thus fetishized as a physical entity and undergoes, through inversion, a transformation. Represented as an independent object, it appears to exercise control over the very people who produce and use it. The impression of objectivity is real to the extent that the city is alienated from the social life of its inhabitants. The functionalization of the city, which presents space as politically neutral, merely utilitarian, is, then, filled with politics. For the notion that the city speaks for itself conceals the identity of those who speak through the city.

This effacement has two interrelated functions. In the service of those groups whose interests dominate decisions about the organization of space, it holds that the exigencies of human social life provide a single meaning which necessitates proper uses of the city — proper places for its residents. The prevailing goals of the existing spatial structure are regarded as, by definition, beneficial to all. Correlatively, the ideology of function obscures the conflictual manner in which cities are actually defined and used, repudiating the very existence of those groups who counter dominant uses of space. For these reasons, critical evaluations of the relations of domination materialized in space pivot on the recognition that the production and use of the city is a conflictual process. As the urban critic Raymond Ledrut observes, “The city is not an object produced by a group in order to be bought or even used by others. *The city is an environment formed by the interaction and the integration of different practices.* It is maybe in this way that the city is truly the city.”⁴

Ledrut's definition of the city as the product of social practice, negating its hypostatization as a physical object, strongly opposes the technocratic definition of the city as the product of experts. The city, Ledrut insists, is not a spatial framework external to its users, but is produced by them. These competing definitions are themselves a stake of political struggle. Deceptively simple, Ledrut's formulation has far-reaching implications. Not only does it explicitly acknowledge the participation of diverse social groups in the production of the environment, it argues against an environment imposed from above by state institutions or private interests, one that is dictated by the necessities of control and profit but legitimized by concepts of efficiency or beauty. Delineating the

4. Raymond Ledrut, “Speech and the Silence of the City,” in M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, eds., *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 122.

city as a social form rather than a collection and organization of neutral physical objects implicitly affirms the right of presently excluded groups to have access to the city—to make decisions about the spaces they use, to be attached to the places they live, to refuse marginalization. It describes a concrete social reality suppressed by dominant urban spaces, sketches the terms of resistance to those spaces, and envisions the liberation of the environment in what Henri Lefebvre calls a “space of differences.”⁵ In place of the image of a “well-managed city,” it proposes the construction of a “work of life,” suggesting that such a vital work is extinguished by a discourse that separates people endowed with “eternal” needs from an environment supposedly built to meet them. It restores the subject to the city. The struggle to establish the validity of Ledrut’s definition of the city is, then, irrevocably fused to other controversies about the city’s form and use. “The definition of urban meaning,” Manuel Castells maintains, describing the inscription of political battles in space,

will be a process of conflict, domination, and resistance to domination, directly linked to the dynamics of social struggle and not to the reproductive spatial expression of a unified culture. Furthermore, cities and space being fundamental to the organization of social life, the conflict over the assignment of certain goals to certain spatial forms will be one of the fundamental mechanisms of domination and counter-domination in the social structure.⁶

Mayor Koch’s assignment of a directing purpose—transportation—to Grand Central Station in order to prevail over what he portrays as a parasitic function—shelter for homeless people—encapsulates this means of domination. First, it sequesters a single place from the totality of spatial organization. But the real efficacy of the functionalization of the city as a weapon of power in struggles over the use of urban space rests on its ability to deny the reality that such struggles are productive of spatial organization in the first place. Yet the presence in public places of the homeless—the very group that Koch invokes—represents the most acute symptom of a massive and disputed transformation in the uses of the broader city. Far from a natural or mechanical adjustment, this reorganization is determined in all its facets by prevailing power relations. It includes a transformation of New York into a center for international corporations and business services with attendant changes in the nature of employment. The shift of manufacturing jobs elsewhere, frequently overseas, is accompanied by a loss of traditional blue-collar jobs and the rise of poverty-level wages in low-echelon service sector or new manufacturing jobs. Even mass media analyses

5. Henri Lefebvre, “Space: Social Product and Use Value,” in J.W. Freiberg, ed., *Critical Sociology: European Perspectives*, New York, Irvington Publishers, 1979, p. 293.

6. Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983, p. 302.

now routinely note this change as a cause of homelessness, although they view it as a technological inevitability. Since, under capitalism, land and housing are commodities to be exploited for profit, the marginalization of large numbers of workers engenders a loss of housing for the poor as New York devotes more space to profit-maximizing real estate development—high-rent office towers, luxury condominiums, corporate headquarters—that also provides the physical conditions to meet the needs of the new economy. Today's homeless, therefore, are refugees from evictions, secondary and exclusionary displacement—the conversion of their neighborhoods into areas they can no longer afford.⁷ More broadly, they are products of wage and property relations and of governmental policies allocating spatial resources to the uses of big business and real estate while withdrawing them from social services such as public housing. And the homeless are produced by technical decisions made by state and municipal planning agencies about land uses, decisions that increasingly reinforce an economically and racially segregated spatial structure by directing low-income groups toward the city's periphery. To elucidate the specific historical, rather than mythical, reasons for the presence of today's homeless, they should, more accurately, be called "the evicted." Koch's attempt, exemplified in his address to the architects' convention, to extract New York's urban space from the very social relations that create it further marginalizes the poor. Having first been expelled from their apartments and neighborhoods, they are now denied, by means of what the French situationists termed "a blackmail of utility,"⁸ a right to the city at all.

Exhortations to the authority of objective use are considered in situationist pronouncements to be one of two mechanisms shielding the capitalist conquest of the urban environment from challenge. The other is aesthetics, characterized, along with urban planning, as "a rather neglected branch of criminology."⁹ This appraisal retains its pertinence in New York today, where, in unison, notions of beauty and utility comprise the ideological alibi for redevelopment. Under its protection, the conditions of everyday life for hundreds of thousands of residents are destroyed. The reciprocity between discourses of beauty and utility is evidenced by the fact that Koch's question and answer session at the architects' meeting, where he made his remarks about utility, replaced, at the last minute, a prepared speech the mayor was to deliver on the subject not of the well-managed city but of the beautiful one. The substitution does not indicate a reversal of priorities. Both urban images are equally instrumental for the redevelopment

7. For a more complete definition of "exclusionary displacement," see Peter Marcuse, "Abandonment, Gentrification, and Displacement: The Linkages in New York City," in Neil Smith and Peter Williams, eds., *Gentrification of the City*, Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1986, pp. 153–177.

8. Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem, "Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism," in Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. 65.

9. *Ibid.*

process. In the name of needs and corresponding functions, Koch engaged in narrow problem-solving about the uses of public spaces. But his espousal of the city that speaks for itself permits a remarkable silence to prevail about the incompatibility between true functionality and a social system in which production "is accomplished not for the fulfillment of needs in general, but for the fulfillment of one particular need: profit."¹⁰ Indeed, as Baudrillard warns, "any system of productivist growth (capitalist, but not exclusively) can only produce and reproduce men—even in their deepest determinations: in their liberty, in their needs, in their very unconscious—as productive forces."¹¹ Within such a system, if a person "eats, drinks, lives somewhere, reproduces himself, it is because the system requires his self-production in order to reproduce itself: it needs men."¹² In bourgeois society, when people such as today's homeless are redundant in the economy—or needed to cheapen labor costs—they are converted from residents of the city into predators on the "fundamental" needs of New Yorkers. No longer required as productive forces, the homeless themselves have no requirements.

The stunning reversals enacted in the name of utility—invoking for the purpose of demonstrating natural needs the very group whose existence testifies to the social mediation of needs—occur also in the name of beauty. The mayor's prepared speech on the topic of government's relation to aesthetics celebrated the city's preservation of historical landmarks, architectural heterogeneity, and neighborhood context, mobilizing a protectionist discourse of permanence and continuity under whose aegis patterns of development progressively threaten historical action, diversity, and entire communities with elimination. Such inversions are possible because, presupposed to lie outside of socio-material conditions, commitments to beauty and utility present themselves as incontrovertible evidence of public accountability. Thus, as further proof of the advantages of New York's "ascendancy," Koch's planned speech stressed the current administration's interest in the aesthetics of the city—its revitalization of the municipal art commission, programs of flexible zoning regulations, planning controls, design review panels, and public art. "Once again," the speech asserted, "public art has become a priority."¹³

10. Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984, p. 54.

11. Jean Baudrillard, "The Ideological Genesis of Needs," in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1981.

12. *Ibid.*

13. "Remarks by Mayor Edward I. Koch at Awards Luncheon of the American Institute of Architects," May 18, 1988, p. 7.

Redeveloping "the Public"

It is not difficult to understand why an increase in public art commissions attends New York's "ascendancy." As a practice within the built environment, public art participates in the production of meanings, uses, and forms for the city. In this capacity, it can help secure consent to redevelopment and to the restructuring that make up the historical form of late capitalist urbanism. But like other institutions that mediate perceptions of the city's economic and political operations—architecture, urban planning, urban design—it can also question and resist those operations, revealing the suppressed contradictions within urban processes. Since these contradictions stamp the image of the city with a basic instability, public art can be, in Althusserian terms, a "site" as well as a "stake" of urban struggle.

It is also not unexpected that, along with demonstrations of the new city's beauty and utility, intensified talk of "the public" should accompany the accelerating privatization and bureaucratization of land-use decisions in New York. Wholesale appropriations of land by private interests, massive state interventions that de-territorialize huge numbers of residents, and inequitable distribution of spatial resources by government agencies insulated from public control: these acts governing the shape of New York's landscape require a legitimating front. Citing "the public," whether this word is attached to art, space, or any number of other objects, ideas, and practices, is one means of providing the uneven development of New York with democratic legitimacy. Discourse about "the public" is frequently cast as a commitment made by the principal actors in the real estate market—developers, financial institutions, landlords, corporations, politicians—to rescue, for New Yorkers, a significant quantity of "public space" from the ravages of "overdevelopment." Routinely, for instance, public areas, paid for with public funds, furnish private redevelopment projects with the amenities necessary to maximize profits.¹⁴ In other cases, city regulations require corporations, in exchange for increased density allowances, to build privately owned atriums or plazas. The resulting locations are designated "public" spaces. These phenomena mirror each other as facets of the privatization of public space. They represent individual answers to the problems faced by municipal governments confronted with the need to facilitate capital accumulation and still maintain responsiveness to residents' demands for participation in decisions about the uses of the city. Private public space is most frequently acclaimed as an innovative partnership between the public and private sectors—falsely supposed to be distinct spheres. Such an alliance, we are told, if extended to the entire configuration of the city, would benefit all New York residents. Yet the provision of space for "the public" testifies, under present circumstances, to the wholesale

14. For a discussion of one example of this process, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection* and the Site of Urban 'Revitalization,'" *October*, no. 38 (Fall 1986), pp. 63–98.

withdrawal of space from social control. Clearly, the local state can meet with only limited and precarious success in harmonizing its goals of meeting capital's demands and maintaining democratic legitimacy, since the two goals are, objectively, in conflict. Not surprisingly, therefore, New York's new public spaces, materializations of attempts at reconciliation, are the objects of contests over uses and, moreover, are hardly designed for accessibility to all. Rather, they permit, through a multitude of legal, physical, or symbolic means, access by certain social groups for selected purposes while excluding others.

When disputes do arise that threaten to expose the political implications of such exclusions, an ideology of "the public" justifies particular exclusions as natural. Because "the public" is conceived either as a unity or, what amounts to the same thing, as a field composed of essential divisions, dilemmas plaguing the use of public spaces can be attributed to the inevitable disruptions attendant on the need to harmonize the "natural" differences and diverse interests characteristic of any society. Heightened diversity is viewed, even further, as a distinctive feature of modern urban life, whose problems, in turn, are understood to result from the inevitable technological evolution of human society. Neutralizing concepts of diversity form part of the urban ideology and are wielded to defeat genuine diversity. "The public," employed as an imprecise and embracing rubric, substitutes for analysis of specific spatial contests, ascribing discord to quasi-natural origins. Exclusions enacted to homogenize public space by expelling specific differences are dismissed as deeds necessary to restore social harmony. This perspective disavows the social relations of domination that such deeds make possible.

Exclusions and homogenization, operations undertaken in the name of "the public," distinguish what German filmmaker Alexander Kluge has called the "pseudo-public sphere." With Oskar Negt, Kluge has theorized various permutations in the bourgeois public sphere and, especially, its transformation in the interests of profit-maximization. The pseudo-, or, as variously labeled, the representative, classical, or traditional, public sphere, conventionally deemed to be a spatial and temporal arena where citizens participate in political dialogue and decision-making, is, according to Negt and Kluge, an arena that in practice represses debate. This repression, a hallmark of the bourgeois public sphere, results from its origins in the false demarcation drawn in bourgeois society between the private and public realms. Because economic gain, protected from public accountability by its seclusion within the private domain, actually depends on conditions that are publicly provided, the bourgeois public sphere developed as a means by which private interests seek to control public activity. But since capitalism requires the preservation of the illusion that a well-defined boundary divides the public and private realms, the contradictions that gave birth to the public sphere are perpetuated and "reconciled" in its operations. Conflicts between groups are obfuscated by generalizing dominant interests as universal and by simultaneously privatizing experience. Homogenization of divergent concerns

can, however, only be effected through exclusions: "A representative public sphere," Kluge argues, "is representative insofar as it involves exclusions." It "only represents parts of reality, selectively and according to certain value systems. . . ." ¹⁵ Negt and Kluge describe how, increasingly, the pseudo-public sphere has yielded to a public sphere that is privately owned, determined by profit motives, and characterized by the transformation of the conditions of all aspects of everyday life into objects of production. Within this public sphere, "the public" is defined as a mass of consumers and spectators. ¹⁶ Against the pseudo- and private public spheres, grounded in relations of exclusion and private property, Negt and Kluge conceptualize the construction of an oppositional public sphere—an arena of political consciousness and articulation of social experience which would challenge these relations.

Recently, artists and critics have sought to initiate such a challenge within art practice by constructing what has been termed a cultural public sphere. The ideas that art cannot assume the preexistence of a public but must help produce one and that the public sphere is more than a physical space nullify, to a considerable extent, accepted divisions between public and nonpublic art. Potentially, any exhibition venue is a public sphere and, conversely, the location of artworks outside privately owned galleries, in parks and plazas or, simply, outdoors, hardly guarantees that they will constitute a public. But while, in these ways, the concept of a public sphere shatters the category of public art, it also raises unique questions for art that has been conventionally so categorized and, especially, for work commissioned to occupy New York's public spaces. Given the proliferation of pseudo- and private public spaces, how can public art counter the functions of its "public" sites in constructing the dominant city? We can at least begin to answer this question by discarding the simplifications that pervade mainstream aesthetic discourse about "the public." Rather than a real category, the definition of "the public," like the definition of the city, is an ideological artifact, a contested and fragmented terrain. "The public," as Craig Owens observes, "is a discursive formation susceptible to appropriation by the most diverse—indeed,

15. Alexander Kluge, "On Film and the Public Sphere," *New German Critique*, nos. 24–25 (Fall/Winter 1981–82), p. 212.

16. An especially patronizing depiction of the public as consumers of mass spectacle appeared in a 1980 *New York Times* editorial about New York's public space. "New Yorkers," the editorial began, "love parades, festivals, celebrations, demonstrations and entertainments, particularly when such occasions bring large numbers of them together outdoors." The conflation of political demonstrations (rallies in Union Square were cited as a historical example) and patriotic celebrations (the 1976 Bicentennial celebration, for one) and the reduction of both to an opportunity to enjoy the weather ("The finer the weather, the greater the urge to gather, the sweeter the siren call of causes") were employed to support the use of public funds to create public parks for a luxury redevelopment project—Battery Park City. Needless to say, by the end of the editorial any reference to political demonstrations had been dropped. "What better place for New Yorkers to do *their public thing*?" the editorial concluded ("A Public Plaza for New York," *New York Times*, June 16, 1980, p. A22, emphasis added).

opposed—ideological interests.”¹⁷ But crucial as this perception is, significant challenges to dominant interests will continue to elude us unless this basic understanding prompts inquiries into the precise identity of those interests and the concrete mechanisms of their power. Unless we seriously respond to Owens’s subsequent query—“who is to define, manipulate and profit from ‘the public’” today?¹⁸—critical interventions will remain inchoate and directionless. Paramount among the issues confronting all urban practices is the present appropriation of public space and of the city itself for use by the forces of redevelopment. Public art shares this plight. Although its current predicament is not without historical precedent—most notably in late nineteenth-century civic beautification and municipal art movements—the complexities of the present conjuncture necessitate a new framework for analyzing the social functions of public art.

Public Art and Its Uses

Most existing aesthetic approaches can neither account for current conditions of public art production nor suggest terms for an alternative, possibly transformative, practice. Even when they comprehend the problems of the public sphere or entail sophisticated materialist critiques of aesthetic perception, they generally lack an adequate knowledge of urban politics. Needless to say, traditional art-historical paradigms cannot explicate the social functions of public art—past or present—since they remain committed to idealist assumptions that work to obscure those functions. Maintaining that art is defined by an independent aesthetic essence, prevailing doctrines hold that, while art inevitably “reflects” social reality, its purpose is, by definition, the transcendence of spatiotemporal contingencies in the universal, timeless work of art. Conventional social art history provides no genuine alternative. Frequently attracted to the study of public art because of what they perceive to be its inherently social character, social art historians, in keeping with the discipline’s empiricist biases, confine themselves to describing either the iconography or the historical “context” of individual works. Hostile to forms of analysis that penetrate beneath surface phenomena, they restrict meaning to the work’s overt subject matter and relegate social conditions to the status of a backdrop. They thus preserve the idealist separation of art—its ontological status intact—from social environments with which art merely “interacts.” In addition, art history mystifies the social environment just as it does the work of art. With few exceptions, all tendencies within art history are informed by notions of the city as a transhistorical form, an inevitable

17. Craig Owens, “The Yen for Art,” contribution to a discussion entitled “The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art,” in Hal Foster, ed., *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1987, p. 18.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

product of technological evolution, or an arena for the unfolding of exacerbated individualism.¹⁹

More significantly, the present role of public art in urban politics also calls into question ideas informing some critical perspectives on public art. Beginning in the late 1960s, contemporary art and criticism questioned idealist tenets of artistic autonomy by exploring art's social functions. In part, the critique was initiated by shifting attention away from the "inside" of the artwork—supposed in mainstream doctrine to contain fixed, inherent meanings—and focusing, instead, on the work's context—its framing conditions. Site-specificity, a technique in which context was incorporated into the work itself, originally developed to counteract the construction of ideological art objects, purportedly defined by independent essences, and to reveal art's determination by its institutional frame. Over the years, in what is now a familiar history, site-specificity underwent many permutations. Most fruitfully, context was extended to encompass the individual site's symbolic, social, and political meanings as well as the discursive and historical circumstances within which artwork, spectator, and site are situated. Insofar as this expansion stressed the social relations structuring the artwork and site, exclusive concern with the physical site often signaled an academic fetishization of context at the aesthetic level. Critical site-specific art, as opposed to its academic progeny, continued, however, not only to incorporate context as a critique of the artwork; it also attempted to intervene, through the artwork, in its site. The reciprocity between artwork and site altered the identity of each, blurring distinctions between them and preparing the ground for the enhanced participation of art in wider cultural and social practice. For public art, the alteration, rather than affirmation, of the site required that the urban space occupied by a work be understood, just as art and art institutions had been, as socially constructed spaces.

The most radical promise embodied in the public art that attempted to de-fetishize both art and urban space was the potential for artists and critics to articulate their aesthetic opposition to the spaces of art's reception with other elements of social resistance to the organization of the city. Without taking this step, the role public art plays in urban struggles remains uncertain. When, for example, a site-specific work such as Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* intervenes in urban space in order to redefine space as the site of sculpture,²⁰ to what extent is art itself redefined? Without addressing the precise stakes of spatial redefinition, *Tilted Arc* exhibits a curious combination of specificity and generalization that is

19. For a discussion of the notion of "the urban" that informs art history, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Representing Berlin: Urban Ideology and Aesthetic Practice," in Irit Rogoff and MaryAnne Stevens, eds., *The Divided Heritage: Themes and Problems in German Modernism*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

20. See Douglas Crimp, "Serra's Public Sculpture: Redefining Site Specificity," in Rosalind Krauss, *Richard Serra/Sculpture*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 53.

symptomatic of the split it maintains between critical aesthetic issues and critical urban problems. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly wedded concretely to its site: it establishes its difference from surrounding architecture, engages and reorients spatial patterns, invites viewers into the space of the work, and traces the path of human vision across the Federal Plaza. Perhaps, as Douglas Crimp argues, positing *Tilted Arc* as an example of radicalized site-specificity, it metaphorically ruptures the spatial expression of state power by destroying the plaza's coherence.²¹ It might also, as Crimp less speculatively suggests, reveal the condition of alienation in bourgeois society. These are the most provocative claims made for *Tilted Arc* as a practice that addresses the material conditions of art's existence, and, although they identify a radical potential for public art, they tend, as an interpretation of Serra's work, toward exaggeration. For in its own way *Tilted Arc* still floats above its urban site. The lingering abstraction of the sculpture from its space emerges most lucidly in the attitude the work and its supporters adopt toward urgent questions about the uses of public space.

Indeed, "use" was elevated to a central position in the debates about public art generated by the hearings convened in 1985 to decide whether Serra's sculpture should be removed from its site. The proper use of the site became a banner under which crusades against the work were conducted; supporters countered with alternative uses. *Tilted Arc*'s most astute defenders problematized the assumptions about utility that justified attacks on the sculpture, challenging, as does the work itself, simplistic notions of natural or populist uses. Yet, in proposing aesthetic uses for the space, isolated from its social function in specific circumstances, supporters substituted one ideological conception of use for another, upholding, as did the work's detractors, a true use. Moreover, the notion that *Tilted Arc* bestows on the Federal Plaza an aesthetic use that is available to *all* users ignores questions recently posed in a number of disciplines about differences among users and about the *user as producer* of the environment. Phenomenological readings, placing subjective experience of space outside the socio-material conditions of the city, fail to see that the primary object of their study is already ideological. "The situation of man confronting the city involves other things than schemas of perceptive behavior. It introduces ideology."²² Precisely because the ideology of spatial use was, in fact, never introduced, discussions about the work, despite the prominence they accorded to questions of use, remained aloof from critical public issues about the uses of space in New York today: oppositions between social groups about spatial uses, the social division of the city, and the question of which residents are forcibly excluded from using the city. These issues occupy the heart of urban politics. They were also the hidden

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–55.

22. Raymond Ledrut, *Les images de la ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1973, p. 28.

agenda of assaults from certain quarters against *Tilted Arc*, which, represented as an impediment to the beneficial uses of public space, became a foil for public art that celebrates the dominant uses of space. Yet these questions remained unexcavated during the hearings, because, confined within the boundaries of critical aesthetics, discussions failed to perceive the function of public art in contemporary urbanism—the social processes producing the city's tangible form. While they frequently entailed complicated materialist critiques of art's production and of aesthetic perception, they obstructed an interrogation of the conditions of production of New York's urban space.

Opening the question requires that we dislodge public art from its ghettoization within the parameters of aesthetic discourse, even critical aesthetic discourse, and resituate it, at least partially, within critical urban discourse. More precisely, such a shift in perspective erodes the borders between the two fields, disclosing the existence of crucial interfaces between art and urbanism in the subject of public art. The need for criticism to conceptualize this meeting ground is especially pressing now, since neoconservative forces are appropriating that task in order to promote a type of public art that complies with the demands of redevelopment. "In fact," to quote just one journalist who has established the "new criterion" for public art, "public art needs to be seen as a function not of art, but of urbanism. It needs to be thought of in relation to, rather than insulated from the numerous other functions, activities and imperatives that condition the fabric of city life."²³ The problem we face, then, is not so much the absence of a consideration of the city in current discourse about public art; it is rather the fact that this discourse perpetuates mythologized notions about the city. Typically, it claims to oppose cultural elitism while remaining committed to artistic quality, a claim that corresponds to broader assertions that the redeveloped city provides quality public space. Consistent with these allegations, journalists promote a type of public art that is fully incorporated into the apparatus of redevelopment. My desire to approach contemporary public art as an urban practice is, then, an abstraction for heuristic purposes, but one that is motivated by the imperative, first, to respond to concrete events changing the function of public art and, second, to contribute to an alternative. An oppositional practice, however, must possess an adequate knowledge of the dominant constructions within which it works. In the case of public art, it depends, therefore, on a critical perception of the city's metamorphosis and of the role public art is playing within it.

When Mayor Koch's speechwriters for his talk before the American Institute of Architects stated that "once again, public art has become a priority," they were drawing attention not only to an increase in the number of public commissions, but also to enhanced support for a qualitatively different kind of public art.

23. Eric Gibson, "Public Art and the Public Realm," *Sculpture*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January/February 1988), p. 32.

And even though their reference to art was contained within a speech on aesthetics—the beautiful city—it could equally have supported the mayor's later remarks about utility—the well-managed city. In fact, the new public art illustrates the marriage of the two images in the redevelopment process.

What distinguishes the “new” public art in the eyes of its proponents, and, further, what renders it more socially accountable than the old, is precisely its “usefulness.” “What is the new public art?” asked an art journalist in one of the earliest articles reporting on the new phenomenon:

Definitions differ from artist to artist, but they are held together by a single thread: *It is art plus function*, whether the function is to provide a place to sit for lunch, to provide water drainage, to mark an important historical date, or to enhance and direct a viewer's perceptions.²⁴

From this indiscriminate list of functions it is difficult to ascertain precisely how the new public sculpture differs from previous types. Nineteenth-century war memorials, after all, commemorate important events, while *Tilted Arc*, against which the new art opposes itself, directs a viewer's perception. Yet advocates do specify, albeit confusedly, a quality that distinguishes the work of new public artists:

All share a dedication to extra-aesthetic concerns. Use—not as in criticality but as in seating and tables, shade and sunlight—is a primary issue.²⁵

We are putting function back into art again.²⁶

This architectural art has a functional basis. Unlike most traditionally modern works of painting and sculpture, which modern artists were careful to define as “useless” in comparison to other objects of daily life, recent architectural art is often very much like a wall, a column, a floor, a door or a fence.²⁷

Scott Burton—whose work, primarily pieces of furniture designed for public places, epitomizes the phenomenon—repeatedly declares that “utility” is the principal yardstick for measuring the value of public art.²⁸

The new art, then, is promoted as useful in the reductive sense of fulfilling

24. Douglas C. McGill, “Sculpture Goes Public,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 27, 1986, p. 45.

25. Nancy Princenthal, “On the Waterfront: South Cove Project at Battery Park City,” *Village Voice*, June 7, 1988, p. 99.

26. Nancy Holt, quoted in McGill, “Sculpture Goes Public.”

27. Robert Jensen, “Commentary,” in *Architectural Art: Affirming the Design Relationship*, New York, American Craft Museum, 1988, p. 3.

28. See Gibson, “Public Art and the Public Realm.”

"essential" human and social needs. Just as Koch designated Grand Central Station a place for travel, this art designates places in the city for people to sit, to stand, to play, to eat, to read, even to dream. Building on this foundation, the new art claims to unify successively a whole sequence of divided spheres, offering itself in the end as a model of integration. Initially setting up a polarization between the concerns of art and those of utility, it then transcends the division by making works that are both artworks and usable objects. Further, it claims to reconcile art, through its usefulness, with society and with the public benefit. Use, we are told, ensures relevance.

As an artist working toward the social good, he [the public sculptor] produces works that are used by the populace, that inhabit its plazas, that are part of its plans for urban design and economic redevelopment—works that rapidly leave the environment of art to enter the realm of artifacts.²⁹

Just as function is limited to utilitarianism, social activity is constricted to narrow problem-solving, so that the provision of "useful" objects automatically collapses into a social good. "The social questions interest me more than the art ones," says Scott Burton, describing his furnishings for the Equitable Assurance Building, whose function in raising real estate values remains thoroughly unexamined. "I hope that people will love to eat their lunch there."³⁰ And, he continues, "Communal and social values are now more important. What office workers do in their lunch hour is more important than my pushing the limits of my self-expression."³¹

The conflation of utility with social benefit has a distinctly moralistic cast: "All my work is a rebuke to the art world,"³² Burton has stated. Critics agree: "[Scott Burton] challenges the art community with neglect of its social responsibility. . . . Carefully calculated for use, often in public spaces, Burton's furniture clearly has a social function."³³ All these purported acts of unification, predicated as they are on prior separations, conceal underlying processes of dissociation. Each element of the formula—art, use, society—first isolated from the others, has individually undergone a splitting operation in which it is rationalized and objectified. Art possesses an aesthetic essence; utilitarian objects serve

29. Kate Linker, "Public Sculpture: The Pursuit of the Pleasurable and the Profitable Paradise," *Artforum*, vol. 19, no. 7 (March 1981), p. 66. Linker's article recognizes the functions of the new public art in raising the economic value of its sites but, perhaps because it was written at an early stage in the contemporary redevelopment process, does not address the social consequences of this function.

30. Quoted in McGill, "Sculpture Goes Public," p. 63.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

32. Quoted in Nancy Princenthal, "Social Seating," *Art in America*, vol. 75, no. 6 (June 1987), p. 131.

33. *Ibid.*

universal needs; society is a functional ensemble. They surmount specific histories, geographies, values, relations to subjects and social groups, to be reconstituted as abstract categories. Individually and as a whole, they are severed from social relations, fetishized as external objects. This is the real social function of the new public art: to reify as natural the conditions of the late capitalist city into which they hope to integrate us.

The supreme act of unification with which the new public art is credited, however, is its interdisciplinary cooperation with other professions shaping the physical environment.

The new public art invariably requires the artist to collaborate with a diverse group of people, including architects, landscape architects, other artists and engineers. So far, most of the public artists have had few problems adjusting to the collaborative process; indeed, many have embraced it with enthusiasm.³⁴

"Few might have guessed that these collaborations would so seriously affect the art, design and planning professions in such a short time,"³⁵ writes one critic with surprise. Yet, given the fact that the new public art rallies all the notions that currently inform the planning of redevelopment, it is hardly surprising, if not in fact completely predictable, that such work should be fully integrated into the process of designing New York's redeveloped spaces. Presented as beautiful, useful, public, and expertly produced, it advertises these environments as images of New York's ascendancy. Indeed, the rise of collaborative public art accompanied the acceleration of urban redevelopment almost from its inception. In 1981, John Beardsley concluded his survey of "community-sponsored" art projects, *Art in Public Places*, by identifying a recent shift in artistic attitudes. "A new kind of partnership is emerging between contemporary artists and the nation's communities," he explained in a chapter entitled "New Directions: Expanding Views of Art In Public Places,"

with the result that artists are increasingly involved in significant development efforts. In part, this is a consequence of new initiatives within cities. As an element of major building programs in the last decade and a half, some have sought the participation of artists in developing innovative solutions to public design problems.³⁶

Since their emergence in the late 1970s, public art collaborations have grown to

34. McGill, p. 66.

35. Diane Shamash, "The A Team, Artists and Architects: Can They Work Together," *Stroll: The Magazine of Outdoor Art and Street Culture*, nos. 6-7 (June 1988), p. 60.

36. John Beardsley, *Art in Public Places: A Survey of Community-Sponsored Projects Supported by The National Endowment for the Arts*, Washington, D.C., Partners for Livable Places, 1981, p. 81.

such an extent that they now dominate accounts of public art. "This is a season," writes Michael Brenson,

that is bringing the issue of artistic collaboration to a head. Over the past few years a great deal of hope has been invested in the partnership between sculptors and architects, and between sculptors and the community. There is a widespread feeling that this is the future for public sculpture and perhaps for sculpture in general.³⁷

The consistent invocation of "the community" in passages such as these typifies the terminological abuses pervading discussions of public art and endowing the new type with an aura of social accountability. That Beardsley's book consistently describes government-funded art as "community-sponsored" is especially ironic, since the "new initiatives within cities" and "major building programs" he mentions as the impetus for collaborations frequently comprise state interventions in the environment, interventions that destroy minority and working-class communities and disperse their residents. "Community" conjures up images of neighborhoods bound together by relations of mutual interest, respect, and kinship; "community-sponsored" connotes local control and citizen participation in decision-making. But it is community, as both territory and social form, that redevelopment destroys. Redevelopment converts the city into a terrain organized to fulfill capital's need to exploit space for profit; if anything, clashes, rather than confluence, between communities and state-imposed initiatives are more likely to characterize urban life today.

Inaccuracies of language, demonstrating indifference to the issues of urban politics, resemble other distortions pervading discourse about public art collaborations, distortions that confuse the issues of aesthetic politics as well. Like the appropriation of urban discourse, these misrepresentations try to invest the recent marriage of art and urban planning with a social justification, using the vocabulary of radical art practice. The new public art is deemed to be anti-individualist, contextualist, and site-specific. Collaborative artists frequently display a lack of concern with private self-expression and, thereby, an opposition to the autonomy and privilege of art. As part of urban design teams, they also reject notions of public art as "decoration," because, as they contend, they are not merely placing objects in urban spaces but creating the spaces themselves. If writers such as Beardsley single out "new initiatives within cities" as one factor contributing to the growth of public art collaborations, they see the second crucial factor to be developments within contemporary art itself.

In part, it [the shift to public art partnerships] follows as well from the

37. Michael Brenson, "Outdoor Sculptures Reflect Struggles of Life in the City," *New York Times*, July 15, 1988, pp. C1, C28.

increasingly interdisciplinary character of contemporary art. . . . There is a pronounced shift in these projects from the isolated object to the artwork integrated with its environment and from the solitary creator to the artist as a member of a professional team.³⁸

Of course, the new public art is born of recent tendencies within urbanism and art practice. To say so tells us very little. Genuine explanation hinges on understanding the nature of each of these developments and of their interaction. The new art's promoters misunderstand both sources of the new public art. The difference between their version of site-specificity and its original meaning is obvious and needs only to be summarized here.

Commitment to developing an art that neither diverts attention from nor merely decorates the spaces of its display originated from the imperative to challenge the neutrality of those spaces. Contextualist art intervened in its spatial context by making the concealed social organization and ideological content of that space visible. The new public art, in contrast, moves "beyond decoration" into the field of spatial design in order to create, rather than question, its space, to conceal its constitutive social relations. It moves from a notion of art that is "in" but independent of its spaces to one that views art as integrated with its spaces and users but in which all three are independent of urban politics. It simply combines twin fetishisms and is thus instrumental for redevelopment. One critic, delineating "a right way and a wrong way to insert art in public places," wrote about a collaborative art project in New York exemplifying the "right way" that it

represents the gentrification of site art—it's been successfully, even brilliantly, tamed, its sting removed. You can sometimes miss the good old days when artists were fierce individualists wrestling the wilderness to its knees, like Dan'l Boone with the bear; the "otherness" of art out on the American desert touched some mythic nerve. But times have changed. The two traditions—the gentrified and the wild—can't be mixed.³⁹

The statement constructs false dualisms that conceal genuine differences. What has been eliminated from the new "site-specific" art is not "individualism," as opposed to teamwork, but political radicalism in favor of collaboration with the forces of power. The real measure of just how depoliticized this art has become—and how political it actually is—under the guise of being "environmentally sensitive" is the author's assumption that gentrification is a positive metaphor. As anyone genuinely sensitive to New York's social landscape realizes, however, the prior symbolization of gentrification as the domestication of wild frontiers pro-

38. Beardsley, p. 90.

39. Kay Larson, "Combat Zone," *New York*, May 13, 1985, p. 118.

foundly misapprehends the nature of the phenomenon. Gentrification only appears to result from the heroic conquest of hostile environments by individual "pioneers"; in truth, as Neil Smith writes,

it is apparent that where the "urban pioneers" venture, the banks, real-estate companies, the state or other collective economic actors have generally gone before. In this context it may be more appropriate to view the James Rouse Company not as the John Wayne but as the Wells Fargo of gentrification.⁴⁰

The depiction of gentrification—a process which replaces poor, usually minority, residents of frequently well-established neighborhoods with white middle-class residents—as a beneficial activity taming uncivilized terrains is not only naive about economics, it is an ethnocentric and racist conceit as well. The use of this conceit in art criticism epitomizes the arrogance inherent in aesthetic practices claiming to respond to urban environments while lacking any commitment to comprehend them.

Instead, absorbing dominant ideology about the city, proponents of the new public art respond to urban questions by constructing images of well-managed and beautiful cities. Theirs is a technocratic vision. Insofar as it discerns a real problem—the loss of people's attachment to the city—it reacts by offering solutions that can only perpetuate alienation: a belief that needs and pleasures can be gratified by expertly produced, "humanized" environments. The incapacity to appreciate that the city is a social rather than technical form renders this perspective helpless to explain a situation in which the same system that produces, for the purposes of profit and control, a city dissociated from its users today, for the same reasons literally detaches people from their living space through eviction and displacement. Under these circumstances, the technocratic view is left with limited options: encouragement of these actions, disavowal, or dismissal of homelessness as an example of how the system fails rather than, more accurately, how it currently works. Society's "failure" can produce a resigned abandonment of the most troubling facts of city life, resulting in attitudes supporting the use of the city for economic growth even while proposing degrees of regulation. One urban designer, dedicated to institutionalizing urban design as a technical specialty and arm of public policy, freely acknowledges, for instance, that gentrification and historic preservation displace "earlier settlers" in city neighborhoods. He suggests measures to "mitigate the adverse effects of social change in historic districts. However," he succinctly concludes,

the dynamics of real estate in a private market always mean that someone profits at someone else's expense. On balance, the preserva-

40. Neil Smith, "Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space," in Smith and Williams, eds., *Gentrification of the City*, pp. 18–19.

tion and restoration of old neighborhoods has to be considered valuable for the economic health of a city, even if there is hardship for individuals.⁴¹

Believing that the dominant forces producing today's city represent the collectivity and, despite references to "social change," that such forces are immutable, interdisciplinary urban design teams—including public artists—fashion the mental and physical representations of New York's ascendancy. To do so, they must suppress the connection between redeveloped spaces and New York's homelessness.

The Social Uses of Space

Public artists seeking to reveal the contradictions underlying images of well-managed or beautiful cities also explore relations between art and urbanism. Their interdisciplinary ventures differ, however, from the new collaborative and useful ones. Instead of extending the idealist conception of art to the surrounding city, they combine materialist analyses of art as a social product with materialist analyses of the social production of space. As a contribution to this work, urban studies has much to offer, since it analyzes the concrete mechanisms by which power relations are perpetuated in spatial forms and identifies the precise terms of spatial domination and resistance. Over the last twenty years, the "social production of space" has become the object of an impressive body of literature generated by urbanists in many fields—geography, sociology, urban planning, political economy. Critical spatial theories share a key theme with critical aesthetic thought, and the two have unfolded along a similar trajectory. Initially, each inquiry questioned the paradigm dominating its respective discipline. Just as materialist art practice challenged formalist dogma, critical urban studies questioned mainstream idealist perspectives on urban space.⁴² "The dominant paradigm," as sociologist Marc Gottdiener summarizes it,

loosely identified as urban ecology, explains settlement space as being produced by an adjustment process involving large numbers of relatively equal actors whose interaction is guided by some self-regulating invisible hand. This "organic" growth process—propelled by techno-

41. Jonathan Barnett, *An Introduction to Urban Design*, New York, Harper & Row, p. 46.

42. For critiques of traditional urban studies, see, among others, Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1977; M. Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1985; Peter Saunders, *Social Theory and the Urban Question*, London, Hutchinson, 1981; Edward W. Soja, "The Spatiality of Social Life: Towards a Transformative Retheorisation," in Derek Gregory and John Urry, eds., *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1985.

logical innovation and demographic expansion—assumes a spatial morphology which, according to ecologists, mirrors that of lower life forms within biological kingdoms. Consequently, the social organization of space is accepted by mainstreamers as inevitable, whatever its patterns of internal differentiation.⁴³

The ecological perspective views forms of metropolitan social life in terms of the adaptation of human populations to environments in which certain processes tend to remain constant and invariable. Employing biologicistic analogies, it attributes patterns of urban growth to “laws” of competition, dominance, succession, and invasion, and thus explains the form of the city as a product of semi-natural processes. Even when the ecological legacy of environmental determinism has been complicated or discarded altogether, many tendencies within urban studies continue to view space as an objective entity against which subjectivities are measured and therefore to marginalize the wider social system as cause of urban spatial form. But just as critical art practice in the late 1960s and 1970s sought to de-fetishize the ideological art object, critical urban studies did the same with the ideological spatial object—the city as an ecological form. The two inquiries investigated the ways in which social relations produce, respectively, art and the city.

