

# OCTOBER

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1968*

*The Surveillant Gaze: Michael  
Haneke's The White Ribbon*

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## Un-War: An Aesthetic Sketch

ROSALYN DEUTSCHE

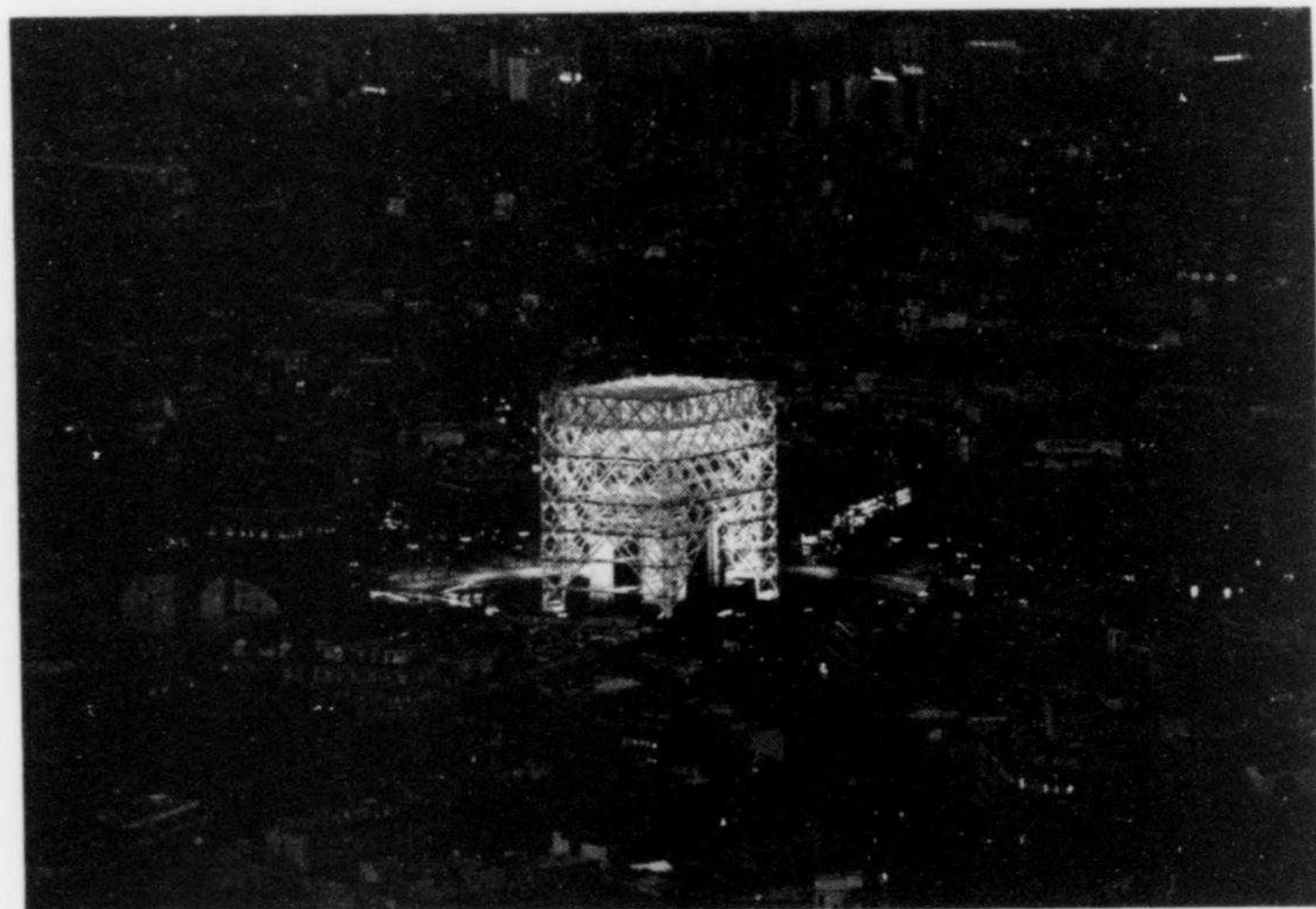
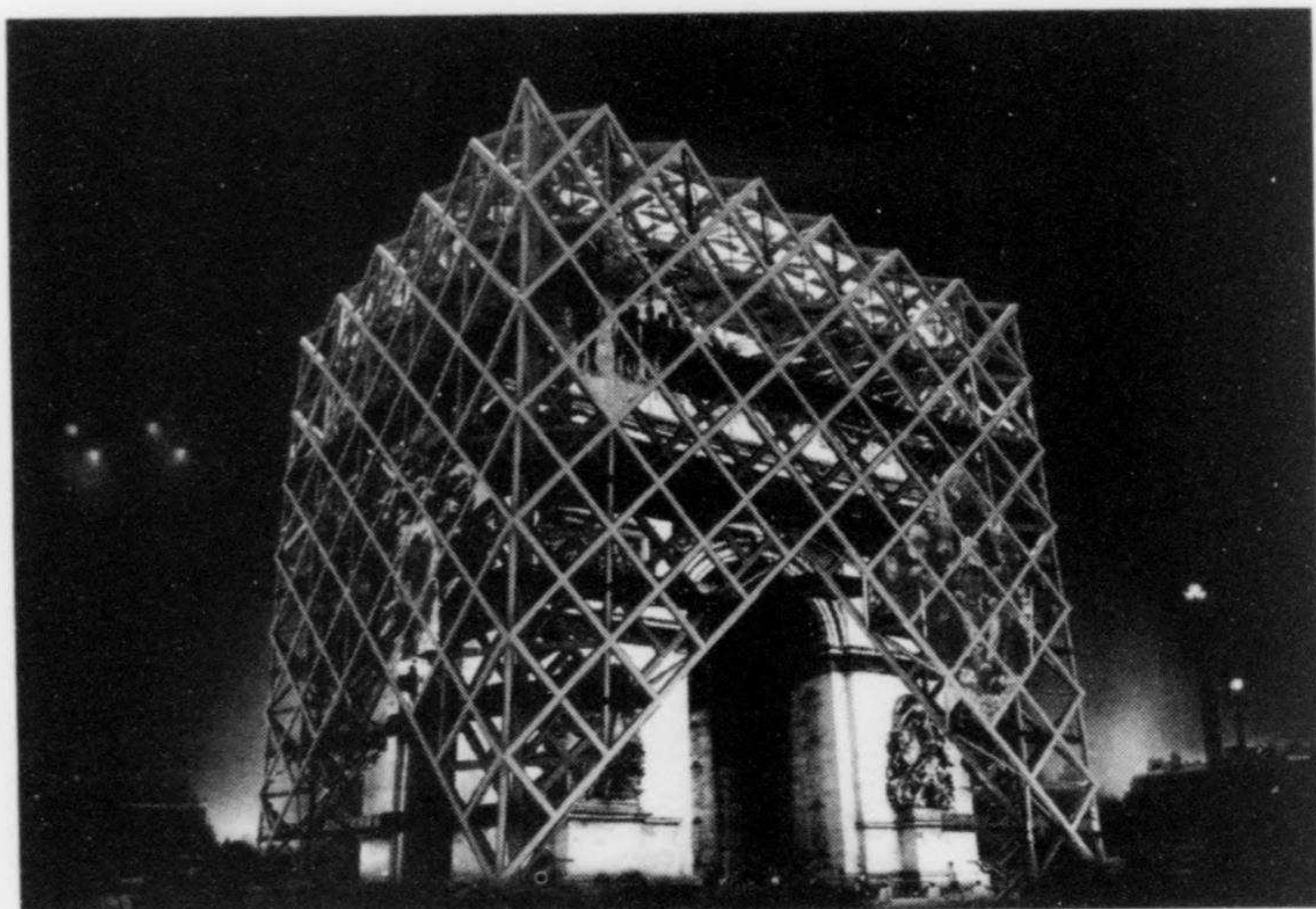
Attempts to abolish war—not a particular war but war as a social institution—are often dismissed as utopian idealism, wild fantasies far removed from the realm of real politics. War, we are told, is inevitable. Humans are territorial and predatory beings. Besides, there has always been war. Who can forget the opening pages of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, wherein the narrator says that he is writing an antiwar novel and his interlocutor replies, "You know what I say to people when I hear they're writing antiwar books? . . . I say, 'Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?'" "What he meant, of course," the narrator explains, "was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that, too."<sup>1</sup> (Of course, that was before global warming.)

Still, Krzysztof Wodiczko fearlessly pursues perpetual peace in an ongoing aesthetic project titled *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War* and in a book, *Abolition of War*, that documents, contextualizes, and theorizes the project. Introduced in *Harvard Design Magazine* in 2010, *Arc de Triomphe* is a proposal to attach a transparent scaffold-like structure to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.<sup>2</sup> Traditional historical monuments such as the Parisian Arc embody what Friedrich Nietzsche called "monumental history" and Walter Benjamin famously denounced as the history of the victors—the past narrated as a progression of supposedly eternal "great" moments.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, all traditional monuments, whether or not they overtly commemorate war, can be considered war memorials. Wodiczko has long treated them as such in public projections that animate and destabilize monumental structures, for example, the *AT&T Long Lines Building Projection*, the *Homeless Projection*, the *Hirshhorn Museum Projection*, and the *San Diego Museum of Man Projection*, all realized in the 1980s. The projections infiltrate buildings and sculptures with images that awaken memories of those groups that have been defeated in the conflicts that produce social space.

1. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (1969) (New York: Dial Press, 2009), p. 5.

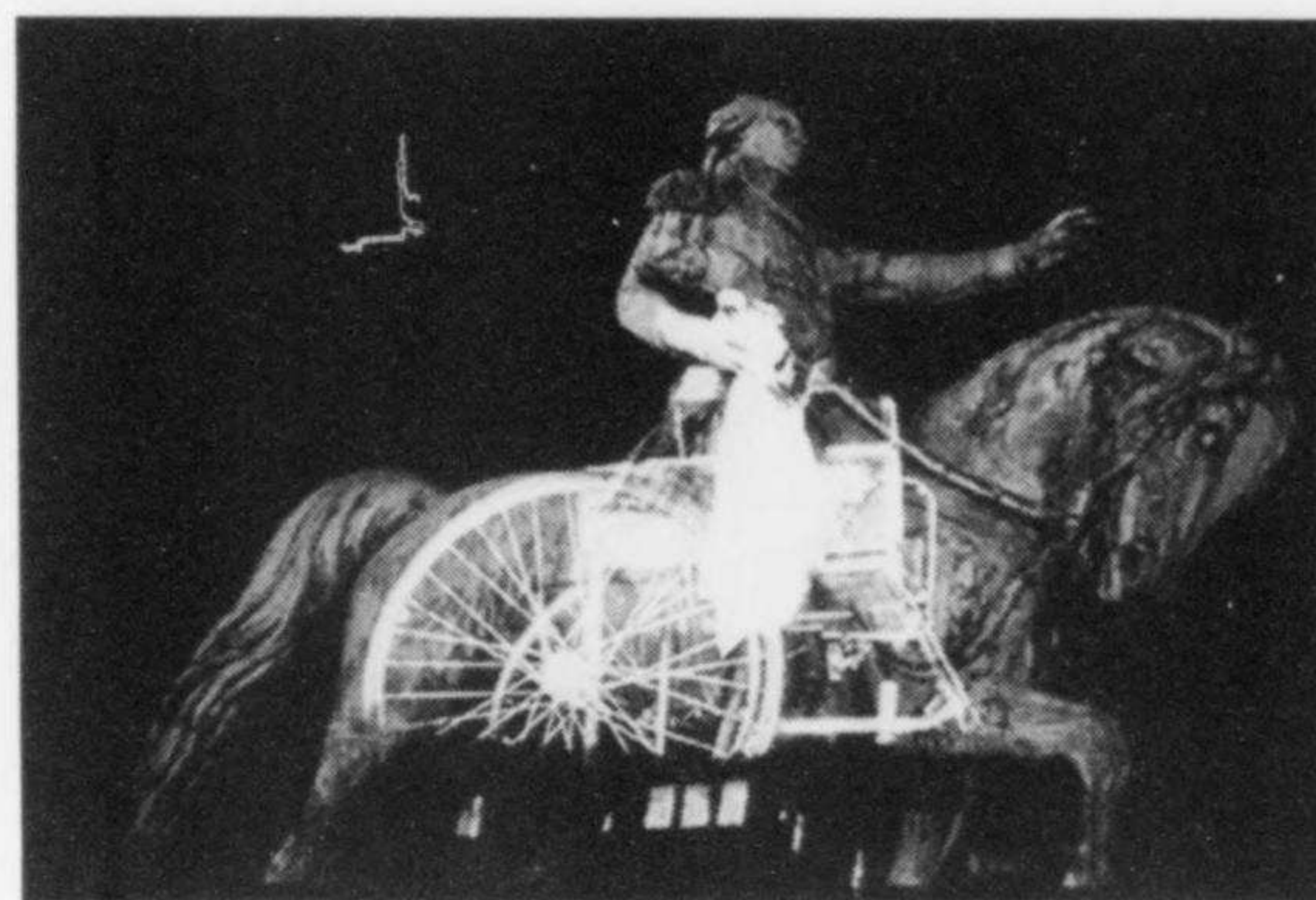
2. Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War," *Harvard Design Magazine* 33 (Fall/Winter 2010–2011), pp. 126–35.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (1874), trans. Adrian Collins (London: Macmillan, 1957). Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969).