Having insisted, however, on the relationship between society and art, on the one hand, or space, on the other, both critiques rejected the notion that this relationship is one of simple reflection or interaction. If formalism reentered aesthetic discourse in the notion that art inevitably mirrors society, so idealism returned to spatial discourse in the formulation that space simply reflects social relations. But “two things can only interact or reflect each other if they are defined in the first place as separate,” observes urban geographer Neil Smith.

Even having taken the first step of realization, then, we are not automatically freed from the burden of our conceptual inheritance; regardless of our intentions, it is difficult to start from an implicitly dualistic conception of space and society and to conclude by demonstrating their unity.⁴⁴

Indeed, by means of such separations, not only are space and art endowed with identities as discrete entities, but social life appears to be *unsituated*, to exist apart from its material forms. Space and art can be rescued from further mystification only by being grasped as socially produced categories in the first instance, as arenas where social relations are reproduced and as, themselves, social relations.

Framing my remarks about kindred developments in two distinct fields is a belief that they share a common purpose. Both attempt to reveal the depoliticiz-

43. Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space*, p. 264.

44. Smith, *Uneven Development*, p. 77.

ing effects of the hegemonic perspectives they criticize and, conversely, share an imperative to politicize the production of space and art. These comparable goals do not merely present an interesting academic parallel. Nor, as in the standard conception of interdisciplinary endeavors, do they simply enrich each other. Rather, they converge in the subject of public art, which, under current circumstances functions as a spatial activity. Understanding the fusion of urban space with prevailing social relations reveals the extent to which the predominant tendency within public art to design the landscape of redevelopment fully implicates art in spatial politics.

Such a statement only makes sense, however, in light of a theory of spatial organization as a terrain of political struggle. Urban theories, far from monolithic, are characterized by debates that are much too complex to receive justice within the scope of this essay.⁴⁵ Still, it is necessary to outline, however briefly, why space is on the political agenda as it has never been before. Henri Lefebvre, originator of the phrase "the production of space," attributes the significance of space, in part, to changes in the organization of production and accumulation under late capitalism. New spatial arrangements assure capitalism's very survival. Because, according to Lefebvre, production is no longer isolated in independent units within space but, instead, takes place across vast spatial networks, "the production of things in space" gives way to "the production of space."⁴⁶ Due to this growth and to revolutions in telecommunications and information technology, "the planning of the modern economy tends to become spatial planning."⁴⁷ The implications of this fundamental premise are clear. Individual cities cannot be defined apart from the spatial totality—the relations of spaces to one another within and between various geographic levels: global, regional, urban. The spatial restructuring of New York—a process at the urban level—can only be comprehended within the global context: the internationalization of capital, new international division of labor, and new international urban hierarchy.⁴⁸ Cities such as New York, occupying the upper ranks of the hierarchy, function within the division of labor as centers for decision-making and administrative control of finance capital and global corporations. Productive activities and, now, low-level clerical jobs are exported, permitting savings on labor costs along with enhanced flexibility and control. But the corporate center itself materializes not only

45. Summaries of these debates and of the history of spatial theories are included in Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space*; Edward W. Soja, "The Socio-spatial Dialectic," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 70 (1980), pp. 207–25; Saunders, *Social Theory and the Urban Question*.

46. Lefebvre, "Space: Social Product and Use Value," p. 285.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

48. For a discussion of the international urban hierarchy, see R.B. Cohen, "The New International Division of Labor, Multinational Corporations and Urban Hierarchy," in Michael Dear and Allen J. Scott, eds., *Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society*, London and New York, Methuen, 1981, pp. 287–315.

because of global restructuring but also through a restructuring within the city. Concentrations of luxury housing, office buildings, and high-status entertainment and recreational facilities serve the new workforce and destroy physical conditions of survival for blue-collar workers. This restructuring is paradoxical, entailing as it does simultaneous processes of deindustrialization and reindustrialization, decentralization and recentralization, internationalization and peripheralization. Crucial to grasping the character of New York, however, is the key insight that within the finance and service center, as on the global level, individual spaces have no intrinsic substance; their character and condition can only be explained in relation to other city spaces.

Specific spatial relations within the city correspond, in part, to the circumstances of accumulation under late capitalism. Today the accumulation process occurs not by absolute expansion but through the internal differentiation of space. It is, then, a process of uneven development. The idea that uneven spatial development is "the hallmark of the geography of capitalism"⁴⁹ combines insights of geography with a long and embattled tradition within Marxist political economy. Theorists of uneven development explain capital accumulation as a contradictory process taking place through a transfer of values within a hierarchically unified world system. "In this whole system," writes Ernest Mandel,

development and underdevelopment reciprocally determine each other, for while the quest for surplus-profits constitutes the prime motive power behind the mechanisms of growth, surplus-profit can only be achieved at the expense of less productive countries, regions and branches of production. Hence development takes place only in juxtaposition with underdevelopment; it perpetuates the latter and itself develops thanks to this perpetuation.⁵⁰

While urban geographers and sociologists routinely include uneven development among the features distinguishing the production of late capitalist space, Neil Smith has extensively analyzed it as a structural process governing spatial patterns at all scales. Smith's work is essential to a comprehension of the spatial restructuring of New York since it explains phenomena such as gentrification and redevelopment as manifestations of the broad, yet specific, underlying process of uneven development affecting land use in the city.

Smith theorizes two factors responsible for uneven development at the urban scale. Following David Harvey, he applies to explanations of urban space theories maintaining that overaccumulation crises prompt capital, in an attempt to counteract falling rates of profit, to switch its investment from crisis-ridden spheres of the economy into the built environment. Gentrification and redevel-

49. Smith, *Uneven Development*, p. xi.

50. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1975, p. 102.

opment represent this attempt. But uneven development in the city operates not only in response to such broad economic cycles; it functions because of corresponding conditions within metropolitan land markets. According to Smith, the profitability of investment in the built environment depends on the creation of what he calls a "rent gap."⁵¹ The rent gap describes the difference between the present value of land and its potential value. The devalorization of real estate, through blockbusting, redlining, and abandonment of buildings, creates a situation in which investment by real estate and finance capital for "higher" land uses can produce a profitable return. In Smith's analysis, redevelopment results from both the uneven development of capital in general and of urban land in particular. Whether or not one agrees that the creation of a rent gap is sufficient to produce redevelopment, Smith's thesis discloses the concealed relation between processes such as gentrification and those of abandonment. The decline of neighborhoods, rather than being corrected by gentrification, is its precondition. Smith's theorization of uneven urban development offers, as well, a key to understanding the construction of the image of the redeveloped city. The identity of redeveloped spaces as symbols of beneficial and uniform growth requires that declining spaces be constituted as separate categories. Growth as redifferentiation is disavowed. Consequently, the repressed "other" of spaces of ascendancy has a concrete identity in deteriorating areas and the immiseration of city residents.

Uncovering the economic determinations of spatial redifferentiation in New York does not, however, illuminate the operations of space as a determining weight on social life or as ideology. For urbanists such as Lefebvre, however, advanced capitalism creates a distinctive and multivalent space that reproduces all social relations. "It is not only supported by social relations, but it also is producing and produced by social relations."⁵² Capitalist space, which Lefebvre, among others, calls abstract space, serves many functions. It is, at once, a means of production, an object of consumption, and a property relation. Abstract space is also a vehicle for state domination, subordination, and surveillance. According to Lefebvre, it possesses a distinctive combination of three features. Abstract space is homogeneous or uniform so that it can be used, manipulated, controlled, and exchanged. Within the homogeneous whole, which spreads over vast areas, it is fragmented into interchangeable parts, so that, as a commodity, it can be bought and sold. Abstract space is, further, hierarchically ordered, divided into centers and peripheries, upper- and lower-status spaces, spaces of the governing and governed. All three features require that space be objectified and universal-

51. For explanations of the "rent gap," see Neil Smith and Michele LeFaivre, "A Class Analysis of Gentrification," in J. John Palen and Bruce London, eds., *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1984, pp. 43-63; and Smith, "Gentrification, the Frontier and the Restructuring of Urban Space."

52. Lefebvre, "Space: Social Product and Use Value," p. 286.

ized, submitted to an abstract measure. But above all else, numerous contradictions haunt this space. As a global productive force, space is universalized, but it is also, as Lefebvre describes it, "pulverized" by relations of private property that demand its fragmentation into units. This conflict expresses a broader contradiction in the asymmetrical development of the forces of production — geographical space in this case — and the social relations of production — here the economic ownership and control of space. The universalization/pulverization contradiction embodies still another conflict — that between homogenized space serving as a tool of state domination and the fragmentation of space required by economic relations. Abstract space can serve as a space of control because it is generalized from specificity and diversity, from its relation to social subjects and their uses of space. But while abstract space homogenizes differences, it causes them at the same time to assert themselves. This contradiction emerges as cities — which Lefebvre defines as arenas for the encounter between differences — are homogenized, by means of exclusion, into centers of wealth, decision-making, and power. "The dominant space, that of the spaces of richness and power, is forced to fashion the dominated spaces, that of the periphery."⁵³ The relegation of groups of people and particular uses of space to enclosed areas outside the center produces an "explosion of spaces." Thus, through homogenization, a multitude of differences become available to perception as abstract space imposes itself on the space of everyday life. This process embodies a further contradiction, that between the production of space for profit and control — abstract space — and for social reproduction — the space of everyday life, which is both created by and yet escapes the generalizations of exchange. Abstract space represents, then, the *unstable* subordination of integrated social space by a centralized space of power. Because space is essential to daily life, the space of domination is resisted by what Lefebvre terms the "appropriation" of space for individual and social purposes. It follows that society's essential spatial conflict entails the appropriation of space from its alienation in capitalist spatial organization. This reparative goal is what Lefebvre refers to as "the right to the city,"⁵⁴ and it includes the struggle of the marginalized to occupy and control space.

Lefebvre's intricate formulations about the preeminence of space in social conflicts have provoked extensive criticism, including charges of "spatial fetishism," "vagueness," and "reproductionism." Largely untranslated from the French, they originally became familiar to English-speaking readers in Manuel Castells's *The Urban Question*, where the author opposed Lefebvre in a debate on the theory of space.⁵⁵ Although Lefebvre's ideas have since been advanced by numerous English-speaking urbanists, his emphasis on social reproduction rather

53. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

54. Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1968.

55. Manuel Castells, "From Urban Society to Urban Revolution," in *The Urban Question*.

than production has made him vulnerable to criticism from those who continue to privilege production as the primary locus of political activity. Surely Lefebvre's rejection of reformist measures to ameliorate urban problems and his refusal to propound doctrinaire solutions frustrate those who are searching for a single explanatory factor or new system. Yet the rejection of such systems and of predictable solutions is one of Lefebvre's principal strengths. Moreover, his analysis of the spatial exercise of power as a construction and conquest of difference, although it is thoroughly grounded in Marxist thought, rejects economism and opens up possibilities for advancing analysis of spatial politics into realms of feminist and anticolonialist discourse. Certainly, more successfully than anyone of whom I am aware, Lefebvre has specified the operations of space as ideology and built the foundation for cultural critiques of spatial design as a tool of social control. For Lefebvre, space is broadly ideological because it reproduces existing social relations. Through the auspices of coherent spatial order, efforts are made to control the contradictions inherent in abstract space. "One of the most crying paradoxes of abstract space," Lefebvre observes,

is that it can be simultaneously the birthplace of contradictions, the milieu in which they are worked out and which they tear up, and finally, the instrument which allows their suppression and the substitution of an apparent coherence. All of which confers on space a function previously assumed by ideology.⁵⁶

Professions such as urban planning and design—and now, public art—assume the job of imposing such coherence, order, and rationality on space. They can be regarded as disciplinary technologies in Foucault's sense insofar as they attempt to pattern space so that docile and useful bodies are created by and deployed within it. In performing these tasks, such technologies also take on the contradictory functions of the state. Called upon to preserve space for the fulfillment of social needs, they must also facilitate the development of an abstract space of exchange and engineer the space of domination. Consequently, urban practitioners who view planning as a technical problem and politics as a foreign substance to be eliminated from spatial structures mask spatial politics.

The contours of New York's redevelopment cannot be conceptually manipulated to fit exactly within the mold of Lefebvre's depiction of late capitalist space. Yet the concept of abstract space, together with that of uneven development, specifies the terms, distilled from concrete events, of urban spatial struggle. Materialist analyses of space enable us to evaluate the consequences of cultural practices, such as the new public art, engaged in that struggle on the side

56. Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris, Anthropos, 1974, p. 420 (translated in M. Gottdiener, "Culture, Ideology, and the Sign of the City," in Gottdiener and Lagopoulos, eds., *The City and the Sign*, p. 215).

of real estate and state domination. They also indicate the points where public art can enter the arena of urban politics in order to resist that domination, perhaps facilitating the expression of social groups excluded by the current organization of the city. Participation in urban design and planning enmeshes public art, unwittingly or not, in spatial politics. But public art can also appropriate the city, organized to repress contradictions, as a vehicle for illuminating them. It can transform itself into a spatial praxis, which Edward Soja has clarified as "the active and informed attempt by spatially conscious social actors to reconstitute the embracing spatiality of social life."⁵⁷ Against aesthetic movements that design the spaces of redevelopment, interventionist aesthetic practice might — as it does with other spaces — redesign these sites. For if official public art creates the redeveloped city, art as spatial praxis approaches this city in the cautious manner of the cultural critic described by Walter Benjamin. Confronted with "cultural treasures" — "documents of civilization" — Benjamin's critic unveils the barbarism underlying their creation by brushing their history "against the grain."⁵⁸ Likewise, we can brush New York's spatial documents of ascendancy against the grain, revealing them to be, at the same time, documents of homelessness. First, however, they must be admitted to have a history.

The Soul of Battery Park City

"In Battery Park there was nothing built — it was landfill — so it was not as if there was a history to the place. This was a construction site."⁵⁹ The sentiment that New York's waterfront development lies not only on the edge of the city but outside history is widespread. Here it is voiced by a public artist who recently cooperated as part of an urban design team creating a "site-specific installation"⁶⁰ called South Cove, a park located in a residential area of Battery Park City in Lower Manhattan. South Cove is just one of several collaborative "art-works" sponsored by the Fine Arts Committee of the Battery Park City Authority, the state agency overseeing what has become "the largest and most expensive real estate venture ever undertaken in New York City."⁶¹ The elaborate art program, corresponding in its ambitiousness to the scope of the real estate program, "will be," most critics agree, "New York's most important showcase for public art."⁶² As a massive state intervention in New York redevelopment

57. Edward W. Soja, "The Spatiality of Social Life: Towards a Transformative Retheorisation," in Gregory and Urry, eds., *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*.

58. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken, 1969, p. 257.

59. Claudia Gould, "Mary Miss Covers the Waterfront," *Stroll: The Magazine of Outdoor Art and Street Culture*, nos. 4–5 (October 1987), p. 55.

60. Robin Karson, "Battery Park City: South Cove," *Landscape Architecture* (May/June 1988).

61. Albert Scardino, "Big Battery Park City Dreams," *New York Times*, December 1, 1986, p. D1.

62. Nancy Princenthal, "On the Waterfront," *Art in America*, vol. 75, no. 4 (April 1987), p. 239.

and, concurrently, exemplar of the governmental priority now accorded public art, Battery Park City elicits virtually unanimous accolades from public officials, real estate and business groups, city planners, art and architecture critics alike. The apotheosis, individually, of urban redevelopment and of the new public art, it also seals their union. Dominant aesthetic and urban discourses dissemble the nature of the alliance. A typically hyperbolic example of the role the art world plays is John Russell's response, in 1983, to the unveiling of designs for a major Battery Park City art collaboration—the public plaza of the World Financial Center, the project's commercial core. Interpreting for his readers the interaction between art and urbanism embodied in this event, Russell set the stage by defining Battery Park City's essence to be, in the first instance, aesthetic—the encounter between land and water.

Battery Park City is just across the water from the Statue of Liberty, as everyone knows, and it therefore occupies a particularly sensitive position. In every great city by the sea there comes a moment at which land meets with moving water. If the city is doing a good job, whether accidentally or by grand design, we feel at that moment that great cities and the sea are predestined partners. Their interaction can turn whole cities into works of art.⁶³

Having intimated that maritime cities are shaped by transcendent forces, Russell invents romantic precedents for Battery Park City, first, in a lineage of seaside cities—St. Petersburg, Constantinople, Venice—and, then, in the “great” painting, music, and literature they inspired. Yet Battery Park City's topographical configuration—land meeting water—conditions the meanings attributed to the area far less than do elusive presuppositions, drawn from art history, about the nature of another encounter—that between art and the city. The discipline's habitually accepted links—the city as a work of art and as the inspiration for works of art—lend support to Russell's later implication that Battery Park City's “natural” potential to become an aesthetic object generates reciprocal possibilities for revitalizing art as well. Discharging its task of effecting the city's metamorphosis, art, too, will be transformed.

What they [the Battery Park City Fine Arts Committee] did was to redefine the respective roles of architect, artist and landscape designer in the planning of large-scale building projects. Instead of being assigned pre-existing spaces in which to present works of art, the artists are to function from the outset as co-designers of the spaces.⁶⁴

63. John Russell, “Where City Meets Sea to Become Art,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1983, Section 2, p. 1.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Characterizing the "new notion of public art," Russell slips into another ready-made formulation about art and the city—the artwork in the city or the discourse about public art. Here, he celebrates public art that is immersed in, rather than aloof from, metropolitan life: "The general thrust of the plan was away from the hectoring monumentality of 'public sculpture' and toward a kind of art that gets down off the pedestal and works with everyday life as an equal partner."⁶⁵ Yet his identification of Battery Park City as a work of art in aesthetic terms has already released the author from the responsibility to understand the city's social processes and their effect on everyday life. The purported metamorphosis of Battery Park City and, by extension, all New York, into a work of art conceals the city's real metamorphosis. If, then, the new art proudly relinquishes its status as aesthetic object isolated from "life," it is only in order to confer that mystifying status on Battery Park City itself.

Similar mystifications pervade descriptions of all facets of Battery Park City. Surpassing even the usual promotional enthusiasm with which the mass media announces the progress of New York real estate developments, articles and speeches about the completion of Battery Park City treat it as a symbol of New York's ascension from "urban decay," "urban crisis," and "urban fiscal crisis." Battery Park City exemplifies multiple victories—of public policy, public space, urban design, city planning.

The phoenix-like rising of their [major corporations'] collective new home [Battery Park City] is demonstrating that predictions of lower Manhattan's demise were unduly hasty—like forecasts for other downtowns across the nation.⁶⁶

For this is the real significance of Battery Park City—not the specific designs of its parks or its buildings, good though they are, but the message the large complex sends about the importance of the public realm.⁶⁷

Battery Park City . . . is close to a miracle. . . . It is not perfect—but it is far and away the finest urban grouping since Rockefeller Center and one of the better pieces of urban design of modern times.⁶⁸

65. *Ibid.*

66. Winston Williams, "Finally, the Debut of Wall Street West," *New York Times*, August 25, 1985, Section 3, p. 1.

67. Paul Goldberger, "Public Space Gets a New Cachet in New York," *New York Times*, May 22, 1988, p. H35.

68. Paul Goldberger, "Battery Park City is a Triumph of Urban Design," *New York Times*, August 31, 1986, p. H1.

A major governmental success and an example of what government can do.⁶⁹

In short, an "urban dream,"⁷⁰ and, in Governor Cuomo's succinct assessment, "a soaring triumph."⁷¹

The project's physical foundations on a manufactured landfill generates still other optimistic tropes. Battery Park City is fresh, untrodden territory unencumbered by historical fetters and past failures, a glittering token of New York's ability to reverse deterioration, an emblem of hope. Ironically, the image granted to land that is *literally* produced figuratively severs the space from the social activities that constituted it. Such conceits unwittingly convert Battery Park City's imaginary landfill into a palpable incarnation, not of the city's triumph, but of a mental operation that fetishizes the city as a physical object. The landfill thus bespeaks the triumph of the technocratic city produced by powers that surpass people. From the project's inception, it was described as the creation by urban professionals of a "community." It provides, according to one planning critic, "the urban functions and amenities—shops, restaurants, schools, parks, rapid transit, utilities, public and recreational facilities—that make a real community."⁷² "We see plan making and implementation," reads the master plan, "as interrelated parts of the same process: successful city building."⁷³ So attenuated are the bonds tying the landfill to its social foundations that, unsurprisingly, Battery Park City almost speaks for itself, stressing its origins in a technical achievement: "It is what it calls itself: a city. It begins by making its own land."⁷⁴

Of course, Battery Park City does have a history. It did not spring full-blown from the sea or, as public relations accounts present it, from the imagination of "visionaries" such as Governor Rockefeller and Mayor Lindsay, who bequeathed their "dreams" to Governor Cuomo and Mayor Koch. It emerged, instead, from a sequence of conflicts over the use of public land and especially over the social composition of city housing. Successive alterations in architecture and design occupy another historical dimension of the project. Intersecting these narratives, Battery Park City in its nearly complete present form occupies,

69. Meyer S. Frucher, quoted in Martin Gottlieb, "Battery Project Reflects Changing City Priorities," *New York Times*, October 18, 1985, p. B1. Gottlieb's article is the only account in the *Times's* extensive coverage of all aspects of Battery Park City's present state that raises critical questions about the project's social history and conditions.

70. Michael deCourcy Hinds, "Vast Project Heads for '93 Finish," *New York Times*, March 23, 1986, p. R18.

71. Quoted in Gottlieb, p. B2.

72. Ada Louise Huxtable, "Plan's 'Total' Concept is Hailed," *New York Times*, April 17, 1969, p. 49.

73. Alexander Cooper Associates, *Battery Park City: Draft Summary Report and 1979 Master Plan*, 1979, p. 67.

74. Huxtable, p. 49.

synchronically, a key position in New York's historically constituted structure of spatial relations. Long overdue, an exhaustive critique of Battery Park City has yet to be undertaken. Here, I want to retrieve enough of the project's history to permit an understanding of the ways in which art and design intervened at a critical moment of the project's unfolding. Restoring the housing question to representations of Battery Park City is crucial, since it is the ramifications of this issue that Battery Park City's design collaborations conceal by deeming political questions to be outside the province of beauty and utility. The organization of housing provision embodies more vividly than any other factor the contradictions of contemporary urbanism. As the central expenditure of low-income families, housing most acutely reflects New York's social polarization, and its withdrawal from poor and minority residents most forcibly denies them a right to the city. To illuminate Battery Park City's role in the development and distribution of housing is, then, to apprehend the project as a graphic emblem, not of New York's triumph, but of its uneven development.

When, in May 1966, Governor Nelson Rockefeller first proposed Battery Park City as a "new living space for New York" and part of his overall program for Lower Manhattan redevelopment, the plan included 14,000 apartments: 6,600 luxury, 6,000 middle-income, and 1,400 subsidized low-income units.⁷⁵ New York's Mayor John V. Lindsay also wanted to develop Lower Manhattan, but solely for high-income residents. On April 16, 1969, Rockefeller and Lindsay presented a compromise plan allocating only 1,266 out of 19,000 units to the poor.⁷⁶ About 5,000 middle-income units were included, with the remaining apartments earmarked for luxury use. Charles J. Urstadt, then chairman of the Battery Park City Authority, speaking as the state's mouthpiece and anticipating protest against the small proportion of low-income housing, announced that the housing mix was "not immutable."⁷⁷ Indeed, the political tenor of the late 1960s was such that numerous liberal groups demanded greater proportions of low-income housing in Battery Park City in exchange for their support of Lindsay's reelection that year. Manhattan Borough President Percy E. Sutton, calling the proposed development the "Riviera of the Hudson,"⁷⁸ stated that "it will use scarce public land resources and public powers to benefit mainly income groups and social classes fully capable of meeting their housing needs without public aid."⁷⁹ More radical elements—tenant groups in particular—also voiced their opposition. Yet Lindsay believed, as expressed in the 1969 Plan for New York City, that New York had to remain a "national center" in order to ensure the

75. Maynard T. Robison, "Vacant Ninety Acres, Well Located, River View," in Vernon Boggs et al., eds., *The Apple Sliced: Sociological Studies of New York City*, South Hadley, Massachusetts, Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1984, p. 180.

76. David K. Shipler, "Battery Park Plan Is Shown," *New York Times*, April 17, 1969, p. 49.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

79. David K. Shipler, "Lindsay Will Get Housing Demands," *New York Times*, June 30, 1969, p. 28.

city's overall prosperity. "He saw preservation and enhancement of the central areas for the elite as crucial to the whole future of the city."⁸⁰ Placing low-income housing in Battery Park City was, in Lindsay's words, "equivalent to putting low-income housing in the middle of the East Side of Manhattan."⁸¹ Nonetheless, Lindsay needed the support of liberal Democrats, and in August he reversed his stand, asking that two-thirds of Battery Park City's 15,000 apartments be built for low- and middle-income tenants.⁸² At a City Planning Commission hearing, a Lindsay aide stated that the mayor believed that "the social benefits to be gained from having an economically integrated community in lower Manhattan far outweigh 'the financial burdens.'"⁸³ Two months later, the Board of Estimate approved the revised Battery Park City plan, although representatives of the East Side Tenants Council and City Wide Anti-Poverty Committee on Housing still protested the liberal decision, arguing that "the low-income New Yorker who most needs new housing was being forgotten by the Battery Park City planners."⁸⁴ Several months earlier, Jack Rand of the East Side Tenants Council had charged in a letter to the *New York Times* that the authority was discriminating between Manhattan and Brooklyn in the distribution of low-income housing.⁸⁵

Under the legal arrangements for the approved plan, the City of New York, owner of the land, would lease it under the terms of a Master Lease to the Battery Park City Authority, which would control its development. The Master Lease went into effect in June 1970. The Authority planned to issue tax-exempt bonds to finance the project, with payment on the bonds to be made out of the revenues generated by development. The Authority also intended to select private developers to build all of Battery Park City's housing, but conditions in the construction and housing markets made developers unwilling to assume the risks involved without government support, and the city moved to provide it. In 1972, "a consensus developed that several provisions in the original Master Lease . . . would be cumbersome, time-consuming or overly costly in the execution of the physical construction of the project, or would impede the marketability of the completed facilities and the administrative operations of the Authority."⁸⁶ "Accordingly," the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate endorsed changes to "eliminate or modify the inevitable conditions."⁸⁷ These changes reduced the proportion of low-income housing to approximately twelve percent. Thirty percent of the units were to be luxury and fifty-six percent

80. Robison, p. 189.

81. *New York Times*, April 17, 1969, p. 49.

82. David K. Shipler, "Lindsay Reverses Stand on Housing," *New York Times*, August 15, 1969, p. 33.

83. *Ibid.*

84. "Battery Park City Is Given Approval," *New York Times*, October 10, 1969, p. 55.

85. Jack Rand, letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, August 4, 1969, p. 34.

86. Battery Park City Annual Report, 1972, "Amendments to the Master Lease."

87. *Ibid.*

middle-income. But even the changed proportions do not indicate the full extent of the Authority's class-biased action. Officially designated limits for establishing low-, middle-, and luxury-income housing eligibility always require scrutiny, since housing costs increase, and income standards are constantly adjusted. By 1972, as sociologist Maynard T. Robison points out, "the cost of 'middle-income' housing was such that its residents would be quite well off."⁸⁸ Amendments that year to the Master Lease also eliminated the requirement that each of Battery Park City's residential buildings reflect the income mix of the entire project. This meant that low-income housing could be segregated. Between 1972, when the first Battery Park City bonds were issued, and 1979, a year before the first payment on the bonds came due, the proposed housing mix of Battery Park City remained stable, but little progress was made on implementing the project itself. Site development on the ninety-one acre landfill continued, and various construction deals were worked out, only to collapse. Robison, who has extensively investigated the progress of Battery Park City from its inception until 1979, attributes the lack of activity to two interrelated factors. First, he believes, all the principal actors in the Battery Park City project — government officials, financial institutions, real estate developers — wanted to build it as a luxury district for corporate and real estate investment. But the site presented several obstacles impeding demand for expensive housing in the area: surrounded by unattractive and decaying terrain, it had no park, stores, restaurants, or entertainment and recreational facilities. The problem for the major groups involved in Battery Park City was, it seems, not whether the public sector should encourage the privatization of the city by subsidizing the rich and guaranteeing business profits, but "how to do so in the face of pressure to use public resources and the site to benefit groups other than the elite."⁸⁹

By 1979, the turning point in Battery Park City's evolution, the answer had appeared in the form of the "fiscal" crisis. Sanctioned by orthodox explanations of the mid-1970s crisis in New York's public finance, the state ultimately transferred Battery Park City's spatial resources to the private sector. Leasing the land to private developers, the Authority sought to attract them through substantial tax abatements, exemptions, and financial incentives for the use of Battery Park City for office towers and luxury condominiums. The Authority also undertook the task of site-development for these projects by creating parks and other amenities to convert the area into an elite district as quickly as possible. In 1979, the immediate fiscal problem facing the Battery Park City Authority was the likelihood that, because it had not yet generated sufficient revenues, it would have to default on the first payment of principal — due November 1, 1980 — of its outstanding bonds. City and state officials, developers, and urban planners concurred that Battery Park City's "failure" resulted from the project's overly

88. Robison, p. 183.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

ambitious conception and from New York's current fiscal troubles.⁹⁰ A "work-out" plan, they believed, must be informed by knowledge of "the city's tough urban realities."⁹¹ Thus, Battery Park City's situation assumed, just as the fiscal crisis itself did, an aura of inevitability that fostered acceptance of inequitable solutions.

Crises in public finance are not caused by inexorable economic laws, however, but by specific economic relations. Critics of conventional definitions of urban fiscal crisis stress varying alternative explanations, but, in general, position it within the broader economic crises of capitalist countries.⁹² Local crisis is inseparable from larger crises of the public sector in which social services are cut back in order to aid business. Some economists analyze urban fiscal crisis as a reflection of the inability of municipal governments to raise revenues in a new era of capital mobility and flexible accumulation. Reacting to forces that are to a considerable extent outside their control, city governments adopt policies oriented toward attracting private investment. Peter Marcuse, emphasizing the ideological *uses* of "urban fiscal crisis" as a concept, points to two constituent factors.⁹³ The first is the problem inherent in capital accumulation, which, to counteract falling rates of profit, constantly seeks to cheapen labor costs and automatize production. To accomplish these goals, capital shifts locations. The state, however, must bear the social costs of capital mobility: infrastructure provision, facilities for the working population, the redundant workforce left behind when businesses move elsewhere. Consequently, Marcuse identifies a real tendency to crisis within the economic and political systems, but he suggests that there is also a *fraudulent* crisis — one that justifies deliberate government policies transparently serving private interests. Both the real crises and the fraudulent one, however, should be perceived as processes in a particular social system, not the natural result of inevitable economic forces. In this sense, the dominant construction of the category "urban fiscal crisis" is ideological. It presents crises

90. Edward Schumacher, "13 Years Later, Battery Park City's an Empty Dream," *New York Times*, October 26, 1979, p. B3.

91. Ada Louise Huxtable, "Is This the Last Chance for Battery Park City," *New York Times*, December 9, 1979, Sec. 2, p. 39.

92. For critical analyses of urban fiscal crisis, see William K. Tabb, *The Long Default: New York City and the Urban Fiscal Crisis*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1982; Eric Lichten, *Class, Power and Austerity: The New York City Fiscal Crisis*, South Hadley, Massachusetts, Bergin & Garvey, Publishers, 1986; Michael D. Kennedy, "The Fiscal Crisis of the City," in Michael Peter Smith, ed., *Cities in Transformation: Class, Capital and the State*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1984, pp. 91–110; John Shutt, "Rescuing New York City, 1975–78," in Ray Forrest, Jeff Henderson, Peter Williams, eds., *Urban Political Economy and Social Theory: Critical Essays in Urban Studies*, Hampshire, England, Gower Publishing, 1982, pp. 51–77; Manuel Castells, *City, Class and Power*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1972; M. Gottdiener, "Retrospect and Prospect in Urban Crisis Theory," in Gottdiener, ed., *Cities in Stress: A New Look at the Urban Crisis*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1986, pp. 277–291.

93. Peter Marcuse, "The Targeted Crisis: On the Ideology of the Urban Fiscal Crisis and Its Uses," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 5, no. 3 (September 1981), pp. 330–355.

as natural and then uses that assumption to justify transferring resources to the private sector and withholding them from the services most needed by the poor. It thus perpetuates the conditions it purports to explain and vividly demonstrates the unequal weight of public and private interests in municipal finance policies.

In 1979 the ideology of crisis justified such inequitable measures in Battery Park City, measures declared to be the project's "last chance."⁹⁴ To rescue Battery Park City, a new legal framework, financial scheme, and master design plan were adopted in an attempt to "make something useful" out of the site.⁹⁵ Principally, the goal was to attract private financing. To do so, the new plan provided substantial tax abatements and other financial incentives and relocated Battery Park City's commercial zone, previously relegated to the landfill's southern end, to a central location. It eliminated all subsidized low-, moderate-, or middle-income housing.

To facilitate these changes, the new plan also included an altered legal arrangement, a version of a widespread mechanism by which government encourages the private sector and cushions it from direct public control. According to an agreement worked out between the Carey and Koch administrations, the state used its power of condemnation to bring the Battery Park City land under the direct ownership of the state Urban Development Corporation. The city thus yielded much of its legal control over the project's course. Indeed, the purpose of this maneuver was "to free the project from the welter of city regulations."⁹⁶ But what, in this case, is meant by "the welter of city regulations"? The shift of legal ownership of Battery Park City from the city government to a state authority ensured, under the guise of antibureaucratic efficiency, that developers would be liberated, as far as possible, from constraints imposed by existing democratic procedures for regulating land-use and planning decisions in New York—community board reviews, public hearings, City Planning Commission approval. Authorities—public corporations empowered to issue bonds in order to undertake economic activity—are one of the few popularly accepted forms by which American government engages in economic ventures. As Annmarie Hauck Walsh concludes in her detailed study of government corporations, they are largely protected from public accountability. Justified by the claim that their quasi-independent status makes them less vulnerable to political influence, authorities are actually less accessible to government regulation, community interests, and local pressures. Removing Battery Park City from city ownership helped remove it from the demands to which municipal government is especially sensitive. "Hybrid creatures," in Walsh's words, authorities are "corporations with-

94. "Last Chance for Battery Park City," editorial, *New York Times*, November 17, 1979.

95. Richard J. Meislin, "Attempt to Revive Battery Park Plan is Readied by Carey," *New York Times*, October 28, 1979, p. 1.

96. *Ibid.*

out shareholders, political jurisdictions without voters or taxpayers."⁹⁷ Inquiries into the authority form of public business cannot be separated from questions about decision-making and resource allocation, since, organized and run according to business principles, authorities often undertake projects on the basis of financial viability rather than public service. Financing through the bond market—with its attendant imperatives to guarantee the security of bonds and, further, make them profitable on the secondary market—also affects the type of enterprises promoted by authorities. The significance of these criteria can be seen in the fact that in May 1980, following the adoption of the new Battery Park City Plan, a leading financial rating agency named Standard and Poor granted Battery Park City's new bonds the highest credit rating possible, assuring their successful sale.⁹⁸ Indeed, the new plan predicted financial results with such success that later in the same year, Olympia and York Properties was conditionally approved as developer of Battery Park City's entire commercial sector. Eventually, the commercial structures materialized, aided by tax advantages and low-interest loans, as the World Financial Center. By April 1982, Battery Park City had become New York's "newest prestige address."⁹⁹ "As a result of economic forces no one could have foreseen," the *New York Times* reported, "luxury-level housing for upper-middle income or higher-income people is at present the only kind that can be built."¹⁰⁰

The Battery Park City scheme released physical planning and land-use decisions from "bureaucratic" entanglements only to submit them to the control of a technocracy amenable to redevelopment—New York's urban design professionals. Urban designers had, in fact, first been welcomed into New York City government as agents of public policy in the late 1960s, when Battery Park City was first proposed. Alexander Cooper Associates, an urban design firm that today engineers major redevelopment projects in New York and New Jersey, prepared the third component of the Battery Park City "workout"—its new master plan—complying with its mandate to make the project "more attractive for investment and responsive to current planning approaches."¹⁰¹ The draft plan outlined the basic design that ultimately determined Battery Park City's final form. Both principals of the firm, Alexander Cooper and Stanton Eckstut, had been leaders of Mayor Lindsay's Urban Design Group in the 1960s. In 1971, Cooper served as executive director of the Urban Design Council, precursor of the Urban Design Group of which Cooper was, for a time, also director. It is a

97. Annmarie Hauck Walsh, *The Public's Business: The Politics and Practices of Government Corporations*, A Twentieth Century Fund Study, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1978, p. 4.

98. Michael Goodwin, "Construction of Battery Park City Is Now Scheduled to Begin in June," *New York Times*, May 16, 1980, p. B4.

99. Alan S. Oser, "Battery Park City: The Newest Prestige Address," *New York Times*, April 18, 1982, Sec. 8, p. 7.

100. *Ibid.*

101. Alexander Cooper Associates, *Battery Park City: Draft Summary Report and 1979 Master Plan*.

Arrivals and Departures was the first installment in a \$2 million advertising campaign called "City Tales," launched by the World Financial Center in 1988. Featured in Ad Week under the lead question, "Can fiction be used to sell a place or product?" the campaign, designed by Drenttel Doyle Partners, aims to sell the redevelopment project as a "city" by hiring writers and photographers to create fictions of New York's public spaces, its efficiency, diversity, and beauty. All these qualities are associated with—in fact literally framed within—the "urban amenities" provided by Battery Park City.

measure of the extent to which planning and aesthetic ideologies block comprehension of the urban social context that in 1969, during the height of agitation for low-income housing at Battery Park City, the mayor's Urban Design Council, along with the Municipal Art Society, had endorsed the strongly contested Battery Park City plan without referring to the housing controversy at all.¹⁰²

More than ten years later, designers again marginalized housing as an issue in "successful city building" when they devised Battery Park City's master plan. Directing the appearance, use, and organization of Battery Park City land, the discourse about design and the actual spaces that planners produced also assumed the task of rewriting the site's history, not so much concealing social reality as transposing it into design. For if Battery Park City's plan became a medium for evacuating history as action and struggle, it did so by reinventing history as spectacle and tradition. Thus, in 1979, the moment when Battery Park City changed most definitively and New York entered its accelerated phase of restructuring, development proceeded under a master plan stressing principles of continuity, permanence, invariance. Just when decisions about land-use became increasingly privatized and withdrawn from public control, designers resurrected talk about public space in a form that represses its political implications. Just when Battery Park City was relegated to the needs of profit, ensuring not only that low-income housing needs would be unmet but also that more people would be made homeless through raised property values in the city, there was intensified emphasis on designed spaces that, we were told, would fulfill essential human needs. And coinciding with the construction of Battery Park City as the epitome of abstract space—hierarchical, homogeneous, fragmented—designers mobilized a discourse about diversity, history, and locational specificity. Early in the process, the Battery Park City Authority incorporated public

102. David K. Shipler, "Battery Park City Plans Scored and Praised at Public Hearing," *New York Times*, July 17, 1969, p. 50.

art into the implementation of the master plan: in 1982, "as part of its commitment to good design," it established the Fine Arts Program "to engage artists in the planning and design of the community's open spaces."¹⁰³ Besides South Cove Park, collaborative ventures between artists, architects, and landscape architects now include the plaza of the World Financial Center, the South Gardens, and West Thames Street Park. Numerous other public works have been selected because they are considered to be "sensitive," even if not intrinsic, to their sites.