*Krzysztof Wodiczko. Arc de Triomphe: World Institute  
for the Abolition of War. 2010–present.*

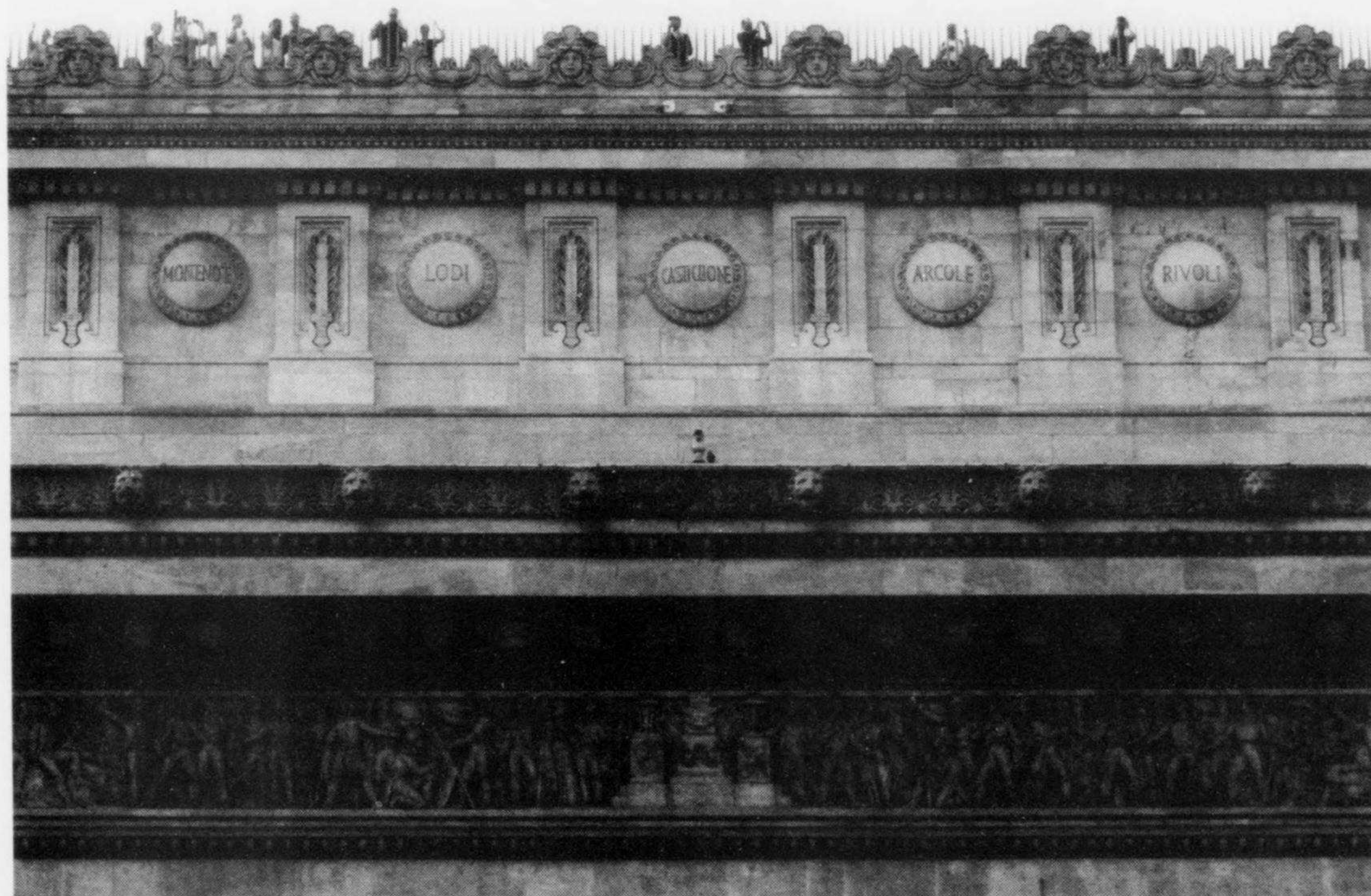
However, the neoclassical Arc de Triomphe, the scene and object of Wodiczko's new activity (itself a kind of projection<sup>4</sup>), is not only an explicit war memorial—"a permanent insult to the vanquished by the victor," as the Paris Commune called the Vendôme Column before destroying it—but an especially hyperbolic example of the genre. Until 1982, the Arc de Triomphe was the largest triumphal arch in the world, and its immensity coupled with its patriotic messages made it the standard for modern public monuments. Commissioned in 1806 and



Wodiczko. Homeless Projection:  
A Proposal for the City of New York. 1986.

completed in 1836, modeled on the Roman Arch of Titus, the Arc glorifies Revolutionary and Napoleonic conquests. For many years, it served as the rallying point of French troops parading after successful military campaigns. As the linchpin of the city's sequence of monuments and grand thoroughfares known as the

4. For an interpretation of all of Wodiczko's works as projections, see my "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996), p. 346, n. 119, and "Architecture of the Evicted," *Strategies* 3 (1990), pp. 159–83, repr. in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 150–65.



Sylvestre Brun. Federation of 1790. 1834.

Historical Axis—also a visualization of monumental history—the Arc now occupies a central place in both Paris and the European Union as a symbol of Western triumphalism. Beneath its vault lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War I—“the war to end all wars”—installed on Armistice Day in 1920, accompanied by the first eternal flame lit in Europe since the fourth century and by a typically nationalistic inscription: “Here lies a French soldier who died for the fatherland, 1914–1918.” The Arc is adorned with thirty shields inscribed with the names of ninety-six Revolutionary and Napoleonic military victories, allegorical and historical friezes, an engraved list of French victories, an engraved list of 660 soldiers and generals who fought in French victories, and four enormous sculptural reliefs, including, most strikingly, François Rude’s bellicose *La Marseillaise*, which features a wild-eyed Winged Victory wearing a helmet crowned by Furies. The chronological order of the reliefs, advancing from *Departure* to *Triumph* to *Resistance* to *Peace*, suggests that war can produce peace.



François Rude. The Departure of the Volunteers of 1792 (“La Marseillaise”). 1833–36. Detail.

Wodiczko approaches the Arc de Triomphe not only as a symbol but also as a symptom of our culture of war.<sup>5</sup> “The motivation to fight and die in war,” he writes,

is perpetuated by a Culture of War that manifests itself through uniforms, war games, parades, military decorations, and war memorials (including statues and shrines, triumphal arches, cenotaphs, victory columns, and other commemorations of the dead); the creation of war art and military art, martial music, and war museums; and the popular fascination with weapons, war toys, violent video and computer games, battle reenactments, collectibles, and military history and literature.<sup>6</sup>

These undisguised expressions of warlike culture are only the tip of the iceberg, however. For, as Virginia Woolf demonstrated in *Three Guineas*, her feminist anti-war essay of 1938, the culture of war (though she didn’t use the term) takes more insidious and therefore more dangerous forms. It is perpetuated, for instance, in

5. For another investigation of contemporary war culture, see John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, Iraq* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

6. Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Abolition of War* (London: Black Dog, 2012), p. 11.

the customs of the most esteemed professions of men, manifested by distinctions of dress that indicate rank or titles placed before or after names, both of which establish superiority, provoke competition, and encourage a warlike disposition: grandiose, vain, egoistic, possessive, combative.<sup>7</sup>

Enclosed within Wodiczko's new structure, the *World Institute for the Abolition of War*, the Arc de Triomphe undergoes a Brechtian transformation into an extraordinary object. Remaining fully visible but appearing isolated and entrapped, it metamorphoses into a gigantic specimen, as Wodiczko describes it, even a pathogen, producing war as "collective madness."<sup>8</sup> *World Institute's* objective is to disarm the Arc. Combining commemorative, investigatory, educational, and activist functions, it would, if built, allow the public as well as scholars from a variety of disciplines to examine the memorial from new viewpoints. The *Institute* would also house a wide array of activities devoted to peacemaking, or what Wodiczko calls "un-war," the term he prefers to "peace."<sup>9</sup> Peace, after all, has long coexisted with preparedness for war. According to the American philosopher William James, writing in the first decade of the twentieth century,

"Peace" in military mouths today is a synonym for "war expected." The word has become a pure provocative, and no government wishing peace sincerely should allow it ever to be printed in a newspaper. Every up-to-date dictionary should say that "peace" and "war" mean the same thing, now *in posse*, now *in actu*. It may even be reasonably said that the intensely sharp *preparation* for war by the nations is the *real war*, permanent, unceasing; and that the battles are only a sort of public verification of the mastery gained during the "peace"-interval.<sup>10</sup>

Un-war, by contrast, implies disarmament, a process of un-doing war, which, as we shall see, the artist understands not only as military preparedness and combat but

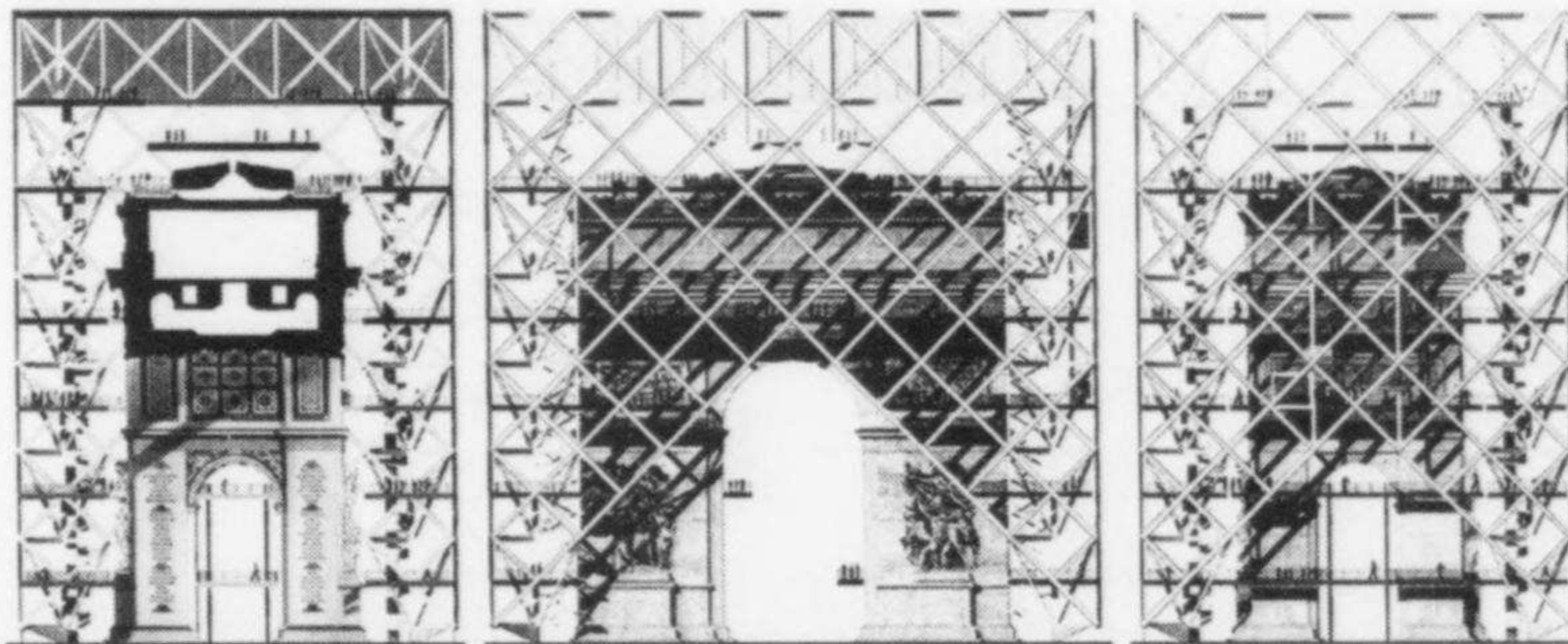
7. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938, p. 19.

8. Wodiczko, *Abolition of War*, p. 9.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

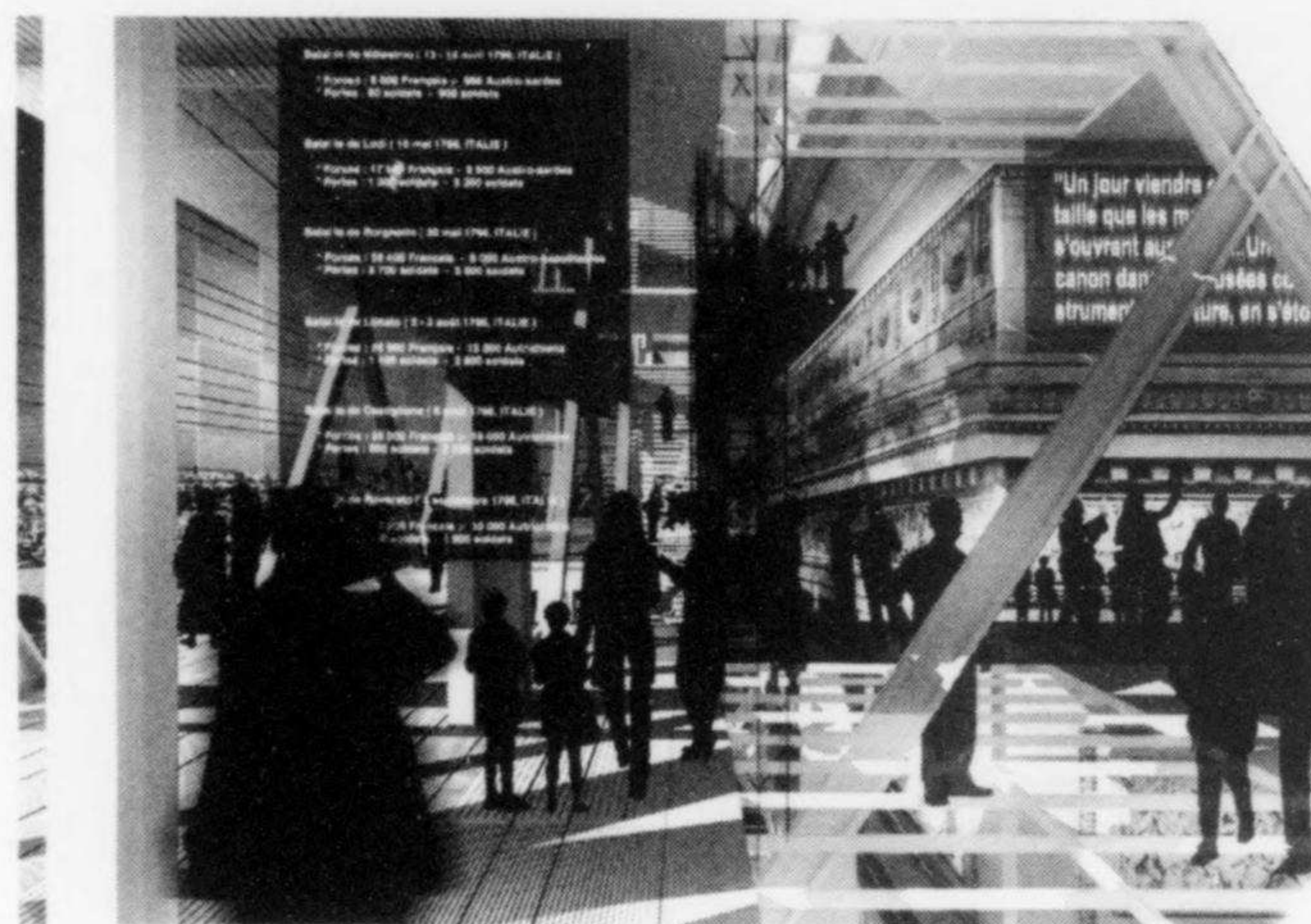
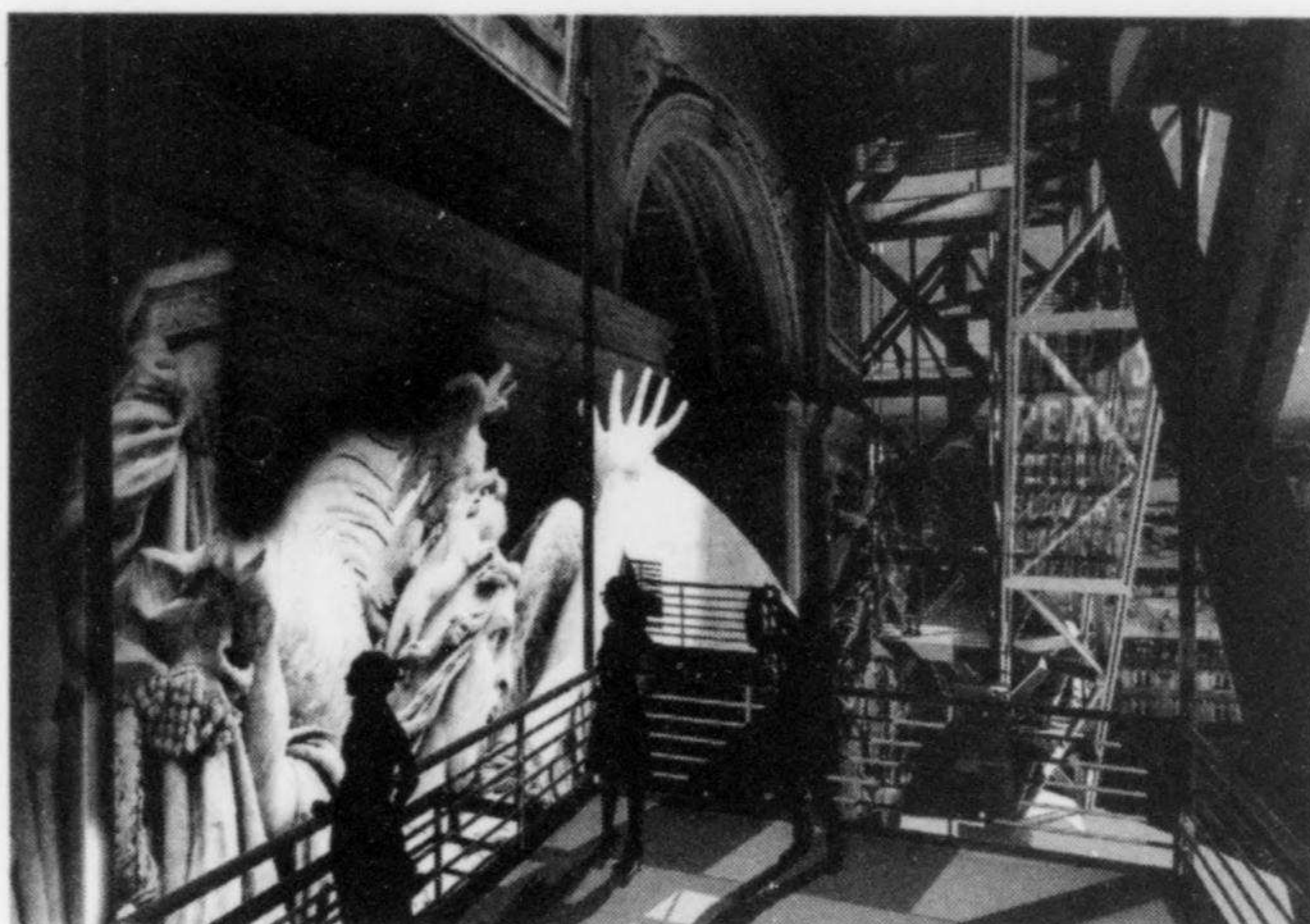
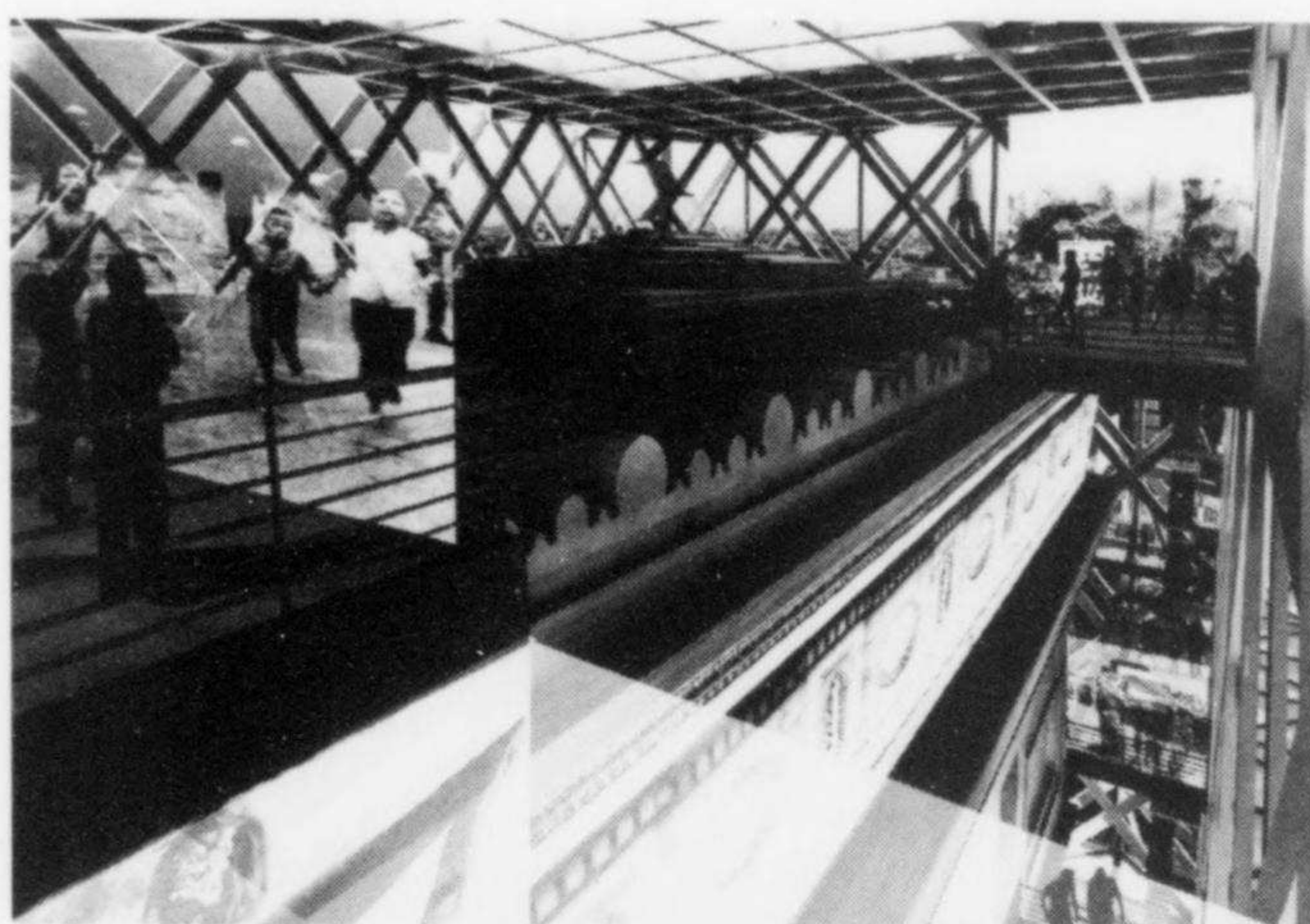
10. William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War." <http://www.constitution.org/wj/meow.htm> (accessed January 26, 2014). This essay, first published in 1910, was based on a speech delivered at Stanford University in 1906. For more on the essay, see footnote 48. I am grateful to Gregg Bordowitz for a long-ago conversation in which he introduced me to James's text.

Wodiczko. Drawings for Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War. 2010.



also as an individual and collective state of mind.<sup>11</sup>

Wodiczko's plan for a project to disarm the Arc and the larger culture of war exhibits the same combination of practicality and vision that distinguishes his earlier works of "interrogative design" such as *The Homeless Vehicle* of 1988 or the immigrant instruments of the 1990s. Like the interrogative-design projects, which invent equipment to fulfill the urgent needs of excluded and oppressed groups while questioning the societies that produce such needs, *World Institute for the Abolition of War* incorporates meticulous technical drawings and other architectural renderings into a work of imagination. It may therefore be tempting to describe it as a work of "visionary architecture." Yet the project also resists such a categorization. For one thing, Wodiczko insists that his designs on paper are meant for actual use; the institute is to be built. And while the project is certainly "imaginative," it is not unrealistic or impossible. Rather, it deals creatively with realities that often go unseen and anticipates a cultural condition that may yet come to pass. Renderings of the proposed institute present a



11. Wodiczko, *Abolition of War*, p. 13.

*Renderings of the World Institute's displays, projections, media environments, and installations. 2010.*

system of ramps, elevators, horizontally moving walkways, and vertically moving viewing platforms that intersect along the outside and through the inside of the Arc. The circulation system, if realized, would allow visitors to study the Arc's iconography and diagnose the war pathologies that war culture tries to repress. For instance, when standing on a platform to view at eye level the female representation of Victory at the top of Rude's *La Marseillaise*, one could detect just how crazed she is. External and internal plasma screens and pixel boards installed throughout the scaffolding would display programs related to the Institute's work and encourage visitors to stop to join discussions. Parallel to the main frieze of the Arc, a continuous strip of media-display panels would enumerate all recorded wars, campaigns, battles, and military assaults on civilians and list direct and indirect human casualties. Similarly, parallel to each relief honoring a Napoleonic battle would stand a list of killed and wounded soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians.