The 1979 master plan discarded the original futuristic plan for Battery Park City, which had been adopted, with Lindsay's support, in the late 1960s. Replacing the old arrangement, which accentuated Battery Park City's architectural disjunction from the rest of Manhattan, the Cooper-Eckstut design, labeled "A Realist's Battery Park City,"¹⁰⁴ aimed to integrate Battery Park City—physically, visually, functionally—with New York, making it an organic extension of adjacent neighborhoods in lower Manhattan and of the rest of the city. The layout extended—and slightly reoriented in the direction of the water—Manhattan's rectilinear grid, subdivided the land into smaller development parcels, and relocated the commercial area. Further, the plan emphasized the use of traditional architectural elements and street furniture for the waterfront esplanade and other public spaces, objects copied from past structures in old New York neighborhoods—Central Park, Gramercy Park, Madison Avenue, the Upper West Side—to confer on Battery Park City the status of tradition. "We wanted to make it look as though nothing was done," explained Eckstut.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the new plan created a system of conventional blocks to allow developers to take on small parcels, and it established flexible controls that do not prescribe final designs for individual buildings. All these features were intended to assure, within the framework of an accelerated redevelopment program, the diversity and sense of historical memory that mark a city incrementally produced over time. History, then, was to be simulated in a compressed time frame and diversity isolated in physical style and in the realm of historic "preservation." In city planning rhetoric, "history" has become so malleable that the notion that Battery Park City has no history can be arbitrarily exchanged for the notion that Battery Park City has always existed.

The Cooper-Eckstut plan, sanctioned by fiscal crisis ideology, stated unequivocally that "the mechanism for providing large numbers of subsidized middle- and moderate-income housing—as originally envisioned—does not now exist. . . . The State is not in a position to sponsor moderate-income housing, and there is no technique for meeting the needs of this income group."¹⁰⁶ Low-income housing received no mention, despite the designer's

103. "Battery Park City," leaflet distributed by Battery Park City Authority.

104. Paul Goldberger, "A Realist's Battery Park City," *New York Times*, November 9, 1979, p. B4.

105. "Esplanade Recalls Old New York," *New York Times*, July 3, 1986, p. C3.

106. Alexander Cooper Associates, 1979 Master Plan, p. 18.

belief that a revised plan can "pursue a planning concept more in keeping with development realities . . . without sacrificing the amenities that make the project desirable."¹⁰⁷ When Governor Cuomo took office in 1983, however, he voiced concern about the fact that public land was being given over on a grand scale to luxury housing and commercial development. According to Meyer S. Frucher, president of the Battery Park City Authority, the governor told him to give the project "a soul." The "soul," which Cuomo has since designated as Battery Park City's "social purpose," materialized in 1986 in the form of the Housing New York Corporation, a state agency empowered to issue bonds backed by Battery Park City revenues in order to finance the provision of low- and moderate-income housing in New York City. The first phase of the plan, which contributes its funds to Mayor Koch's program to rehabilitate city-owned properties, consists of the renovation of 1,850 apartments in Harlem and the South Bronx, with one-third of the units reserved for the homeless. Battery Park City's "soul," a concept offered as proof of the benefits of public/private partnership, has also been loosely extended as a rubric under which all the project's "public" benefits—its art and open space—are categorized. No doubt the government agencies and officials most deeply implicated in Battery Park City would like to present the "soul" of the project as, indeed, its animating principle. Yet even without examining the details of the city's housing plan—what percentage of the units will actually serve the homeless, how they will be run and maintained, whether as part of cross-subsidy programs they will, primarily, encourage redevelopment—several realities frustrate this contention. First, it begs the question of whether low- and moderate-income housing should be provided by channeling public resources toward large-scale redevelopment. Since redevelopment, as part of broader restructuring, produces homelessness, no matter what palliatives are administered to mitigate and push out of sight its worst effects, we are being asked to believe that the housing crisis can only be cured by publicly encouraging its causes. Second, the assertion that the Battery Park City plan is a triumph for the public sector places the government squarely in support of the spatial relations the plan reinforces—luxury enclaves in the city center shielded from areas for the poor and minorities on the periphery. Public resources, it holds, should be directed toward the production of New York as a segregated city.

It is, of course, true, as one expert observed about Battery Park City's low- and moderate-income housing program, that "advocates of low-income housing will take housing wherever and however they can get it."¹⁰⁸ But this understanding should not obscure, due to resignation or a false sense of victory, the realiza-

107. *Ibid.*

108. Brian Sullivan, Pratt Center for Community and Environmental Development, quoted in Gottlieb, "Battery Park Reflects Changing City Priorities," p. B2.

tion that what the Battery Park City program confirms is not the triumph of public policy but the manner in which New York's preeminent space of richness, power, and decision-making has been forced to fashion the dominated spaces, too, thus corroborating Lefebvre's description of late capitalist space. And in accord with Lefebvre's evaluation of urban planning, the spatial design of Battery Park City suppresses this contradiction by substituting an image that presents the area's abstract space as, instead, natural, traditional, diverse, and functionally integrated with the entire city. Public art collaborations and the discourse that validates them also assume these ideological tasks. Paramount among their methods is the assertion that the spaces they produce are useful. "It seems," says a public artist at Battery Park City,

that there are archetypal needs that are met regularly in different cultures—needs for protected spaces, places of distraction. I am interested in poking at these potent situations and trying to find ways of creating equivalents within our own context.¹⁰⁹

The humanist myth rehearsed in this statement about universal human conditions and needs "aims," as Roland Barthes observed more than thirty years ago,

to suppress the determining weight of History: we are held back at the surface of an identity, prevented precisely by sentimentality from penetrating into this ulterior zone of human behavior where historical alienation introduces some 'differences' which we shall here quite simply call 'injustices.'¹¹⁰

Surely, within what the artist calls "our own context"—New York's social polarization, uneven development, homelessness—to posit a "need for protected spaces" that is *met* in Battery Park City can only perpetuate such injustices. To recognize this function, however, art discourse must renounce its own humanist myth, acknowledging its specificity within historical sites. For the weight of Battery Park City's past, as well as its current position within the urban structure, enables us to "know very well," just as Barthes knew about the character of work in capitalist society, that shelter in New York, "is 'natural' just as long as it is 'profitable.'"¹¹¹ Suppressing this realization, Battery Park City's "soul"—its public art and spaces—mentally released, through universalizing notions about beauty and utility, from the material conditions of the project's existence, performs the function of myth. Like the other portion of the "soul"—low-income housing removed geographically from Battery Park City—it attempts to reconcile conflicts arising between the belief that the city should serve

109. Claudia Gould, "Mary Miss Covers the Waterfront," p. 54.

110. Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man," in *Mythologies*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1972, p. 101.

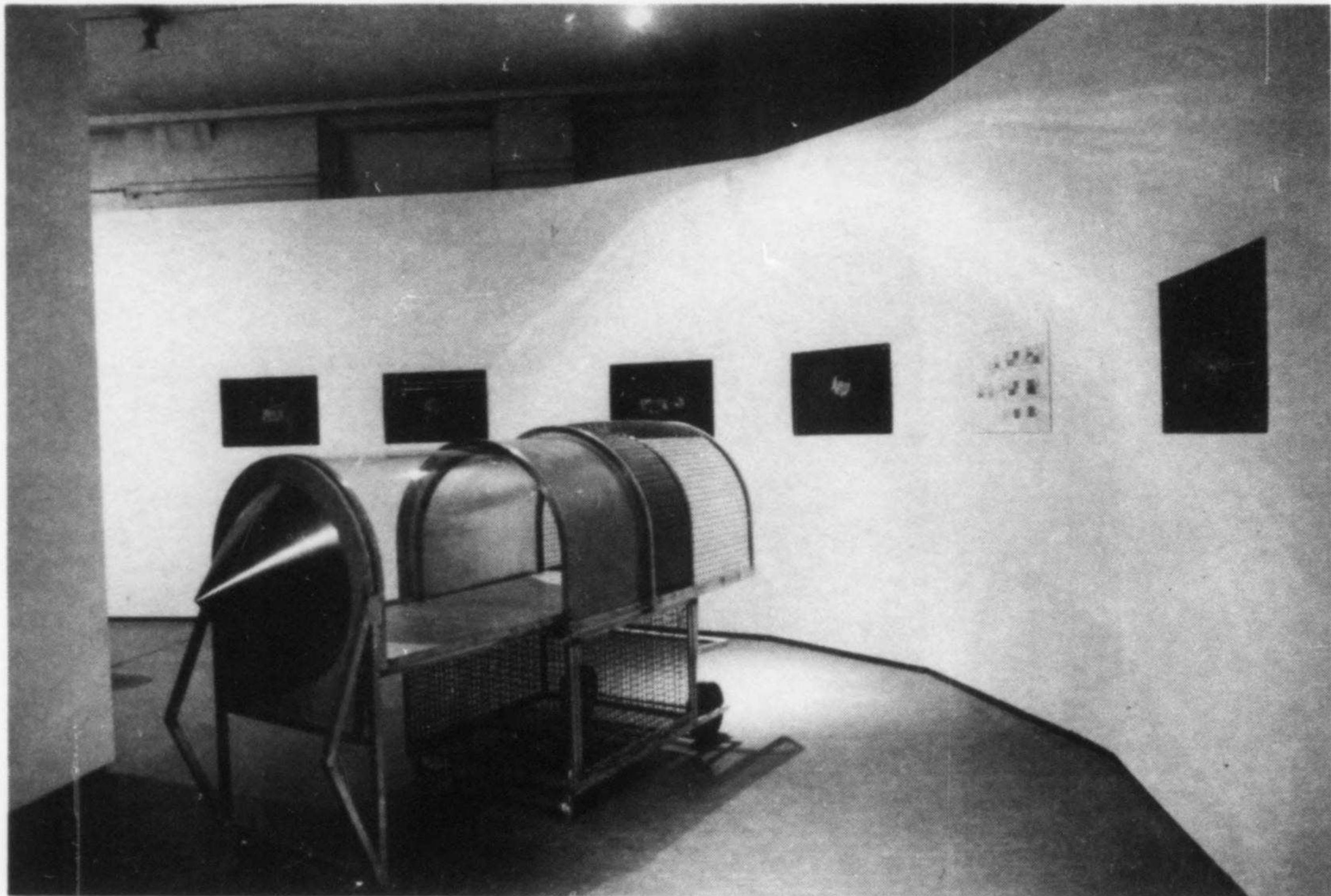
111. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

social needs and the experience of New York's domination by business and real estate. It is hardly surprising, then, that accounts of the useful public art at Battery Park City fail to comment on major transformations in the project's social uses. No matter how much it speaks of the space's coherence, this art violently fractures the social picture. Apparently integrated and diverse, Battery Park City is homogenized and hierarchized. Represented as harmonious, it conceals domination. "Historical," it rejects time, converting the past as a product of human agency into interchangeable fragments of the city's architectural remains. "Public," it transforms public space into places where selected New Yorkers are permitted to do what a *New York Times* editorial called "their public thing."¹¹² In the end, Battery Park City's art and design do try to integrate the area with New York, but with a redeveloped New York—ghettoized and exclusionary.

A Beautiful and Useful Weapon

Last winter, Mayor Koch ordered that the homeless living in public places be examined by authorities and, if judged mentally incompetent, forcibly hospitalized. Coinciding with these events, occurring in the middle of a season that is always the most difficult for the homeless, the Clocktower, a city-owned exhibition space in lower Manhattan, displayed a proposal for a public artwork entitled the *Homeless Vehicle Project*. The exhibition included several elements combined in a format that resembled the presentational modes by which urban planning and architecture proposals are regularly unveiled to the public. Its nucleus was a prototype of a stark, industrial-looking object—a vehicle designed by public artist Krzysztof Wodiczko in consultation with several homeless men. Constructed of aluminum, steel mesh, sheet metal, and plexiglass, the vehicle aims to facilitate the survival activities of one segment of the homeless population—individuals who live on the streets and survive by collecting, sorting, storing, and returning cans and bottles to supermarkets in exchange for deposits. The device would enable this group of homeless residents to circulate more easily through the city, a mobility necessitated by their lack of permanent housing and their mode of subsistence. Besides easing the job of scavenging, the cart offers a degree of shelter. Engineered so that it can expand or fold into a variety of positions, it furnishes, minimally, facilities for eating, sleeping, washing, defecating, and sitting. Sketches of the vehicle demonstrating different aspects of its operation were displayed at the Clocktower along with the model itself. Also shown were preliminary drawings revealing alterations made during the evolution of the design as the artist responded to requests from the homeless consultants. In a separate section of the gallery, Wodiczko simulated an outdoor urban

112. "A Public Plaza for New York," see footnote 16.



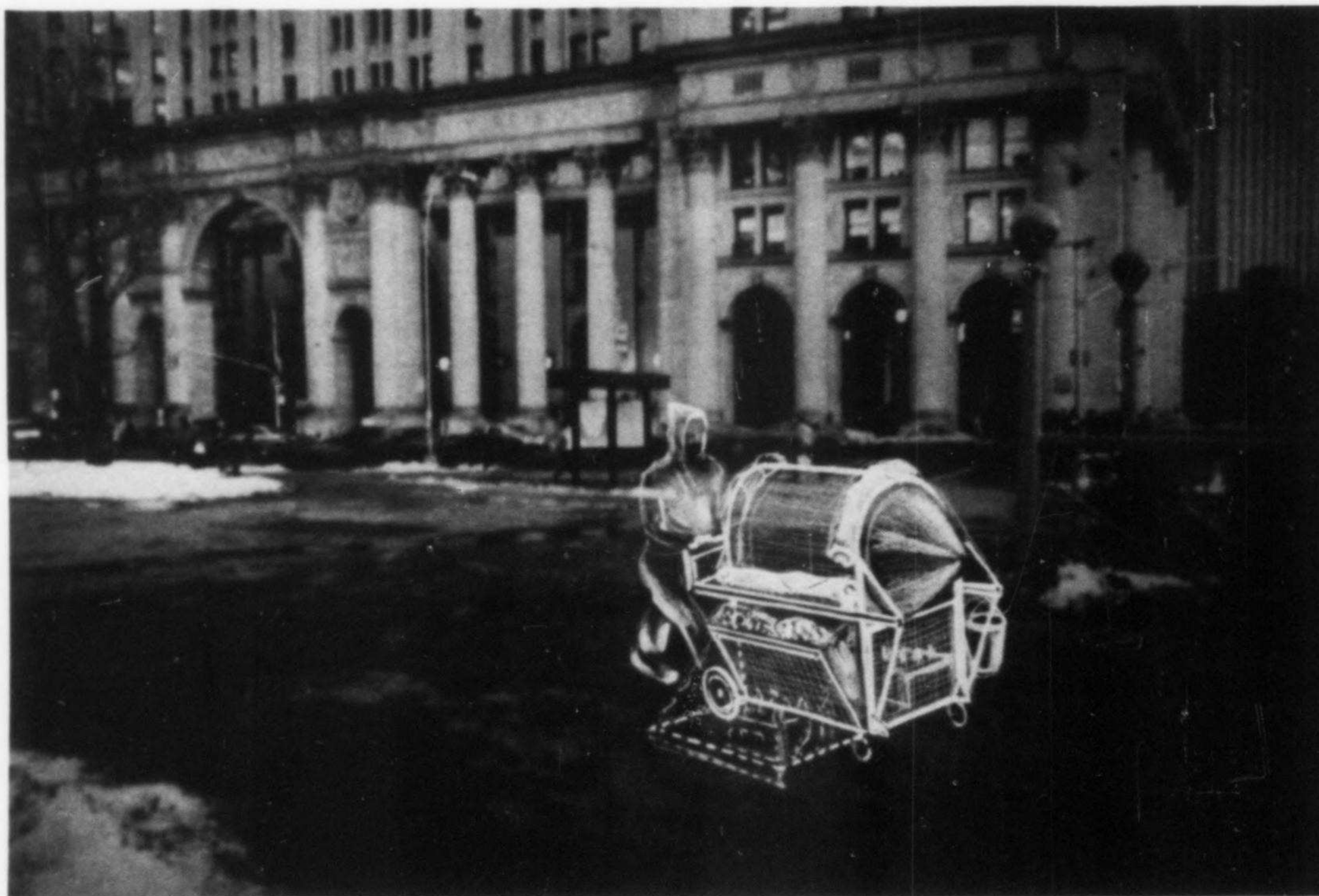
Installation of the Homeless Vehicle Project at the Clocktower, New York, 1988.

landscape by projecting onto the walls slides depicting public spaces in New York City—Tompkins Square, City Hall Park, and the area directly outside the Municipal Building. Employing montage techniques, he then infiltrated the scenes with ghostly images, enlarged from sketches, of the vehicle being maneuvered through the municipal spaces by its potential users. The figures' spectral aspect materialized from two procedures: the drawings were printed white on black, and, blown up, their outlines became slightly blurred. By visualizing the vehicle in civic spaces, the slides thematically related homelessness to the action and inaction of local government, accusing the city not only of failing to cure the problem but, in fact, of producing it. Wodiczko's slide images also, more obliquely, associated homelessness with dispersed apparatuses of power in the city. The artist's presentation adopted an institutionalized form that embodies architecture, city planning, and urban design discourses: the visual projection of proposed objects and spatial alterations into the existing urban context in order to demonstrate their positive, benign, or, at the very least, unobtrusive effect on potential physical sites. By modifying this convention and projecting images that merged physical and social sites, Wodiczko's panorama commented on and es-

established its divergence from the official role of environmental disciplines in New York today. Such practices engineer redevelopment, ejecting people from their homes and banishing the homeless. They also suppress the evidence of rupture by assigning social functions and groups to designated zones within the spatial hierarchy. Wodiczko's presentations, in contrast, symbolically lodged the homeless in the urban center, concretizing memories of social disruption and imagining the impact of the homeless on the city. Taped conversations between Wodiczko and homeless people, in which they discussed the vehicle's design, played continuously during the exhibition, and the gallery distributed a text containing transcripts of the conversations as well as an essay about the project, coauthored by Wodiczko and David Lurie.

Dictated by the practical needs and direct requests of men who live and work on the streets, the *Homeless Vehicle Project* implicitly expressed support for those homeless people who, deprived of housing, choose against official coercion to resist relegation to dangerous and dehumanizing shelters. In no way offering itself as a solution, the Homeless Vehicle challenges the city's present solution—the proliferation of a shelter system not simply as a temporary adjunct to, but in lieu of, substantive construction of decent permanent housing. Questioning government housing and shelter policies does not obviate support, under crisis conditions, for the construction of low-income housing “wherever and however they can get it.” It simply means that advocacy of housing and even shelters must be framed within a broad critique that voices the terms of substantive change—social ownership of housing, opposition to the rights of private property—and comprehends how policies offered as solutions frequently exacerbate or merely regulate the problem. Currently, government emphasizes “temporary” shelters, which, given the lack of new public housing construction, tacitly become permanent. Or it manufactures cumbersome financing schemes by which a grossly inadequate number of low-income units are provided without direct public expenditure, as a means of facilitating redevelopment and, frequently, for private gain. At the same time, the city continues to channel large subsidies to business and developers. Thus, it perpetuates and disavows the relation between homelessness and the city's economic transformation. Described by one critic as “an insidious form of institutionalized displacement purporting to be humane while incarcerating thousands whose only ‘crime’ is poverty,”¹¹³ the shelter system is, however, not only necessitated by restructuring and real estate development but itself participates in New York's spatial division into core and periphery areas. By increasing the visibility of the homeless, who, in reality, already inhabit urban space, the Homeless Vehicle dramatizes the right of the poor not to be isolated and excluded. Heightened visibility, however, is only the necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for this dramatization. Indeed, visibility can also be used, as

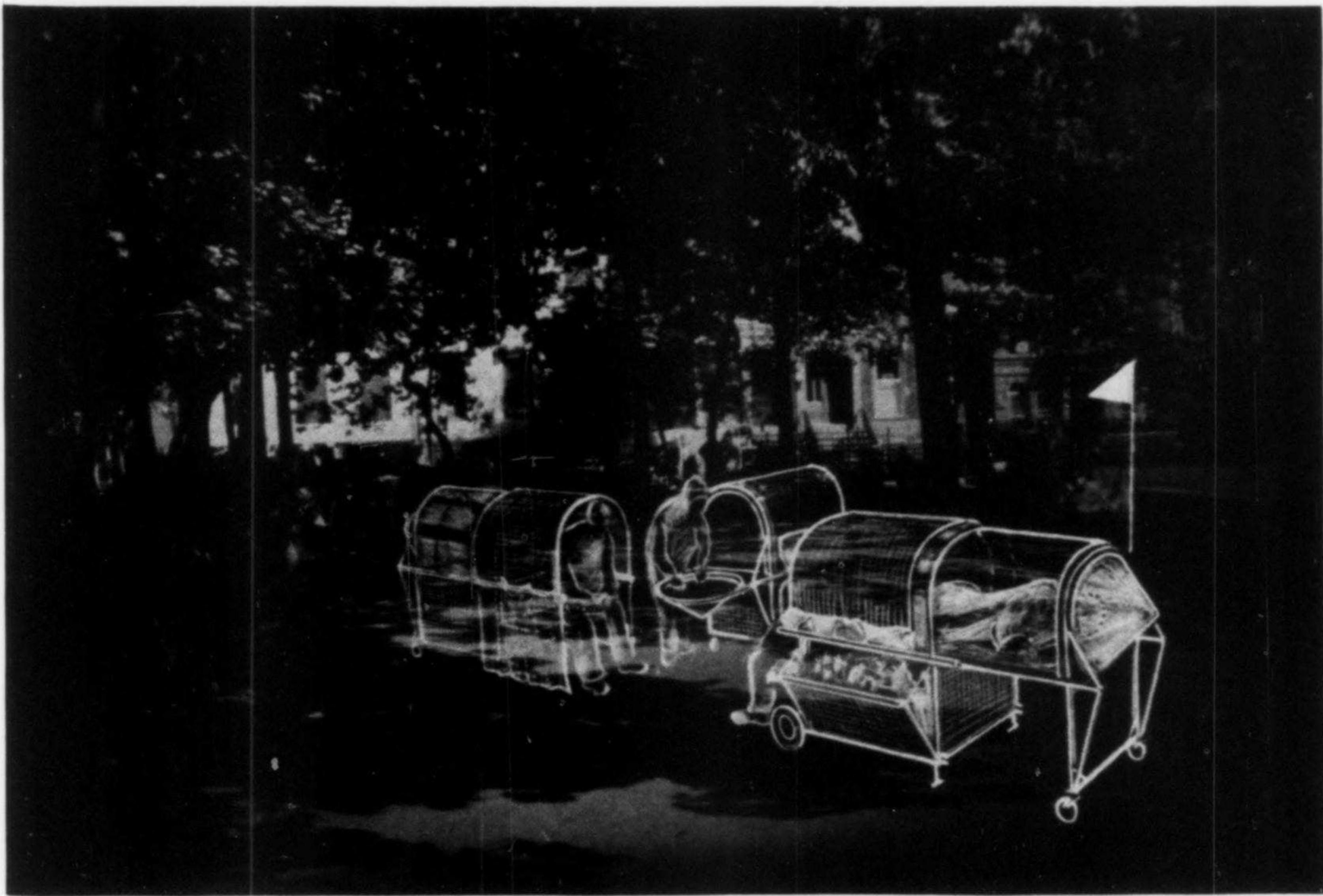
113. Theresa Funicello, reply to letters, *The Nation*, June 18, 1988, p. 876.



Slide projections of the Homeless Vehicle Project at the Clocktower, New York, 1988.

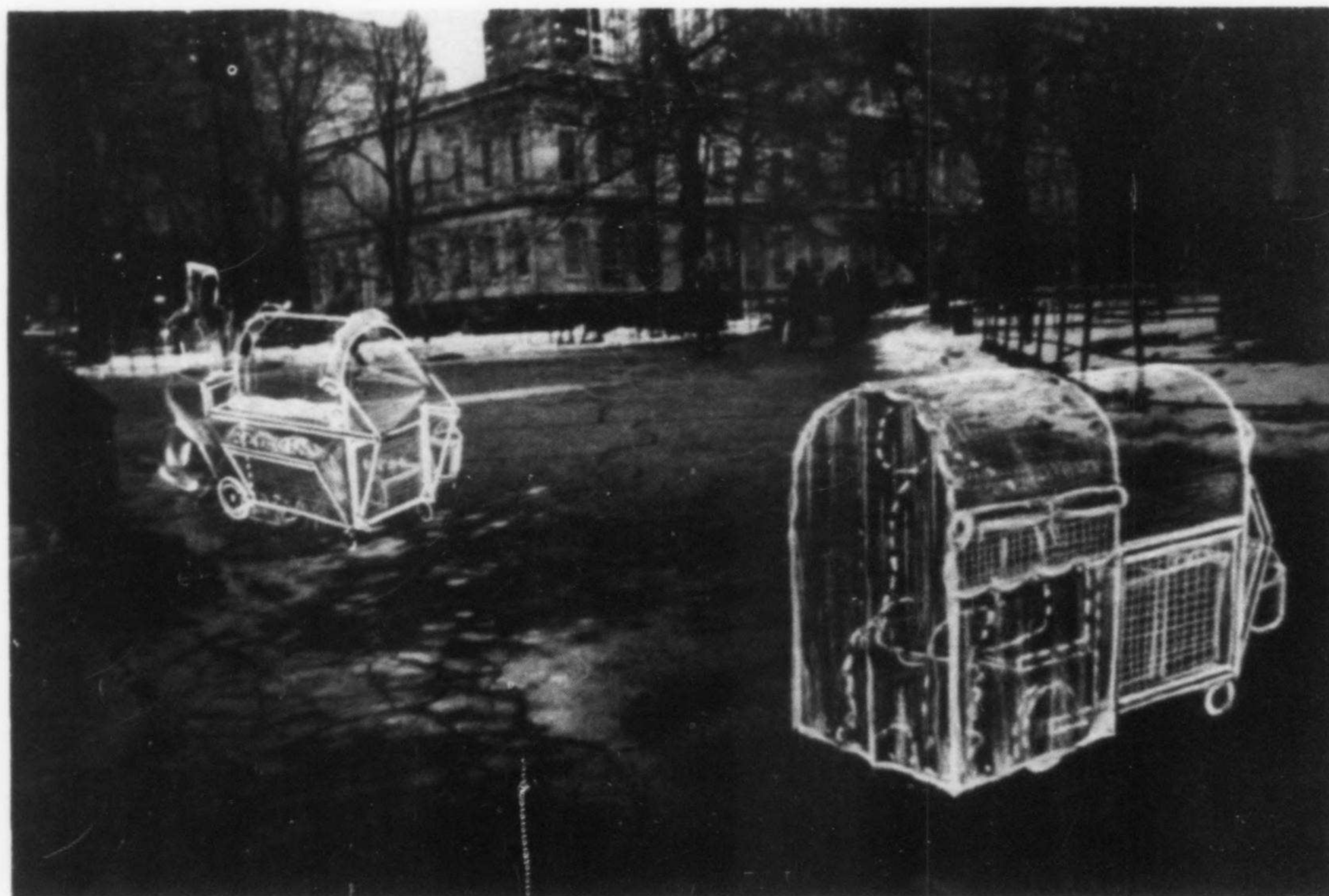
it is by conservatives, to support demands for the removal of the homeless. But the Homeless Vehicle reveals the homeless to be active New York residents whose means of subsistence form a legitimate element of the urban social structure. It thus focuses attention on that structure and, in so doing, not only challenges the economic and political systems that evict the homeless but also subverts the modes of perception that exile the homeless.

The Homeless Vehicle is, then, both practical object and symbolic articulation. In the gallery and, potentially, on the streets, it alters the image of the city. It is precisely the tension between its two functions that raises and openly confronts a troubling question, one that informs debates among the homeless and their advocates about the shelter system. Cultural practices addressing New York's environment face a similar problem: How is it possible to recognize and respond to homelessness as an emergency situation and still not foster, as do some proposals designing equipment for the homeless, an acceptance of current conditions and concealment of their causes? The dilemma presents art with a seemingly paradoxical solution. In the very act of referring to a practical function, it must reaffirm its status as a signifying object. Yet this oscillation simply illustrates the truth, concealed by functionalist ideology, about all urban objects.



Without recognizing the social construction of function—and without indicting the forces producing homelessness—practical plans to help the homeless survive on the streets are likely, no matter how well-intentioned, to be tools for redevelopment. Openly complicitous, of course, are those plans sponsored by redevelopment associations themselves, groups who proffer charitable projects as evidence of redevelopment's benefits or of corporate philanthropy. A sleekly presented proposal sponsored by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) of Los Angeles, exhibited in 1986 at the New York Storefront for Art and Architecture's important *Homeless at Home* exhibition, epitomizes this tactic. Observing that Los Angeles's skid row lies within the CRA's 1,500 acre Central Business District Redevelopment Project, the CRA announced a plan to direct a portion of the tax revenues generated from new development and rising property values for programs toward aid for the inhabitants of skid row, "recognizing," as the proposal's text phrased it, "that skid rows will always exist" and seeking to "reduce the impact of Skid Row on the adjacent downtown area." Primarily, these projects try to shelter the redeveloped city from the adverse effects of the homelessness it causes and, simultaneously, to counteract the system's legitimization crisis by presenting homelessness as a transhistorical problem.

The *Homeless Vehicle Project* also proposes a way to alleviate some of the



worst aspects of homeless peoples' lives, but in doing so, it strengthens, rather than reduces, their impact on the central business district. The project's critical force, then, springs from the interaction between its practical and signifying purposes, a reciprocity emblemized in the design of the vehicle, which, on the one hand, recalls Bauhaus functionalism and, on the other, resembles a weapon. It thus becomes a tool used against redevelopment. Instead of rendering the homeless invisible or reinforcing an image of them as passive objects, the Homeless Vehicle illuminates their mobile existence. Instead of severing or cosmeticizing the link between homelessness and redevelopment, the project visualizes the connection through its active insertion into the transformed city. It facilitates the seizing of space by homeless subjects rather than containing them in prescribed locations. Consequently, instead of restoring a surface calm to the "ascendant" city, as reformist plans try to do, it disrupts the coherent urban image, which today is only constructed by neutralizing homelessness. As a result, the Homeless Vehicle legitimates the homeless rather than the dominant spaces that exclude them, symbolically countering the city's own ideological campaign against the poor. In a minor, yet exemplary, gesture in this crusade, Mayor Koch, as we have seen, tried to eject the homeless from Grand Central Station by aiming against them the weapon of functionalization. The station's objective function, he in-

sisted, is to serve the needs of travel, and it is impeded by the stationary homeless. The Homeless Vehicle retaliates by announcing a different function for the urban environment—the fulfillment of the travel needs of the homeless. It foregrounds a collateral system already built by the homeless to support their daily lives. Yet the vehicle does not simply pit one use or group against another. It subverts the ideology of utility, silencing the city that seems to speak for itself—the instrumental city—by disrupting the city's silence on the subject of social needs. For the Homeless Vehicle's function, far from general or inevitable, is clearly a socially created scandal. The work strikes at the heart of the well-managed city, an image which today functions for the needs of profit and control.

At Battery Park City, collaborative public art helps build this image under the guises of utility, beauty, social responsibility—a rapprochement between art and life. But the Homeless Vehicle, too, is useful and collaborative. For this project, a skilled professional has applied sophisticated design principles to an object of everyday life, which, intruding upon space, practices a mode of urban design. But these superficial similarities only underscore profound differences. Responding to an emergency, the Homeless Vehicle is quick and impermanent. Implicit in its impermanence is a demand that its function become obsolete, a belief in the mutability of the social situation that necessitates it. Battery Park City appears to stabilize this situation, but such stationary and monumental spaces become the target of the Homeless Vehicle. Whereas Battery Park City art employs design to enforce dominant social organization, the Homeless Vehicle uses design for counter-organization, reorganizing the transformed city. The shelter system, peripheralization of low-income housing, de-territorialization of the poor—these aspects of contemporary spatial relations are fashioned by Battery Park City art, which, producing the privileged spaces of the central city, retains its own privilege as an object outside the political realm. It converts social reality into design. The Homeless Vehicle, a vehicle for organizing the interests of the dominated classes into a group expression, employs design to illuminate social reality, supporting the right of these groups to refuse marginalization.

In the essay accompanying the exhibition of the *Homeless Vehicle Project*, Wodiczko and Lurie stress the significance of collaborative relationships between professional designers and users of the vehicle. "Direct participation of users in the construction of the vehicle," they explain, "is the key to developing a vehicle which belongs to its users, rather than merely being appropriated by them."¹¹⁴ Countering the technocracy of design, they seem to be referring to the distinction between a vehicle planned specifically by and for the homeless and the adaptation by the homeless of supermarket shopping carts. It is only through the

114. David Lurie and Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Homeless Vehicle Project," *The Clocktower*, 1988; reprinted in this issue of *October*.

collective production of objects by their users, Lurie and Wodiczko suggest, that people might resist the domination of their lives. Yet the Homeless Vehicle's substitution of an actively produced object for an appropriated one suggests the need for a more sweeping change—the possession by users of their living space. Just as it negates the abstraction of function from specific social relations, the project challenges the abstraction of the city from its inhabitants. At the same time, however, it suggests that even under current circumstances the act of production is, in fact, not confined to those who manufacture the city, but already includes those who use and appropriate it.

Appropriating the space of the city—reclaiming space for social needs against space organized for profit and control—and diverting it, in a manner similar to what the situationists called *détournement*, from its prescribed functions, the Homeless Vehicle responds to ordinary needs and horrifying realities, yet, in a mixture of fantasy and reality that some critics find “disturbing,” it offers a vision of the emancipation of the environment. “In order to change life,” Lefebvre has written, “society, space, architecture, even the city must change.”¹¹⁵ Such a possibility will, of course, be realized, not in isolated acts of *détournement*, but through historical action that establishes the concrete conditions for such a change. Still, in the present, by upholding the “right to the city,” the *Homeless Vehicle Project* corroborates Ledrut's definition of the city—“an environment formed by the interaction and the integration of different practices”—and thus anticipates the construction, not simply of beautiful or well-managed cities—they are, after all, by-products—but of a “work of life.” Through this imaginative act, the project participates as well in the construction of an oppositional public sphere, one that counters the dominant relations organizing public space and permits the organized expression of social experience. The production of such a public art is, in fact, inseparable from the production of New York City as a living work. Yet the *Homeless Vehicle Project* also attests to the degree of knowledge about urbanism and the astuteness, even stealth, of operation required by public art if it is to accomplish these goals. For given its reliance on corporate and civic approval, public art, like New York itself, will, no doubt, develop unevenly.

115. Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 73 (1988), p. 11; translation of “Quotidien et Quotidienneté,” *Encyclopaedia Universalis*.

Homeless Vehicle Project

DAVID V. LURIE and
KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO



Homeless Vehicle Prototype. Photo: Dennis Dollens.

*I was not insane when they picked me up—
I was homeless.*

—Joyce Brown, homeless person forcibly hospitalized by the New York City government

During the winter of 1987–88, an estimated 70,000 people were homeless in New York City.¹ A large portion of this population is made up of homeless individuals. Unlike families with children, homeless individuals are not given priority for placement in the city's transitional housing facilities or in welfare hotel rooms. Instead, the city government offers space to the single homeless in its growing system of dormitory shelters.

Most city-run shelters—though they provide food and respite from the elements—are dangerous and unfriendly places that impose a dehumanizing, even prisonlike, regimentation on residents. Guards routinely treat clients as inmates, allegedly denying them food for the violation of rules. Some shelter residents are bused from place to place for food, showers, and sleep. Charges of violence by shelter security guards and clients are common.

According to the mayor of New York City, a homeless person who chooses to live on the street rather than accept placement in a shelter during the cold of winter is, by definition, to be suspected of mental illness. But given the city's official response to the problem of homeless individuals, it is not surprising that many have made a rational choice to live on the streets.

Though a significant proportion of homeless individuals are the de-institutionalized mentally ill, a growing majority of them are not. Furthermore, both the sane and insane homeless share the same immediate, life-threatening condition: they have no permanent shelter and no safe place to go.

Their alternative has been to develop a means of survival on the streets of New York City. The nomadic homeless people we all observe and encounter on the streets have been compelled to develop a series of strategies for self-sufficiency under constantly changing—and always threatening—circumstances. Problems of garnering food, keeping warm, remaining safe from personal harm and relatively undisturbed during sleep all present challenges that are never perfectly resolved.

The fact that people are compelled to live on the streets is unacceptable. But failing to recognize the reality of these peoples' situation or holding up the fact of their living on the streets as proof of their universal insanity is a morally and factually untenable position. Advocacy for permanent, safe, and dignified shelter for all people is essential—and is being pursued. But a recognition that

1. Coalition for the Homeless estimate report in *New York Newsday*, January 4, 1988.

all individuals need and deserve permanent housing must also lead to an examination of the immediate needs of homeless people. Given the failure of the city's shelter system, what can we do for individuals struggling for self-sufficiency on the streets today?

Our proposed vehicle is designed to play a role in filling a dangerous gap in shelter needs. It seeks to be of use to the significant number of individuals who will, for the foreseeable future, continue to be compelled to live a nomadic life in the urban environment. Rather than an ideal shelter, the vehicle is designed with attention to the specific limitations and compromises imposed by urban nomadic existence. Though it cannot appropriately be called a home, the vehicle is a potential means for ameliorating the conditions of life for people surviving under trying circumstances.

When I came to New York I was struck by the occasional form lying on the street, with people standing over it as if it wasn't there.