Currently, there are several different designs for the World Institute. Likewise, the Institute's program is provisional. Wodiczko foresees the division of the structure's top floors into four informational zones, each containing audio-visual, interactive, telepresent, and immersive displays and environments. The zones, suggests the artist, might be devoted to information about past and present peace-building efforts, the

disarmament process, the present state of world armament, multidisciplinary theoretical discourses in peace-related fields past and present, and cultural, artistic, and pedagogical projects that have contributed to the discourse of war resistance. Wodiczko's program also provides for a World Situation Map located in the area above the roof of the Arc, in the central horizontal section of the upper level of the structure. Displaying the changing global dynamics of wars, conflicts, and post-war, post-conflict, and peace zones, the map overhangs a large hall bearing the name of the Discursive Forum for the Abolition of War, a highly mediatized space that hosts special events and global conferences. The area surrounding the Discursive Forum contains facilities for what is called the Cross-Disciplinary Center for Global Peace Projects, which develops and implements practical programs to abolish war.<sup>12</sup>

The *World Institute for the Abolition of War* aims to render the Arc de Triomphe

12. Wodiczko, *Abolition of War*, pp. 73–83.

inoperative in promoting war, but, Wodiczko says, it is not enough to disarm the external culture of war. Un-war projects must also disarm the individual. One of the premises of *World Institute*, then, is that abolishing war is an individual responsibility. Wodiczko's call for individual responsibility arises not from moralism but from the conviction that we are each accountable for war because, as psychoanalysis teaches us, war is hidden in our unconscious minds. "We are ourselves inner war memorials," the artist writes,<sup>13</sup> unwittingly echoing Gertrude Stein, who in 1947 observed that while there is certainly war outside, there is also war inside: "What is there inside in one that makes one know all about war," she asked.<sup>14</sup> As if in response to Stein, Wodiczko makes research into the psychoanalytic dimensions of war an indispensable part of his project's agenda.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, war is, above all, a collective phenomenon, so the notion that we are "inner war memorials" raises the vexed question of the relationship between internal wars and external wars—between, that is, the psychical and the social realms: Is violence instilled in us from within or from without? In an essay devoted to the location of violence, especially sexual violence, Jacqueline Rose, quoting Wilhelm Reich, poses the question this way: "Where does the misery come from?"<sup>16</sup> For Reich, violence is imposed on the individual's psyche by a strictly external social world that is itself untouched by psychic processes.<sup>17</sup> Rose observes that Reich's social-determinist theory "pits inside and outside against each other in . . . deadly combat" and, in doing so, "wipes out any difference or contradiction on either side."<sup>18</sup> This polarizing structure—one that, we might note, is warlike—is shared with the seemingly opposing yet equally determinist view that strictly internal psychic processes cause social violence.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, both approaches evade what Rose calls the radical ambiguity of the inside-outside, psychical-social relationship.<sup>20</sup> The relationship is ambiguous because, among other reasons, the psychoanalytic subject itself is social, which is to say that it is formed through relationships and that its emergence is one and the same with its entry into the social field, so that subjectivity exceeds the level of

13. Ibid., p. 82.

14. Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (1945) (London: Brilliance, 1984), p. 9. Mignon Nixon discusses Stein's book in "War Inside/War Outside: Feminist Critiques and the Politics of Psychoanalysis," *Texte zur Kunst* 17 (December 2007), pp. 134–38.

15. Wodiczko, *Abolition of War*, p. 53.

16. Jacqueline Rose, "Where Does the Misery Come From? Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Event," in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (Ithaca: Cornell, 1989), pp. 25–39.

17. Ibid., p. 25.

18. Ibid., p. 29.

19. Ibid., pp. 30–31. Rose briefly discusses the work of Janine Chassequet-Smirgel and Bela Brunberger as an example of the psychic-reductionist approach. See Chassequet-Smirgel and Brunberger, *Freud or Reich? Psychoanalysis and Illusion*, trans. Claire Pajaczkowska (London, Free Association, 1985).

20. Rose, "Where Does the Misery Come From?," p. 34.

the individual. Therefore there can be no bright line, no secure boundary, between internal and external worlds. In addition, psychoanalysis has theorized complex connections between individual and social subjectivity, particularly in its study of group psychology, which is based on the premise, as Freud wrote, "that in the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, an opponent"; therefore, "from the very first individual psychology . . . is at the same time social psychology as well."<sup>21</sup> In 1952, the British analyst W. R. Bion combined Freud's researches with those of Melanie Klein to elaborate on the idea that groups such as armies and churches are driven by unconscious forces.<sup>22</sup> Psychoanalytically speaking, then, the idea that war exists inside each of us does not mean, as sociologically oriented thinkers tend to assume and as Wodiczko sometimes seems to suggest, that a purely external culture of war imposes war on our minds. Neither does it mean that a purely external power—the state—forces individuals to go to war, though of course the state does so. Rather, it means that unconscious aggressivity—a tendency toward destructive, hostile attitudes and behavior, a tendency springing from the individual's formative relationships—abides in human subjects, persisting throughout our lives and playing a significant role in wars outside us. For this reason, each individual is responsible for war in the sense of being its agent, and in an ethical universe, each individual is responsible for war in the sense of being accountable for abolishing it.

#### *Responsibility*

Psychoanalytic literature offers many ideas about the psychic dimensions of the war phenomenon. In 1915, for example, during World War I, we find Freud struggling to understand the connection between internal and external violence. Expressing shock at the extreme cruelty of the war and the participating nations' lack of respect for the laws of war, Freud speculated that war depends on a regression to infantile barbarism. Regression, he writes, is possible because in the development of the human mind, earlier stages persist alongside later ones: "Succession also involves co-existence."<sup>23</sup> Normally, the capacity for barbarous deeds is held in check, even transformed, by external factors—the community and the state, which forbid wrongdoing. Freud hypothesizes that it does so "not because it desires to abolish [wrongdoing], but because it desires to monopolize

21. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922), trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, W.W. Norton, 1959), p. 2.

22. W. R. Bion, "Group Dynamics," in *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1961), pp. 141–91.

23. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 14, p. 285.

it, like salt and tobacco."<sup>24</sup> In times of war, however, the state sanctions rather than prohibits barbarism.

As far as I am aware, the most thoroughly elaborated psychoanalytic theory of war was drafted by Franco Fornari. Fornari was president of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society, a member of Psychoanalysts Against Nuclear War, and the person who introduced the ideas of Melanie Klein to Italy. In 1964, he published *The Psychoanalysis of Nuclear War*, following it two years later with *The Psychoanalysis of War*, which greatly influenced Wodiczko.<sup>25</sup> *The Psychoanalysis of War*, the only one of Fornari's books translated into English, is out of print, despite the fact that the important French psychoanalytic thinker André Green apparently called the author's thoughts on war "the most important work on the subject since Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*."<sup>26</sup> Fornari wants to return war to the unconscious of the individual subject while, like Freud, avoiding reductive approaches to the inside/outside relationship. He reassures his readers that psychoanalytic exploration "is not a matter of a conflict between the traditionally recognized, external causes (economic, demographic, political, ideological, etc.) of war and its unrecognized internal causes, but rather of a shift of emphasis from the former to the latter" and that the mobilization of the psychological factors of war requires the intervention of specific historical realities.<sup>27</sup> For Wodiczko, too, fighting on the scale of war materializes when virulent patriotism, collective hatred, and other cultural values draw on unconscious aggression. At the same time, however, Fornari insists that investigations into social phenomena that separate social facts from the concrete individuals who form society are obscurantist and lend a pseudo-scientific pretext to the renunciation of responsibility.<sup>28</sup>

In Fornari's theory, war mobilizes—indeed resolves—unconscious depressive and persecutory anxieties and conflicts that, as Klein taught, arise from the major role played by aggression in infantile mental life. For Klein, the infant's rudimentary ego experiences conflict between loving and destructive impulses. The conflict is aroused by and experienced in relation to external objects, such as the mother's breast, which, as the infant's first love-object, stands for the principle of the outside world. Terrified by its internal destructiveness, which it believes can destroy the love-object, the infant rids itself of the terror by means of the unconscious mechanisms of splitting and projection. Splitting the external world into good and bad objects, the infant projects its own destructiveness into the bad ones, which it experiences as persecutory and destructive of the love-object. Building on Freud's notion that early stages of mental life persist in and are available to the adult psyche, Fornari argues

24. Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," p. 279.

25. *Abolition of War* refers to Fornari several times and features a full-page display quote from the psychoanalyst.

26. Franco Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War* (1966) (New York: Anchor, 1974), p. 248. Fornari reports that Green said this in response to Fornari's paper delivered at the Twenty-fifth International Congress of Romance Language Psychoanalysts.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

that the individual subject's projection of its internal terror—what he calls the Internal Terrifier—onto external enemies operates in war, with the difference that in adult life, the love-object that needs protection has become a group or nation. Projection, motivated by terror and love, allows us to express aggressiveness without guilt. As a result, war defends people against deep-seated anxieties about internal enemies by finding real enemies to kill. But, says Fornari, with the advent of the nuclear situation, war enters a state of crisis. It ceases to operate as a defense because nuclear war destroys the love-object along with the enemy.

With regard to the question of responsibility, the most important part of Fornari's theory is his idea that the individual subject gets rid of its violence, which is prohibited by law, by investing or alienating it in the state, the social institution that monopolizes violence. Fornari returns war to the subject precisely in order to "rouse" individuals from their alienation in the state and thereby motivate them to take responsibility for war. In a passage that Wodiczko spotlights in *The Abolition of War*, Fornari writes:

It is we ourselves who desire war, and the alienation of our aggressiveness into the state serves us simply to be able to say that it is not we who desire war but that the state forces us to make war. In this manner, we convince ourselves that the state is responsible for war in order not to feel responsible for it ourselves. To escape from our alienation in the state, therefore, means to be personally responsible for war, just as we feel personally responsible for inter-individual crimes.<sup>29</sup>

"I deem it important," he says, "to insist on the thesis that in tracing the war phenomenon to the unconscious of each man we arrive at considering each man responsible for war."<sup>30</sup>

Taking responsibility for abolishing war begins, then, with taking responsibility for war, which is one and the same act as taking responsibility for the unconscious. And taking responsibility for the unconscious means tolerating what Freud taught us: that in our unconscious, as Mignon Nixon has remarked, "we are very bad."<sup>31</sup> Since the alternative to tolerating badness is self-deception, which includes externalizing aggressivity in the form of the external enemy against whom we wage war, to take responsibility for the unconscious is to embrace what the psychoanalyst Anthony Sampson, following Jacques Derrida, calls "a courageously disillusioned Freudian politics," one that acknowledges what is most troubling about the human subject.<sup>32</sup> "It is a central tenet of psychoanalysis," says Jacqueline Rose,

that if we can tolerate what is most disorienting—disillusioning—about our own unconscious, we are less likely to act on it, less inclined to

29. Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*, p. 199. Italics in original.

30. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

31. Mignon Nixon, "Sperm Bomb: Art, Feminism, and the American War in Vietnam," unpublished book manuscript. Freud makes clear that "impulses in themselves are neither good nor bad. We classify them and their expressions in that way, according to their relation to the needs and demands of the human community." Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," p. 281.

32. Anthony Sampson, "Freud on the State, Violence, and War," *Diacritics* 35, n. 3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 78–91.

strike out in a desperate attempt to assign the horrors of the world to someone, or somewhere, else. It is not . . . the [aggressive] impulse that is dangerous but the ruthlessness of our attempts to be rid of it.<sup>33</sup>

In an uncharacteristic moment, Wodiczko promises that un-war projects will eventually turn “our formerly bloody, self-destructive minds” into a thing of the past and make our “souls” war-free.<sup>34</sup> With this statement, he steps back from the psychoanalytic principles he otherwise espouses. For Freud did not underestimate the enduring power of the forces he grappled with, making clear that, in reality, there is no such thing as eradicating psychic violence.<sup>35</sup> According to the British analyst Hanna Segal, recognizing such psychic facts is “the psychoanalytic stand.”<sup>36</sup> Naive idealism—the charge frequently leveled at those who want to abolish war—inheres, then, not in working for a world without war but, rather, in failing to face the difficulty of the goal, a difficulty that arises because opposition to abolishing war comes “not only from others but also has its roots in ourselves.”<sup>37</sup> Yet today, in an era of perpetual war, not to mention sexualized torture, intellectuals on the left continue to resist psychoanalytic insights into the war phenomenon and therefore to refuse responsibility for the unconscious, frequently expressing the belief that psychoanalytic ideas about subjectivity are a distraction from politics.

In this manner, some antiwar leftists may worry that reflecting on individual responsibility will automatically divert attention from the need for collective action. For those whose antiwar politics are courageously disillusioned, however, the reverse has been the case: Precisely because we are warlike, they argue, a less violent world requires the establishment of new social institutions and, in particular, international institutions. Consider, to begin with, Immanuel Kant’s 1795 essay “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” one of the earliest modern proposals for an international peacemaking institution. Kant believes that “the warlike inclination of those in power,” the “savagery” of European and American states, is integral to human nature: “A state of peace among men living together is not the same as the state of nature, which is rather a state of war.”<sup>38</sup> What he elsewhere calls “radical evil”—a wickedness of the human heart that is innate insofar as it cannot be gotten rid of and that is displayed, on the level of the state, in war—makes peace difficult; “thus,” Kant concludes, “the state of peace must be *formally instituted*.”<sup>39</sup> Kant’s reasoning about the relationship between evil and social insti-

33. Jacqueline Rose, “Freud and the People, or Freud Goes to Abu Ghraib,” in *The Last Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 166–67.

34. Wodiczko, *Abolition of War*, p. 82.

35. Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” p. 281.

36. Hanna Segal, “Silence Is the Real Crime” (1987), in *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972–1995* (Oxford: Routledge, 1997), p. 155.

37. Segal, “From Hiroshima to the Gulf War and After: Socio-Political Expressions of Ambivalence,” in *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War*, p. 168.

38. Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Hans S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), p. 98.

39. *Ibid.* Italics in original. Kant discusses constant war as the display of evil by “the great societies

tutions applies equally if we view war psychoanalytically: because of our ineradicable "badness," our unconscious aggressivity, un-war must be formally instituted. Fornari, invoking the Kleinian notion of our ability to recognize and make reparation for destructive impulses,<sup>40</sup> says as much:

The purpose of the psychoanalytic disclosure of the individual responsibility for war is to prepare the ground for new social institutions which would allow the individual concretely to express his responsibility on the politico-social level. . . . If it is I who am responsible it is I who must make amends; but if I must make amends, I must have concrete political instruments through which my reparative wishes may be concretely expressed.<sup>41</sup>

Believing that responsibility for unconscious wishes can become a social force, Fornari proposes such a reparative political instrument, one he names the Omega Institution. Integrating individual forces into social reality was the purpose of the institution, to which we shall return.

#### *Cosmopolitics*

In designing the *World Institute for the Abolition of War*, Krzysztof Wodiczko becomes heir to the modern legacy of international peacemaking, placing his work within the field of cosmopolitan politics, or, as it is sometimes called, cosmopolitics. Modern cosmopolitanism, an embattled term going back to the eighteenth century, encompasses a variety of moral and political views and is currently the subject of vigorous debates.<sup>42</sup> I use it here to refer to a global political consciousness that, though not necessarily post-nationalist, responds to the suffering of those who live beyond its own geographic and cultural borders and is adversarial in relation to global patriarchy and capitalist cosmopolitanism, which is what Marx calls exploitation on a world scale through a global mode of production. Equally contentious is cosmopolitanism's correlative term *universalism*. In contrast to depoliticizing, generalizing universalisms that cast differences and particularities into privacy and constitute one aspect of Enlightenment thought, another kind of "universalism" names a practice dedicated to extending the demand for justice and equality, which, along with nationalism, was also a facet of the Enlightenment. The demand for justice requires, in Etienne Balibar's words, "the affirmation of a *universal right to politics*," the right to,

we call *states*" in a footnote to "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason" (1793), in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), p. 57.

40. Melanie Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation" (1937), in *Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945, vol. 1, The Writings of Melanie Klein* (New York: Free Press, 2002), pp. 306-343.

41. Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*, p. 207.

42. For rigorous histories and analyses of these debates, see Bruce Robbins, ed., *Cosmopolitics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998); Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York University, 1999); Robbins, *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence* (Durham: Duke University, 2012).

that is, constitute the social order and put it at risk.<sup>43</sup> Joan Copjec advocates the second kind of Enlightenment universalism in a superb essay on radical evil: "The Kantian universal is neither an underlying principle that informs individual beings, nor a superior instance that subsumes our particularity; it is rather, the focal point of our actions."<sup>44</sup>

Focusing on "perpetual peace," by which he means the cessation not only of hostilities but of the threat of their breaking out, Kant believes that the only rational way to bring this peace about is by establishing an international state. Realizing, however, that at the time such a state was not the will of nations, he proposes a "negative substitute": a federation of nations that would create a system of international law based on principles of right.<sup>45</sup> For his part, Fornari agrees with Bertrand Russell, one of many influential figures who after 1945 thought that a single world government was the only alternative to the extinction of the human race, but like Kant, though for different reasons, he envisions obstacles to its formation. However, Fornari also emphatically rejects Kant's substitute: a union of states, an organization like the United Nations, in which "each member nation [is] above all jealous of preserving its own sovereignty."<sup>46</sup> World government, Fornari insists, presupposes the abolition of state sovereignty. But "who will abolish it?" Arguing that the abolition of sovereignty "from above," by international agreements between nations, would only arouse the persecution and castration anxieties that lead to heightened vindictiveness, Fornari maintains that state sovereignty must first be abolished "from below," when individual citizens reappropriate the violence they have alienated in the state. In so doing, individuals do not themselves become violent or exonerate the state's violence; rather, they take responsibility for war by withdrawing their consent to—protesting against—state violence. Returning to the subject, then, is the starting point for the sovereign state to evolve toward the non-sovereign state, one subject to the same laws as its citizens, and is also the foundation of the Omega Institution, a judicial institution operating on a *national* level that would inaugurate the evolution by establishing laws prohibiting the nation's aggression against other groups and instituting penalties for the exportation of violence. Omega Institutions would, to borrow Wodiczko's term, "detoxify" national cultures and group identities<sup>47</sup> and, according to Fornari, pave the way to world government.<sup>48</sup>

43. Etienne Balibar, "'Rights of Man' and 'Rights of the Citizen,'" in *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, trans. James Swenson (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), p. 49.

44. Joan Copjec, "Introduction: Evil in the Time of the Finite World," in *Radical Evil*, ed. Copjec (New York: Verso, 1996), p. xxiv.

45. Kant, "Perpetual Peace," p. 105.

46. Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*, p. 201.

47. Wodiczko, *Abolition of War*, p. 100.

48. It is interesting to contrast these proposals by courageously disillusioned peacemakers with one based on quite different, in some respects opposing, premises. In 1910, very late in his life, William James wrote an essay titled "The Moral Equivalent of War," in which he asserts that "interna-

Wodiczko's *World Institute for the Abolition of War* diverges from more classical paradigms of international peacemaking because, unlike Kant's and Fornari's proposals, it is not grounded in the model of the nation-state. Instead it stresses multilateral, nongovernmental alliances in the form of the Discursive Forum for the Abolition of War and the Cross-Disciplinary Center for Global Peace Projects. Neither does *World Institute* make reference to world government. *World Institute*, then, participates in the construction of a *new* cosmopolitics, one responsive to Derrida's exhortation to cultivate the spirit of the cosmopolitan tradition by questioning its limits and adjusting it to our own time.<sup>49</sup> For Derrida, this means, in addition to assuming responsibility before the stranger,<sup>50</sup> recognizing that justice is not fully exercised within the framework of the nation-state or the boundaries of law—that the law cannot encompass ethical life.<sup>51</sup> While Wodiczko, like Derrida, may support international law as a means of helping to expand justice universally, *World Institute* is not a law-making or judicial institution but, rather, a public and a cultural one—"public" not in the sense of state-related or open to a preexisting audience but because, in a Kantian spirit, it cultivates a public sphere of critical speech

tional rationality" should be used to resolve conflicts between nations. He begins by stating, in a manner similar to our philosophers, that warlike "pugnacity"—part of Mignon Nixon's "badness"—cannot be eliminated in modern man, who, he believes, has "inherited" it—something like original sin—from uncivilized ancestors. He also asserts that it is precisely "the horrors [of war] that make the fascination" with it. But James also agrees with "the war party" for whom the martial virtues—patriotism, "intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command"—"are absolute and permanent goods." "No healthy minded person," he says, can disagree that "militarism is the great preserver of our ideals of hardihood, and human life with no use for hardihood would be contemptible. . . . Hardihoods continue the manliness to which the military mind so faithfully clings. . . . Martial virtues. . . must still remain the rock upon which states are built . . . war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community." This concession to militarism (and masculinism) leads him to conclude, following H. G. Wells, that the martial character should be bred by a force other than military conscription—the conscription of young men into a period of national service: mining, building bridges, window-washing, road-building, etc. He calls this force "the moral equivalent of war." It is not necessary to challenge James's solution or to disagree with his contention that pacifists cannot rely simply on moral argument to note that his ultimate focus on man's "nobility" and "honor"—his "manly virtues" and goodness—entails a complete turn away from the problem of what he himself has previously called man's "innate pugnacity" and fascination with horrors as causal factors of war, factors that will not be eradicated by the building of bridges. James's fetishistic disavowal of ineradicable aggressivity—simultaneously recognizing it and acting as though he hadn't—is also facilitated by his failure to question that war performs disciplinary rather than disinhibiting functions and that the state is a force for good. William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," n.p.

49. Jacques Derrida, "A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), p. 130. Derrida is not the only one to theorize a new cosmopolitanism. For the history of other new cosmopolitanisms of the 1990s, see Bruce Robbins's books listed in footnote 42.

50. Derrida reworks Kant's ideas, expressed in "Perpetual Peace," about hospitality toward the stranger in *Of Hospitality: Ann Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (Redwood City: Stanford University, 2000).

51. Borradori, "Deconstructing Terrorism," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 163.

and democratic, agonistic discourse. Perhaps the very debate about war might help bring about un-war, for, as Chantal Mouffe writes,

the novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of [the] us/them distinction—which is an impossibility—but the different way in which it is established. . . . The aim of democratic politics is to construct the “them” in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but an “adversary,” i.e., somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question.<sup>52</sup>

*World Institute*, unlike previous peacemaking proposals, aims to dismantle the culture of war and institutionalize a new transnational un-war culture, challenging the oft-expressed notion that emotional ties, identifications, and shared responsibilities can only be forged on local and national scales. Bruce Robbins, a scholar of cosmopolitanism, notes that “though the concept of culture emerged historically in close connection with nationalism, it does not belong inevitably or definitively on the side of nation, inheritance, or locality.” The reason, he explains, is that although throughout most of human history “both habitual knowledge of others and habitual opportunities to affect others’ lives were very limited in space,” social organizations and communication technologies have now expanded and, along with them, possibilities for international common cultures and modes of belonging.<sup>53</sup> To realize one such possibility, Wodiczko mobilizes sophisticated communication and information technologies, in order to bring about an antiwar instance of what Robbins calls “global feeling.”<sup>54</sup> *World Institute* thus exemplifies what Robbins has more recently called “a *newer* cosmopolitanism,” which, in the wake of the localizing, pluralizing tendency of certain new cosmopolitanisms of the 1990s, reconsiders “the virtues of cosmopolitanism’s universalist impulse” and, like the Omega Institution, makes it a priority to oppose the military aggression of one’s own country, especially if that country is the United States.<sup>55</sup>

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In the preface to “Perpetual Peace,” Kant remarks on the practical politician’s condescending attitude toward political theorists. “The worldly-wise statesman,” he writes, believes that the theorist is a mere academic who cannot endanger the state. “It thus follows,” he concludes, “that if the practical politician is to be consistent, he must not claim, in the event of a dispute with the theorist, to scent any danger to the state in the opinions which the theorist has randomly uttered in public. By this saving

52. Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?,” Political Science Series 72 (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 2000). [http://.ihs.ac.at/publications/pol/pw\\_72.pdf](http://.ihs.ac.at/publications/pol/pw_72.pdf) (accessed August 12, 2013).

53. Bruce Robbins, *Global Feeling: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York University, 1999), pp. 19–20.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

55. Robbins, *Perpetual War*, p. 3. Emphasis mine.

clause, the author of this essay will consider himself expressly safeguarded, in correct and proper style, against all malicious interpretation."<sup>56</sup>

Kant casts himself as a hopeless idealist, detached from practical matters, trading in fantasies—the role frequently assigned to those who assume responsibility for abolishing war. Kant's preface is ironic, however, because, as the ethico-political philosopher Allen W. Wood writes, Kant actually rejected the notion that "historical hopes must never be entertained . . . as though we could not devote ourselves to final ends of humanity . . . unless we see clear signs that humanity is on the brink of fulfilling them."<sup>57</sup> *World Institute for the Abolition of War* makes clear that the same is true of Wodiczko, who, in a time of perpetual war, allows the historical hope of unwar to enter the public space of appearances, establishing it as a reality.

56. Kant, "Perpetual Peace," p. 93.

57. Allen W. Wood, "Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace," in *Cosmopolitics*, p. 72.





NO DRONES

*Louise Lawler. No Drones. 2013.*



*Louise Lawler. No Drones. 2011.  
Installation view.*

MIGNON NIXON

*It is a queer experience, lying in the dark and listening to the zoom of a hornet, which may at any point sting you to death. It is a sound that interrupts cool and consecutive thinking about peace. Yet it is a sound—far more than prayers and anthems—that should compel one to think about peace.*

—Virginia Woolf, “Thoughts  
on Peace in an Air Raid”

*1. Doodlebugs*

Hitler deployed the first pilot-less flying bombs, the doodlebugs, as weapons of terror over London. “The drone of the planes,” Virginia Woolf related, is “like the sawing of a branch overhead. Round and round it goes, sawing and sawing.” It falls to the civilian under aerial attack to “fight with the mind” by “thinking against the current, not with it.” Thinking in darkness, thinking in bed, thinking with the unconscious—Woolf defends the supposedly “futile activity of idea-making” as a counterpoint to the drone of war.<sup>1</sup>

Artistic resistance to war is often faulted for its futility. It is as if artistic responses to war succeeded only in stripping art, and its audience, of their political dignity. All antiwar art is not equally scorned, of course. Documentary and

1. Virginia Woolf, “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (1942), in *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 1. First published in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. Commenting on “Living Under Drones,” a recent Stanford/New York University report on the effects of American drones on the civilian population of Waziristan, Clive Stafford Smith compares them to the flying bombs that menaced London in World War II: “When the doodlebugs (as V1s—Hitler’s drones—were called) came over,” he observes, citing the experience of his own mother, the buzzing of the engine signaled temporary reprieve; sudden silence meant imminent death. The droning sound became a weapon of terror in itself, as it has in Waziristan, where “the Predators emit an eerie sound, earning them the name *bangana* (buzzing wasp) in Pashtu.” Clive Stafford Smith, “Drones: The West’s New Terror Campaign,” *Guardian* (September 24, 2012). <http://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2012/sep/25/drones-wests-terror-weapons-doodlebugs-1> (accessed January 30, 2014).

activist modes may be counted as extensions of journalism and politics. Memorializing and witnessing gestures bear the import of history. Protest art defies authoritarian repression. And while any of these may be dismissed as naïve or ineffectual, a special contempt is reserved for those modes of artistic resistance that refuse or mock the rhetoric of war.<sup>2</sup>

Woolf furnishes some reasons. War is not an event that suddenly comes along, she explains. It is already here. "The desire to dominate and enslave" defines everyday life, she writes, and the prevention of war, like war itself, therefore begins at home, with ourselves.<sup>3</sup> In her expansive text of 1938 on the prevention of war, *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that the cleavage of public and private spheres is the foundational violence of militarism, placing war beyond reach of the everyday.<sup>4</sup> War as we know it is a ruse of militarism, in other words.