—John Bowers, *New York Times* op-ed piece, April 4, 1987

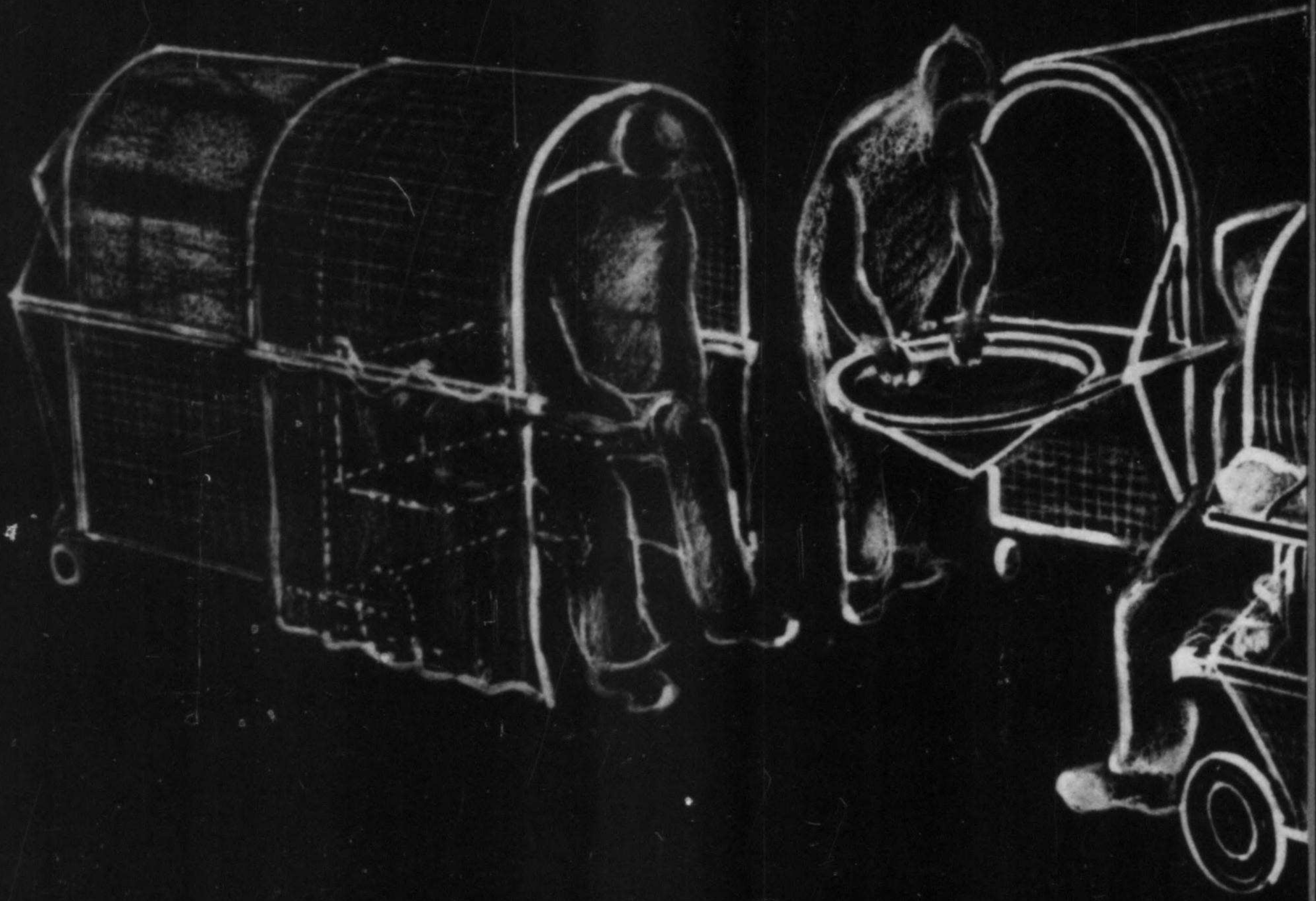
Although in our daily encounters with homeless people we are aware of their status as refugees, we generally fail to recognize that they are refugees from the transformation of the city itself. The redesign of city parks to allow for better surveillance and easier removal of homeless people signifies an institutional ignorance of the fact that the destruction and renovation of entire neighborhoods has left no place for these people to go.² We are reluctant to discern the relationship between the physical transformation of the city—through real estate development and economic displacement—and the creation of homelessness. An ABC official stated that his company is hesitant to construct a public plaza next to its midtown headquarters because it does not want to see “a tent city for the homeless here.”³ But with or without a plaza, the homeless will not disappear.

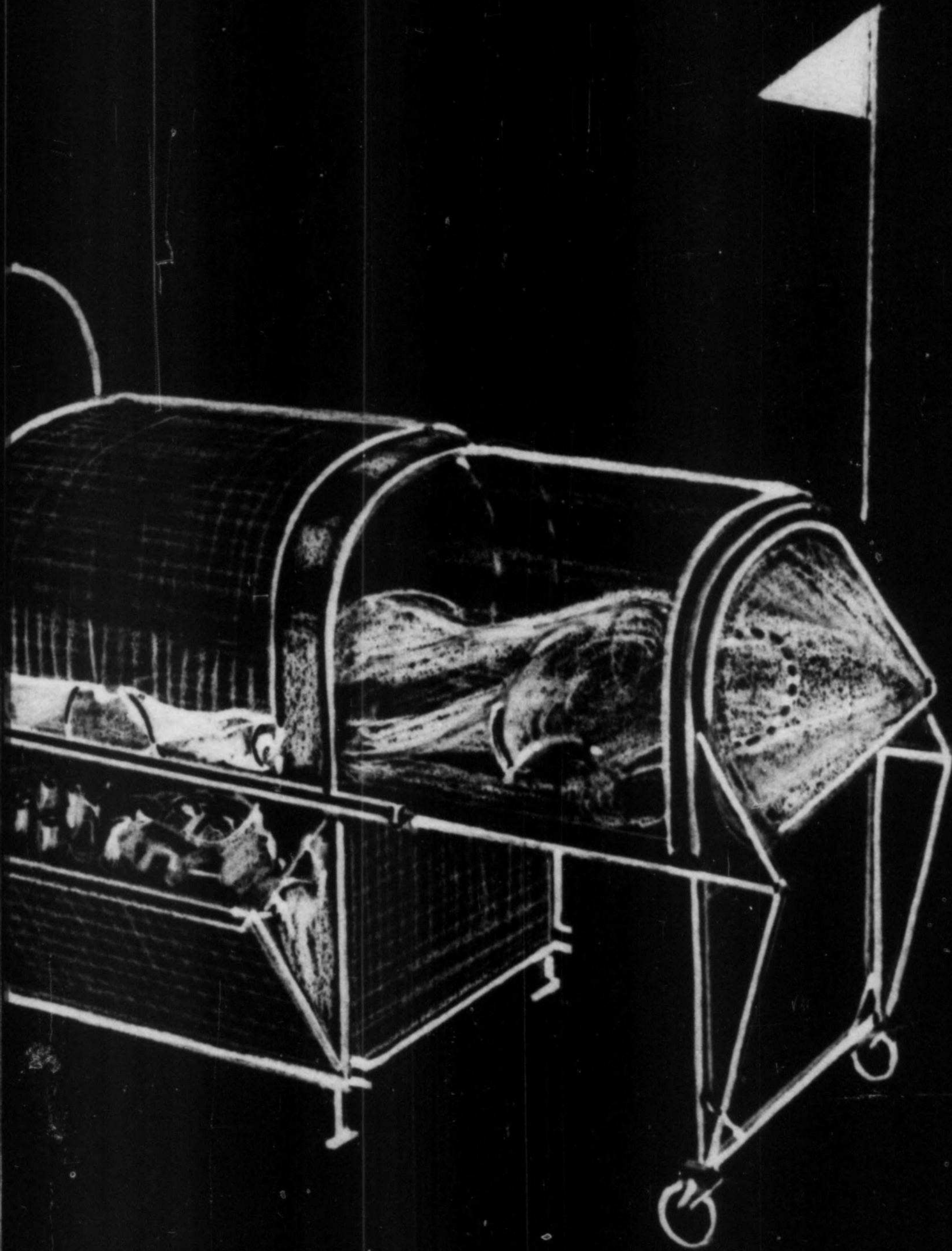
Homeless peoples' marginalization is directly tied to the refusal of other city residents to recognize them as fellow urban citizens. The dominant notion of the homeless as mere objects largely explains why we allow people to live and die on our streets without doing much to help them.

In a television forum, columnist George Will argued that the presence of ragged masses camped out in front of midtown New York office buildings was an infringement of the legitimate rights of executives working there. In Will's view,

2. See Rosalyn Deutsche “Krzysztof Wodiczko's Homeless Projection and the Site of 'Urban Revitalization,'" *October*, no. 38 (Fall 1986), pp. 63–99.

3. Quoted by Paul Goldberger, *New York Times*, January 17, 1988.





dodging the bodies of homeless people and enduring their incessant demands for small change is an unnecessary addition to the already stressful lives of businessmen. In the activity of moving through the city, described by Walter Benjamin as a "series of shocks and collisions," the homeless are apprehended as immobile barriers to travel. This description, from a recent *New York Times* article, of seasoned commuters' strategies for dealing with their daily encounters with homeless people in the Port Authority bus terminal is typical: they block out recognition by "locking their eyes forward" and "striding purposefully" toward the exits. The homeless are seen as identity-free objects that must be negotiated rather than recognized. The article describes acknowledgment of the presence of the homeless as a sign of inexperience, a trap that only temporary visitors to the city fall into: "They stop and stare, eyes wide open to the unfamiliar, raw suffering."⁴

Of course, the dramatic image of the homeless as faceless, rag-encased bundles signifies an elision of these peoples' actual modes of survival. Though we encounter the homeless as figures anchored to a grate or bench or asleep in the subway as we rush to work, surviving on the streets of New York is actually dominated by the constant necessity for movement, often in response to the actions of authorities. In recreation areas such as Tompkins Square and Riverside Park, uniformed police officers are routinely deployed to remove homeless people. All of Grand Central Station and portions of the Port Authority bus terminal are closed to homeless residents during the night. Survival, therefore, compels mobility. Especially for those who live entirely outside of the shelter system, the ability to travel from place to place with one's personal belongings in a swift and efficient manner is a key to functioning successfully in the city.

Through the use of adapted, appropriated vehicles, some homeless individuals have managed to develop a means of economic sustenance in the city. These people, known as scavengers, spend their days collecting, sorting, and returning cans to supermarkets in return for the five-cent deposit. Shopping and postal carts and other wheeled vehicles are used for collecting and transporting cans and bottles during the day and for storage of collected materials during the night. Crowds of homeless redeemers outside of supermarkets have become commonplace since the bottle bill went into effect in 1983.

In their familiar position of supplication and helplessness, homeless individuals do not stake a claim to the territory that has been taken from them. They are reduced to mere observers of the remaking of their neighborhoods for others. Their homelessness appears as a natural condition, the cause is dissociated from its consequence, and the status of the homeless as legitimate members of the urban community is unrecognized.

The activities of scavengers and the growing numbers of what one reporter described as their "gaily decorated" shopping carts have played a role in altering

4. Jane Gross, *New York Times*, November 9, 1987.



Oscar's vehicle.



Homeless Vehicle Prototype. Photo: François Alacoque.

the public perception of homeless individuals. Their visibly purposive movement through the city gives them an identity as actors in the urban space. Since scavengers are mobile, they cannot be walked away from or easily dismissed as silent nonpersons. In opposition to the notion of the immobile figure whose status is provisional and ambiguous, the scavenger stakes a claim to space in the city and indicates his or her membership in the urban community.

The shelter vehicle attempts to function usefully in the context of New York City street life. Therefore, its point of departure is the strategy of survival that urban nomads presently utilize. Through discussions with scavengers, a proposal for a vehicle to be used both for personal shelter and can and bottle transportation and storage was developed. An earlier design was shown to potential users and modified according to their criticisms and suggestions. Since the design developed through reference to the needs of a specific group of homeless people, all of whom are tall, male, and physically strong, it is possible that it may not be appropriate for other homeless people. As the project develops, the needs and interests of other groups of potential users must be addressed, particularly those of homeless women. We have yet to speak with any homeless women and learn of their particular strategies of survival. Though certain features of the vehicle as it is presently designed, such as a possible built-in toilet, might be of use to homeless women, discussions with them will be necessary to develop a design responsive to their needs.

An initial proposal, the project is not put forward as a finished product, ready for use on the streets. Rather, it is conceived as a starting point for further collaboration between skilled designers and potential users. Both parties will have to play roles in the design and production of future versions of the vehicle, with continued adaptations in the design made in response to the survival needs of users and additional strategies devised by designers. Though such a collaborative relationship may sound unlikely or even impossible, it is the key to the project's success. Only through such cooperation can the vehicle function usefully. Direct participation of users in the construction of the vehicle is the key to developing a vehicle that belongs to its users, rather than merely being appropriated by them.

A false notion of the homeless as individuals functioning in isolation from the urban community and from each other contributes to their current status as exiles in their own city. We hope the vehicle will aid in making visible and strengthening the modes of cooperation and interdependence that now exist in the homeless population. The possibility of grouping, even linking, the vehicles together could be explored.

The signifying function of the vehicle is as important as its strictly utilitarian purpose. Building upon the existing image of the scavenger as an autonomous, active individual, the vehicle attempts to function as a visual analogue to everyday objects of consumption and merchandising (such as food vendor carts) and to create a bridge of empathy between homeless individuals and observers.

Through the use of a vehicle fashioned specially for their collection activities, the fact that scavengers, like other urban citizens, are working for their subsistence will be made visible.

The goal of the vehicle project is, therefore, twofold: to function successfully in fulfilling the needs of homeless people for a means of transportation and shelter and to aid in the creation of a legitimized status for its users in the community of the city.

The prototype vehicle bears a resemblance to a weapon. In our view, the movements of carts through New York City are acts of resistance, opposing the continuing ruination of an urban community that excludes thousands of people from even the most meager means of life. Though the transformation of the city, which has compelled so many people to survive through collection of its detritus, is an outrage, we must all be forced to recognize the value and legitimacy of their daily work.

*

Since its first presentation at the Clocktower in January 1988, the Homeless Vehicle underwent preliminary tests on the streets of New York City. The working model was discussed with scavengers and passers-by. Drawings and documentary material were shown to architects, artists, urban geographers, social workers, activists, and journalists. These tests and discussions resulted in many practical suggestions, critical comments, new concerns and ideas. New developments in urban politics, such as the Koch administration's construction of floating shelters for the homeless and the confiscation of homeless peoples' belongings and destruction of their habitat in City Hall Park, as well as resistance to the curfew and the related antigentrification riot in Tompkins Square, have intensified the gravity of the situation for which the vehicle was intended, requiring additions to and reinforcements of its functional and symbolic program. These include the following:

Mobility:

—A simple suspension system, larger wheels, and other adjustments to facilitate increased maneuverability over curbs, potholes, and steps.

Safety:

—A simple break system both for slopes and for parking while resting or sleeping.

—An emergency escape system in case of fire or attack.

—A lock and alarm system to protect collected goods and personal property.

—Rearview mirrors and emergency signals to protect against traffic.

Variants:

—Versions of the vehicle responding to the needs of various users, in particular those of women scavengers.

—Transformation of the vehicle into a vendor's cart for selling found goods, such as clothing, magazines, etc.

—Assembling vehicles in groups as collective habitats or defensive encampments against police harassment.

With the help of Painted Bride in Philadelphia, as well as Exit Art and the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, two different series of prototypes will be built and tested in the spring and summer of 1989.

The following people helped with the Homeless Vehicle Project:

François Alacoque, technical assistance

Janusz Bakowski, photography

Tom Finkelparl, coordination

Jay Johnson, technical consultant

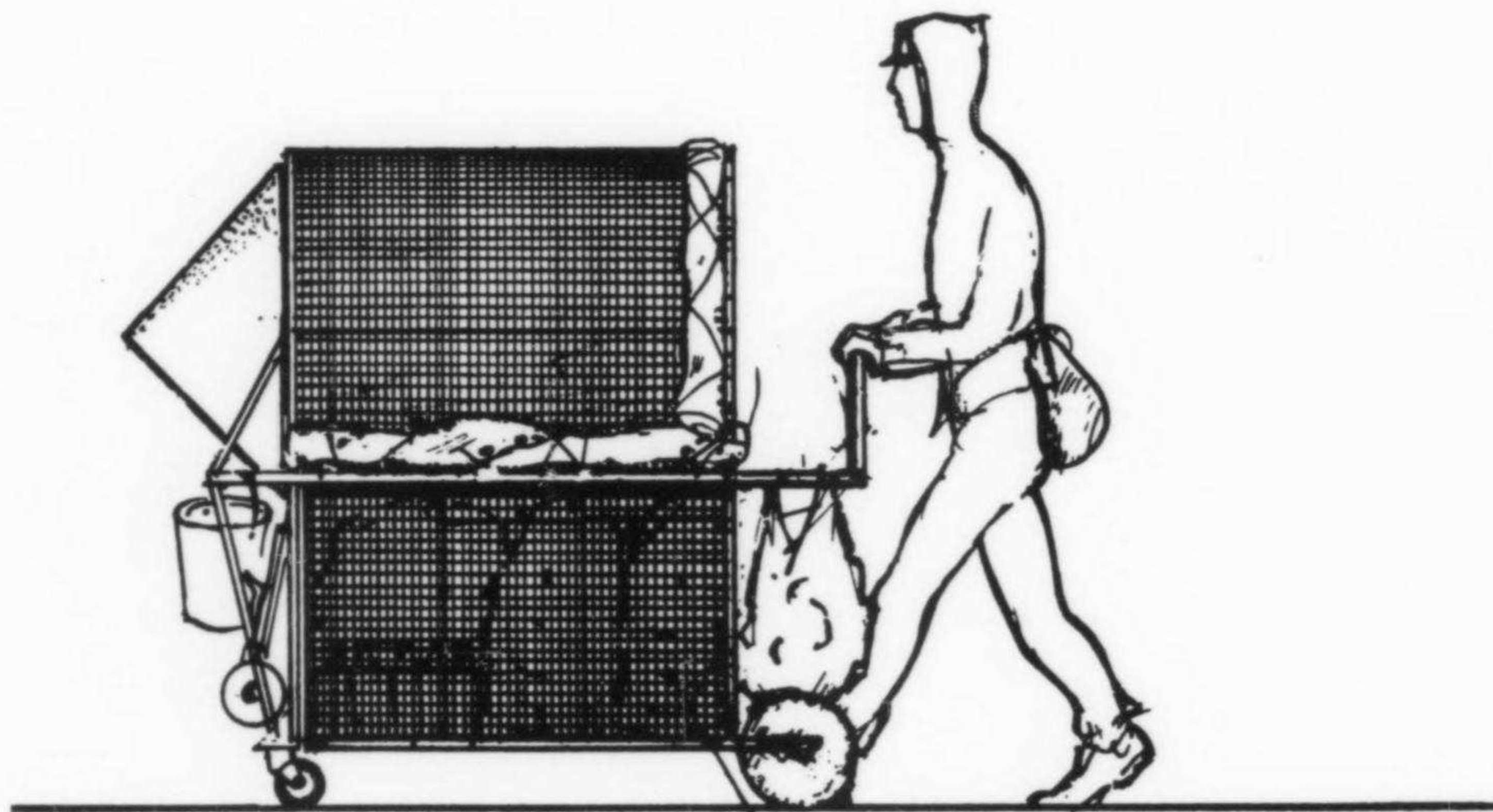
Kyong Park, design consultant

Jagoda Przybylak, photography

Leslie Sharpe, transcriptions

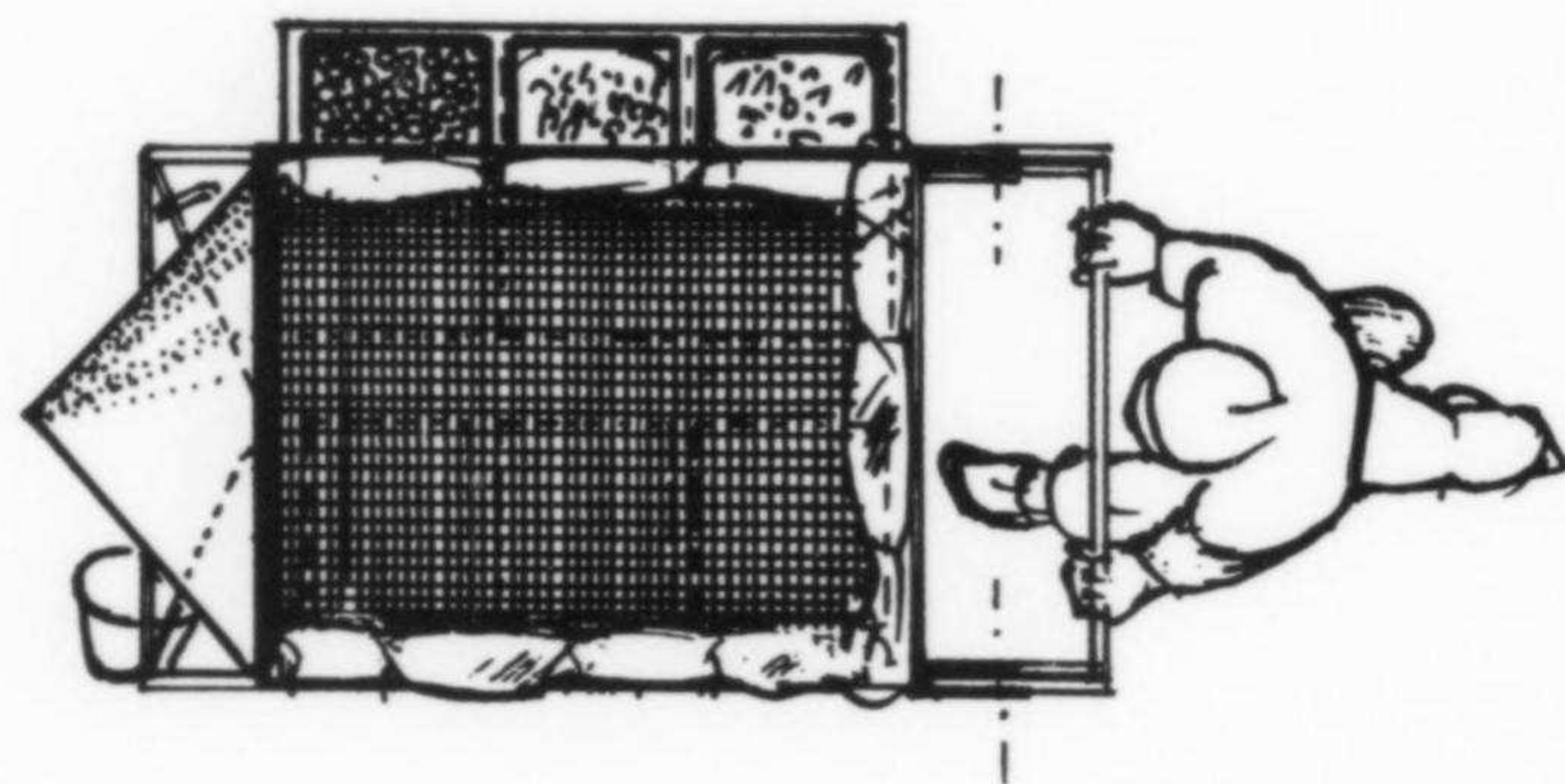
Heidi Schlatter, prototype builder

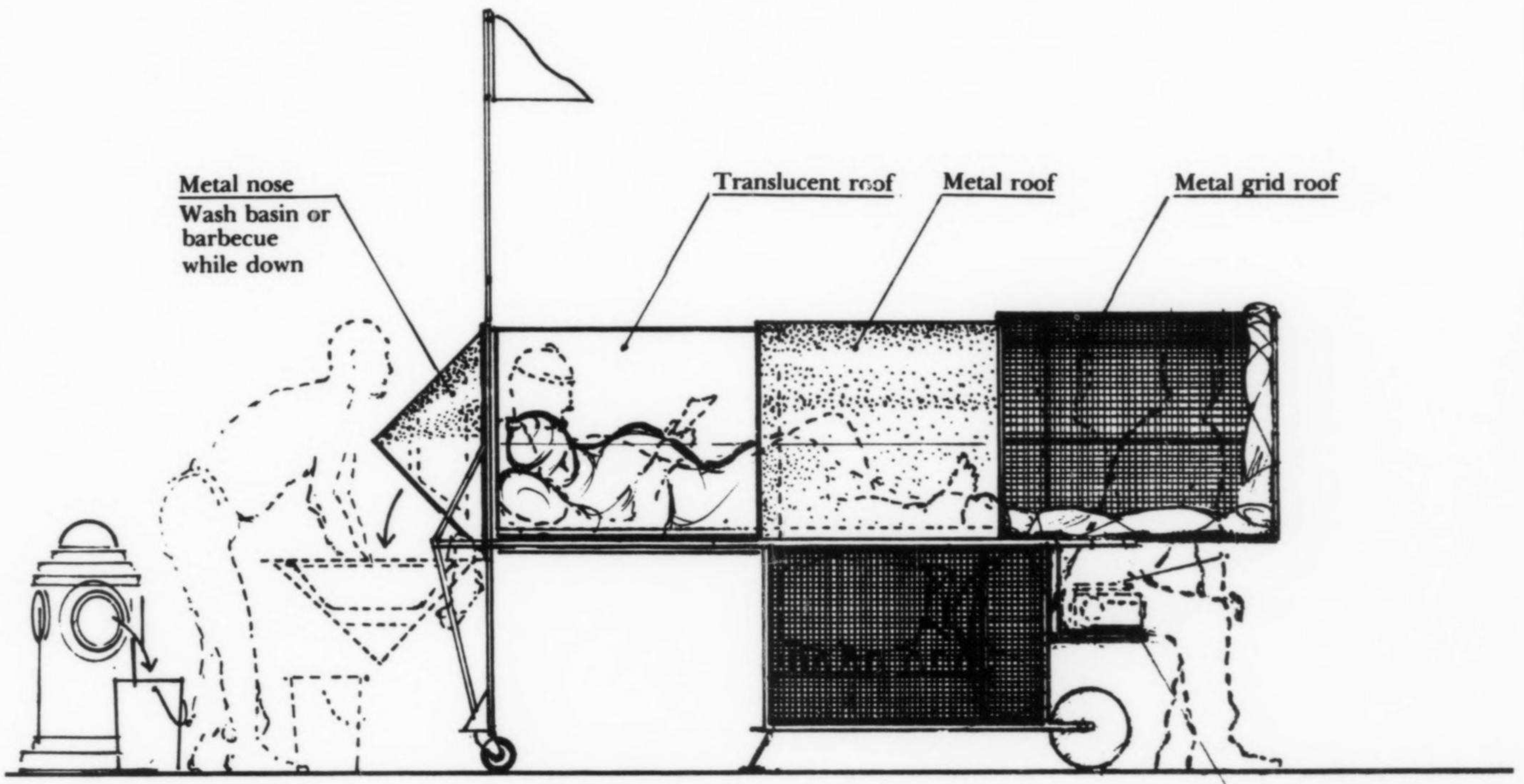
Rirkit Tirevanija, model builder



Traveling position

Container for collected bottles and other re-salable objects





Metal nose
Wash basin or
barbecue
while down

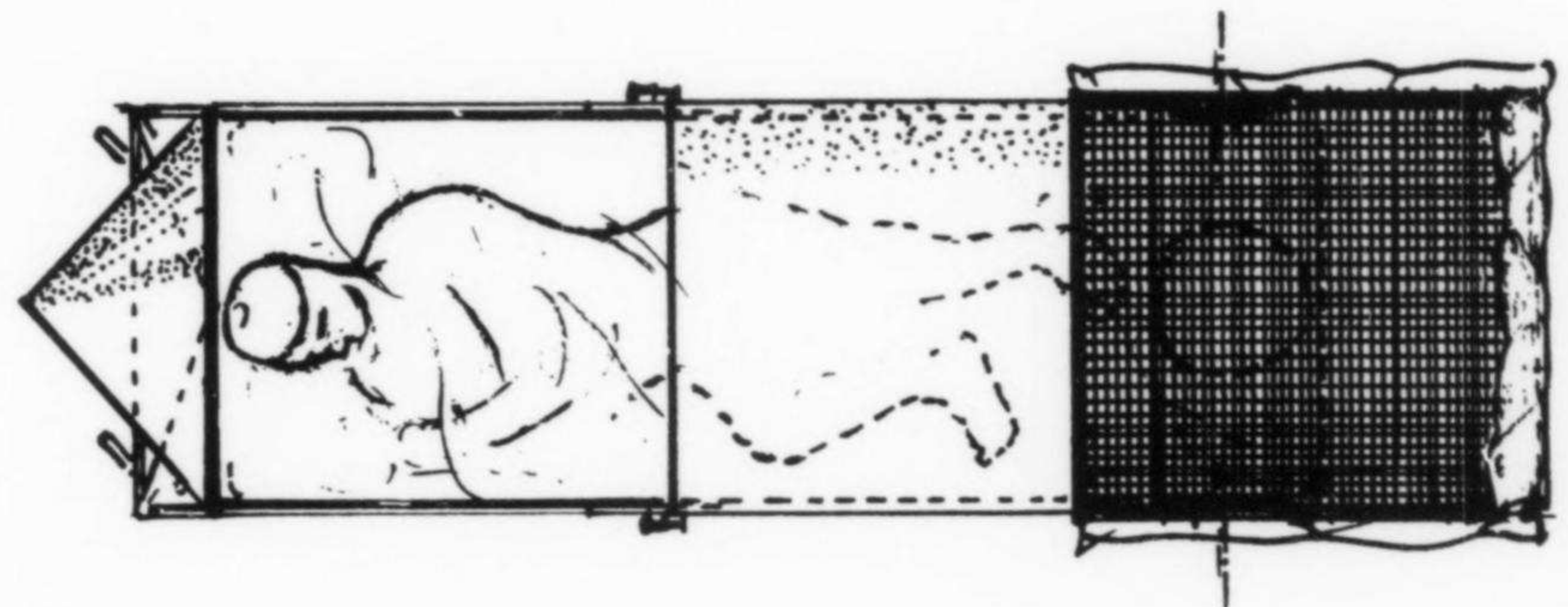
Translucent roof

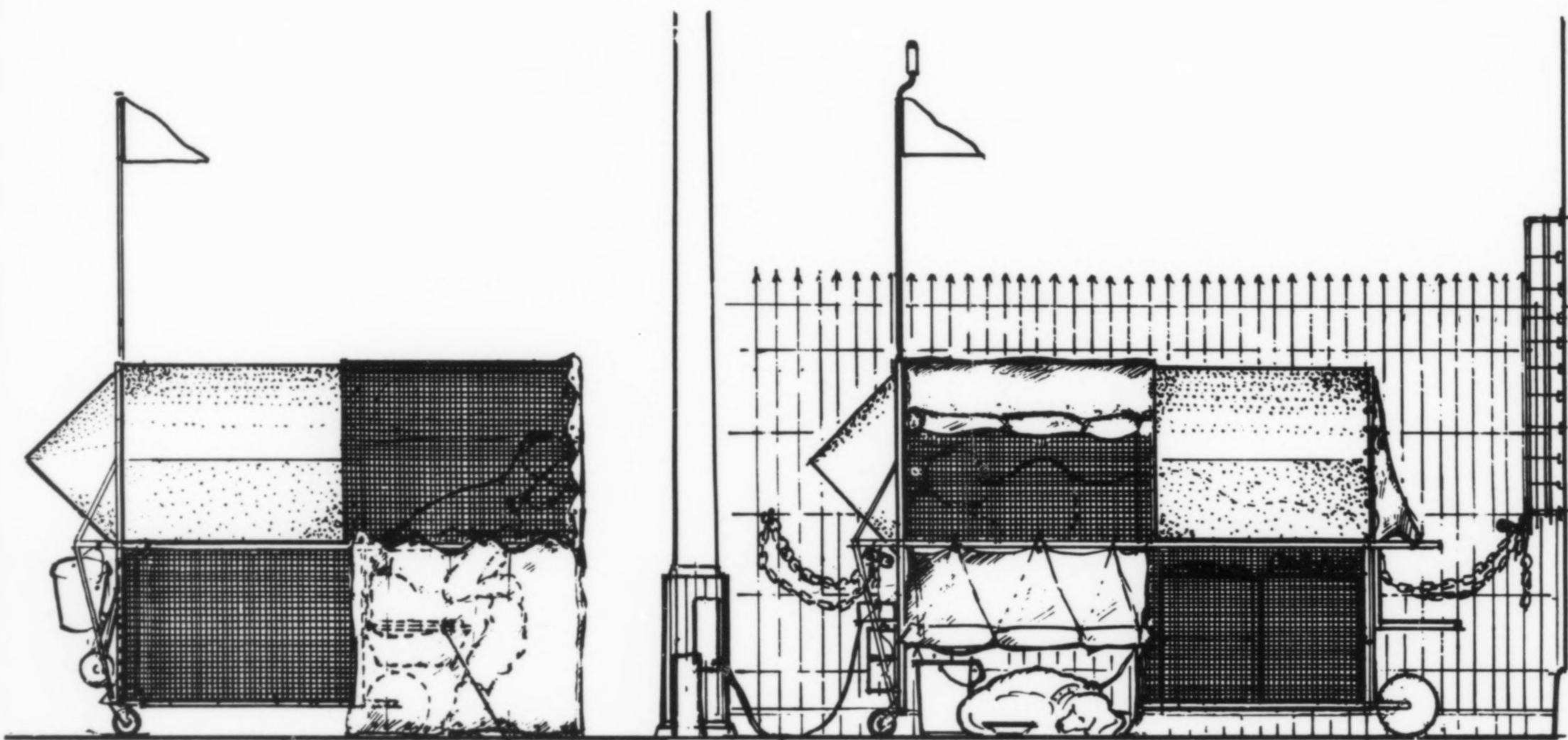
Metal roof

Metal grid roof

Washing, sleeping and resting position (day)
Metal nose operates as emergency exit,
storage for basin and other objects and tools, or, when open, as
basin or barbecue

Handle/seating/step
in sitting position

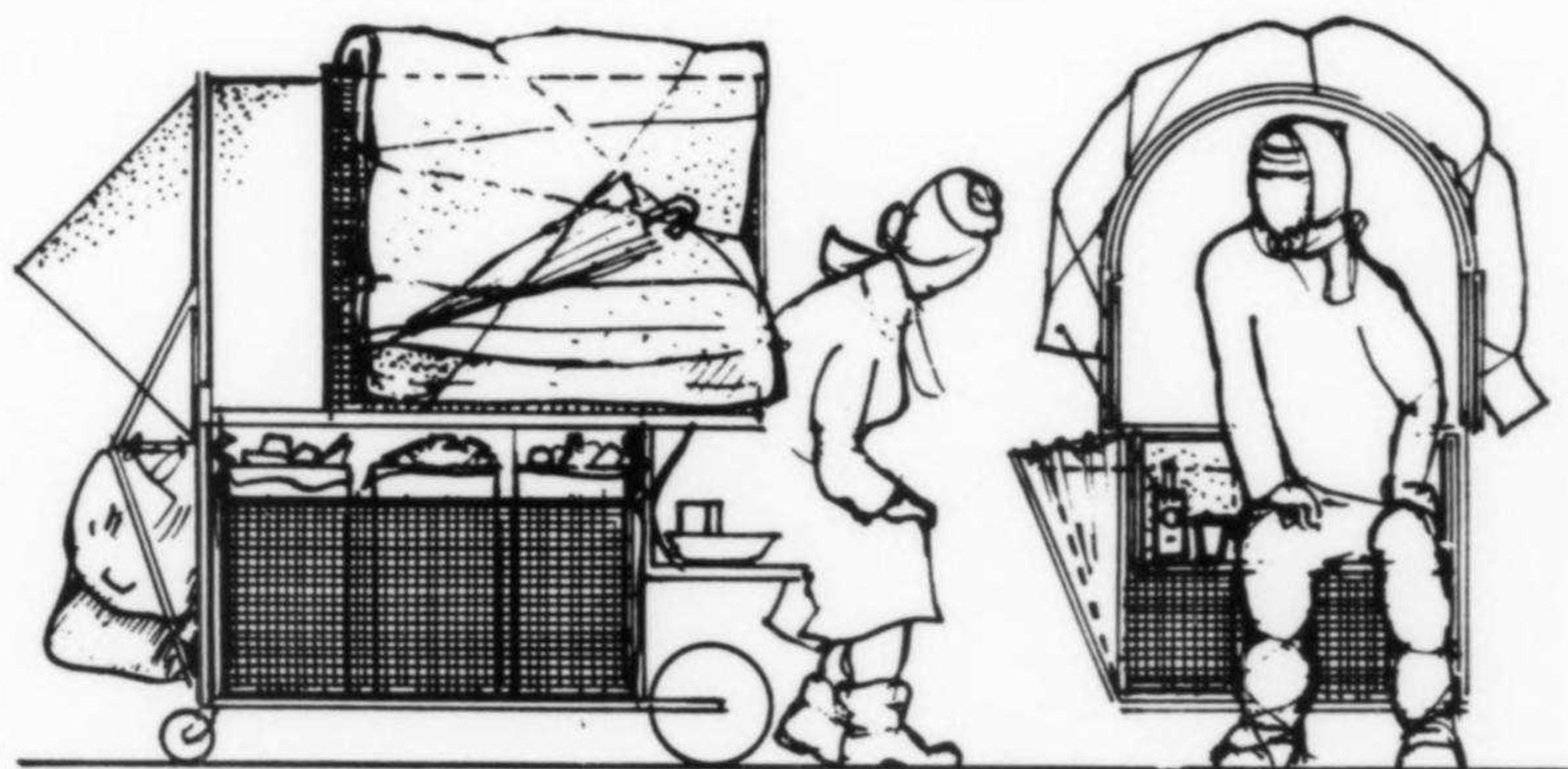




Toilet position

Handle/seat/step
in toilet position
(plastic curtain down)

Sleeping position (night)
Metal grid over translucent roof,
security flashing light installed, vehicle chained



Resting position while traveling and collecting

Conversations about a Project for a Homeless Vehicle

DANIEL, KRZYSZTOF, OSCAR, and VICTOR

Krzysztof: Now, don't laugh, because after what you told me last time . . . I feel that the basket part designed for collecting cans is not that good, but the rest . . .

Oscar: It's all right, man.

Krzysztof: What you see here is the traveling position. That means that the inner shell, which you don't see, is inside of the external shell. You see, this is like a wedge of cheese, or a slice of pizza, and there is another one inside, so right now the space is half . . .

Oscar: It's empty.

Krzysztof: No, you can use it as a locker, for personal belongings, when you travel. Also, for a mattress and maybe a sleeping bag. And . . . this is the part that should be redesigned, after what you told me.

Oscar: This would be the container where the bottles are kept?

Krzysztof: Yes, and other parts—external parts—can be designed to hold bags and attach other things to it. What you see here is a relatively large wheel, something you don't have on shopping carts. The wheels would have to be smaller if they are . . .

Oscar: . . . to be stable.

Krzysztof: Yes, and the front wheels would also have to twist. To make it cheaply, they would have to be smaller, just to keep that level.

Oscar: To keep the balance.

Krzysztof: Yes. I already rejected the additional door because it's too complicated. There would be enough space here, on this side, for a door, so you could actually enter from the side, and then it would be protected from rain and snow.

Oscar: Right. I could go for that.

Krzysztof: This is a little shorter and narrower than a standard bed, because we don't want to make it too large.

Oscar: Right, you've got to be able to keep it consumption size. If you make it too bulky, the person operating it will have a lot of problems behind it.

Krzysztof: Meaning its weight?

Oscar: Not the weight, but police, traffic, people in general.

Krzysztof: But folded, this shape is the minimum size, because the length of the bed, that is, the length of the vehicle unfolded, determines its height, but that's also a good height for sitting up.