Louise Lawler's sly interventions in contemporary war discourse underscore this point. Apart from an extensive body of work on American militarism, culminating in her 2011 exhibition *No Drones*, the artist's antiwar ephemera and non-works (including the double-page spread that opens this essay) resist the efforts of militarism to monopolize and mystify war, to cut it off from the everyday. Woolf sharpened her pen on the spectacle of militaristic display, the frippery and finery on parade in military, parliamentary, and academic pageantry alike. Lawler trains her attention on the rituals of the art world, implying that militarism runs through them like a steady line, smoothly connecting the dots. At the same time, her art reveals another trend of militarism, which is the colonization of daily life, the relentless intrusion of state violence into our so-called private lives. To expose the ruse of militarism, Lawler suggests, we must open our eyes to its most intimate and most insidious effects.

Militarism distinguishes "war inside" (as Gertrude Stein referred to our birthright of destructiveness) from "war outside," the violence of the state. Predicated on a fastidious separation of subject and state, militarism cultivates our sense of estrangement from war, discounts our insider knowledge, and discourages questions like the one Stein recollected from childhood in her 1945 memoir *Wars I Have Seen*: "What is it inside in one that makes one know all about war?"<sup>5</sup> For Stein, war is always already part of one, inside one. The mystery of war is that it lays its claim on us from the inside out.

2. An example of such contempt is the critical response to Yayoi Kusama's performances against the nuclear arms race and the American war in Vietnam. Mignon Nixon, "Anatomic Explosion on Wall Street," *October* 142 (Fall 2012), pp. 3–25.

3. Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," p. 3. Woolf's prolific insights about the continuities of tyranny and destructiveness in everyday life and in war underpin much essential feminist writing on war culture. See, for example, Rosalyn Deutsche, "Un-War: An Aesthetic Sketch," in this issue.

4. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993).

5. Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (1945; London: Brilliance Books, 1984), p. 9. On Stein's war memoir and contemporary artistic responses to war, see Mignon Nixon, "War Inside/War Outside: Feminist Critiques and the Politics of Psychoanalysis," *Texte zur Kunst* 17, no. 68 (December 2007), pp. 65–75; and Rosalyn Deutsche, "Un-war: An Aesthetic Sketch," in this issue.

## 2. Drones

"Wars. So many wars. Wars inside and wars outside." This line carries the cadence of Stein, but it is actually Bruno Latour, in a lecture delivered in the spring of 2003, some two weeks after the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq. He begins to list the wars. "Culture wars, science wars, and wars against terrorism. Wars against poverty and wars against the poor. Wars against ignorance and wars out of ignorance." Then he comes straight to the point: "My question is simple. Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals?"<sup>6</sup> Latour could almost be channeling Woolf now, except that she would never have associated herself with "the scholars, the intellectuals," whose vanities she read as symptoms of militarist culture. The difference tells when Latour abruptly pivots to what he calls his worry: "Quite simply, my worry is that we might not be aiming for the right target." With this swerve from the question of whether we, the self-professed thinkers, should also be at war to the worry that we might simply have the wrong target in our sights, Latour abandons the question of intellectual and psychical responsibility for war in order to embrace the very symmetries between academe and militarism that Woolf decries. "To remain in the metaphorical atmosphere of the time," he remarks, "military experts constantly revise their strategic doctrines, their contingency plans, the size, direction, and technology of their projectiles, their smart bombs, their missiles; I wonder why we, we alone, would be saved from those sorts of revisions." For Latour, what counts is to be rhetorically current, or "in the metaphorical atmosphere" of one's time, and to be quick to recognize "new threats, new dangers, new tasks, new targets." Once upon a time, he reminds us, "intellectuals were in the vanguard."<sup>7</sup> The cultural avant-garde not only kept up with rhetorical change but set the pace. Now it is the military-scientific-industrial complex that drives the agenda.

Woolf, by contrast, makes a virtue of hesitation and delay. "Three years is a long time to leave a letter unanswered," she announces in the arch opening line of *Three Guineas*, "and your letter has been lying without an answer even longer than that."<sup>8</sup> Setting aside the abundant appeals that pile up on her desk, waiting for more dust to gather before lifting her pen, the author ruminates at leisure before replying at length to a question styled, in the now familiar way, to flatter prospective patrons of a new society: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" Woolf's response runs to some two hundred pages in small type. "It is true that many answers have suggested themselves," she confides, "but none that would not need explanation, and explanation takes time."<sup>9</sup>

6. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004), p. 225. First presented as the Stanford presidential lecture, Stanford Humanities Center, April 7, 2003. Subsequent references are to p. 225 except where noted.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

8. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*, p. 117.

9. *Ibid.*

A twenty-first-century Woolf, one imagines, would not “donate now” to stall next week’s war or circulate an online petition to her address book with an urgent personal message. It is difficult to conjure her tweeting advice to the prime minister: to bomb or not to bomb. Offered opportunities to sign a petition, attend a political meeting, and donate to a fund, she declines all three. Belated as it is, Woolf’s thick, chiding letter to the founder of the new society does not conclude by enclosing a check. Instead, it promises a guinea for the rebuilding fund of a women’s college. The prevention of war, she reasons, rests on a new model of education, one not beholden to the arms industry. She imagines a “poor college,” experimental and nonhierarchical, with a curriculum devoted not to “the arts of dominating other people” (which “require too many overhead expenses”) but to “the arts of human intercourse.”<sup>10</sup>

Latour’s call to academic arms is an exercise in devil’s advocacy, to be sure. Yet it touches on a real problem: how does critique adapt to a war footing? Suggesting that the humanities have an obligation to move with the times, “to press ahead, to redirect our meager capacities as fast as possible,” he charges the humanities, and himself, with debunking and deconstructing while Rome burns.<sup>11</sup> Latour borrows yet another military analogy, that of “fighting the last war,” to diagnose the malaise in which the humanities, circa 2003, were plunged. For military doctrine has it that war, unlike history, does not repeat itself. “Would it not be rather terrible,” he wonders, “if we were still training young kids—yes, young recruits, young cadets—for wars that are no longer possible . . . leaving them ill-equipped in the face of threats we had not anticipated, for which we are so thoroughly unprepared?”<sup>12</sup>

When Latour extolled the superior competence of military experts who constantly revise “the size, direction, and technology of their projectiles,” the current wars were in their infancy. Since then, it has become *de rigueur* for the humanities to court legitimacy in a culture of techno-militarism, even as the credibility of that culture has inexorably declined. Close to home, militarist thinking is detectable even in some revisionist histories of postmodernism, which reduce those debates to abstract culture wars, and in a broad revival of fantasies of mastery that feminist, psychoanalytic, and poststructuralist work had once discredited. The prospect of a humanist academy on the militarist model—a drone academy—seems rather different now. Even as a rhetorical weapon, the smart bomb seems disastrously ill-equipped to alleviate the cultural malaise of anti-rationality bordering on nihilism that Latour warned against back then and that has only deepened in our prolonged time of war. Rather than restrain us, “the scholars, the intellectuals,” from “add[ing] ruins to ruins”—by which Latour intended the absurdist gesture of reflexively invoking deconstruction in a public discourse already conducted under

10. Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own/Three Guineas*, p. 155.

11. Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” p. 226.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

the sway of the death drive—today's drone culture has conferred on Latour's rhetoric a tragic reality. To the extent that we in the humanities are willing to assume responsibility for the current wars, the question "is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins?" can no longer be deemed safely rhetorical.<sup>13</sup> The "young recruits, young cadets" of the current generation have assimilated the streamlined training regimes dedicated to applying "meager capacities as fast as possible" to urgent contemporary debates, as Latour admonished. But at what cost? Have we inadvertently conspired to abet a techno-militarist fantasy of the humanities themselves as a "fresh ruin," a ruin overdue for being added to the "field of ruins"?<sup>14</sup>

### 3. No Drones

Posted on the door of my office at the Courtauld Institute of Art is a tattered souvenir from Louise Lawler's 2011 London exhibition *No Drones*. A few eyebrows were raised when the poster went up. Its pale and faintly shimmering echo of "No Nukes"—a political slogan that lingers on the fringes of British protest culture—offered an uncomfortable reminder of past failure. And that was part of the point: War is retro, however futuristic it appears. When artistic resistance to war summons the past, it reminds us of this. The posting of *No Drones* was also intended as one small way of highlighting the nexus of militarization, art, and the humanities in the everyday life of an academic institution. It was, of course, not only the students I was addressing but, more particularly, myself.

In November 2011, Lawler's exhibition *No Drones* coincided (coincidentally) with a retrospective of Gerhard Richter at Tate Modern.<sup>15</sup> Lawler in effect transferred two works by Richter, *Mustang Squadron* (1964), based upon a photograph of Allied bombers over Germany, and *Skull* (1983), to the Sprüth Magers gallery at the dead end of an elegant Mayfair street. Printed on

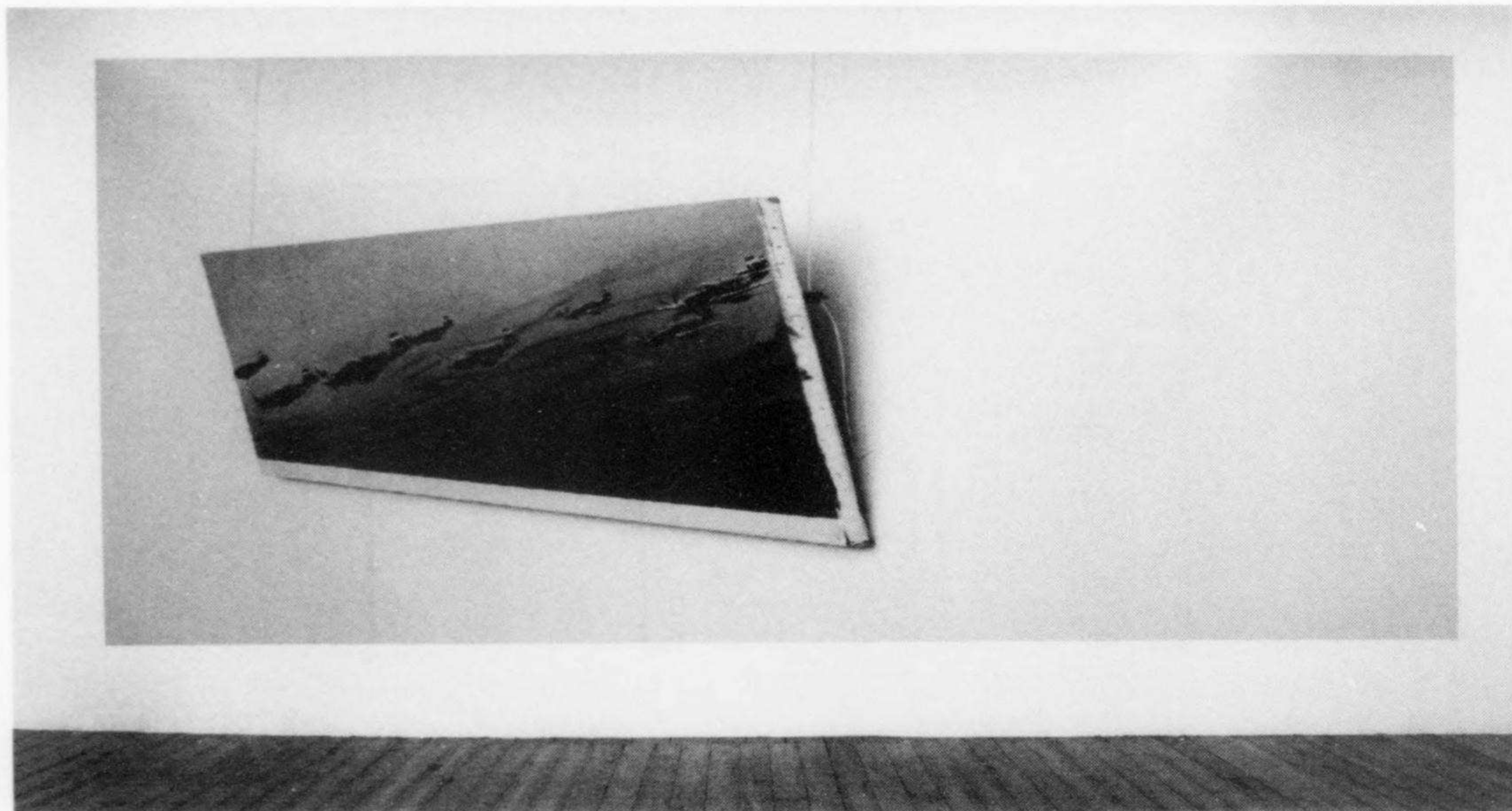
NO DRONES

*Announcement  
for No Drones.  
Sprüth Magers,  
London. 2011.*

13. Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" p. 225.

14. For an example of how the eclipse of the humanities by the sciences has become academe's new "worry," see, for example, Tamar Lewin, "As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry," *New York Times* (October 30, 2013). <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/31/education/as-interest-fades-in-the-humanities-colleges-worry.html> (accessed January 30, 2014). Stanford University, where Latour gave his 2003 lecture at the Humanities Center, is one of the campuses described as particularly worried.

15. Lawler was not responding directly to Tate Modern's Gerhard Richter exhibition and was not aware it would coincide with her own. Conversation with the author, October 10, 2012.



*Lawler. No Drones. 2011.*  
*Installation view.*

adhesive vinyl and applied directly to the gallery walls, Lawler's photographs of these works, taken during the installation of Richter's work in the Albertinum Museum/Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, in 2010, were manipulated—adjusted to fit, in Lawler's description—to make them strictly proportional to the site.<sup>16</sup>

Titled *No Drones* and *Civilian*, the two works took on fresh political import as an extension of Richter's own procedure in retrieving and enlarging photographs of the bombing of Germany during World War II. Drawing on photographs of a recent past that had already been effectively repressed, Richter pointed to a process of historical forgetting: His photographs were reminders of a "last war" that was briefly imagined to mark the end of wars. By applying optically distorted, or stretched, editions of her own photographs of Richter's paintings in Dresden, the site of frenzied Allied bombing of civilians, to a gallery wall in London, the city where Hitler deployed the first unmanned drones, Lawler invited reflection on the extent to which the remembrance of wars past shapes the dynamics of our own current wars. In particular, the installation invited reflection upon aerial destruction as a preeminent mode of cultural domination and control.

"Dresden was the Florence of Germany," Sven Lindqvist has written, "an old cultural capital, full of art treasures and architectural masterpieces that the bombing had left untouched throughout five years of war. So the city was full of

16. On Lawler and Richter, see *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter: Photographs and Works*, ed. Dietmar Elger, essay by Tim Griffin (Dresden: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012). On Lawler's adjusted-to-fit works, see Sven Lütticken, "'Not Stone': Acting in and with Louise Lawler's Pictures," in *Louise Lawler: Adjusted* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2013).



*Lawler. No Drones. 2011.  
Installation view.*

refugees and practically undefended when the British attacked on February 13, 1945.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, he remarks, “even today there is no hint in any British museum of the systematic attacks on German civilians in their homes, no hint that these attacks constituted crimes under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians.”<sup>18</sup> Even, or perhaps especially, in the war museum, historical perspective is trumped by aerial perspective.

Lawler’s photograph of *Mustang Squadron* is entitled *No Drones*. Its angle is sidelong to the painting. Stretched out along the wall, it is anamorphically distorted, prodding the viewer’s body to shuttle sideways, as if in search of some elusive optical resolution. Adhering to the wall like a label, the vinyl surface of *No Drones* contrasts with its subject, a painting seen askance, pitched sharply forward, partially obscured, hooks and wire exposed. Not an image of an image of an image of bombing, then—an image suspended in the infinite regress of the virtual—*No Drones* presents instead a photographic mural of a photograph of an installation of

17. Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (London: Granta, 2001), entry 214 (n.p.).

18. *Ibid.*, entry 200 (n.p.).

a painting of a photograph, itself photographically reproduced, of a squadron of bombers. And each of these translations performs a kind of estrangement, drawing the viewer into an intricate process of interpreting an aerial perspective. Unlike the viewpoint of the drone, whose operators search screens for targets to destroy, the perspective of *No Drones* is one of anamorphosis, in which mastery of the visual field, and by implication historical depth, is sufficiently frustrated that the very premise of such mastery is called into doubt.

In his seminar on anamorphosis, Jacques Lacan drew the attention of his listeners to a painting in the National Gallery in London, Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), which offers a virtuoso demonstration of the principle that a picture is "a trap for the gaze."<sup>19</sup> The young ambassadors, Jean de Dinteville and George de Selve, stand "frozen, stiffened in their showy adornments," he recounts, while between them, arrayed on two shelves, is "a series of objects that represent in the painting of the period the symbols of *vanitas*."<sup>20</sup> The upper shelf, where the figures' elbows rest, is the repository of astronomical devices, including a celestial globe, a portable sundial, and an astrolabe, instruments for measuring the heavens, the early equipment of a scientific dream of aerial mastery. The lower shelf

19. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 89.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 88.



*Hans Holbein. The Ambassadors. 1533.*

holds a terrestrial globe, a compass, an open hymn book, and a lute. The work's most enigmatic feature, however, hovers in the foreground, tilted on the diagonal, as if levitating. Lacan describes it as "the singular object . . . which is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, to catch in its trap, the observer, that is to say, us."<sup>21</sup> Only by surrendering an overview of the painting and moving to its side does the viewer discern that the tilted object floating in the foreground is a skull. "It is," Lacan continues,

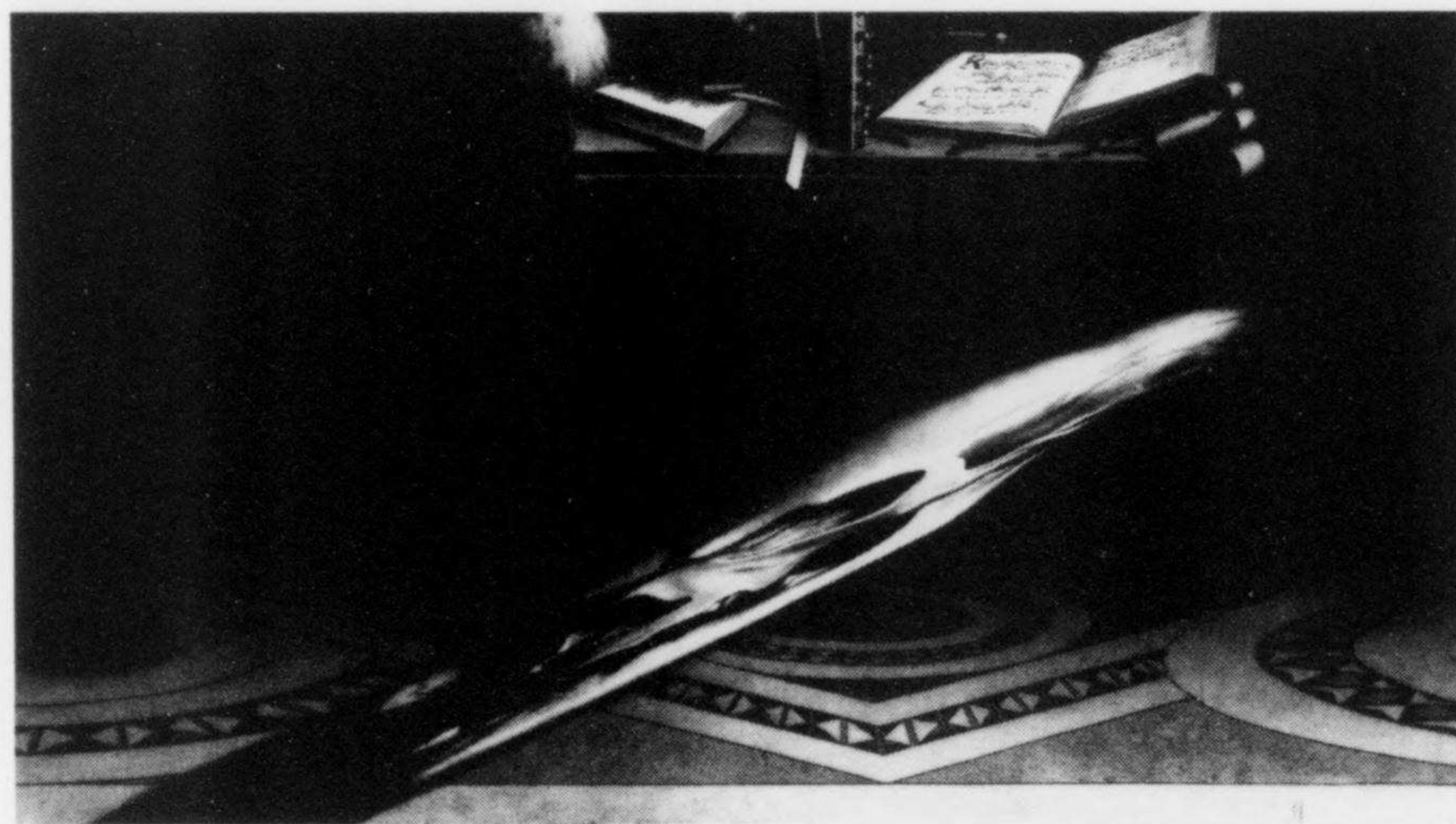
an obvious way . . . of showing us that, as subjects, we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught. For the secret of this picture . . . is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating figure signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head.<sup>22</sup>

A visitor to Lawler's exhibition in London, turning away from *Mustang Squadron/No Drones*, confronted—what else?—a photograph of Richter's *Skull* of 1983 pasted to the adjacent wall and retitled *Civilian*. In *The Ambassadors* of Holbein, the outsized skull hovers in the foreground of the painting, obscure to the viewer who examines the tableau head-on. This skull is, of course, a memento mori, a reminder of mortality that haunts the world of appearances, displayed here "in all its most fascinating forms," as Lacan exclaims, in the double portrait.<sup>23</sup> For Lacan, its more particular effect, however, is to echo, or reflect, our nothingness, to annihilate us in the act of seeing. "All this shows," he writes, "that at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometral optics was an

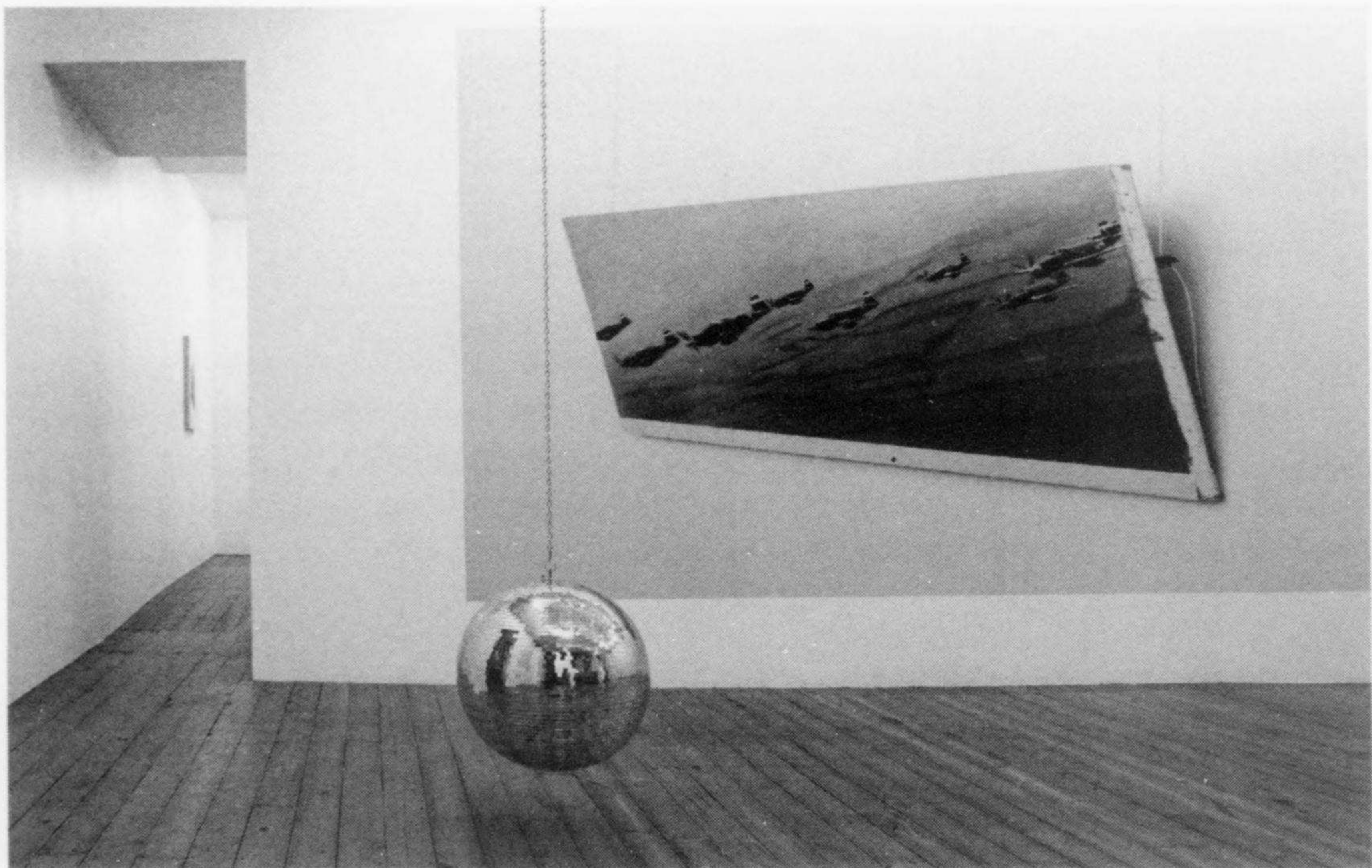
21. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 92.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 88.



Holbein. *The Ambassadors* (detail). 1533.



*Lawler. No Drones. 2011.  
Installation view.*

object of research, Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated.”<sup>24</sup> In Lawler’s staging of the anamorphic scenario, the subject-as-annihilated is, in effect, the civilian that could be me. In contrast to the drone’s eye view, which adopts the aerial perspective of the perpetrator, or plane, the anamorphic situation exploits an “inverted use of perspective” to reveal the illusion of this abstraction.<sup>25</sup>

Coincident with the historical emergence of the mastering subject through perspective, Lacan speculated, came the emergence of “the gaze as such, in all its pulsatile, dazzling, and spread out function, as it is in this picture.”<sup>26</sup> In *No Drones*, the anamorphic picture and the skull are accompanied by a third element, a mirrored disco ball hung between them, low to the floor, reflecting the installation in its fish-eye gaze. At night, when the gallery was dark, the disco ball became the star of the show, a luminous silver globe spinning like a planet in a dazzling field of red and green flickers that was evocative both of festive holiday lights and of that other light show unfolding on computer screens in technological fantasies of aer-

24. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 88.