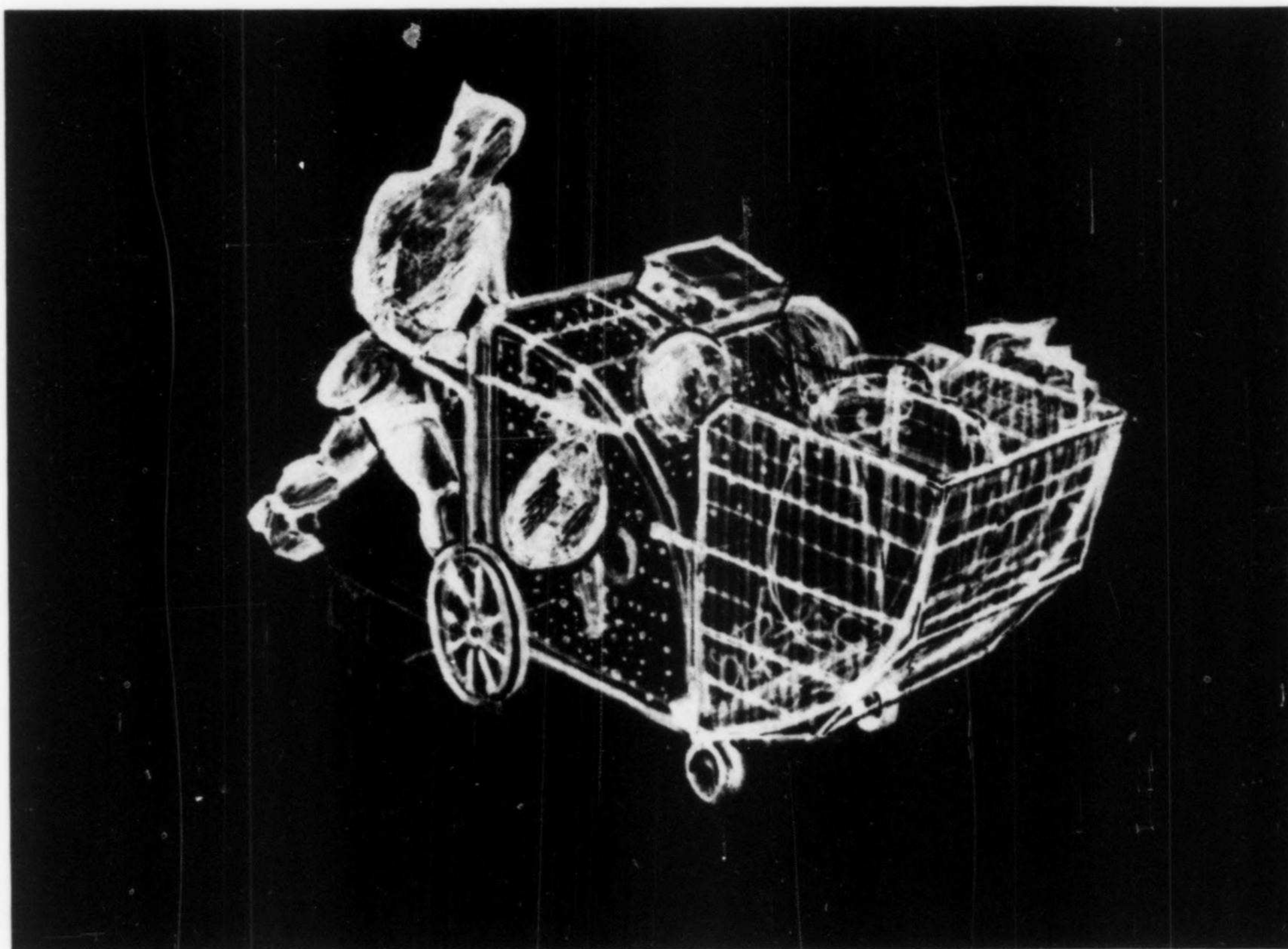
Oscar: Right. So why did you say I would laugh at this? I think you have a very good idea. The size will be appropriate, a cabinet with a shell of itself that can hold a person's belongings, his personal items, his money, so I don't see anything so ill-informed about that. This doesn't have to be a complicated matter, because it can be cheaply made. Traffic won't be a pain

in the neck, the police won't hassle you about having such a long vehicle. You can crawl inside, you can sit up, you can lie down, you can keep your personal belongings. The only complication that you might run into is that you have to make it big enough for collection. The minimum weight that people take is ten cases. You have to be able to hold, say, at least 500 bottles and cans . . .

Krzysztof: 500?

Oscar: 240 is ten cases, so you double 240, you get 480, so 500 bottles and cans.

Krzysztof Wodiczko. Initial Design for Homeless Vehicle (traveling position). 1987.



Your weight comes from the bottles, not from cans or plastics. A good time to collect is summertime, a very beautiful time, when you have festivals, parades, and so much activity. The weather's nice, there's lots of outdoor drinking—restaurants, clubs, what have you.

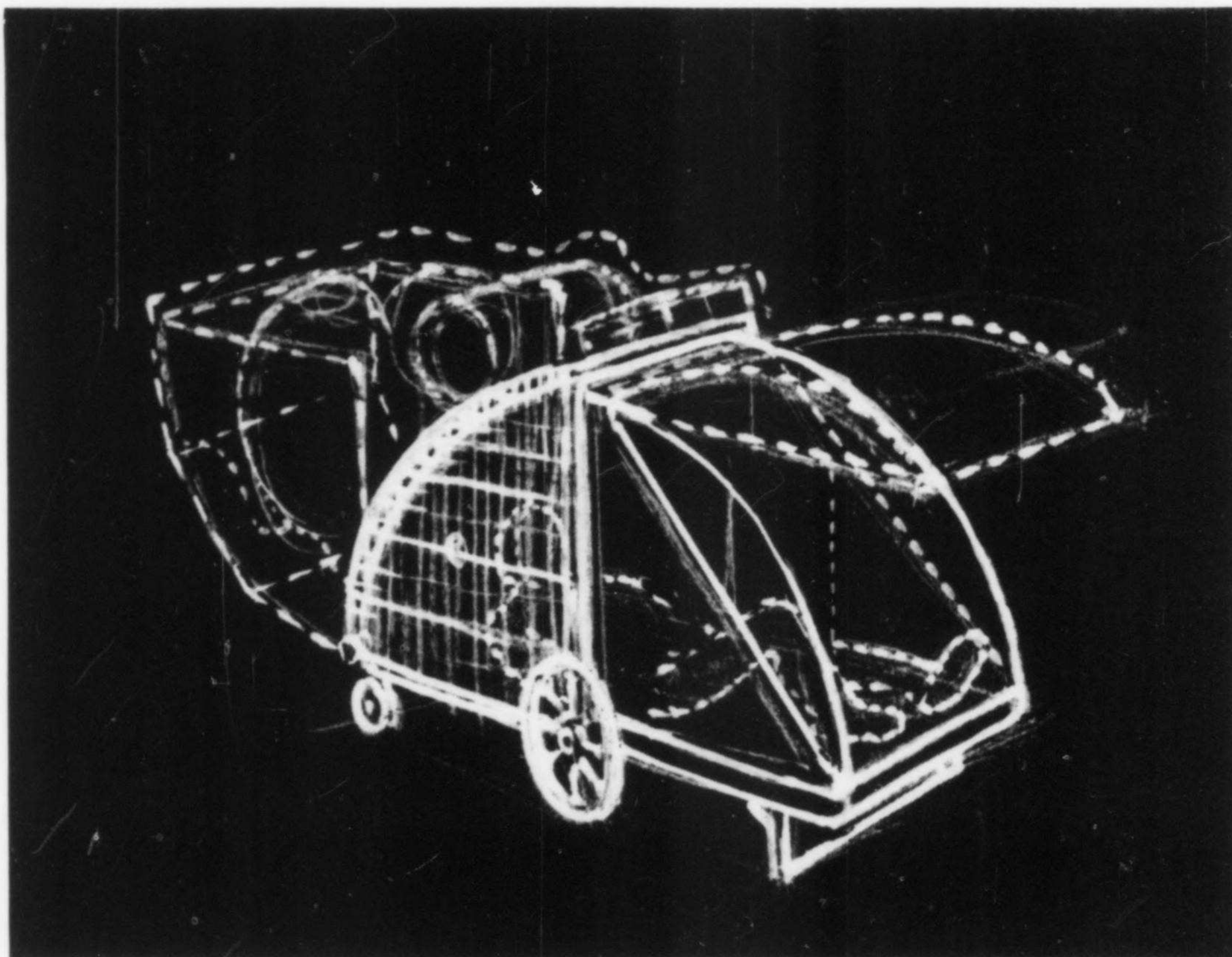
Krzysztof: So do you think that this will be enough space? When I look at your vehicle, I . . . Would it be necessary to design separate areas for bottles?

Oscar: That's what I do. I keep the glass away from the cans. The reason that separate compartments are good is that

when I go to the grocery store, or to the distributor, whoever's going to take my bottles and cans, it's easier and faster. You want the simplest way to unload your cart, get your money, get everything processed, get out, because as soon as you turn that first corner, there's another can. I could circle this park three times and come up with shit every time. I only work specific little areas. I don't have to work too far. I can fill up one cart in one block.

Krzysztof: Where do you take the cans once you've filled up the cart? What's the nearest place from here, for instance?

Krzysztof Wodiczko. Initial Design for Homeless Vehicle (resting position). 1987.



Oscar: Oh, wow, it's a long way.

Krzysztof: That's why you've got to do 500 cans?

Oscar: Right, then it's worth it. You've got to take a walk, take the stuff out, box it up, then possibly stand in line. Somewhere along the line, we can talk about an idea I have. I'd like to open up a redemption center. There's a few ideas I have to make life easier for the bottle/can man.

Krzysztof: If you were to imagine yourself having this vehicle, how would you use it?

Oscar: All right, this is the front of the vehicle. This right here is the opening of the front, right? This is where I'd put my bottles; you get more bottles than anything else.

Krzysztof: And plastic bags on top of it?

Oscar: No. If possible, cans and plastics, but, you see, you have beer cans, tall and small, tall cans, little cans, soda cans, so you want to keep your soda cans with other soda cans, tall cans with tall cans, little cans with little cans, glass with glass, beer bottles with beer bottles.

Krzysztof: So plastic bags are good?

Oscar: Plastic bags are beautiful. Unless you have to travel a long way, like I've got to do tonight.

Krzysztof: What about the other part of the vehicle, about using it as a home? As a place to sleep?

Oscar: It's a good idea. It's a bad idea. My product's on top, I'm underneath. Now I've got to think about thieves.

Krzysztof: But won't you have sold those cans?

Oscar: No, man, there's no way in hell you can have an empty cart. Once you start collecting, there's a can lying on every street that you walk down. I can empty the whole cart right now, and as soon as I empty it, there'll be a can right there. So you gonna dump it? Of course, you're gonna take it.

Krzysztof: So you want to have all this above you? or below you?

Oscar: Victor had a good idea. If you could possibly come up with an idea for a sealtight.

Krzysztof: You could use a tarp.

Oscar: No, you need something to seal it.

Krzysztof: But you don't need to waterproof cans.

Oscar: Yes you do, because when you take them to the store, if they're all wet—you've got to think about the weather, too—you put them in a box, and the box will fall apart, and you can lose everything right there.

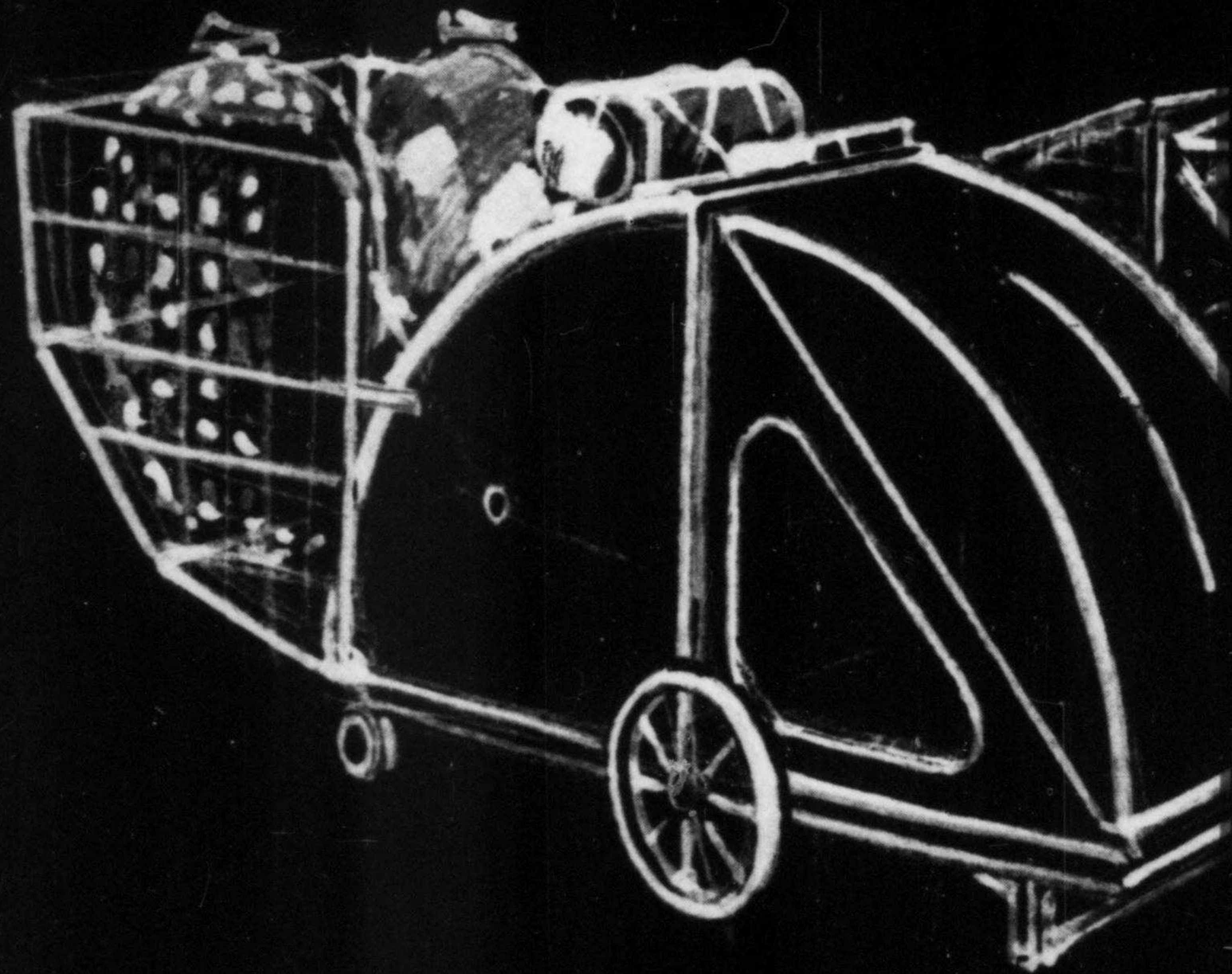
Krzysztof: Look at this drawing over here. It will give you a sense of proportion. You can sit up inside, because this is the whole length of the body when you sit up.

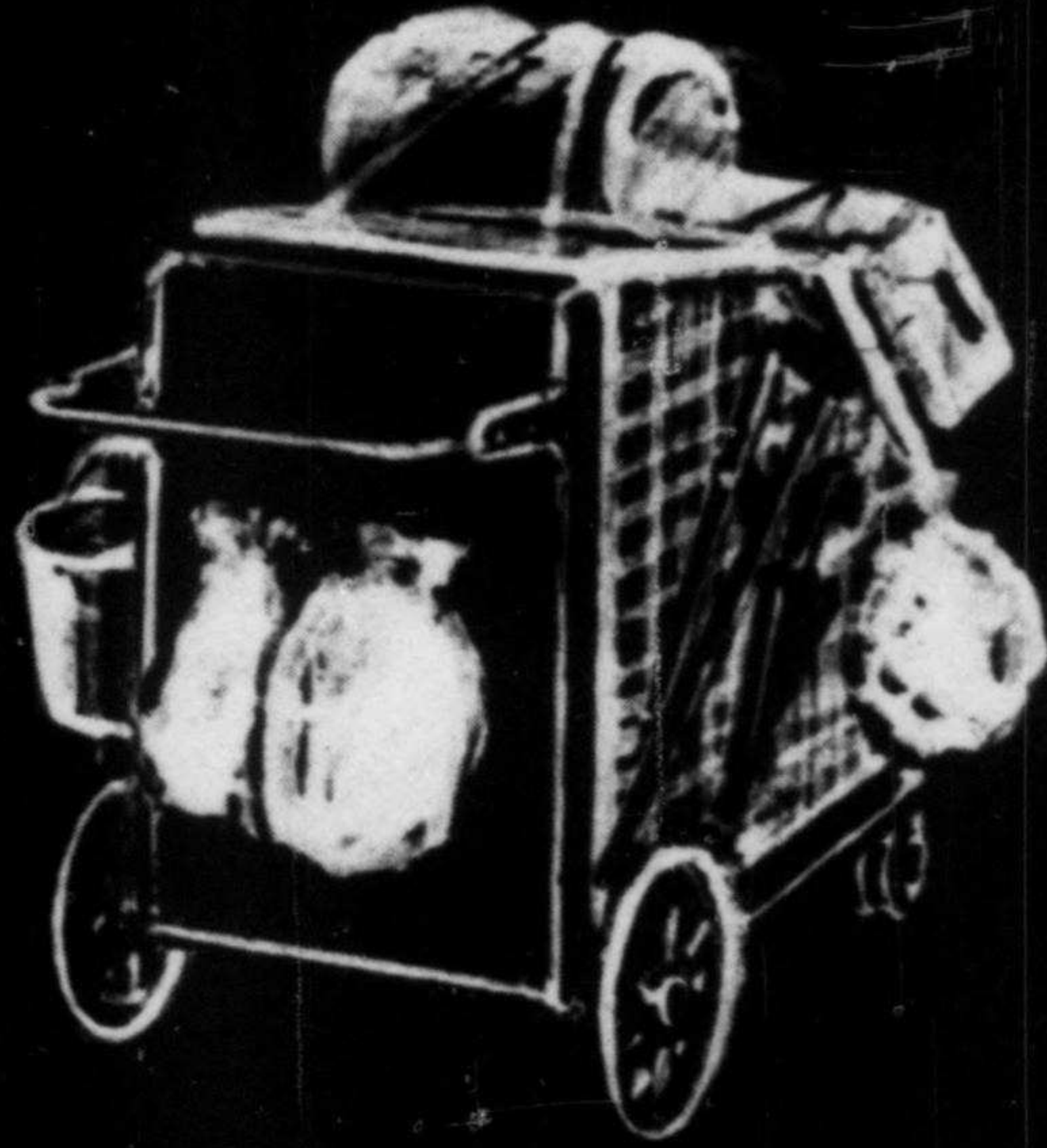
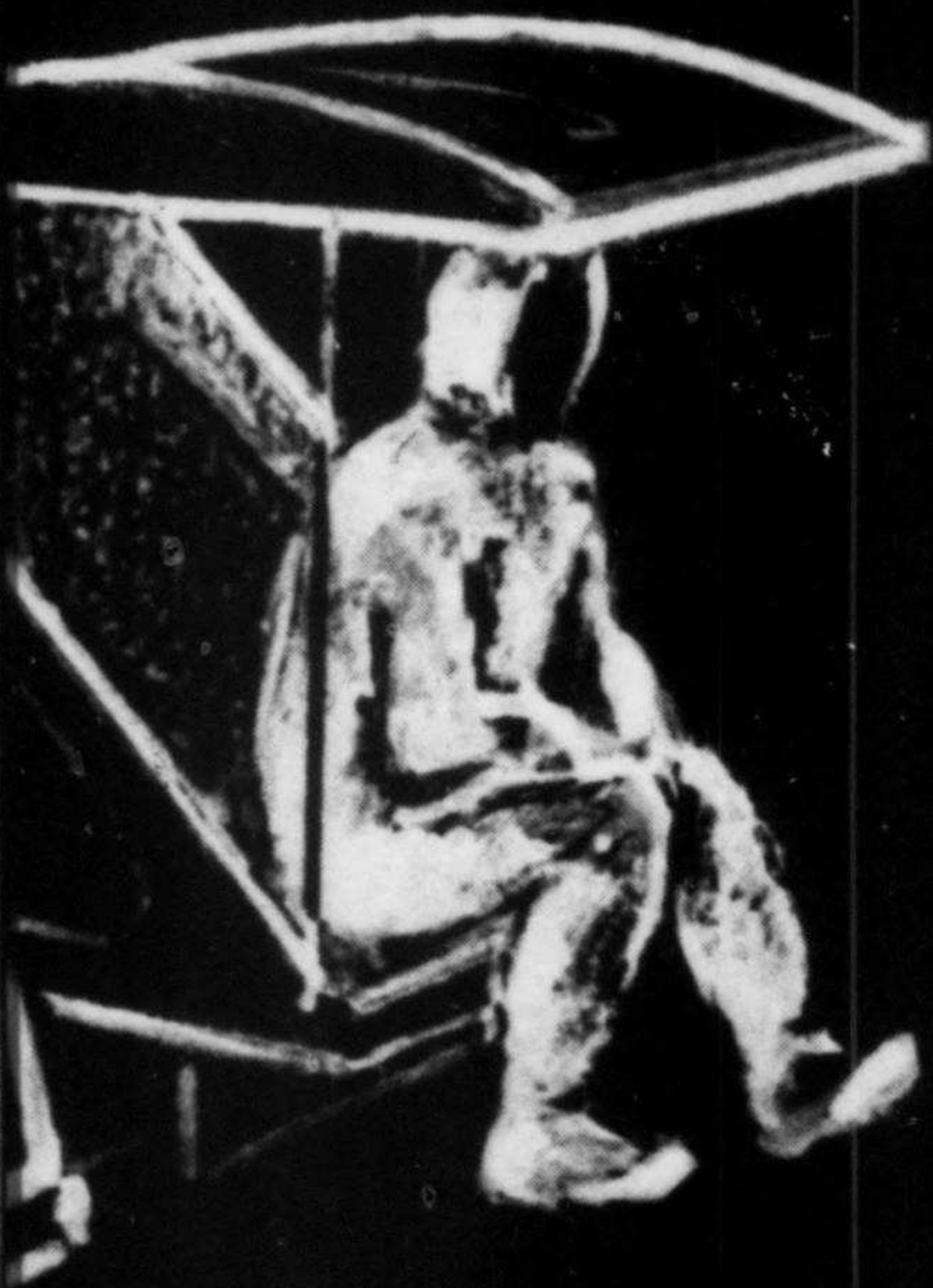
Victor: Why do you want to sit over here?

Krzysztof: Sit over here? No, sit inside.

Victor: And lie down?

Krzysztof: Yes, but if you're lying down, you might want to sit up, too.





Victor: Make another drawing. Like I told you before, the cart a little higher than this, two feet longer than this, have a top over here that you can open and close, and still have this space for somebody to lie down and stay out of the wind and cold. If people lie down here with this closed, ain't nobody going to steal anything or come around bothering anybody.

Krzysztof: So you think all those bottles and cans could be stored above you?

Victor: Let's say you make it high like this and this longer and this a little wider—a lot of cans will go in there. You can be out in the park and sleep in the park, and that will have a top to close it.

Krzysztof: But, you see, it won't be able to be as long as this one, because you cannot make this the length of the body or the vehicle will be too long. I already made some drawings similar to what you are saying, but I rejected them because it appeared to be too long to be maneuverable in the city, and, as Oscar said, it looked to be unacceptable for the police and the traffic.

Victor: That's nothing. I mean, we're not talking about building a car.

Krzysztof: But for him—you see, now there are two different approaches. He is interested in the collecting part, and you are interested in the sleeping part. Now we have the option of combining the part for bottles and cans with the sleeping part below. What he is saying is that it doesn't have to be the entire length of the body because you can sleep with legs bent. So that means it could be shorter, and then all the storage area could be above and closed with a plastic seal.

Oscar: Right, not only is there protection from the wind, but it's theft-proof. The most important thing is that you've got to think about when you're underneath, and somebody attacks you.

*

Krzysztof: I'll show you a drawing. Remember, you mentioned a vehicle . . .

Daniel: Yeah, the U.S. Postal vehicle.

Krzysztof: Do you think this is a good amount of space for collecting cans and bottles?

Daniel: Sure, but instead of carrying those bags to the supermarket, the supermarket should have a place where you could go with the postal cart, because the bottles are too heavy for the bags, so you could put them in the postal cart.

Krzysztof: I was thinking about combining the function of collecting bottles with an emergency place to sleep.

Daniel: Yeah, but that's too small for a human being to fit in, and it's also good if you sleep in there without the bottles, because it's more protected from the wind.

Krzysztof: I'm designing it in order to produce it, and to establish a workshop with interested people, like maybe you and Oscar. We could start making these vehicles in the fall or the spring, or anytime.

Daniel: Oh, whenever you're ready, man, you let me know. I'll make you all the best I can, as long as you've got the wheels.

Krzysztof: What about the temperature? What is the best material to use?

Daniel: Insulation, like cotton and wood and aluminum, insulation.

Krzysztof: All of those panels folded around the cart could form some kind of little building on top. Oscar told me that there is no need to have the full length of the body, because you can bend your legs a little bit when you sleep.

Daniel: Some people don't feel comfortable like that, so you've got to build it the full size of a person.

Krzysztof: That means that I will have to unfold it a little more to create a longer . . . So you would suggest a special insulation, using two aluminum sheets and maybe something in between?

Daniel: They call that expanded insulation, and it's very good, because it'll take the wind.

Krzysztof: So you think with this you will survive most of the . . .

Daniel: You'll survive, but you're going to have to attach yourself, you're going to have to have two empty screws here for the key chain. That way, if the wind is too strong, it won't take you away.

Krzysztof: So you attach it to a fence or something?

Daniel: Yeah, the fence or pole or something, you know, because otherwise you'll go bump bump bump, and it's no good.

Krzysztof: So I'll have to design this part to make it a little longer. I can't have this cart as long as a human body. It would be too long.

Daniel: That's what I'm trying to tell you. If you have it this size, it's okay, a person can fit in there, but, you know, it's gonna have to be on top, so they have room to stretch out.

Krzysztof: But, still, a person is longer than that, but you could bend the legs a little bit.

Daniel: Right, and fit inside, I've done it, too. But I'm saying that other people don't sleep the same way.

Krzysztof: So you have to have other parts that unfold to compensate for the difference.

Daniel: You could expand this part just a little more.

Krzysztof: I'll do that, I like the idea. What would be the best material for the bottom part?

Daniel: Plywood, because when you put in the boxes of bottles, they won't slide back and forth.

Krzysztof: But when you replace this canvas here with plywood, you'll be much heavier.

Daniel: The problem is you can't make it heavier than what it is, because if you're going to build a cart that's too heavy to push, who the hell is going to push it?

Krzysztof: You mentioned fiberglass for the top?

Daniel: You know why? Because the roof . . . you want to see.

Krzysztof: But a small hole is good to see out of.

Daniel: That's okay for some people. How would *you* do it?

Krzysztof: But I don't live outside.

Daniel: But I *do*. I know. You ever seen those snowcone carts? They have a big thing, all glass. That way, people can see what they're buying, like chocolate or vanilla.

Krzysztof: But you're not chocolate to be purchased, you are a person. Maybe you need some privacy.

Daniel: But I'm saying that what they use on top is glass. And for *you*, for your *safety*, for you to sleep.

Krzysztof: You're saying that it's better to

be visible, to show that you're there, rather than to be hidden?

Daniel: Yes, that you're there, because what if someone comes along and turns you over? At least you could see that somebody's there. You gotta think of that, too, 'cause there's a lot of crazy motherfuckers around on the street, too.

Krzysztof: What about at night, an emergency light, to show you're there, because of garbage trucks?

Daniel: Yeah, 'cause they might take you and just put you in . . .

Krzysztof: Right, okay, this is very helpful.

Daniel: See, I gave you a lot of good ideas.

Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History

An Introduction to "Rigorous Study of Art"

THOMAS Y. LEVIN

Just because art history depends upon seeing does not mean that it should avoid thinking.

—Heinrich Wölfflin, Review of Alois Riegl's *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*

Walter Benjamin's influence on the theory and practice of art history in the English-speaking world has grown substantially in recent years, largely as a result of the increasing availability of his work in translation. But because the art-historical reception of Benjamin has focused primarily on the essays dealing with photography and film, it has largely failed to recognize that Benjamin's texts on the theory of mimesis, on the epistemology of form and perception, and, above all, on the philosophy of history are also of tremendous significance for the history of art.¹ Indeed, as evidenced by many of Benjamin's works, ranging from the (unfortunately still untranslated) *Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (*The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism*) to his posthumously published magnum opus, the *Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades Project*),² the practice of a certain kind of art history—understood in a broad sense as the critical, sympto-

1. See, for example, Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," trans. Knut Tarnowski, *New German Critique*, no. 17 (Spring 1979), pp. 65–69; "On the Mimetic Faculty," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Reflections*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979, pp. 333–336; "Theses on the Philosophy of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken Books, 1978, pp. 253–264; and especially "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," trans. Knut Tarnowski, *New German Critique*, no. 5 (Spring 1975), pp. 27–58; compare also the translation by Kingsley Shorter in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, London, New Left Books, 1979, pp. 349–386.

2. The former is available in an excellent French translation by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Anne-Marie Lang entitled *Le concept de critique esthétique dans le romantisme allemand*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986; the methodological prolegomena to the *Passagen-Werk* have been translated by Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth as "N (Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress)," in *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 15, nos. 1–2 (Fall/Winter 1983–84), pp. 1–40.

matological deciphering of cultural production — was one of Benjamin's primary theoretical concerns.

The intimate connection between Benjamin's work and central methodological issues in the history of art is nowhere more apparent than in his interest in the work of the Austrian art historian and theorist Alois Riegl (1858–1905). As Benjamin explains in a posthumously published narrative curriculum vitae, Riegl's work — and in particular the concept of artistic volition (*Kunstwollen*) — was a "decisive influence" on his early writings.³ Like Riegl, Benjamin also conceives his work as an attempt "to promote an analysis of artworks which considers them as a complete expression of the religious, metaphysical, political and economic tendencies of an epoch and which, as such, cannot be limited to a particular discipline."⁴ For Benjamin the paradigmatic example of such a philosophically informed, interdisciplinary cultural symptomatology was Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry*, a work still generally ignored in Anglo-American art history.⁵

There is both anecdotal and stylistic evidence indicating that Benjamin's first encounter with Riegl's major study was rather early in his career, most likely before 1916.⁶ This makes the beginning of his interest in Riegl virtually coinci-

3. Walter Benjamin, "Drei Lebensläufe," in Siegfried Unseld, ed., *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 51; unless otherwise noted, this and all subsequent translations are my own. For Riegl's discussion of the concept of *Kunstwollen*, see *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, p. 215; for a more extended treatment, see Erwin Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1920), pp. 321–339.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

5. Given the almost complete absence, until very recently, of translations of Riegl it is hardly surprising that his work remains generally unknown in the English-speaking realm. Despite the fact that the importance of *Late Roman Art Industry* has been pointed out repeatedly — in *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* (New York, Pantheon, 1948, p. 226), Bernard Berenson insists that there is "no other publication in our field more indispensable to thoughtful students" — Riegl's magnum opus did not become available in English until 1985, and then in a prohibitively expensive translation by Rolf Winks published in Rome by Giorgio Bretschneider Editore (vol. 36 in the series "Archaeologica").

Secondary material on Riegl in English is equally sparse. Some of the more substantive treatments include: Margaret Iversen, "Style as Structure: Alois Riegl's Historiography," *Art History*, no. 2 (March 1979), pp. 62–72; Otto Pächt, "Art Historians and Art Critics VI: Alois Riegl," *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 105, no. 722 (May 1963), pp. 188–193; Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982 (esp. chapter V: "Riegl," pp. 71–97); Meyer Schapiro, "Style," in *Anthropology Today*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953; Henri Zerner, "Alois Riegl: Art, Value and Historicism," *Daedalus*, no. 105 (Winter 1976), pp. 177–188; B. Harlow, "Realignment: Alois Riegl's Image of Late Roman Art Industry," *Glyph*, no. 3 (1978), pp. 118–136.

6. This is documented by Michael Jennings in his study, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 154, note 32. Whereas Werner Kraft, for example, recalls that Benjamin had read *Late Roman Art Industry* during the war ("Über Walter Benjamin," in *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins*, p. 62), Benjamin himself writes only that he read it during his "student years," i.e., prior to 1919 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1972, vol. 6, p. 225). Jennings also points out that Benjamin employs technical terms from Riegl's system as early as 1916 in texts such as "Über das Mittelalter" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 132–133) and "Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie" (pp. 137–140).

dent with a profound disenchantment with Heinrich Wölfflin, which can be dated quite precisely to 1915, the year Benjamin began to attend Wölfflin's university lectures in Munich. In a pair of letters to Fritz Radt, unfortunately not included in the two-volume edition of Benjamin's correspondence, Benjamin describes at some length his terrible disappointment with Wölfflin as a teacher.⁷ Indeed, so negative was Benjamin's impression that at one point he notes: "I often think of writing a piece which would be devoted to chronicling and preserving the spectacle of this man, even if it would not be something which could be published in the near future. For the very hideousness of this phenomenon makes it significant and typical."⁸ Despite the Rieglian logic of this remark, which, one could imagine, might have made such an essay on Wölfflin imperative, the project seems to have remained at the stage of a passing intention whose only concrete traces are a series of epistolary remarks. Both the theoretical and anecdotal interest of this eyewitness account by Benjamin warrant an extended citation:

I did not recognize right away what Wölfflin was up to. Now it is clear to me that what we have here is the most disasterous activity I have ever encountered in a German university. A by no means overwhelmingly gifted man, who, by nature, has no more of a feel for art than anyone else, but attempts to get around this by using all the energy and resources of his personality (which have nothing to do with art). As a result, he has a theory which fails to grasp what is essential but which, in itself, is perhaps better than complete thoughtlessness. In fact, this theory might even lead somewhere were it not for the fact that, because of the inability of Wölfflin's capacities to do justice to their object, the only means of access to the artwork remains exaltation, i.e., a feeling of moral obligation. He does not see the artwork, he feels obliged to see it, demands that one see it, considers his theory a moral act; he becomes pedantic, ludicrously catatonic, and thereby destroys any natural talents that his audience may have. For the combination of an ungrounded, surreptitiously obtained concept of refinement and distance, and the brutality with which he obscures his lack of (receptive) genius, has the effect of attracting an audience that clearly has no idea what is going on: they are getting an understanding of art which is on the same level and of the same purity as their "normal" understanding of culture. In a word, the sources which are

7. Letters to Fritz Radt (dated "Munich, November 21, 1915" and "Munich, December 4, 1915") cited in full by Gershom Scholem in a 1980-81 essay entitled "Walter Benjamin und Felix Noeggerath," reprinted in Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin und sein Engel. Vierzehn Aufsätze und kleine Beiträge*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1983, pp. 79-89. I am very grateful to Gary Smith for having brought this text to my attention.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

the most inaccessible but have therefore remained unsullied even if unchanneled, are being muddied.⁹

In the following years it was thus not Wölfflin but Riegl who served Benjamin as a methodological model. Riegl's rehabilitation of late Roman craft served as an analogy for Benjamin's reevaluation of the previously dismissed seventeenth-century genre of German tragic drama. Both projects focused on periods whose aesthetics violated fundamental tenets—beauty and vitality—of the classical philosophy of art. Indeed Riegl remained an influence on Benjamin's work, as is evidenced by a 1929 article entitled "Books That Have Remained Alive," in which Benjamin accords Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry* a place in a distinguished quartet of theoretical writings whose other members include Alfred Gotthold Meyer's *Eisenbauten (Iron Structures, 1907)*; Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption (1921)*; and Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness (1923)*. Riegl's study, Benjamin writes, is an

epoch-making work [that] applied with prophetic certainty the sensitivity and insights of expressionism (which occurred twenty years later) to the monuments of the late Imperial period, broke with the theory of "periods of decline," and recognized in what had previously been called "regression into barbarism" a new experience of space, a new artistic volition [*Kunstwollen*]. Simultaneously, this book is one of the most striking proofs that every major scholarly discovery results in a methodological revolution on its own, without any intention to do so. Indeed, in the last four decades no art-historical book has had such a substantive and methodologically fruitful effect.¹⁰

Despite Benjamin's rather striking methodological affinity to Riegl—for example, in his shift away from the individual artist toward collective, anonymous works, in the significance accorded to the detail, the marginal phenomenon, the work as a cultural cipher, and so on—this affinity has only recently been considered in the English-language literature.¹¹ It is in this light that the

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

10. Walter Benjamin, "Bücher, Die Lebendig Geblieben Sind," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, p. 170.

11. Cf., for example, the very insightful remarks in Charles Rosen's "The Ruins of Walter Benjamin," *New York Times Book Review*, vol. 24, no. 17 (October 27, 1977), pp. 31–40; reprinted in Gary Smith, ed., *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1988, pp. 129–175; esp. 140–141; and a section in Michael Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, pp. 151–163. The only works which focus exclusively on this topic are Wolfgang Kemp, "Walter Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft. Teil I: Benjamins Beziehungen zur Wiener Schule," *Kritische Berichte des Ulmer Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1973), pp. 30–50; "Walter Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft. Teil 2: Walter Benjamin und Aby Warburg," *Ibid.* vol. 1, no. 3 (1975),

essay "Rigorous Study of Art" takes on such great importance: as one of the only texts in which Benjamin discusses the work of Riegl and of Heinrich Wölfflin explicitly and at some length, it provides a unique opportunity to examine closely Benjamin's positions on the reigning debates in art-historical methodology and, in turn, Benjamin's own model for the rigorous study of art.

The essay "Rigorous Study of Art" is a review of the first volume of *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*,¹² a forum for art-historical essays by scholars from the Vienna School, which Meyer Schapiro described at the time as "perhaps the most advanced organ of European academic writing on art history today."¹³ As indicated by the title of Hans Sedlmayr's lead essay "*Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft*" ("Toward a Rigorous Study of Art"), which Benjamin adapted for the title of his review, the yearbook was polemically conceived as the inauguration of a new method for the study of art. Benjamin was sent the volume shortly after its publication by one of the contributors, Carl Linfert, whose essay on architectural drawings displays a marked theoretical indebtedness to Benjamin's work on the German tragic drama.¹⁴ Excited by what he perceived to be the translation into art-historical practice of his own critical, redemptive project, Benjamin subsequently wrote a review of the volume, which he submitted for publication to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

This text, the first version of "Rigorous Study of Art," never appeared in print, having been rejected by Friedrich T. Gubler, the editor of the feuilleton section at the time, and by Benno Reifenberg. But since Benjamin's friend Linfert was a regular contributor to the newspaper, he was thus able to meet with the editors to establish the reasons for the rejection. Over the course of their extended discussion—which Linfert later conveyed in meticulous detail in a long, confidential letter to Benjamin dated December 12, 1932¹⁵—it became clear that their negative response was a product of their inability to understand Benjamin's critique of the dangers of Wölfflinian formalism as anything but a categorical dismissal. Secondly, their (symptomatic) lack of familiarity with

pp. 5–25; and "Fernbilder, Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft," in Burkhardt Lindner, ed., *Walter Benjamin im Kontext*, Koenigstein, Athenaeum, 1978, pp. 224–257, esp. 224–228.

12. Otto Pächt, ed., *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, Berlin, Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1931.

13. Meyer Schapiro, "The New Viennese School," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 18, no. 2 (June 1936), pp. 258–266. Schapiro's extensive review concentrates primarily on volume II of the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, Berlin, Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1933, including detailed summaries of the articles by Guido Kaschnitz-Weinberg, Hans Sedlmayr, Karl M. Swoboda, Otto Pächt, Maria Hirsch, Michael Alpatoff, and Emil Kaufmann. The first three pages, however, are a response to the methodological program set out in Sedlmayr's lead article in volume I.

14. In an enthusiastic letter to Linfert confirming receipt of the book, Benjamin remarks on the "numerous and profound affinities between our work" (Letter dated July 18, 1931, cited in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, p. 653). The following remarks rely on the excellent documentation—including the correspondence between Benjamin and Linfert—provided by Hella Tiedemann-Bartels, the editor of volume 3 of the *Benjamin Schriften*, pp. 652–660.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 653–657.

Riegl's work rendered unintelligible Benjamin's critique of universal history, the privileging of the micrological focus of the monograph, and his emphasis on the marginal case. They simply could not grasp, so Linfert explains, that Benjamin was simultaneously endorsing Wölfflin's shift away from an anecdotal, biographical, and largely sentimental art-historical practice toward a close visual study, and yet criticizing the increasingly formalist tendency of Wölfflin's materialism because it failed to think through the epistemological stakes of formal change.¹⁶

Based on this inside information from Linfert, Benjamin subsequently rewrote the review, reluctantly excising certain potentially offensive passages—such as the polemical remarks about Sedlmayr and the extended discussion of Linfert's essay—and strategically incorporating certain ideas suggested by his friend. "Perhaps now," Benjamin wrote in a letter accompanying the revised second version, "—thanks to the toning down of various sections and the citation of various authorities—Reifenberg's resistance will be overcome."¹⁷ This seems to have been the case, since on July 30, 1933, "Rigorous Study of Art" finally appeared in the literary section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* under Benjamin's pseudonym Detlef Holz.

The resistance that "Rigorous Study of Art" encountered prior to its publication is, of course, highly indicative, a veritable barometer of the radicality of Benjamin's theoretical positions at the time.¹⁸ Moreover, the availability of

16. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," perhaps the best known example of just such an epistemological meditation on the ramifications of formal change, it is thus no surprise that Benjamin immediately refers to the Vienna school of art history (Riegl and Wickhoff in particular) in his analysis of the politics of the transformation of perception brought about by the new medium. See Chryssoula Kambas, *Walter Benjamin im Exil. Zum Verhältnis von Literaturpolitik und Ästhetik*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 1983, esp. pp. 128–141, "Filmische Wahrnehmung, gedacht aus Riegls methodischen Ideen."

17. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, p. 658.

18. Although motivated by different theoretical stakes, the resistance to Benjamin's writing continues well into the present. Indeed, the publication of the translation of "Rigorous Study of Art" encountered difficulties surprisingly similar to those that befell the original essay. Initially intended for a special "Art and Ideology" issue of a leftist journal, the text was judged to be "too theoretical" and was returned to the translator with the request that he simplify some of the more dense formulations and eliminate what was deemed an unnecessarily philological interpolation of the two versions. Unwilling to edit Benjamin and determined to take advantage of the rare opportunity to document Benjamin's own encounter with editorial pressures, the translator decided instead to offer the text to a journal that would respect both its integrity and theoretical density.

What is significant about the initial rejection of the translation, however, is not only the amusing structural parallel to the fate of the original essay, but also the disturbing similarity of the logic that gave rise to this editorial decision and certain contemporary neoconservative positions. A leftist journal that imposes an "ordinary language" requirement on theory—in its advertisements the journal in question prides itself for having "presented the best Marxist and other radical scholarship in jargon-free English—unwittingly adopts a position uncomfortably close to right-wing antitheoretical polemics. The resemblance is evident, for example, in a recent virulently anti-Marxist article by Roger Kimball, "The October Syndrome," *New Criterion*, vol. 7, no. 2 (October 1988), pp. 5–15. This would-be indictment of *October*, a xenophobic, resentment-laden rehearsal of reactionary clichés, does little more than decry the "deliberate obscurity," "triumph of opacity," "arcane pseudo-philosophical jargon" and the "obfuscatory theories imported from the continent." Indicati-

both versions of the text provides an unusual opportunity to examine the subtleties of Benjamin's rhetorical calculus at work in his successfully strategic revisions of the rejected first version. In order to make it possible for the English reader to undertake such a comparative analysis, the following procedure has been adopted in the English version of Benjamin's essay. The translation contains the entire text from the manuscript of the more polemical first version (V1); all passages from V1 *deleted* in the second, published, version (V2) are marked within the text by pointed brackets "<.....>"; finally, all passages *added* in the second version are included in footnotes located at the site of their insertion. In short, everything from *both* the rejected and the published versions has been included, with only one exception: for the sake of a slightly less cumbersome apparatus, additions or deletions of single words and/or punctuation have been noted only where it was deemed to be significant.

vely, the only German writer whom Kimball includes in his list of insufferable crypto-hermeticists such as Barthes, Bataille, de Man, Derrida, and Foucault is none other than Walter Benjamin.

Rigorous Study of Art

On the First Volume of the
*Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen**

WALTER BENJAMIN

translated by THOMAS Y. LEVIN

In the foreword to his 1898 study *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, Heinrich Wölfflin made a gesture that cast aside the history of art as it was then understood by Richard Muther.¹ "Contemporary public interest" he declared,

seems nowadays to want to turn toward more specifically artistic questions. One no longer expects an art-historical book to give mere biographical anecdotes or a description of the circumstances of the time; rather one wants to learn something about those things which constitute the value and the essence of a work of art. . . . The natural thing would be for every art-historical monograph to contain some aesthetics as well.

A bit further on one reads: "In order to be more certain of attaining this goal, the first, historical, section has been furnished with a second, systematic, section as a counterpart."² This arrangement is all the more indicative because it reveals not only the aims but also the limits of an endeavor which was so epoch-making in its time. And, in fact, Wölfflin did not succeed in his attempt to use formal analysis (which he placed at the center of his method) to remedy the bleak condition in which his discipline found itself at the end of the nineteenth cen-

* A translation, interpolating both the first (unpublished) and the second (final) version of "Strengte Kunstwissenschaft. Zum ersten Bande der *Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen*," which appeared, under Benjamin's pseudonym Detlef Holz, on July 30, 1933, in the literature section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Jg. 78, Nr. 561, 2. Morgenblatt, Literaturblatt Nr. 31, S. 5); both reprinted in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 3, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1982, pp. 363-374. All notes are by the translator.

1. Richard Muther (1860-1909), art historian and critic often cited as paradigmatic of the "old school" of nineteenth-century art history, his work was a mixture of religiosity, sentimentality, and eroticism.

2. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die klassische Kunst. Eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance*, Munich, F. Bruckmann, 1899, pp. VII-VIII; translated from the 8th edition by Linda and Peter Murray as *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, London and New York, Phaidon Publishers, 1952, pp. XI-XII (translation modified).

ture.³ He identified the dualism of a flat, universalizing history of the art of "all cultures and times," on the one hand, and an academic aesthetic on the other, without, however, being able to overcome it entirely.

Only from the perspective of the current situation does it become evident to what extent the understanding of art history as universal history—under whose aegis eclecticism had free play—fettered authentic research. And this is not only true for the study of art. In a programmatic explanation, the literary historian Walter Muschg writes:

It is fair to say that the most essential work being done at present is almost exclusively oriented toward the monograph. To a great extent, today's generation no longer believes in the significance of an all-encompassing presentation. Instead it is grappling with figures and problems which it sees marked primarily by gaps during that era of universal histories.⁴

Indeed, the "turn away from an uncritical realism in the contemplation of history and the shriveling up of macroscopic constructions"⁵ are the most important hallmarks of the new research. Sedlmayr's programmatic article, "Toward a Rigorous Study of Art," the opening piece in the recently published yearbook *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen* [*Research Essays in the Study of Art*],⁶ is entirely in accordance with this position:

The currently evolving phase in the study of art will have to emphasize, in a heretofore unknown manner, the *investigation of individual works*. <Nothing is more important at the present stage than an improved knowledge of the individual artwork and it is in just this task, above all, that the extant study of art manifests its incompetence.> . . . Once the individual artwork is perceived as a still unmastered task specific to the study of art, it appears powerfully new and close. Formerly a mere means to knowledge, a trace of something

3. In the second version (hereafter referred to as "V2"), this sentence reads (changes in italics): "In fact, Wölfflin did not *entirely* succeed in his attempt to use formal analysis (which he placed at the center of his method) to remedy the *depressing* condition in which his discipline found itself at the end of the nineteenth century and which Dvorák would later identify so precisely in his obituary of Riegl" (Max Dvorák, "Alois Riegl," *Mitteilungen der K. K. Zentralkommission für Denkmalpflege*, III Folge, Bd. 4, Vienna, 1905, pp. 255–276; reprinted in Max Dvorák, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kunstgeschichte*, Munich, R. Piper, 1929, pp. 279–298).

4. Walter Muschg, "Das Dichterportrait in der Literaturgeschichte," in Emil Ermatinger, ed., *Philosophie der Literaturwissenschaft*, Berlin, Junker und Dünhaupt, 1930, p. 311. Compare also Benjamin's citation of the same passage in his essay "Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, pp. 289–290.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

6. Otto Pächt, ed., *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. I, Berlin, Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1931 (246 pages with 48 plates).

else which was to be disclosed through it, the artwork now appears as a self-contained *small world* of its own, particular sort.⁷

In accordance with these introductory remarks, the three essays which follow are thus rigorously monographic studies.⁸ [G.A.] Andreades presents the Hagia Sophia as a synthesis between orient and occident; Otto Pächt develops the historical task posed by Michael Pacher; and Carl Linfert explores the foundations of the architectural drawing.⁹ What these studies share is a convincing love for—and a no less convincing mastery of—their subject. The three authors have nothing in common with the type of art historian “who, really convinced that artworks were not meant to be studied (but rather only ‘experienced’), studied them nevertheless—only badly.”¹⁰ Furthermore, these authors know that headway can be made only if one considers contemplation of one’s own activity—a new awareness—not as a constraint but as an impetus to rigorous study. This is particularly so because such study is not concerned with objects of pleasure, with formal problems, with giving form to experience, or any other clichés inherited from a belletristic consideration of art. Rather, this sort of studious work considers the formal incorporation of the given world by the artist

not a selection but rather always an advance into a field of knowledge which did not yet “exist” prior to the moment of this formal conquest. . . . This approach only becomes possible through a frame of mind that recognizes that the realm of perception itself changes over time and in accordance with shifts in cultural and intellectual [*geistig*] direction. Such a frame of mind, however, in no way presumes objects that are always present in an unvarying manner such that their formal makeup is merely determined by a changing “stylistic drive” within perceptual surroundings that remain constant.

For “we should never be interested in ‘problems of form’ as such, as if a form ever arose out of formal problems alone or, to put it in other words, as if a form ever came into existence for the sake of the stimulus it would produce.”

Also characteristic of this manner of approaching art is the “esteem for the insignificant” (which the brothers Grimm practiced in their incomparable expression of the spirit of true philology).¹¹ But what animates this esteem if not the

7. Hans Sedlmayr, “Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft,” *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, pp. 19–20.

8. In V2, this sentence reads: “Consistent with these remarks, the principal components of the new yearbook are three rigorously monographic studies.”

9. G.A. Andreades, “Die Sophienkathedrale von Konstantinopel,” *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, pp. 33–94; Otto Pächt, “Die historische Aufgabe Michael Pachers,” pp. 95–132; Carl Linfert, “Die Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung (mit einem Versuch über französische Architekturzeichnung des 18. Jahrhunderts),” pp. 133–246.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

11. Although Benjamin repeatedly attributes this formulation to the brothers Grimm (see also

willingness to push research forward to the point where even the “insignificant” —no, precisely the insignificant— becomes significant? The bedrock that these researchers come up against is the concrete bedrock of past historical existence [*geschichtliches Gewesenseins*]. The “insignificance” with which they are concerned is neither the nuance of new stimuli nor the characteristic trait, which was formerly employed to identify column forms much the way Linné¹² taxonomized plants. Instead it is the inconspicuous <or also the offensive aspect (the two together are not a contradiction)> which survives in <true> works and which constitutes the point where the content reaches the breaking point for an authentic researcher. <One need only read a study such as the one on the Sistine Madonna published years ago by Hubert Grimme¹³ (who does not belong to this group) in order to observe how much such an inquiry, based on the most inconspicuous data of an object, can wrest from even the most worn-out things.> And thus, because of the <focus on materiality>¹⁴ in such work, the precursor of this new type of art scholar is not Wölfflin but Riegl. Pächt’s investigation of Pacher “is a new attempt at that grand form of presentation exemplified in Riegl’s masterly command of the transition from the individual object to its cultural and intellectual [*geistig*] function <as can be seen especially in his study, ‘The Dutch Group Portrait.’”¹⁵ One could just as well refer to Riegl’s *Late*

Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, Gershom Scholem and Theodor Adorno, eds., Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1966, p. 794) it does not appear as such in their writings. Instead, as Roland Kany explains in his recent study *Mnemosyne als Programm* (Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1988, p. 234–235), Benjamin’s definition of philology as the “esteem for the insignificant” has a somewhat different genealogy. The expression first occurs in a letter to Goethe in which Sulpliz Boisserée describes a review of the Grimm’s *Altdeutsche Wälder* by A. W. Schlegel. According to Boisserée’s account, Schlegel “praises what is to be praised, but ridicules with Grimm-like sarcasm the trivial and inconsequential production of meaning and word-play, all their esteem for the insignificant” (Sulpiz Boisserée, *Briefwechsel mit Goethe*, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1862, vol. 2, p. 72). As Kany notes, following the publication in 1862 of Boisserée’s correspondence with Goethe, the phrase is first taken up—albeit stripped of its initially pejorative thrust and enshrined as the paradigmatic expression of Grimmian philology—by Wilhelm Scherer in his biography *Jacob Grimm. Zwei Artikel der Preussischen Jahrbücher* (Berlin, Reimer Verlag, 1865, p. 79f). Indeed, in the second edition of the Grimm biography (1885) Scherer makes a point of his discovery: “Their esteem for the insignificant! What a beautiful phrase this is that Boisserée came up with” (p. 149). The irony resides in the fact that Benjamin employs this very expression as a polemical counterposition to the “positivist concept of philology of the Scherer school” (Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, p. 289).

12. Carl von Linné, also known as Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), a Swedish naturalist considered to be the founder of modern systematic botany, having developed the modern system of binomial scientific nomenclature according to which each living being is classified according to its genus and its species.

13. Hubert Grimme, “Das Rätsel der Sixtinischen Madonna,” *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, no. 57 (1922), pp. 41–49.

14. In V2 this is replaced by “underpinnings in the philosophy of history.”

15. Alois Riegl, “Das Holländische Gruppenportrait,” *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, vol. XXIII, Heft 3–4, Vienna, F. Tempsky, 1902, pp. 71–278; reprinted, edited, and with a preface by Karl M. Swoboda, Vienna, Druck und Verlag der Oesterreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1931. Pages 7–25 of this later edition translated by Stephen Kayser as “Geertgen tot Sint Jans’ ‘The Legend of the Relic of St. John the Baptist,’” in Eugene Kleinbauer, ed., *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History. An Anthology of 20th Century Writings on the Visual Arts*,

Roman Art Industry,¹⁶ particularly since this work[>]¹⁷ demonstrates in exemplary fashion the fact that sober and simultaneously undaunted research never misses the vital concerns of its time. The reader who reads Riegl's major work today, recalling that it was written at almost the same time as the work by Wölfflin cited in the opening paragraph, will recognize retrospectively how forces are already stirring subterraneously in *Late Roman Art Industry* that will surface a decade later in expressionism. Thus one can assume that sooner or later contemporaneity will catch up with the studies by Pächt and Linfert as well.

<There are some methodological reservations, however, regarding the advisability of the move that Sedlmayr attempts in his introductory essay, juxtaposing the rigorous study of art as a "secondary" field of study against a primary (namely positivist) study of art. The kind of research undertaken in this volume is so dependent upon auxiliary fields of study—painting technique and painting media, the history of motifs, iconography—that it can be confusing to constitute these as a somehow separate "primary study of art." Sedlmayr's essay also demonstrates how difficult it is for a particular course of research (such as the one represented here) to establish purely methodological definitions without reference to any concrete examples whatsoever. This is difficult, but is it necessary? Is it appropriate to place this new aspiration [*Wollen*] so assiduously under the patronage of phenomenology and gestalt theory? It could easily be that in the process one loses nearly as much as one gains. Admittedly, the references to "levels of meaning" in the works, to their "physiognomic character," to their "sense of orientation" can be useful in the polemic against positivist art chatter and even in the polemic against formalist analysis. But they are of little help to the self-definition of the new type of research.>¹⁸ This type of study stands to gain <more>¹⁹ from the insight that the more crucial the works are, the more inconspicuously and intimately their meaning content [*Bedeutungsgehalt*] is tied to their material content [*Sachgehalt*].²⁰ It is concerned with the correlation that

New York, Holt, Reinhardt and Winston, 1971, pp. 124–138.

16. Alois Riegl, *Die spätrömische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Oesterreich-Ungarn*, I Teil, Vienna, K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901; 2nd edition, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, Vienna, Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1927; annotated English translation by Rolf Winks as *Late Roman Art Industry*, Rome, Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985.

17. In V2 this sentence begins: "It is precisely Riegl who"

18. In V2, the preceding paragraph was replaced by the following: "Furthermore, in a short essay "Art History and Universal History" ["Kunstgeschichte und Universalgeschichte," in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Karl M. Swoboda, ed., Vienna and Augsburg, Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, 1928, pp. 3–9] which was published in 1898, Riegl also differentiates the methodology of the older practice based on universal history from a new approach to the study of art for which he himself paved the way. The latter consists of a penetrating interpretation of the individual work which, without in any way betraying its principles, uncovers laws and problems of the development of art as a whole."

19. In V2: "everything"

20. Benjamin's employment here of the conceptual pair "material content" [*Sachgehalt*] and "meaning or significative content" [*Bedeutungsgehalt*] recalls a similar formulation in the introduction to his essay on Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften* written nearly ten years earlier. In the latter context the terms are employed to elucidate the even more fundamental conceptual distinction between com-

gives rise to reciprocal illumination between, on the one hand, the historical process and radical change and, on the other hand, the accidental, external, and even strange aspects of the artwork. For if the most meaningful works prove to be precisely those whose life is most deeply embedded in their material contents—one thinks of Giehlow's interpretation of Dürer's "Melancolia"²¹—then over the course of their historical duration these material contents present themselves to the researcher all the more clearly the more they have disappeared from the world.

It would be difficult to find a better clarification of the implications of this train of thought than Linfert's study located at the end of the volume. As the text explains, its very subject matter, the architectural drawing, "is a marginal case."²² But it is precisely in the investigation of the marginal case that the material contents reveal their key position most decisively. If one examines the abundant number of plates accompanying Linfert's study, one discovers names in the captions that are unfamiliar to the layman and, to some extent, to the professional as well. As regards the images themselves, one cannot say that they *re-produce* architecture. They *produce* it in the first place, a production which less often benefits the reality of architectural planning than it does dreams. One sees, to take a few examples, [P.E.] Babel's heraldic, ostentatious portals, the fairy-tale castles which [Jacques] Delajoue has conjured into a shell, [Juste-Aurèle] Meissonier's knickknack architecture, [Etienne-Louis] Boullée's conception of a library that looks like a train station, and [Filippo] Juvara's ideal views ["Prospettiva ideale"] that look like glances into the warehouse of a building dealer: a completely new and untouched world of images, which Baudelaire would have ranked higher than all painting. <In Linfert's work, however, the images are submitted to a descriptive technique that succeeds in establishing the most revealing facts in this unexplored marginal realm. There is, as is commonly known,

mentary [*Kommentar*] (whose object is the *Sachgehalt*) and critique [*Kritik*] (whose object is the *Bedeutungsgehalt* or the *Wahrheitsgehalt*). See Walter Benjamin, "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, pp. 125–126.

21. Karl Giehlow, "Dürers Stich, 'Melancolia I' und der maximilianische Humanistenkreis," in *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für vervielfältigende Kunst*, Beilage der "Graphischen Künste," Vienna, 1903.

22. Linfert, "Architekturzeichnung," p. 153. In V2 the following paragraph was inserted at this point: "Already in *Late Roman Art Industry*, the marginal case—and indeed goldsmithery which considers itself applied art is just that—proved to be the point of departure for the most significant overcoming of conventional universal history with its so-called 'high points' and 'periods of decline.' When all is said and done, Wölfflin also adopted the same strategy by being the first to understand the Baroque in a positive light, a period in which even Burckhardt could see only evidence of decline. And what is more, Dvůřák's research on mannerism [Max Dvůřák, "Über Greco und den Manierismus," 1920, in *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, Munich, R. Piper, 1928, pp. 259–276; translated as "On El Greco and Mannerism," in Max Dvůřák, *The History of Art as the History of Ideas*, trans. John Hardy, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 97–108; compare also the translation by John Coolidge in *Magazine of Art*, no. 46 (January 1953), pp. 14–23] demonstrated what historical insights can be gleaned from a spiritualist distortion of the now empty schemata of the pure classical period. All this was overlooked by a rigidly periodic universal history."

a manner of representing buildings using purely painterly means. The architectural drawing is sharply distinguished from images of this sort and is found to have the closest affinity to nonrepresentational [*unbildmässige*] work, that is, the supposedly authentically architectonic presentations of buildings in topographic designs, prospects, and vedutas. Since in these, too, certain "errors" have survived up through the late eighteenth century despite all the progress in naturalism, Linfert takes this to be a peculiar imaginary world [*Vorstellungswelt*] of architecture which is markedly different from that of the painters. There are various indications that confirm the specificity of this world, the most important one being that such architecture is not primarily "seen," but rather is imagined as an objective entity [*Bestand*] and is experienced by those who approach or even enter it as a surrounding space *sui generis*, that is, without the distancing effect of the frame of the pictorial space. Thus, what is crucial in the consideration of architecture is not seeing but the apprehension [*durchspüren*] of structures. The objective effect of the buildings on the imaginative being [*vorstellungsmässige Sein*] of the viewer is more important than their "being seen." In short, the most essential characteristic of the architectural drawing is that "it does not take a pictorial detour."

So much for the formal aspects.> In Linfert's analyses, however, formal questions are very closely tied to historical circumstances. His investigation deals with "a period during which the architectural drawing began to lose its principal and decisive expression."²³ But how transparent this "process of decay" becomes here! How the architectural prospects open up in order to take into their core allegories, stage designs, and monuments! And each of these forms in turn points to unrecognized aspects which appear to the researcher Linfert in their full concreteness: Renaissance hieroglyphics, Piranesi's visionary phantasies of ruins, the temples of the Illuminati, such as we know them from the "Magic Flute."²⁴ Here it becomes evident that the hallmark of the new type of researcher is not the eye for the "all encompassing whole" nor the eye for the "comprehensive context," <(which mediocrity has claimed for itself) but rather the capacity to be at home in marginal domains. The men whose work is contained in this yearbook represent the most rigorous of this new type of researcher. They are the hope of their field of study.>²⁵

23. Linfert, "Architekturzeichnung," p. 231.

24. Benjamin is probably referring to Karl Friedrich Schinkel's epoch-making stage sets for the "Magic Flute" in 1816, whose neoclassical exoticism became a model for many subsequent stagings. Benjamin might even have seen a performance of the "Magic Flute" with these Schinkel sets, since they were still being used by the Berlin State Opera as late as 1937.

25. In V2 the concluding lines read: "with which the sedate mediocrity of the founding period used to be completely engrossed. Rather, the most rigorous challenge to the new spirit of research is the ability to feel at home in marginal domains. It is this ability which guarantees the collaborators of the new yearbook their place in the movement which—ranging from [Konrad] Burdach's work in German studies to the investigations of the history of religion being done at the Warburg Library—is filling the margins of the study of history with new life."

The Garden of Scopic Perversion from Monet to Mirbeau

EMILY APTER

In his attempt to give ocular disorders a psychoanalytical interpretation Freud cited the tale of Lady Godiva. This "beautiful legend," he wrote, "tells how all the town's inhabitants hid behind their shuttered windows, so as to make easier the lady's task of riding naked through the streets in broad daylight, and how the only man who peeped through the shutters at her revealed loveliness was punished by going blind."¹ For Freud, the fate of the renegade voyeur illustrated how *scopto-* or *scopophilia* (the "love of looking") is punished by the ego with blindness or, in the term popularized by his teacher Jean-Martin Charcot, with *scotomization* (from the Greek *skotos*, meaning "groove" or "cut"; signifying partial, distorted, or peripheral vision within the field of ophthalmology). Moving beyond the studies of hysterical vision made by Charcot and Pierre Janet between 1887 and 1889 that merely identified characteristic symptoms such as color blindness, dilated pupils, strabismus, or the twisting of the orb to reveal the whites of the eye, Freud inferred the law of *lex talionis* (*Urteilverwerfung*), literally, "retaliation," in the condemnation of a visual representation deemed sexually culpable by the faculty of judgment. This "verdict of guilty," strangely recalling the old wives' tale that masturbation leads to blindness, also evokes as its corollary the equally proverbial notion of "turning a blind eye." For Freud, however, these sayings were the folkloric expressions of a malady that was not only individual, but also collective. If in the private world of the self the punishments for *Schaulust* imposed by the ego assumed the form of hysteria, in the public realm they signaled a crisis of judgment, an imbalance in the careful treaty made by civilization between sexual drives and their institutional sublimation.

Charcot's *scotome scintillant*, characterized as an *éblouissement de ténèbres* ("dazzle of shadow") clouding the eyes of his female hysterics, became a privi-

1. Sigmund Freud, "The Psycho-Analytic View of Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision" (1910), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psycho-Analytic Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 11, p. 217. All further references to this work will be to this edition and will appear in the text abbreviated DV.

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leged sign of personal and public psychosis within the early history of psychoanalysis.² Comparing the scotoma to a "fortification à la Vauban," Charcot made a drawing of this "ophthalmic migraine" as a hatched and broken spiral:

a luminous image, first circular, then semi-circular, in the form of a zigzag; like the drawing of a fortification flickering in a very rapid, vibrating movement. An image sometimes phosphorescent, sometimes offering shades of yellow, red, or blue of varying densities. That is what we call the scintillating scotoma.

This scotoma, interfering with the visual field, was associated by Charcot with the first stages of hysteria, the "douleur" or irritation of the eye that commenced the *aura hysterica*. From Charcot to René Laforgue, the scotoma was so matter-of-factly taken by the French psychoanalytical school as the visual sign of repression that it provoked a five-year dispute between Freud and Laforgue, who insisted, despite Freud's objections, on translating *Verdrängung* (repression) as "scotomisation."⁴ Lacan, perhaps complicitous with Laforgue in his desire to "re-Frenchify" denial and disavowal, revived the term *scotoma*, using it as a metaphor for consciousness.⁵ Consciousness, as a variant of Sartrean *méconnaissance*, slides into a model of "seeingness" (*voyure*), in which the scotoma marks the vanishing point

2. See Georges Didi-Huberman's discussion of Charcot's drawing of the "scotome scintillant" and the sensation of an "éblouissement de ténèbres" in *Invention de l'hystérie*, Paris, Macula, 1982, p. 132.

3. Jean-Martin Charcot, "Leçons sur les maladies du système nerveux," *Oeuvres complètes*, III, p. 74, quoted in Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie*, p. 283.

4. The debate between Freud and Laforgue can be found in their correspondence (1923–1937), published in French in the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, no. 15 (Spring 1977), pp. 251–314. In his famous 1927 essay on "Fetishism," Freud took issue with Laforgue's term "scotomisation," arguing that "it suggests that the perception is promptly obliterated, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot of the retina. In the case we are discussing, on the contrary, we see that the perception has persisted and that a very energetic action has been exerted to keep up the denial of it." Freud maintains that the verb "to scotomize" is superfluous because his own concept of repression (including as it does a paradigm of negative affirmation or *dénégation*) suffices in the case of fetishism. The debate over how to define repression may be interpreted against the larger backdrop of competing national psychoanalytical traditions. As Elisabeth Roudinesco has shown in the first volume of her *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France* (Paris, Seuil, 1985), Laforgue and his colleague Edouard Pichon were intent on rendering the Freudian lexicon with non-Germanic terms, as if by way of returning psychoanalysis to its French roots in Charcot's clinic. Their desire for "Frenchification" became, of course, highly objectionable politically during the Occupation (with which they both collaborated). Laforgue's opportunism and compromising political record has been reviewed in detail by Roudinesco.

5. Jacques Lacan, "Anamorphosis," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, Hogarth and Norton, 1976, pp. 82–83. Here Lacan writes of the *scotoma*: "Psycho-analysis regards the consciousness as irremediably limited, and institutes it as a principle, not only of idealization, but of *méconnaissance*, as—using a term that takes on new value by being referred to a visible domain—*scotoma*. The term was introduced into the psychoanalytic vocabulary by the French School. Is it simply a metaphor? We find here once again the ambiguity that affects anything that is inscribed in the register of the scopical drive." All further references to Lacan will be to this work and to this edition. They will appear in the text abbreviated L.

where the eye catches itself off guard in the act of seeing itself see itself:

As the locus of the relation between me, the annihilating subject, and that which surrounds me, the gaze seems to possess such a privilege that it goes so far as to have me scotomized. I who look, the eye of him who sees me as object. In so far as I am under the gaze, Sartre writes, I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears. (L 84)

The scotomized Lacanian subject is caught in a contentious struggle for mastery between the eye and the gaze that parallels Charcot's dialectic between scotophilia and scotomization. Both metaphor for and visible evidence of repression, the scotoma, as Lacan uses the term, plays on an ambiguity already introduced by Charcot, where the physical sight of the brilliant *aura* was interpreted both as manifestation of, and punishment for, hysteria. Signs of the "essential vacillation of the gaze," Lacan's "spots" emerge throughout his writings as blind. Stains, punctiforms, sutures, splits, butterflies ("primal stripes . . . on the grid of desire") (L 76), or points of irradiation . . . from which "reflections pour forth, overflowing the ocular bowl" (L 94), these *taches* are the unmistakable evidence of castrated vision. Within the Lacanian lexicon, male and female viewer alike hystericize the scopic field in an effort to "camouflage" (Lacan's term) the spectacle of phallic lack.

Scotomization, the process of visual occlusion that punishes private or public *voyure-isme*, was strikingly politicized during the Dreyfus affair, when an entire nation, seemingly afflicted by hysterical vision (itself the apparent result of a blinding nationalism) refused to believe the evidence of its own eyes: that the memoranda used to inculcate Dreyfus were obvious forgeries. Looking back on some of the more significant literary portrayals of the trial, it appears that both sides in the affair were conscious of the critical role played by optical repression. In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust developed a disquisition on the theory of *lex talionis* in relation to the popular condemnation of Colonel Piquart, Dreyfus's solitary defender within the ranks of the French army:

It is a sort of Law of Compensation—a *lex talionis*—in the world of moral values, that those, no matter how intelligent or how sensitive they may be, who as the result of laziness or for some other reason have no inner, no disinterested activity on which to employ their minds, inevitably in their judgments of life attach enormous importance to the merely formal. . . .

Votes, regular attendance at meetings or sessions, indispensable calls on possible supporters, canvassing, party cries—all these are so many refuges in which we shelter from the dread necessity of turning our eyes inwards.

Moving from a general theory of how outward patriotic display acts as a cover for

inward ethical occlusion to the particular blind spots operating in Piquart's trial, Proust offers a performative enactment of *lex talionis*, registering the visual "shock" provoked by the life-sized Piquart:

There he was in the flesh, one of the general throng. It came to him [Jean Santeuil] with something of a shock that he could do nothing to modify that physical fact, each feature of which, the reddish complexion, the easy carriage of the head, made him feel almost embarrassed, such violence did they do to his imagination which so long accustomed to visualize the Colonel in a certain way had now to submit to a reality which it could not alter at will.⁶

Proust, a well-known Dreyfus supporter, was astonishingly close to his ideological opponent, Maurice Barrès, in his use of this language of visual violence to describe the affair. Barrès invoked the law of "optical aphasia" with respect to Dreyfus's assumed incapacity to respond to national values and symbols ("He is not remotely susceptible to the feelings roused in us by our land, our forefathers, the flag, or the word "honor.")⁷ Though placed "out of sight" and for the most part "out of mind" on "L'île du Diable" Dreyfus kept resurfacing as a "fly in the eye" of the nation.

The intersection of scopic field and political hysteria, one used as specular allegory of the other, was dramatically exploited in Octave Mirbeau's Dreyfusard novel *Le Jardin des supplices* (*The Torture Garden*), one among surprisingly few novels focusing on the affair.⁸ Joining the ranks of lesser known works by André Beaunier, Gabriel Trarieux, and Romain Rolland, *Le Jardin des supplices*, published in 1899, merits close reading not because its Dreyfusard message eludes decipherment, but rather, because its Dreyfusism is submerged within an ostensibly perverse and pornographic narrative.⁹ Political argument seems to be under-

6. Marcel Proust, "Colonel Picquart" in *Jean Santeuil*, trans. Gerard Hopkins, London, Penguin, 1985, pp. 328 and 335 respectively.

7. Maurice Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*, Paris, Félix Guven, 1902, p. 140.

8. Octave Mirbeau (1848–1917) was born the son of a Norman notary in the Calvados region of France. He began his career as a journalist for newspapers of right-wing tendency. A founding editor of *Grimaces* in 1883, he became famous for his virulently anti-Semitic articles. In 1896, at the height of the Dreyfus affair, he made a political about-face and joined the Dreyfusards. He also became an activist (surveyed by the police) for anarchist causes, regularly contributing prefaces, pamphlets, and political fables to books or journals of the Left. A friend of Mallarmé, as well as many other symbolist writers, his *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899) is at once symbolist in tone and a parody of literary decadence. A similar ambivalence of attitude marked his articles on impressionism, through which artists such as Rodin, Cézanne, and Monet gained considerable visibility in the public eye. His plays and novels were immensely popular at the turn of the century—a stylistic mixture of naturalist metaphor and verbal invective. *Les Vingt et un jours d'un neurasthénique* (1902) projects a modern flavor with its loosely concatenated vignettes describing the neuroses, perversions, and addictions of the middle classes, and his *La 628-E8* (1907), worthy of Marinetti, is among the first novels of the automobile. Mirbeau's best known work is *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1901) which was made into a film (*Diary of a Chambermaid*) by Luis Buñuel in 1964.

9. For an analysis of literary representations of the Dreyfus affair, see Susan Rubin Suleiman's

cut by sadomasochistic fantasy, where (as Gilles Deleuze says of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*) "history, politics, mysticism, eroticism, nationalism and perversion are closely intermingled, forming a nebula around the scenes of flagellation."¹⁰ In Mirbeau's text, the cross-contamination of pornography and politics serves to aestheticize, to "psychiatrize," and ultimately to destabilize its ideological stance. So, for example, the critique of pathology and difference (Jews, the poor, the Orientalist Other), ostensibly the core of Mirbeau's literary project, yields to a psycho-poetics of display and exhibition, a dynamic of seeing and looking that merits consideration as a kind of Lacanianism *avant la lettre*.¹¹ Whether the objects of scopic fascination are flowers exquisitely rendered with impressionist facture or tortured Chinese victims exposed before the public, the perverse curiosity of the gaze—the viewer's indulgence in scopophilic pleasure—is dramatically exploited even as it is put theoretically and politically into question.

*

Le Jardin des supplices qualifies as pornographic more in terms of certain stylistic and structural similarities to a Sadian text than in terms of its erotic content.¹² Just as the Marquis de Sade had devised a syntax of tortures and sexual perversions classifiable, repeatable, and combinatorial like the elements of a language, so Mirbeau, in his description of a Chinese prison, enumerates infinite variations of punishment and debauchery in a tone of deliberately affected irony. Starting with prosaic forms—whipping, branding, starving, or garotting—the visitors are soon initiated into more sophisticated torments: the "torture of the caress," consisting of sexually exciting the male member until the prisoner dies of pleasure, or the display in a niche of a naked woman whose genitalia have been abraded:

Another woman, in another niche, her legs spreadeagled (*écartées*), or rather quartered (*écartelées*), had her neck and arms in iron clamps. . . . Her eyelids, nostrils, lips, and sexual parts were rubbed with red pepper and her nipples were squeezed by two screws.¹³

essay "The Literary Significance of the Dreyfus Affair," in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 117–139.

10. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil, New York, George Braziller, 1971, p. 10.

11. Rosalind Krauss provocatively treated the theme of "Exhibit/Exhibitionisme," in relation to Duchamp's *Etant Donn e*, in a lecture delivered at a conference entitled "Mostly Modernism and Some Post," organized by Mary Ann Caws at the CUNY Graduate Center, New York, March 25, 1988.

12. *Le Jardin des supplices* was marketed as pornography, especially by its English publishers (London, Tandem, 1969), who, according to Reg Carr, cut out the Dreyfusard preface. See his *Anarchism in France: The Case of Octave Mirbeau*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1977.

13. Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices*, Paris, Fasquelle, 1949, p. 224. All further references to this work will be to this edition and will appear in the text abbreviated JS. All translations of this work are my own.

The skewered, pried-open figuration of the female sex — fascinating and repellent like Freud's fetish, yet far too "exposed" to function as a fetish — also foreshadows the image of the *speculum*, a term deployed by Luce Irigaray to suggest both the desecration of the female body through barbaric gynecological practice (where "inside" turned "outside" results in "over-exposure") and the more general condition of woman's occlusion throughout history.¹⁴

Emphasizing his lurid vision through compulsive repetition, Mirbeau replicates these infernal "niches" in miniature as display cabinets in a museum in which exquisitely crafted art treasures are sardonically presented for viewer delectation:

These niches contained painted and sculpted wood blocks representing, with that terrifying realism which is a specialty of Oriental art, every genre of torture commonly used in China: scenes of decapitation, strangulation, the flaying and morselation of flesh. . . . (JS 148)

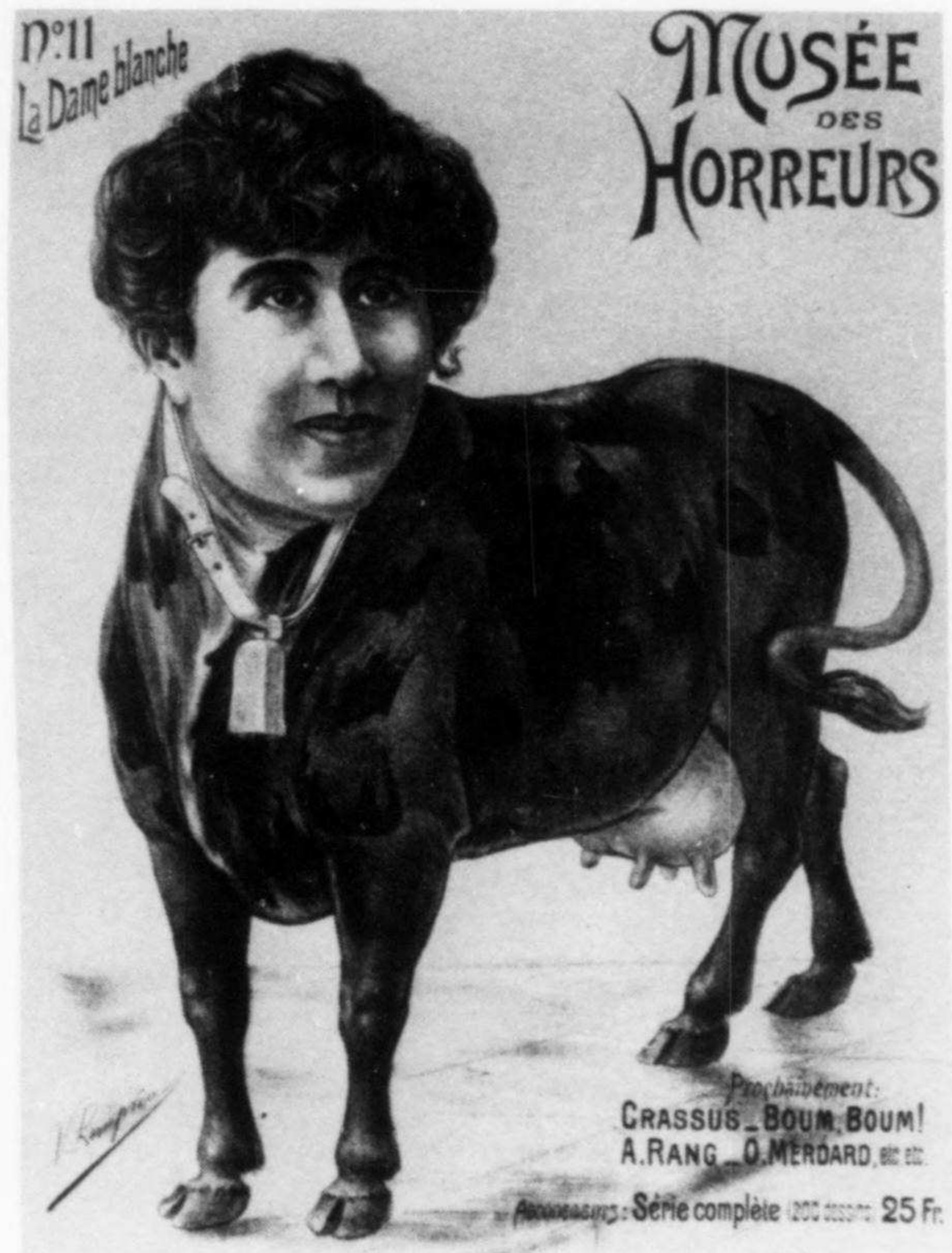
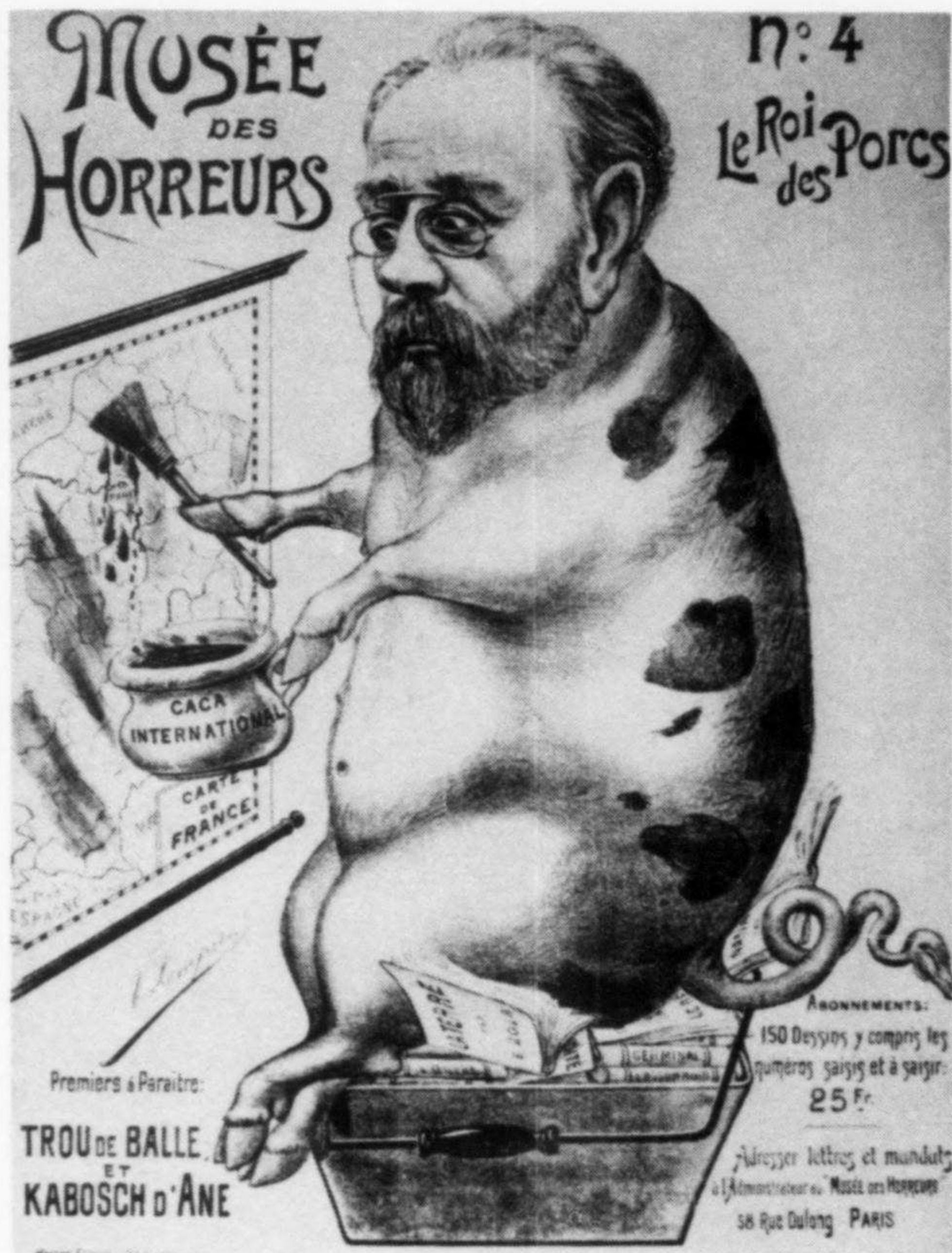
This museum of horrors, a grotesque counterpart of the Musée de l'Homme or Charcot's clinic, parodies the taxonomy of cultural and psychological curiosities as well as their exhibition to a prurient audience. Charcot's famous "man in a cage" feeding on raw meat before a circus public — a case history of "degeneracy" — finds its mocking parallel in Mirbeau's imprisoned poets, condemned to recite on command in return for rotten scraps.¹⁵ The female victims recall Charcot's bevy of performing hysterics, women like the celebrated Alphonsine Bar, Louise Glaiz, and Blanche Wittmann, who were trained to produce convulsions before a curious public.¹⁶

Lest one read this museum as referring exclusively to Charcot's clinic, it must be remembered that the culture of sadistic, racist iconography, diffused by anti-Third Republic newspapers such as *La Libre Parole*, *La Croix*, *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Courrier Français*, *Le Cri de Paris*, *Psst . . . !* and *Le Sifflet*, had been given a tremendous boost by the Dreyfus affair. As a freak show featuring bestial specimens of humanity, *Le Jardin* explicitly specularizes the anti-Semitic caricatures of popular artists such as Jean-Louis Forain, Adolphe Willette, Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Félix Vallotton, Caran d'Ache, and Gyp. Published in the same year as Mirbeau's novel (1899), during Dreyfus's second trial, a set of virulently anti-Semitic posters by the illustrator Lenepveu, marketed as a Musée des Hor-

14. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985. Though the present essay does not focus on the complex issue of gender in Mirbeau's oeuvre (he was a blatant misogynist), our use of the expression "blind spots," (*points aveugles* in French) intentionally "quotes" Irigaray's feminist ascription. See, in particular, her chapter entitled "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry."

15. J.M. Charcot, *Leçons du mardi 1887-1888: Hystérie et dégénérescence chez l'homme* in *J.M. Charcot: L'hystérie*, ed. E. Trillat, Toulouse, Privat, 1971, pp. 143-45.

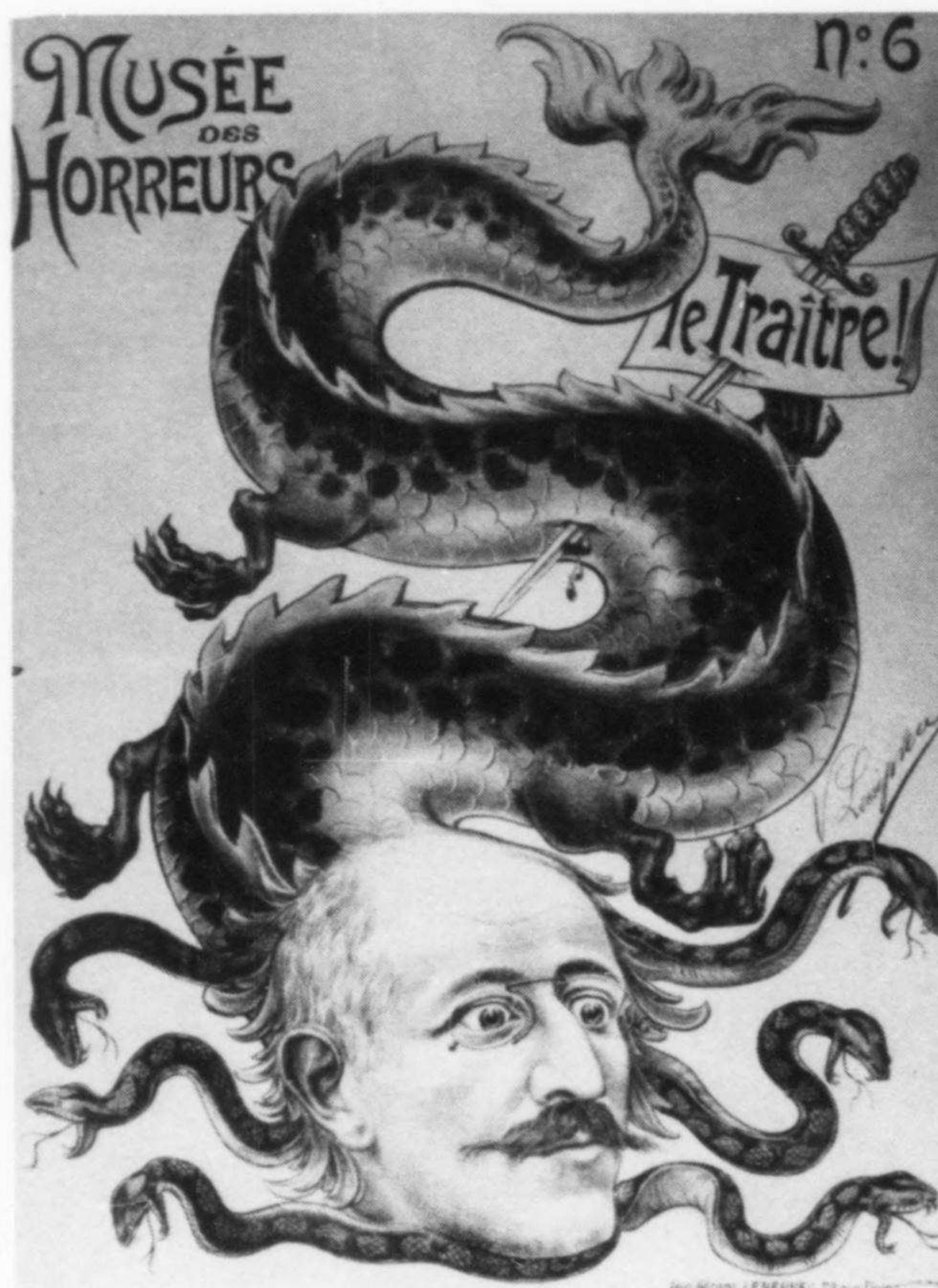
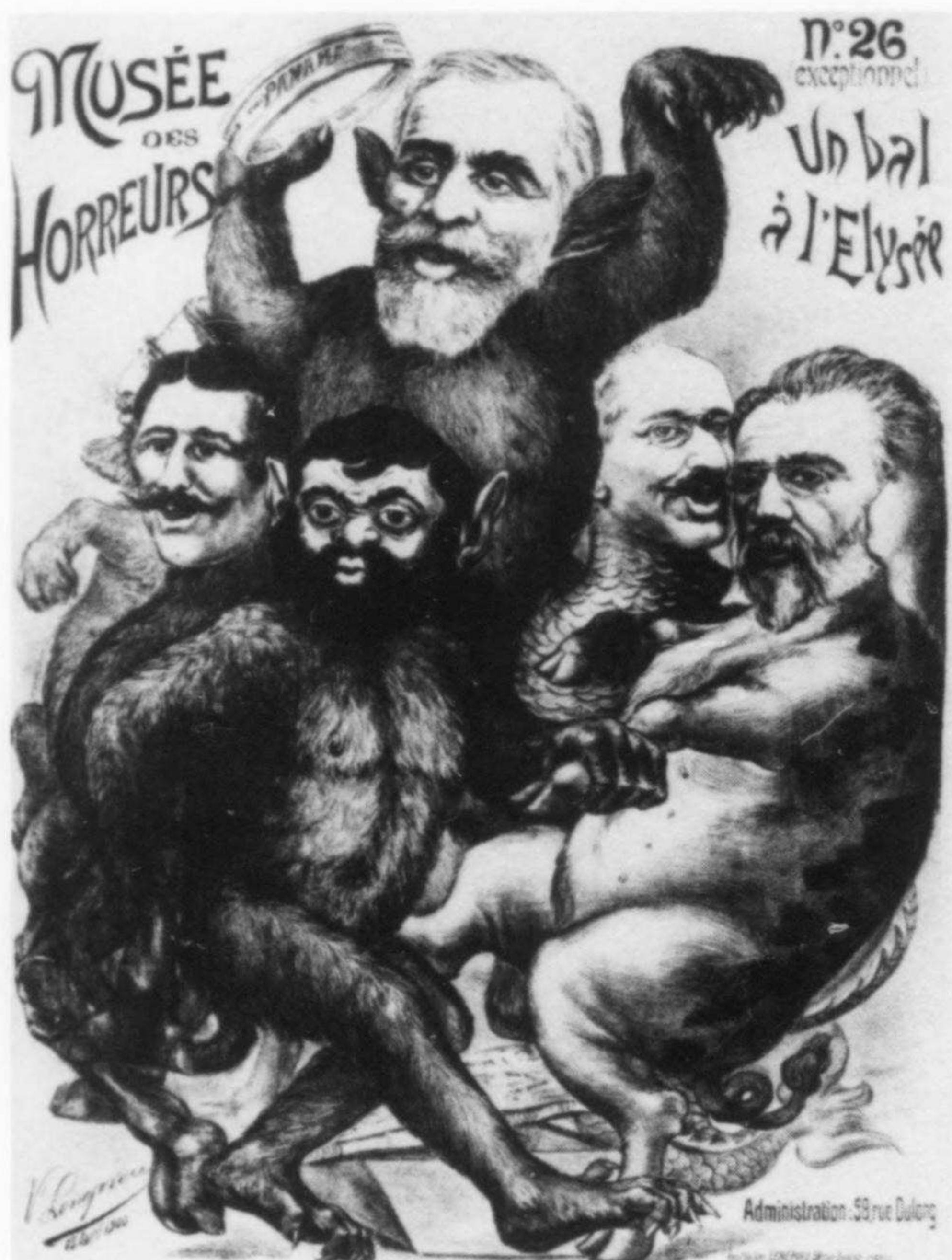
16. For a discussion of this "living pathological museum" see Joan Copjec's "Flavit et Dissipati Sunt," *October*, no. 18 (Fall 1981), pp. 20-40.



V. Lenepveu. Musée des Horreurs. 1900. Left: The King of Pigs (Zola); right: The White Lady (Séverine).

reurs, must also be read alongside Mirbeau's literary horror show. The chilling resemblance between the images of these cartoons and those of Mirbeau's novel is due, in part, to the fact that Mirbeau had previously been an anti-Semitic writer for his own journal, *Les Grimaces* (a clone of the more famous paper *Le Rire*).¹⁷ Where Lenepveu's illustrations depict Jews and Dreyfusards as caca-ingesting pigs (Zola), bovine females (Séverine), drunken elephants (Jaurès), and

17. In his early politics Mirbeau exhibited a fanatical anti-Semitism. During the Dreyfus affair he reversed his position so completely that many suspected him of trying to protect his place among the literary ranks that supported Zola. Militarist, monarchist, and xenophobe, he vented his splenic hatreds throughout the early 1880s in the weekly newspaper *Les Grimaces*, which he founded with Paul Hervieu, Alfred Capus, and Grosclaude. In many of his articles, he launched *ad hominem* attacks on the Rothschilds, pictured France as the victim of speculators in league with the Jews, and accused his country of having made of Judaism a state religion.



V. Lenepveu. Musée des Horreurs. 1900. Left: Ball at the Elysée (the Grand Rabbi Zadoc Kahn, Picquart, Reinach, Dreyfus, and Zola); right: The Traitor (Dreyfus).

cloven-footed demons (Piquart, Reinach, Dreyfus, et al.), Mirbeau presents a breviary of dehumanized prisoners wallowing in their own excrement and confined in cages like animals in a zoo.¹⁸

Le Jardin's diegesis is structured, then, around the central image of a zoological museum for which the narrator must furnish new exotic specimens. A corrupt politician masquerading as a Darwinian comparative embryologist, the narrator has been implicated in a scandal and banished to the Orient to discover "the origin of life." On board ship he encounters Clara, a pre-Raphaelite femme fatale, who, after seducing him, enjoins him to accompany her to the torture garden, itself hierarchically structured like Dante's *Inferno* to provide a public

18. See the catalogue for the exhibit (held 1987–88 at the Jewish Museum, New York), *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, Justice*, pp. 244–252.

panorama of increasingly grotesque tortures. Mirbeau's lightly veiled allegories of political corruption presented, as in *Les lettres persanes*, under the guise of a visit to the East, were undoubtedly recognizable to contemporary readers, so too was the implied comparison of the garden to a combination of Charcot's Salpêtrière and the newly instituted Musée Guimet. Mirbeau notes the latter by name in the novel, but only for litotic effect; the Guimet museum's famous collections are deprecatingly evoked so as to deepen our appreciation of the truly dazzling *Gesamtkunstwerk* of suffering proffered by the Chinese garden.

The novel's frontispiece, a curious text in its own right, "exhibits" the latest fashionable theories from Social Darwinism (*sélectionnisme*) to naturalism and anti-Semitism. Assembled in a salon, literati spar over subjects such as the destiny of the species, the female sex, and racial typology. A loquacious philosopher advances the opinion that all men are potential assassins, substantiating his claim by identifying the fatal "stigmata" ("in the look, the neck, the shape of the cranium, the maxillaries, the zygoma of the cheeks") that mark the faces of any crowd chosen at random (JS 10). Here again we encounter an implied political critique of the psychiatric establishment couched in a language of visual semiotics. In a parody of clinical discourse, Mirbeau elides the theories of Hippolyte Bernheim and Paul Aubry—who wrote on the "contagion of murder" in the early 1890s—with the notions of criminal physiognomy developed by characterologists such as Cesare Lombroso and Gina Lombroso Ferrero. In an era when Alphonse Bertillon (an employee of the Paris police department and "handwriting expert" during the Dreyfus affair) was putting Lombroso's methods to disciplinary use, perfecting the photographic recording of criminal traits and compiling precise, detailed inventories of prisoners' handwriting, fingerprints, tattoos, and phrenological contours, Mirbeau's satire alludes implicitly to the racial caricatures of Dreyfus by cartoonists and legal experts alike.¹⁹

What is distinctive about Mirbeau's rendering of these pseudoscientific practices is his conversion of the particularism of traits attributed to the Jew or "born assassin" into a generalized morphology applicable to the whole of humanity. Just as Lombroso had isolated the "born prostitute" according to hereditary abnormalities similar to those of the female "savage" in primitive societies—protuberant jaws, cysts, crooked teeth, large hips, obesity, excessive hairiness, and abundant tattoos—so Mirbeau isolates the "signs" of the murderer.²⁰ But by universalizing his pathology, he undermines the entire psycho-physiognomical method, which depends on specificity, on the isolation of difference, deviation,

19. For a fascinating analysis of this classificatory tradition earlier in the nineteenth century, see Richard Sieburth, "Same Difference: The French *Physiologies* 1840–1842," in *Notebooks in Cultural Analysis*, vol. I, no. 1 (1985), pp. 163–200.

20. Cesare Lombroso and Gina Lombroso Ferrero, *La Femme criminelle et la prostituée*, Paris, 1896. As cited by Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978, p. 442.

See also, Hippolyte Bernheim, "La Suggestion criminelle," *Revue de Hypnotisme*, no. 4 (1890), pp. 243–301, and Paul Aubry, *La Contagion du meurtre*, Paris, Alcan, 1894.

and anomaly. This travesty of socio-racial typology points the frontispiece to its fundamental, Dreyfusard tenet: criminality is not measurable according to positivistic methods; neither handwriting tests nor anatomical indices defined in terms of class, race, or religion qualify as legitimate proof, for man is universally murderous and loth to relinquish his favorite sport—scapegoating. “Never,” Mirbeau’s philosopher pontificates, “was the passion for blood and the joy of the chase so completely and cynically displayed as in the Dreyfus affair” (JS 15).

Displayed (étalé), this choice of adjective, like the word *stigmata*, becomes increasingly significant. Linked to a cosmic theory of what might be called *thanatophilia*, the scapegoating instinct as manifest in the persecution of Dreyfus is part of a larger problem of the visual lure or bait. Like the “displayed” female sex organs in the garden, the spectacle of a martyred, battered Dreyfus attracts a hungry crowd. In the frontispiece, the philosopher evokes these visually salivating hordes as they “play” on the fairground, forsaking the merry-go-rounds and swings for target sport: “Everywhere, under the tents and illuminated boutiques, were the dummies of corpses (*des simulacres de mort*), parodies of massacre, representations of hecatombs. . . . Were these good people ever happy!” (JS 11). The reflections of Lacan on the workings of *invidia*, or the evil eye, provide a particularly appropriate gloss on Mirbeau’s “games”: “How could this *showing* satisfy something, if there is not some appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking?” he queries. His own answer, with its continuation of the gustatory trope, seems to echo the equation between hunger and sight set up in *Le Jardin* during the initial Tantalus episode:

This appetite of the eye that must be fed produces the hypnotic value of painting. For me, this value is to be sought on a much less elevated plane than might be supposed, namely, in that which is the true function of the organ of the eye, the eye filled with voracity, the evil eye. (L 115)

Consonant with the Lacanian evil eye, the restless orb of Mirbeau’s heroine (“with a glint drunk with joy”) projects the image of its own appetite, even as it “feasts” on the voracious stares of the starving prisoners: “simultaneously, twenty eyeballs, each staring out of their sockets, were hurled at the meat, shooting red glances, fixated glances of hunger and fear” (JS 145). The entire spectacle, reflected *en abyme*, is witnessed by a covey of society ladies enticed by this *comédie bouffe*: “Curious women followed the movements of this cruel game with an attentive and delighted air” (JS 147).

Through its black carnivalization of popular pastimes and amusements, *Le Jardin* reinforces the notion of the crowd’s scopophilic attraction to mangled and mutilated quarry. A sado-erotic rhetoric prevails, featuring murder (the ultimate “lure” of desire) as an end to sexual fever and tortuous dissatisfaction:

And it’s man-individual, and it’s man-crowd, and it’s the animal, the plant, the element, all of nature in the end, which, prompted by the

cosmic forces of love, hurls itself at murder, hoping to find outside of life a means of satisfying the furious desires within life, desires that devour and spurt, like jets of dirty foam! (JS 231)

Here, the "dirty foam" (*sale écume*), the sperm of a frustrated nature, which—as a result of being so long imprisoned—turns to blood, doubles as the politically valorized master *tache*—the "ineffaceable red spot"—that appears, as in *Macbeth*, on the ghostly bodies of the narrator's past acquaintances, all innocent victims like Dreyfus.

Mirbeau's intersection of scapegoating and *voyure-isme* reveals the pornographic cast of anti-Semitism, emphasizing its identification in the popular unconscious with visual obscenity and implicating, as accessories to the crime, all reader/viewers "caught in the act of looking." Mirbeau's scopic critique was directed, however, not only at the immediate scandal of the Dreyfus affair, but also toward the domestic repercussions of the colonial expansion of previous decades. While Dreyfus himself was banished to a distant colony, a tropical wasteland where he languished for five years in a fetid hut, his legs in shackles and his lucidity dissipated by paludal fever, Mirbeau was intent on demonstrating that the most deplorable wasteland, the moral one, was located in the heart of France. To the heinous sin of scapegoating he added the crimes of empire: colonial exploitation, enslavement, racism, and the annihilation of indigenous cultures. Systematically, he brought the catalogue of barbaric practices associated by the average Frenchman with tribal societies—human sacrifice, idolatry, rape, cannibalism—home, so to speak, to Europe.

Thus in the course of a motorcar tour through Belgium, in what is often referred to as the first automobile novel, *La 628-E-8* (1907), Mirbeau conflated French anti-Semitism and "primitive" human sacrifice. Picaresque in genre and jovial in tone, the novel yields suddenly and unexpectedly to an account of the pogroms in Russia narrated by an old Jew in the city of Antwerp. Tsarist brigands sack his store, rape and murder his wife, shoot his sons, and commit atrocities on his daughter: "his daughter, poor Sarah, was found on his stall, dead among the vegetables and crushed fruits, and they even had the force to ram the stumps of her legs into her gaping stomach."²¹ Here again Mirbeau employs the shocking device of display, scotomizing the horrified, hypnotized gaze of the reader/viewer. Wincing at the spectacle, we divert our gaze, only to have our eyes fall on another chilling vignette entitled "Red Rubber." In this story, a kind of Baudelairean *flâneur* traps us beguilingly with a visual curiosity in the course of an innocent urban promenade:

I stopped in front of a little boutique whose display was strange: there were pyramids of little objects, little squares, little cylinders, little

21. Octave Mirbeau, *La 623-E-8*, Paris, 10/18, 1977, p. 183. All further references will be to this edition and will appear in the text abbreviated L6.

parallelepipeds, little mounds of dull matter, alternately grey and black. Nothing else. No sign. No label. (L6 146)

The banality of these objects, displayed in the window of an ordinary hardware store in Belgium, is contradicted by the narrator's inexplicable fixation on them: "I couldn't tear my eyes away from these pieces of rubber," he confesses (L6 147). Following an intuition ("Congo, right?— Yes, the shopkeeper replied simply, but proudly"), he ascertains the strange and forbidding origin of the rubber. As if not wanting to believe the evidence of his own eyes, but impelled nonetheless, he projects before our already traumatized retina a scene of Africans, one minute smiling, dancing, and marveling at the array of European goods, the next moment butchered by the colonizer:

In the bits and pieces of grey and black rubber, I clearly distinguished the beautiful torso of a raped and decapitated negress, and I also saw old people, mutilated and agonizing, their dry limbs cracking. And I had to close my eyes to escape the sight of all these horrors, hidden in the rows of rubber there in front of me, so still, so neutral, so suddenly animated. (L6 148)

Smitten by *lex talionis*, the narrator no longer succeeds in obfuscating his perception of flesh transformed into rubber. The dull, neutral mass of inert matter that goes into the making of seemingly anodine and ubiquitous industrial materials—tires, cables, and telephones wires—becomes, like the fetish in Freud's definition, uncannily "animated." A signifier of colonial enslavement as well as of the repressed evidence of European murder (instinctively "blinded" or censored by the Western eye as it navigates the city street), "red rubber" emerges as yet another trope of hysterical vision. Stained by the "red blot" of native blood, the neat stacks of goods that line the shelves of European shops, a kind of demonic transubstantiation, attest to the distortion of vision that has to have occurred in order for Western commerce to accept the debasement of human life to the level of its use-value as product, *Stoff*, expendable substance. "If negro blood oils our tires and wires, how good for business!" the narrator expostulates in a simulation of the stalwart burgher whose profit motive triumphs in every European capital. "Can we," he adds, "better assimilate the inferior races to our own civilization, or more usefully absorb them into our lives and commerce?" (L6 149). The note of intensified cynicism that accompanies this inversion of barbarism and civilization echoes that of *Le Jardin des supplices*, especially the moment when the master executioner bemoans the "waste of death," that is, the killing *without* torture, characteristic of modern times.

Wherever brutality appears comfortingly distant in an exotic setting—Africa or the Orient—Mirbeau relentlessly re-displaces it back to Europe, thereby underscoring civilization's universal blindness to cruelty. But this blindness, in the context of Mirbeau's moral critique of inhumanity, never remains at

the level of simple ignorance. The narrator of *Le Jardin des supplices*, like the enlightened *flâneur* of "Red Rubber," has the scales of oblivion removed from his eyes only to lose the didactic drift of the horrific spectacle before him. As if "forgetting," the conclusion which he is meant to draw at the sight of Clara's sadistic *jouissance*, the narrator is seduced (drawn in, as if by a "lure") through her sublime aesthetic of cruelty. Swathed in fashionable belle époque colors, Clara's gilded person comes at the price of the viewer's moral anaesthetization. Mirbeau heightens this dilemma by crafting a demonic analogy between the bloodred highlights of her hair and the "spots of blood" that stain her elegant footwear, as, a *Gradiva* of the East, she glides through the debris of rotting skulls, quivering brains, and fresh pools of blood in the torture garden. Even this staining of the foot is a double profanation, for Clara is shod in slippers of fine yellow leather fashioned from the skin of murdered Orientals. For Mirbeau, it would seem, the stain marks the spot where scotomization *fails* to censor, and where scopophilia triumphs by showering the eye with a dazzling, decadent spectacle of color and light.

*

When the narrator first visits the garden of tortures, his eye is "dazzled" (*ébloui*) in a manner that strangely recalls the "éblouissement de ténèbres" identified with Charcot's hysterical scotoma:

I looked, dazzled; dazzled by the sweetest light, the clearest sky, dazzled even by the grand blue shadows which the trees softly threw on the grass like a lazy carpet; dazzled by the shimmering fantasmagoria of the flowers. . . .

I looked avidly, without ever tiring of what I saw. (JS 161)

Such a representation, almost painterly in its evocation of an impressionist scene, returns us to Lacan's characterization of "how the appetite of the eye . . . produces the hypnotic value of a painting." Hysterical vision and hypnotic fixation come together in this impression-showered garden. Was Mirbeau, then, adding impressionism as yet another level of symbolic pastiche to his multi-tiered specular allegory? As before, it is the stain and the pain which draw the reader into complicity with scopophilic looking.

It was a commonplace of late nineteenth-century criticism to characterize the impressionists as "spot makers."²² The Goncourt brothers employed the

22. In the Goncourts's *Journal* (May 8, 1888) we find the following reference to impressionists as "faisers de taches": *Ah! les bons impressionistes! Il n'y a qu'eux, d'artistes! De drôles d'artistes qui n'ont jamais pu réaliser quoi que ce soit . . . Or, la difficulté de l'art, c'est la réalisation: l'oeuvre poussée à ce degré de fini qui la sort de la croquade, de l'esquisse, et, en fait un tableau . . . Oui, des esquisseurs, des faisiers de taches, et encore des taches qui ne sont pas de leur invention, des taches volées à Goya, des taches volées aux Japonais . . .*

term in a pejorative sense in *Manette Salomon*, when Coriolus conquers the public with an Ingres-style painting that allows him to transcend the category of a mere *faiseur de taches* ("maker of spots"). Akin to another preferred keyword of the Goncourts, *plaque* (meaning "plaster appliqué," "veneer"), *tache* correlated impressionist impasto with the flaky epidermis of a syphilis victim.²³ The critic Albert Wolff evoked this image of cadaverous skin when he attacked Renoir: "Just try," he urged in his article on the second major impressionist show (1876), "to explain to M. Renoir that a woman's torso is not a decomposing mass of flesh covered with black and blue marks and conjuring up a putrefied corpse!"²⁴ The *tache* was also maligned by Claretie, who castigated Manet for his reliance on this egregiously nonrepresentational sign.²⁵

Huysmans, reiterating the general reaction in his *L'Art moderne*, and availing himself of a self-ironizing rhetoric of excess not unlike Mirbeau's, saw in the impressionist effort to paint the depth, transparency, and evanescence of light and color nothing but opacity—a sickly pallor that clung to the surface of the canvas. Subjecting Monet's feminine subjects to a gaze both violent and violating, Huysmans, as is well known, saw these *femmes-fleurs* ("women-flowers"), with their faces congested by an infernal blush or chalky with layers of make-up, as resembling the inmates of a clinic, an intimation of his imbricated analogy between madness and impressionism. Referring to the paintings as "touching follies," Huysmans asserted that the "works derived their inspiration from physiology and medicine." Finally, he alluded to Charcot directly, despite a stated resolve not to name names: "most of the paintings corroborate Dr. Charcot's experiments on changes in color perception which he noted in many of his hysterics at the Salpêtrière. . . . They had a malady of the retina."²⁶

In ascribing to the impressionists a "malady of the retina," a form of color blindness, Huysmans appears to have been following Charcot, who had himself joined the pathology of hysteria to the study of art. Ranging through the history of art, from medieval grottesche to the postures of torture or spiritual euphoria used in conventional hagiography, to his own sketches of female hysterics in positions of anguished contortion, Charcot sees in the iconography of demonic possession a common thread of visual disturbance. Charting each clownish, savage, giddy, or agonistic gesture, Charcot always registered the changes to the eye. In the prelude to the hysterical attack he noted, among other symptoms, the habitual occurrence of an "obnubation of vision." A drifting into somnolence, or clouding over of consciousness, was followed, according to Charcot, by visual revulsion ("la convulsion en haut des globes"): the eye, flipping backwards into the head, would send up white shutters as if in retaliation (*lex talionis*) against

23. See Jean-Pierre Richard, "Deux écrivains épidermiques Edmond et Jules de Goncourt," in *Littérature et sensation*, Paris, Seuil, 1954, pp. 266–283.

24. As cited by Gustave Geffroy, *Claude Monet: sa vie, son oeuvre*, Paris, Macula, 1980, p. 87.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 103.



Illustration of hysterical spasm of the eyelid from J.M. Charcot's Nouvelle Iconographie.

some terrible mental or moral shock.²⁷ It was with such a state of scotomization that Huysmans hyperbolically characterized Monet: "occasionally a landscape artist of talent, more often, a man off his rocker, someone who rams his finger into his eye up to the elbow."²⁸

The "resolution" of the hysterical attack was, Charcot argued, punctuated by the closing of the eyes, and the entire crisis subject at any moment to the effects of "hallucinations." He referred to the "sad pictures" that moved before his patients' eyes; pictures of fires, wars, revolutions, and assassinations that, like the hellish images of the torture garden, were spattered everywhere with spots of blood. It is easy to see in these spots, the macabre version of Charcot's "dazzling scotoma." In *Les démoniaques dans l'art* he noted: "During the happy phase, the patient thinks that she has been transported to a magnificent garden, a kind of Eden, where the flowers are *red* and the inhabitants *clothed in red*" (D 102, emphasis original).

27. J.M. Charcot and Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*, Paris, Macula, 1984, p. 94. All further references to this work will be to this edition and will appear in the text abbreviated D.

28. Huysmans, p. 106.

The "hysterical" spots of the impressionists and Charcot's hallucinatory flowers were to be merged, in Mirbeau's satire of symbolist synaesthesia, with the fatally scented flowers of the garden of tortures itself. But on another level, the comparison between madness, impressionist technique, and the flower garden was literally forced by the existence of that most hallowed of impressionist landscapes—Monet's Giverny—a garden that in turn served Mirbeau as the real model for his own Oriental *enclos*.

In their plans, Giverny and the torture garden exhibit a disturbing similarity. Giverny was divided into symmetrical sections, each containing carefully aligned flower beds. The path running down the middle sported a succession of arches festooned with climbing roses, and led to the heart of Giverny—the "jardin d'eau" containing the broad "Bassin" on which floated elusive islands of "nymphéas." The pool was surrounded by luxuriant foliage—outstretched "agapanthes" or "love-flowers," iris, lilies, and "glycines"—Oriental blossoms suspended from the Japanese bridge. Mirbeau's garden mirrored this layout virtually element for element:

A huge pond traversed by a bright green Japanese bridge marks the center of the garden in a hollow of the foothills where successive sinuous paths converge. Nymphaeas and nelumbiums animate the water with their processional leaves and wandering corollas in yellow, mauve, white, pink, and purple. Bunches of iris raise their delicate shafts . . . Artistically sculpted canopies of wistaria extend their vault over the water, which reflects the blue of their bobbing, suspended clusters. (JS 159–160)²⁹

Edmond de Goncourt, reminiscing on afternoons spent at Giverny with Monet and Mirbeau, sensed the "unnatural parentage" between the two gardens: "And who knows if it wasn't the dear memory of these flowers that one day exhaled their aroma of lotus and mangrove over the charnel house of *Le Jardin des supplices*."³⁰ Edmond's conjecture may be substantiated not only by Mirbeau's personal passion for gardening ("I love the compost heap as I love a woman"), but also by the fact that it was a gardener recommended by Mirbeau who supervised the upkeep of Giverny when Monet became sufficiently solvent.³¹ In

29. The description of the garden reads as follows in French: Un vaste bassin que traverse l'arc d'un point de bois peint en vert vif, marque le milieu du jardin au creux d'un vallonement ou aboutissent quantité d'allées sinueuses (. . .) Des nymphéas, des nelumbiums animent l'eau de leurs feuilles processionnelles et de leurs corolles errantes jaunes, mauves, blanches, roses, pourprés; des touffes d'iris dressent leurs hampes fines (. . .) des glycines artistement taillées s'élèvent et se penchent, en voute au-dessus de l'eau qui reflète le bleu de leurs grappes retombantes et balancées (my emphases).

30. As cited by Edmond Pilon, *Octave Mirbeau*, Paris, Bibliothèque Internationale d'Édition, 1903, p. 8.

31. See, Claire Joyes, *Claude Monet et Giverny*, St. Nile, Chêne, 1985, p. 100. Mirbeau's "J'aime le terreau comme on aime une femme" (Joyes, p. 28) comes from an undated letter to Monet (1884) published in *Les Cahiers d'Aujourd'hui* (1923), vol. 9, p. 168.

their letters to each other, painter and writer sympathetically exchanged accounts of their horticultural triumphs and failures.

An art critic of some repute, Mirbeau both collected and wrote on painting and sculpture.³² His essays, turned with spontaneity and brio (masking their lack of intellectual depth), appeared regularly in *Le Figaro*, *L'Echo de Paris*, and *Le Journal*. Converting his misogyny into a set of aesthetic criteria, he composed fanciful diatribes against the sickly, "effeminate" tendencies of pre-Raphaelite painting, travestied the provocative feminine curves of art nouveau, and promoted those artists he deemed robust and virile, from Delacroix, Pissarro, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Maillol to his particular favorites, Rodin (whose wash drawings for an edition of *Le Jardin* published by Ambroise Vollard in 1902 constitute, according to Frederic Grunfeld, "one of Rodin's rare forays into book illustration") and Monet.³³

Nothing in Mirbeau's first essay (1889) on Monet (lauding the impressionist's translucent color and natural, "virginal" freshness) prepares us for *Le Jardin's* literary tableau of a grotesque, lubricious, "de-repressed" Giverny.³⁴ In Mirbeau's novel, Monet's preferred flowers are systematically transformed into savage freaks of nature. The parody begins on a linguistic level where plant names traditionally personified by means of their composite Latinate roots are reformulated by Mirbeau in literal evocations of sexual function and character type. Writing in a virtual dialect of botanical onomastics, Mirbeau evokes "giant luzules which mixed their leaves with the *phalliforme*, *vulvoid* blossoms of the most stupendous arroidées," or "a *menisperme* embracing a stone column whose

32. In 1919 part of Mirbeau's collection was sold, including painting and sculpture by Monet, Cézanne, Sisley, Van Gogh, Rodin, Pissarro, Vuillard, and Bonnard. For further details, see Françoise Cachin, "Un défenseur oublié de l'art moderne," *l'Oeil*, vol. 90 (June 1962), pp. 50-55.

See also, a commemorative issue of *Les Cahiers d'Aujourd'hui*, vol. 8 (1922), pp. 105-172, which, in addition to containing significant portions of Mirbeau's correspondence with Monet (roughly between 1884 and 1886), also includes reminiscences by distinguished artists and critics: Gustave Geffroy (who compares Mirbeau to Goya, Swift, and Daumier in his mastery of caricature); Frantz Jourdain ("he had a cult for flowers"); and Thadée Natanson ("a collector who derived more pleasure from thinking about the painter than amassing their works").

33. Frederic V. Grunfeld, *Rodin: A Biography*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1987, p. 274. This magnificent book, which I examined at the Bibliothèque Nationale after learning of its existence from Julia Przybos, raises further questions regarding an aesthetics of perversion common to Rodin and Mirbeau. As Grunfeld points out, however, Rodin's nudes are surprisingly unerotic. Grunfeld explains what happened as follows: "The result [of the collaboration between Rodin and the master lithographer Auguste Clot] was one of the most striking *livres d'artiste* of the century, though most of the drawings have only the most tenuous connection with the text. According to the humor magazine *le Canard Enchaîné*, Rodin had "neglected to read the novel" before delivering the illustrations. Actually, he did make some preparatory studies of nude women undergoing torture but these were left out of the book: where the text speaks of agonies and ecstasies Rodin merely shows calm, lyrical nudes that may well have come from his existing stock of such drawings, already mounting into the hundreds."

34. Octave Mirbeau, "Claude Monet," *Le Figaro* (March 10, 1899), in *Des artistes*, Paris, 10/18, 1986, pp. 88-96. Mirbeau also wrote the preface to a catalogue for Monet's show "Vues de la Tamise à Londres" held from May 9 to June 4, 1904, at the Galeries Durand-Ruel.



Auguste Rodin. Woman Sculpted by the Executioner into a Man (illustration for Le Jardin des supplices). 1902.

base was covered by *nudicaules delphiniums*" (JS 159, 204). If Mirbeau here seems to invent his own floral language of the Jabberwocky, elsewhere he pastiches the style and stock characters of fin-de-siècle boudoir literature: "The flower is nothing but a sex, milady," states the executioner, "These marvelous silky, velvety petals, these soft, supple, strokable fabrics, they are the curtains of an alcove, the drapes of a nuptial bed where the sex organs come together" (JS 191-92).

Mirbeau's mordant satire continues with the transformation of the gardener into a grafter and sculptor of human flesh. This figure of Père Hortus was originally conceived by Mirbeau in a newspaper story as a breeder of floral monsters (he causes his hibiscus to "miscarry").³⁵ In *Le Jardin*, he is recast as the chief executioner, who, comparing himself to a surgeon or artist, boasts of having "remodeled a man from head to foot," and, most diabolical of all, of sculpting a woman out of the detached skin of a man ("D'un homme j'ai fait une femme . . . Hé! . . . hé! . . . hé . . .") (JS 179, 180).

Parodying the encyclopedic commonplaces of the nineteenth-century "Traité du jardinage" and the symbolist vogue of sexual androgyny, Mirbeau's genetic experiments culminate in the crossbreeding of women with Baudelairean flowers of evil. The result is a species of foliated vulva whose stem is nourished by human detritus and whose petals are spackled with the blood of the innocent. But however horrible this specimen strikes us in the context of the torture garden, it appears more sinister still when resituated in the context of Mirbeau's second essay on Monet (written in 1891, some eight years prior to *Le Jardin*). If, on first reading, the article appears to be an anodine "appreciation," it gradually reveals itself as a sinister prolepsis of the garden of scopic perversion.

Entitled, like Mirbeau's first article, "Claude Monet," the flowers, with their inexhaustible sexual appetites, provide a milieu of nature in heat out of which are born Monet's own strange progeny. Both garden and painting merge in Mirbeau's imagination, pictures themselves almost alive, and filled with undercurrents of "troubling mystery."³⁶ In a carefully staged *expositio* of three images drawn from Monet, Mirbeau creates a sense of the taboo, insidiously undermining the apparently carefree and sun-filled world of impressionist flower painting.

35 "Savez-vous ce que je viens de faire? me dit-il. Je viens de féconder un hibiscus . . . L'hibiscus déteste la musique . . . Eh bien! je lui joue du cornet à piston, juste au moment de la fécondation. Ça le dérange, ça l'ennuie, ça lui fait perdre la boule . . . et il va se féconder de travers, c'est-à-dire qu'il va me donner des graines d'où sortira une espèce de monstre cocasse, qui sera un hibiscus sans en être un, une plante comme on n'en a jamais vu," as cited by Emile Gallé, "La Floriculture lorraine au concours régional" (October 1894), in *Ecrits pour l'art*, Marseille, Lafitte Reprints, 1980, p. 87.

Gallé cites Mirbeau as part of a response to the journalist's insult to the "begonia of Nancy," which he claimed was one of those "*fleurs bêtes, les pauvres fleurs à qui les horticulteurs ont communiqué leur bêtise contagieuse.*" Gallé undermined his slight by insinuating that Mirbeau had erroneously identified the flower: "*Le jardinier de M. Mirbeau a planté dans son jardin de lettres, semble-t-il, au lieu de bégonias demandés par le maître, l'abominable Zinnial*"

36. Octave Mirbeau, "Claude Monet" in *L'Art dans les Deux Mondes*, no. 16 (March 1891), pp. 183-185.

The gentle, shaded river, with its obligatory skiff and two young girls, turns, beneath its surface, into a contorted mingling of algae and vegetation resembling nothing less than the knotted mass of a woman's hair; Gorgons, with "bizarres chevelures" writhe in the depths of this placid pool. A second picture, *Jeune fille à l'ombrelle*, gives rise to an equally disturbing image, as, Gradiva-like and coquetishly wielding her umbrella, she has the air of a phantom, emerging, shaded like the stream, into the brilliant sunlight. A third, similarly enveloped in mysterious shade, depicts a young girl seated at a table, on which stands a vase holding three huge sunflowers: her sad and delicate beauty is, for Mirbeau, "strange, . . . troubling, and a trifle terrifying." These enigmatic beauties are, finally, compared to the uncanny phantom of Poe's Ligeia with her complexion betraying the pall of the tomb.

Phrase by phrase, by way of Baudelaire's translation of Poe, Mirbeau draws Monet's girls into complicity with the shadow of living death. Like Ligeia, with her elegant tread — "In vain will I try to describe the majesty and tranquil ease of her walk, the incomprehensible lightness, the elasticity of her step" — Mirbeau's is "a thin, light woman," an "aerial apparition," whose "soaring footstep" makes her seem to glide over the grass. Poe's "she came and went like a shadow . . . her beauty was exquisite and strongly infused with an air of the uncanny," becomes in Mirbeau: "She is as strange as an all-enveloping shadow. . . . Involuntarily, one thinks of some Ligeia figure, both real and phantom."³⁷

These modern specters, in their gardens of impressionist *taches*, are also forms of flowers; the umbrella, hovering above the young girl, "like a huge flower," and the three sunflowers merge, in Mirbeau's fantasy, with their human counterparts to form "female faces, ghostly souls like those evoked in the poems of Stéphane Mallarmé." Through a chain of associations that encompasses the entire symbolist heritage up to and including T.S. Eliot, Mirbeau joins Poe/Baudelaire to Poe/Mallarmé to Giverny/Monet by way of the epithet, Homeric and satanic at once, "hyacinth hair." From Poe, whose Ligeia has "chevelure d'hyacinthe," to Mallarmé's translation of Poe's *Helen*, who likewise has "chevelure hyacinthe," we are returned to the first frame of Mirbeau's vision of Giverny, with its death-bringing spring — "dead are the hyacinths" — a foreboding that itself echoes the occult presence of Huysmans's *Hyacinthe*, companion of Durtal's satanic rites in *Là-bas*.³⁸

Of all the flowers in Monet's garden, none were more enthralling than the nymphéas, the painting of which was to become like a second signature for Monet; an evident sign of the feminine and substitute for the female models

37. Edgar Allan Poe, *Oeuvres en prose*, trans. Charles Baudelaire, Paris, Gallimard, Pléaïde, 1951, pp. 242–43.

38. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Stances à Hélène," *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, Pléaïde, 1945, p. 193.

denied him by his possessive second wife, Alice Hoschedé.³⁹ It is significant that each of the two major cycles of nymphéas seems to have been precipitated by the death of a beloved muse—his adopted daughter in 1899, and his wife in 1911—confirming the intimate relays between mourning and erotic sublimation in these women-flowers. Technically defined as a “water lily with white flowers,” the nymphéa was deeply rooted in Oriental mythology and its reinscription by the symbolists. The most famous of the species, the sacred lotus of the Egyptians, was conjured in its white purity by Mallarmé as virgin and “ideal flower” in an image dedicated to the hardly virginal Méry Laurent, his mistress, Monet’s subject, and a model for Proust’s Odette.⁴⁰ For Mirbeau, the interplay of purity and perversion, remote and understated in Mallarmé and Monet, becomes a leitmotif in *Le Jardin des supplices*, where the nymphéa, with all its sacred and profane associations, is brutally “exposed” as Clara’s “nympho-mania.” It is at this point that the visual lure of the painted flower is bluntly and brutally exchanged for the sexual lure of a no longer aestheticized female sex.

Informed by the botanical vogue that swept through the garden of Bouvard and Pécuchet, the “serres chaudes” of Zola and Maeterlinck, Huysmans and Proust, or the art nouveau interiors of Emile Gallé, Mirbeau’s treatment of Clara’s plantlike instincts implies a theory of feminine sexual rapacity. Literally fertilized by flowers, the woman-flower, an aesthetic hybrid, mimics the popular studies of the mating rituals of insects and flowers that were the outgrowth of Darwinism and the scientific venture into ethology. Most famous of the literary versions of these studies were Rémy de Gourmont’s *Physique de l’amour* (1903) and Maeterlinck’s *L’Intelligence des fleurs* (1907), which, though published subsequent to *Le Jardin*, provide an index to botanical concepts on which Mirbeau also drew. Maeterlinck’s thesis that the survival instinct in plants could be interpreted as a form of “intelligence” (hotly contested by Gide, another amateur botanist), was generously illustrated with examples of their sexual practices, and the remarkable nymphomania of certain female floral species—notably those related to the nymphéa—find their analogue in Mirbeau’s caricature of Clara’s libidinal excess.⁴¹ Of the *ruta graveolens*, or “flower in heat,” Maeterlinck wrote:

At the conjugal hour, obeying female orders heard from on high, the first male approaches and touches the stigmata, then the third, the fifth, the seventh, and the ninth, until all the odd numbers have

39. On Madame Monet’s jealousy, see Daniel Wildenstein, “Giverny ou la conquête de l’absolu,” in *Monet à Giverny: Au-delà de l’Impressionisme*, Paris, Herscher, 1983, p. 15.

40. Mallarmé’s prose poem “Le Nénuphar blanc” (1885) evokes the flower as a *creuse blancheur* or *negative tache* mirrored in the “virginally absent gaze” of a nymph as cold and arresting as Hérodiade (see Mallarmé, p. 286).

41. See André Gide, “Notes pour les livres de Maeterlinck,” in *Journal 1889–1939*, Paris, Gallimard, Pléaide, 1951, pp. 806–810.

inseminated. Next, it is the turn of the evens, the second, fourth, sixth, etc.

It really is love on command.⁴²

As if satirizing in advance the preciousness of Maeterlinck's floricultural behaviorism, Mirbeau makes a natural scientist out of his Chinese executioner, whose reflections on the female orgasm are substantiated by the sexual codes of flowers:

He separated the flower's petals, counted the pollen-laden stamens and said, again, his eyes drowned in burlesque ecstasy: Look, milady! One . . . two . . . five . . . ten . . . twenty. . . . Look how they're quivering! Look! . . . Sometimes it requires twenty males to produce the spasm of a single female! (JS 192)

Mirbeau's parody of the phylogenic make-up of the feminine species-being culminates in the image of Clara quivering with lust as she blindly obeys the signals of the mating ritual—the "male odor" excreted by a peony. Yielding to an attack of nymphomania induced by the scent, Clara drifts inexorably to a Chinese bordello teaming with women who throw themselves, in an act of devotion to their cult, on the multisexed statue of Priapus—"L'Idole aux Sept Verges":

Shouting, screaming, seven women suddenly hurled themselves on the seven-fold phallus. The Idol, bound, whipped, and violated by all this delirious flesh, shook under the multiple shocks of so many possessions, from the kisses, showered on him like ramrods against the iron gates of a city under siege. So it was, all around the Idol, a raging clamor, a madness of savage pleasure, an orgiastic mingling of bodies, so frenetically coiled and welded together that the whole scene took on the wild aspect of a massacre. (JS 247-248)

In this climactic spectacle of Bacchae in heat, Mirbeau scapegoats woman as the purveyor and mirror of the reader/spectator's scopophilia; a "love of looking" which, throughout the narrative, has been "feeding itself" on scenes whose erotic content is progressively augmented. But, like the female hysteric in Charcot's paradigm, the viewer's *Schaulust* is punished through an increasingly hysterical vision, textually reinforced by adjectives of insanity and erotic excess: "furious," "delirious," "demented," "savagely voluptuous."

Clara's nymphomania, thus subsumed within the genetically defined "feminine" malady of hysteria, goes on display at the end of *Le Jardin des supplices* as if it were part of the staged exhibitions at the Salpêtrière. Applying, virtually to the letter, the successive stages and permutations of the hysterical attack as specified by Charcot in *Les démoniaques*, Mirbeau crafts a literary equivalent of the moulds illustrating the postures of hysteria cast by the artist Paul Richer

42. Maurice Maeterlinck, *L'Intelligence des fleurs*, Paris, Editions d'aujourd'hui, 1977, p. 35.

under Charcot's supervision. True to the precursory signals alluded to by Charcot—"She becomes taciturn, melancholy, or held in the grip of extreme excitation" (D 92)—Clara's attack is announced by similar signs of nervousness: "Clara threw herself on the cushions. She was extraordinarily pale and her body trembled, shaken by nervous spasms" (JS 239). She then proceeds to Charcot's "tonic phase," typified by a "tetanic immobilization" and a flashing of the whites of the eye: "Clara didn't move anymore. . . . Beneath her pulled-back lids, her revulsed eyes revealed nothing but their white orbs" (JS 243). The period of contortions and "large movements" was referred to as *clownisme* by Charcot. Here the hysteric would show herself at her most capricious, one moment acting like a child (Clara: "she would let out small poorly articulated words, just like a child"), at another moment enacting the passionate attitudes that Charcot recognized from religious art—supplication, ecstasy, crucifixion, self-mortification (JS 243). The first and last are enacted by Clara: supplication, as she assumes the facial expression of the very torture victims that she had formerly reviled, and self-mortification, as her wrists are pinned "in a way that would prevent her from tearing her own face apart with her nails" (JS 250). At the climax of the crisis, Charcot's hysteric performed great feats of acrobatic skill: "the patients showed a suppleness, agility, and muscular force that seemed made to astonish the spectator" (D 97). Accordingly, Mirbeau's heroine attains the zenith of her frenzy in the "rainbow" posture: "In a final convulsion, her body arched, from the heels to the neck" (JS 250). Entering the last phase (*stertorique*), Clara succumbs to a less dramatic but ultimately more sinister mode of disequilibrium; what Charcot called *l'état du mal*. A form of blindness, this malaise is portrayed in *Le Jardin* as the eery coma into which Clara falls, a coma punctuated only by the refrain from Poe's *The Raven*: "Nevermore!"

Here we are returned to Freud's critical reformulation of Charcot's theory of hysterical blindness, in a fragment written in honor of the Viennese ophthalmologist, Leopold Königstein. Rejecting the simple identification of hysterical blindness with spontaneous autosuggestion, a kind of mirror of hypnosis, Freud proposes a model of opposition that puts the ego drives in competition with the sexual drives for control of the organs of taste and sight. Thus, "the eyes perceive not only alterations in the external world which are important for the preservation of life, but also characteristics of objects which lead to their being chosen as objects of love—their charms" (DV 216).⁴³ Where these two fundamental instincts become disunited, and the ego maintains a repression of the sexual component, pathological consequences occur, of the kind identified in the phenomenon of hysterical vision:

Let us suppose that the sexual component instinct which makes use of looking—sexual pleasure in looking [scopophilia]—has drawn upon

43. It is significant that, as the translator of the *Standard Edition* notes, Freud uses the German *Reize*, meaning both "charms" and "stimuli."

itself defensive action by the ego-instincts in consequence of its excessive demands, so that the ideas in which its desires are expressed succumb to repression and are prevented from becoming conscious; in that case there will be a general disturbance of the relation of the eye and the act of seeing to the ego and consciousness. (DV 216)

In this model, Clara's repeated "Nevermore!" echoing the interior voice of talion punishment, would seem to illustrate what Freud here describes as the ego's overrepression: "It looks as though the repression had been carried too far by the ego, . . . the ego refuses to see anything at all anymore, now that the sexual interest of seeing has made itself so prominent" (DV 216). Clara, like the reader/viewer, would seem to have been "overpunished" for her *voyure-isme*. But Freud goes further: this refusal to see is not just the result of overrepression by the ego, but rather reflects the active revenge against the ego of the repressed instinct, that of "pleasure in looking." It is as though "a punishing voice was speaking from within the subject, and saying: 'Because you sought to misuse your organ of sight for evil sensual pleasures, it is fitting that you should not see anything anymore'" (DV 217). Clara would then have been justly punished, like the witnesses of Dreyfus's trial, or the lone spy on Lady Godiva, for having "seen too much." Her vision has been jarred out of focus so that images appear as sickly *taches*—flower-shaped blood spots or alluring sexual stains. Finally, her scotomized eye might be understood to be not simply the result of her "love of looking," but rather of her "love of (looking at) cruelty," a conclusion supported by the particular brand of dehumanized voyeurism represented in *Le Jardin des supplices*. Mirbeau's extended reflection on the scotomizing *après-coup* of scopophilia would seem in this way to have anticipated Freud's extended German "answer" to the French school.

It is perhaps not incidental that the obsessional neurosis of one of Freud's most celebrated patients, the Ratman, was fueled by the recounting of "a specially horrible punishment used in the East," the introduction of a starved rat into the anus of a bound prisoner; a retelling of one of Mirbeau's sublimely horrible tortures.⁴⁴ Freud, who was forced to supply the words for this story's second retelling, despite his insistence that he "had no taste for cruelty," noted that while the Ratman was struggling with his narrative "his face took on a very strange, composite expression. I could only interpret it as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*."⁴⁵

44. Sigmund Freud, *L'Homme aux rats: Journal d'une analyse*, trans. Elza Riberio, Paris, PUF, 1974, pp. 41–45. The *Journal* records the Ratman's fear of a captain of his regiment who "manifestly loves cruelty" and who recounts what he has recently read of a terrible punishment used in the Orient. The translator's footnote refers to an article by Leonard Shengold in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 52, p. 277, in which the author argues that the book in question was *Le Jardin des supplices*.

45. Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" (1909), trans. Alix and James Strachey, *Collected Papers*, vol. 3, New York, Basic Books, 1959, p. 304.

Obsessional neurosis, in Freud's characterization "only a dialect of the language of hysteria," was itself prey to the scopophilic desire, one that was itself perhaps not entirely repressed in Freud's own fascinated refusal of the optic in favor of the psychic. Mirbeau's play with Sade, ostensibly a political allegory couched in psycho-erotic terms, would lead us, then, to the discovery of a "Freud avec Sade," the hidden underbelly of Freudian *Schaulust*.

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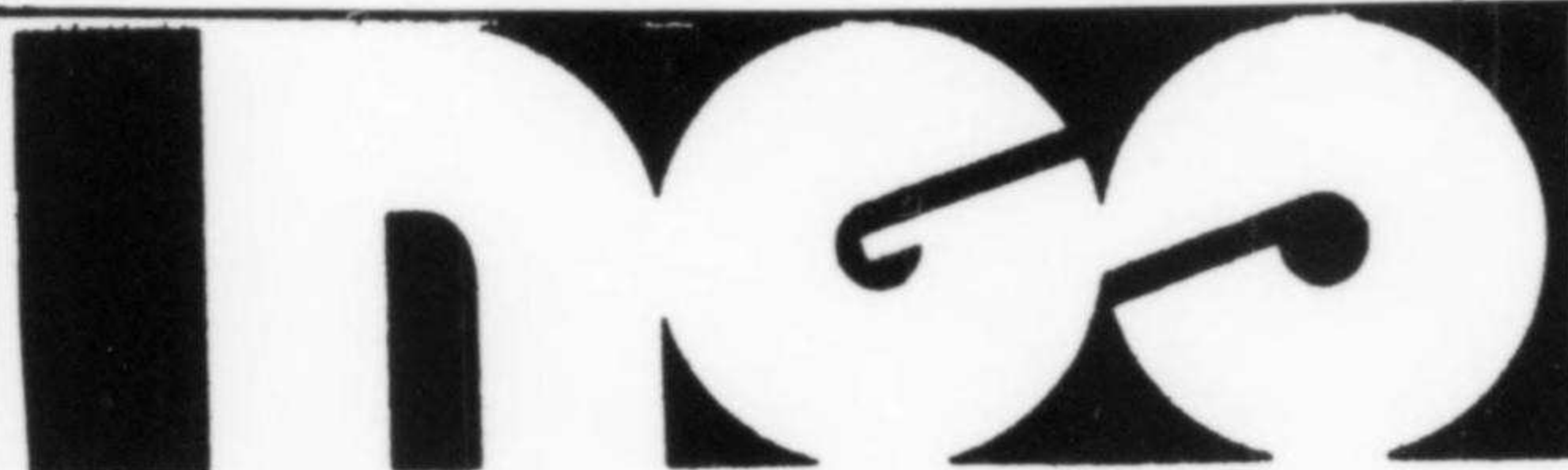
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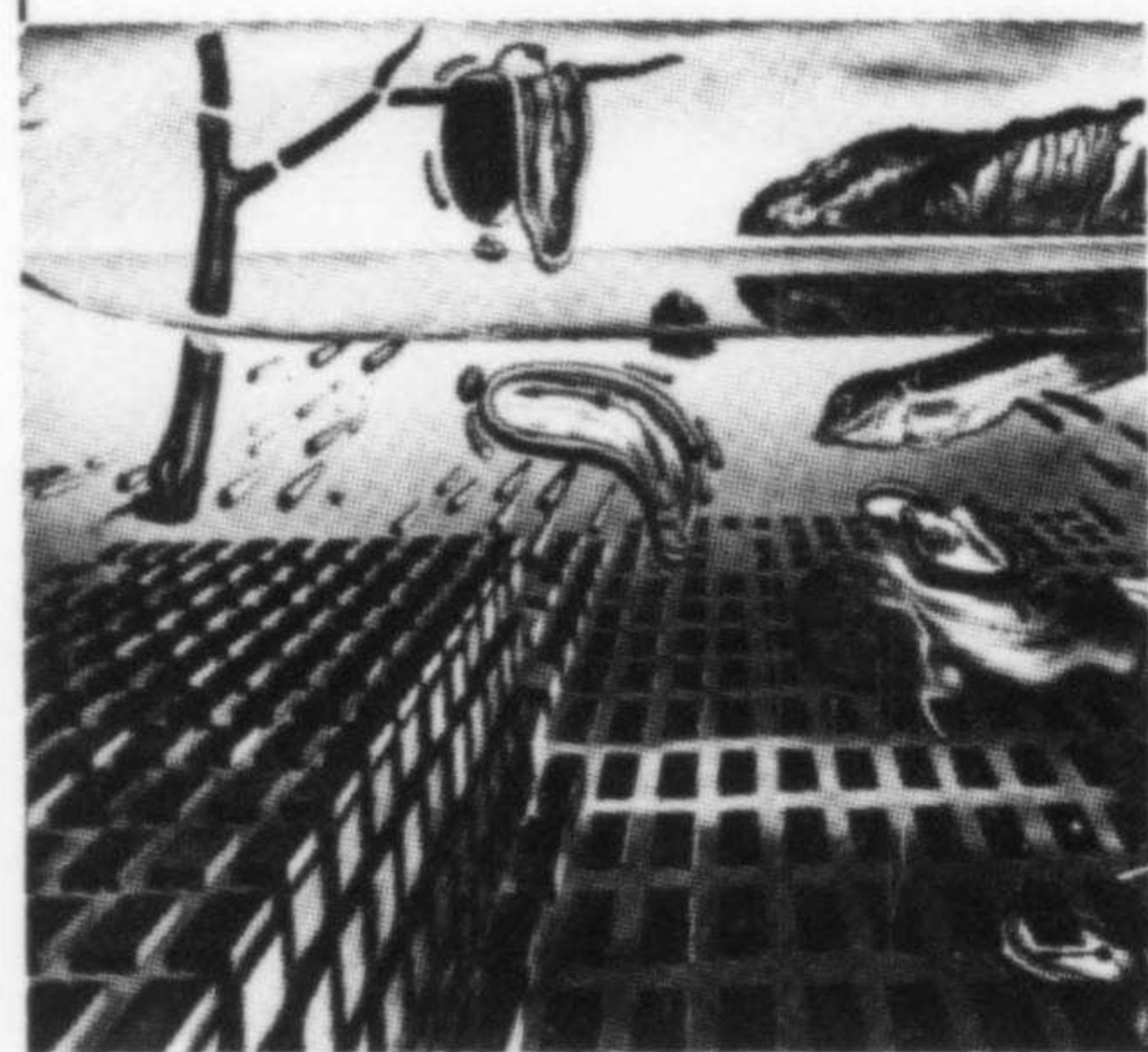
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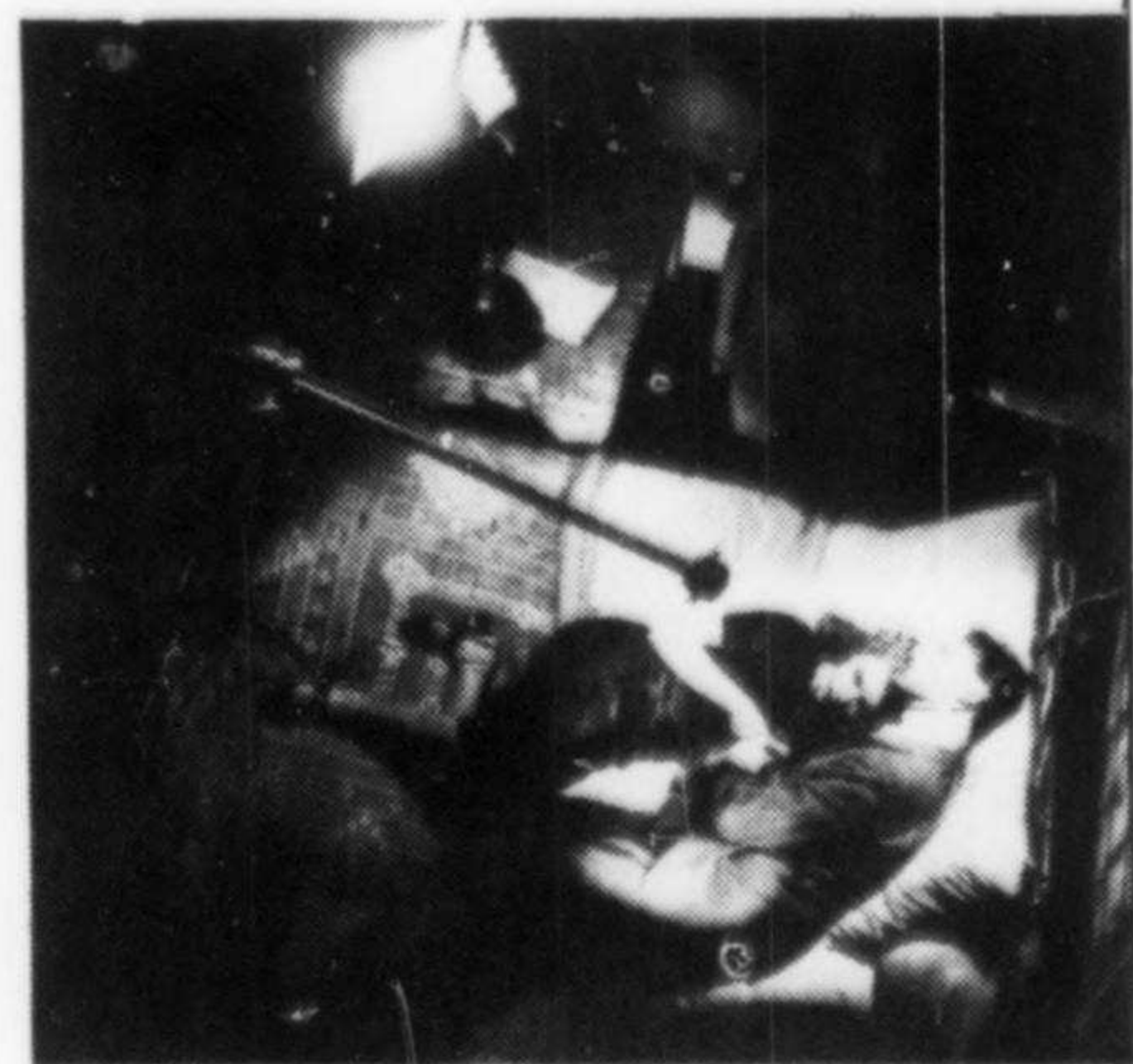
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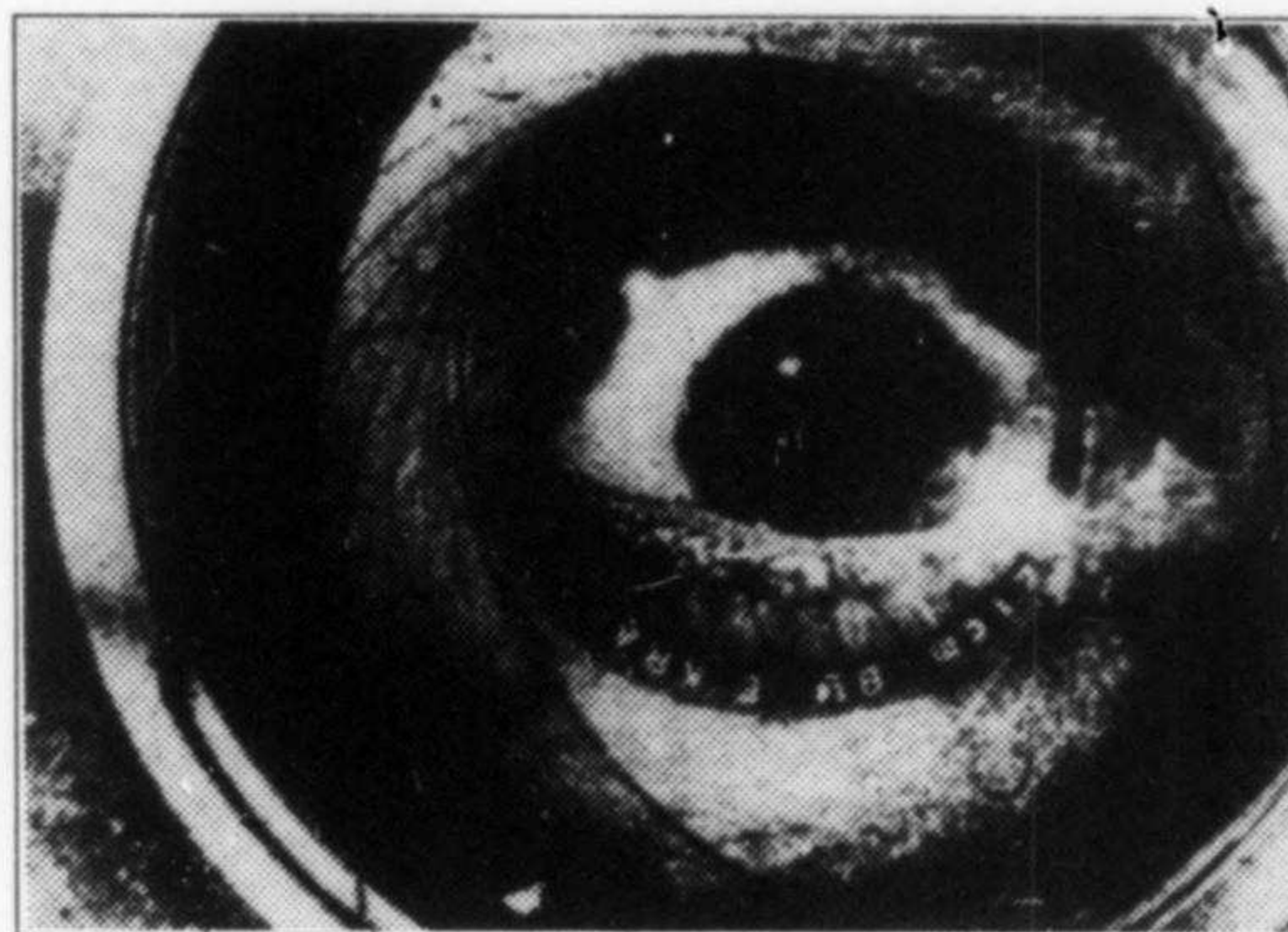
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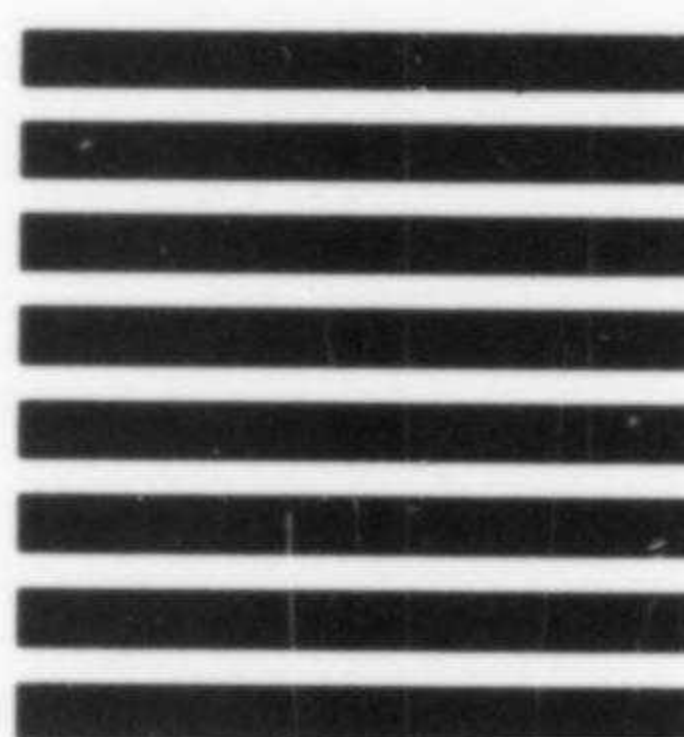
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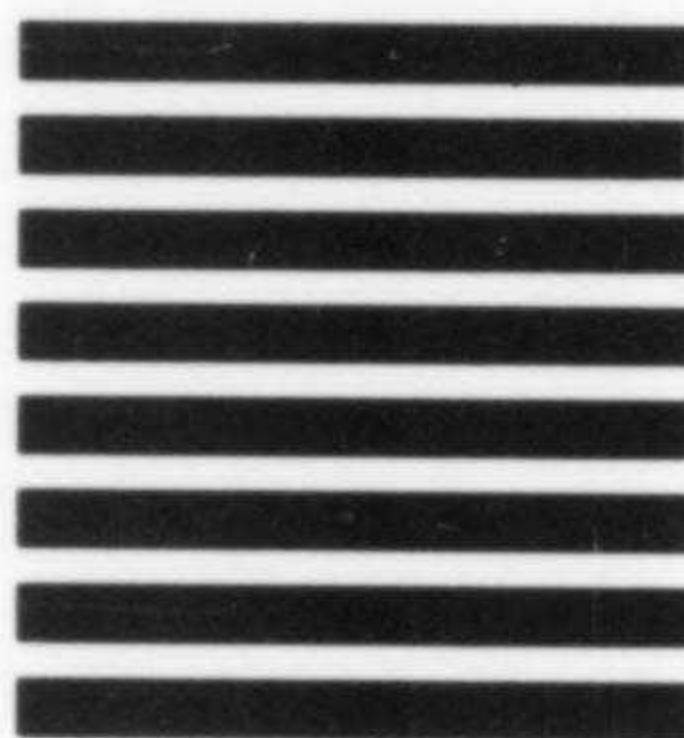
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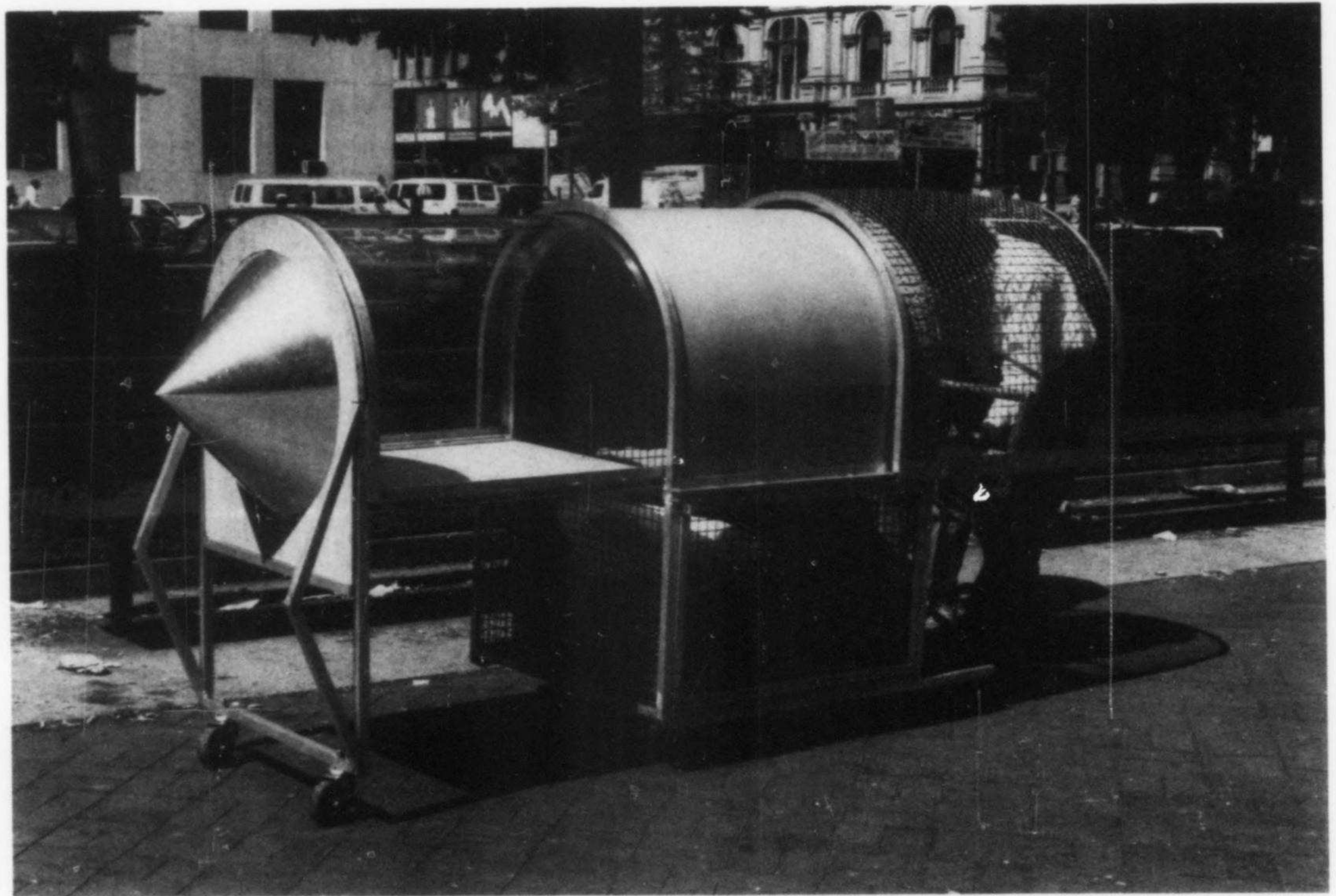
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