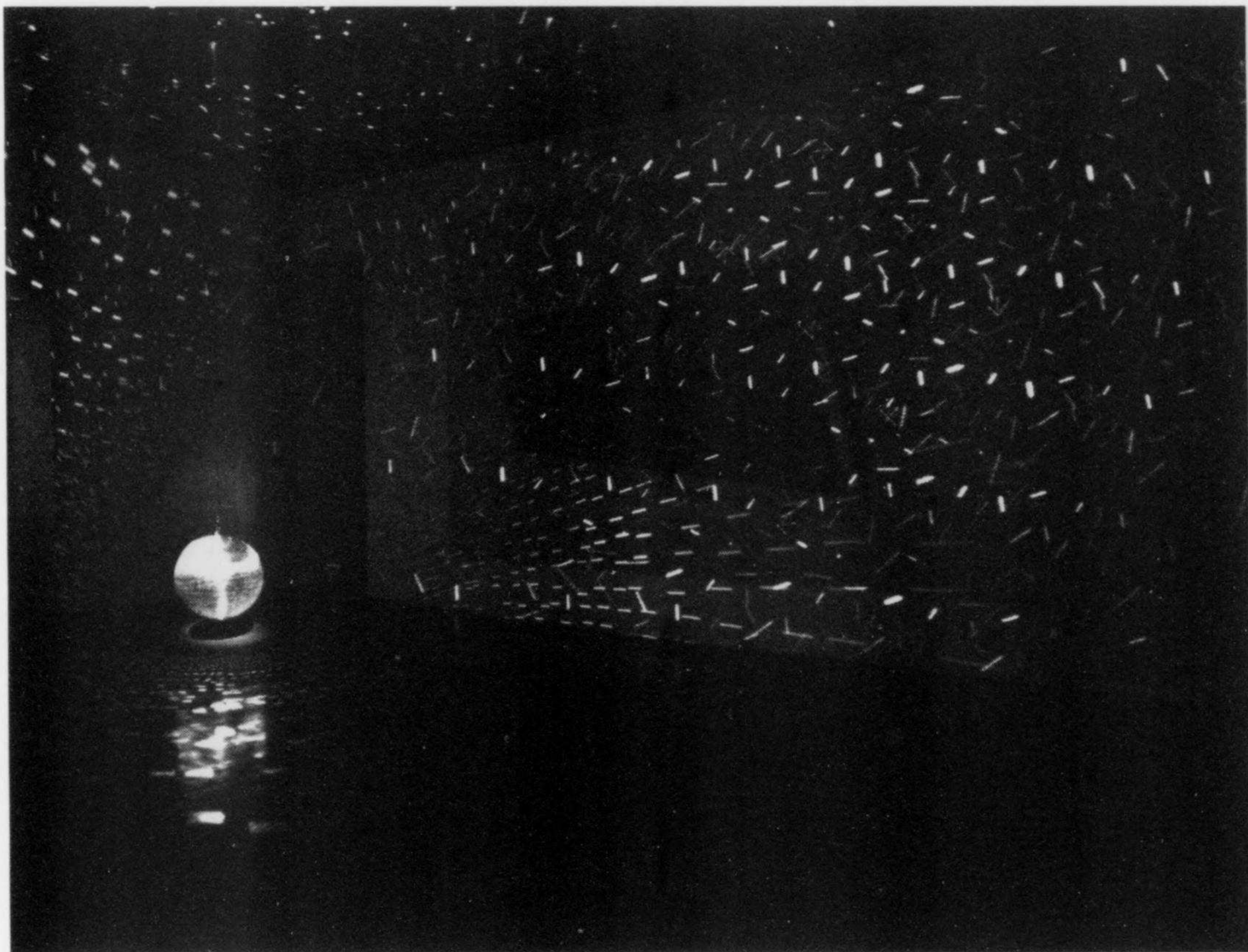
25. Ibid., p. 87. Lawler was not explicitly referencing Holbein’s *Ambassadors*: “I was aware of [the] anamorphic skull, but wasn’t thinking of any particular work when installing” (e-mail communication with the author, October 17, 2012).

26. Ibid., p. 89.

ial mastery and control. In another echo of *The Ambassadors*, with its ostentatious display of scientific instruments and globes—“everything that recalls, in the perspective of the period, the vanity of the arts and sciences”—Lawler drops this pulsating sphere at our feet, in the position occupied in Holbein’s painting by what Lacan calls the “magical floating object” that reflects our own nothingness, our lack.<sup>27</sup>

Retitling Richter’s *Skull as Civilian*, Lawler alludes to the persistent omission from histories of aerial war of the death toll of noncombatants. Since the end of World War II, the perspective of war has been an insistently aerial one, an expansive overview that obscures suffering on the ground through the familiar euphemism “collateral damage.” Missing from these aerial fantasies of war is not only the civilian dead but the specter of our own annihilation, our own nothingness. Swept away with all those “No Nukes” banners that Lawler’s pale poster faintly reflects is the anxiety of annihilation, of nonexistence, to which Lacan’s theory of the gaze is dedicated. It is therefore not surprising that one casualty of our current wars has been psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity that dwell upon our lack.

27. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 92.



Lawler. No Drones. 2011.  
Installation view.

In *No Drones*, Lawler echoes a question posed by Lacan: "How can we not see here, immanent in the geometral dimension . . . something symbolic of the function of the lack?"<sup>28</sup> In *The Ambassadors* of Holbein, the enigmatic object "from some angles appears to be flying through the air," Lacan remarks, "at others to be tilted."<sup>29</sup> It hangs in the air, eerily suspended, hideously flattened. The enigmatic object that is the skull, a reminder of our nothingness, exceeds the perspective of the image. It is only by abandoning the illusion of mastery over the visual field—which Lacan calls only "a partial dimension in the field of the gaze"—that we can make out the anamorphic effect and reflect upon its significance.<sup>30</sup>

Anamorphosis exacts a looking askance that is at odds with the drone perspective of targets and precision strikes. Anamorphosis demands that we take our eye off the target. "Begin by walking out of the room," Lacan advises. "It is then that, turning round as you leave . . . you apprehend in this form . . . What? A skull."<sup>31</sup> In her installation *No Drones*, Lawler conjures anamorphosis at every turn. Aerial fantasies assumed a heightened reality through the rhetoric of aerial photography, as commemorated in Richter's *Mustang Squadron*. Taking a sidelong angle on the painting, Lawler exposes its illusion doubly, first in the re-presentation of Richter's own appropriation of the motif, and then again in the oblique angle that evokes what Lacan calls "the gaze as such," having, as he puts it, a "spread out function."<sup>32</sup> The "spread out function" of Lawler's stretched photographs is in keeping with Lacan's suggestion that our desire for mastery is potentially tripped up by the anamorphic image, which offers an illusion of mastery at the cost of that illusion's being stretched beyond recognition. What destroys the illusion is the gaze, conceived by Lacan as outside us, a "pulsatile, dazzling, and spread out" effect, which Lawler slyly summarizes in the simultaneously refracting and reflecting effects of the mirror ball that is the fish-eye surrogate of Lacan's famous sardine can glinting in the water.<sup>33</sup> It is only by turning one's back on the picture, Lacan insisted, that the viewer discovers the secret of *The Ambassadors*, the secret of one's own nothingness. In order to assume individual responsibility for war, Lawler implies, we might take a hint from Holbein and Lacan and look askance, turn our backs, and ignore the target completely.

In *No Drones*, Lawler produces an anamorphosis of political resistance to war, countering the drone perspective by inviting viewers to look askance, to contemplate our lack. "The anamorphic shift," Slavoj Žižek has noted, "enables us to discern an apparently positive object as a 'negative magnitude,' as a mere 'positivization of a void.'"<sup>34</sup> In *The Ambassadors*, the enigmatic object that is the skull exposes the vanities

28. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 88.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., p. 89.

33. Ibid., p. 95.

34. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 76.

of cultural and scientific mastery represented by globe and astrolabe, and by painting itself. The illusion of perspective is revealed to be exactly that. It is only by sacrificing, however fleetingly, the fantasy of mastery over the visual field that we can discern the logic of anamorphosis—and put it to use. “Ideology,” Žižek maintains, “is the ‘self-evident’ surface structure whose function is to conceal the underlying ‘unbalanced,’ ‘uncanny’ structure.”<sup>35</sup> Lawler proposes the anamorphic shift as a logic that might enable us to glimpse the uncanny structure of drone culture.

#### 4. No Nukes

The Italian psychoanalyst Franco Fornari, writing in the 1960s in response to the Cold War nuclear threat, argued in *The Psychoanalysis of War* that “the war phenomenon” is a cultural solution to a very real psychic and social problem, which is the need to expel terror from the inner world to the outer world, and to export destructiveness from our own social group.<sup>36</sup> Aerial bombing transformed war by enabling some of us to expel our destructiveness to the furthest corners of the Earth and so to distance ourselves from our own annihilative acts even while reveling in fantasies of omnipotence. But there was a catch. The increasing destructiveness of war that aerial bombing had unleashed, the psychoanalyst observed, threatened to deprive us of war itself.

“No Nukes,” in Fornari’s terms, poses a threat to our sanity. Nuclear war threatens to annihilate not only the enemy but ourselves as well. Faced with the prospect of planetary annihilation through war, Fornari predicted (correctly), we might be inclined to act out our desire for war through “transference wars.” In psychoanalytic parlance, transference signifies a distorted repetition of the past. We all engage in transference routinely, transposing past conflicts and attachments onto current situations, all the while imagining that what we do and feel today is fundamentally different from what we once did and felt. In *No Drones*, Lawler gestures toward this phenomenon of transference war, and toward the transference dimension of any war. Her anamorphic photograph of Richter’s painting of an aerial photograph of bombing in the iconic “good war” demonstrates the principle by which the flawed logic of aerial warfare can be stretched, or adjusted, to fit a myriad of contingencies, including those of protracted, even perpetual war. From an aerial point of view, Lawler suggests, a stretched-to-fit war provides a convincing-enough optical illusion. It tricks the eye. It is beneath the zoom of the hornet, as Woolf put it, in the shadow of the plane, that this illusion is undone.

*Crazy* is the title Lawler assigns to the mirror ball that hangs from the ceiling in the exhibition *No Drones*. In Fornari’s terms, war is a cultural bulwark against insanity. It converts the intolerable anxiety of our own aggression, experienced as an “internal terrifier,” into rational violence directed against an actual enemy. Whether found or

35. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 82.

36. Franco Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*, trans. Alenka Pfeifer (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974).

made, Fornari contends, the enemy that is the object of our destructiveness is also our deliverance, the guarantor of our sanity. The prospect of nuclear war, which threatened to render war obsolete, also left us potentially defenseless against our terrors, he maintains. MAD, the military doctrine of mutually assured destruction, was the aptly named solution to this predicament, providing, in the calculus of the Cold War, a logic by which preserving war also prevents its ultimate expression. To submit willingly to the psychic strain of living constantly on the brink of annihilation was mad, but also unsustainable, and our current wars provide, if not a resolution of the persistent nuclear threat, at least a distraction from it.

In her important book *Hiroshima After Iraq*, Rosalyn Deutsche argues that the Iraq War, purportedly instigated in response to an imminent nuclear threat, perpetuates the state of existence that the psychoanalyst Hanna Segal called “nuclear-mentality culture.”<sup>37</sup> After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, other modes of terror bombing, Deutsche observes, were demoted to the term “conventional weapons,” making them appear “benign by contrast with their nuclear counterparts,” in a rhetorical gesture that enabled aerial destructiveness to intensify, even dramatically—for example, in Vietnam—in the guise of restraint.<sup>38</sup> *No Drones*, with its evocation of conventional bombing; *Crazy*, with its allusion to MAD; and *Civilian*, summoning the target of both, conspire to suggest that drone culture is not a solution to the problem of “nuclear-mentality culture” but a perpetuation of it.

We are engaged, as Fornari foretold, in a rearguard action to revive war, to reinvent it not as an actuality, with all the implications this might hold for our own destruction, but as a realistic-seeming fantasy, a skewed transference effect. Drone warfare is real, but its execution is virtual, condensing the nuclear threat of remote-controlled (self-)obliteration into a fantasy of mastery that is unilateral, targeted, and contained.

*Crazy*, the mirrored globe that dangles from the ceiling, its reflections playing dizzily over its faceted surface, encapsulates this fantasy as the precipitate of MAD and recalls an earlier body of work devoted to that theme. In 1966, the New York-based Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama blanketed the lawn of the Italian pavilion of the Venice Biennale with 1,500 plastic mirror balls, offering them for purchase under the slogan “Your Narcissism for Sale” to any passerby for the price of two dollars. She followed this up in the summer of 1967 with a psychedelic film, *Self-Obliteration*, and, in the summer of 1968, conducted a series of “anatomic explosions” in downtown New York, warning against the “pantoclastic prospect,” as Fornari called it, of a world pulverized into polka dots. She went on to produce infinity mirror rooms, kaleidoscopic chambers, and light shows designed to crystallize the hallucinatory condition

37. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Hiroshima After Iraq: Three Studies in Art and War* (New York: Columbia University, 2010), p. 25.

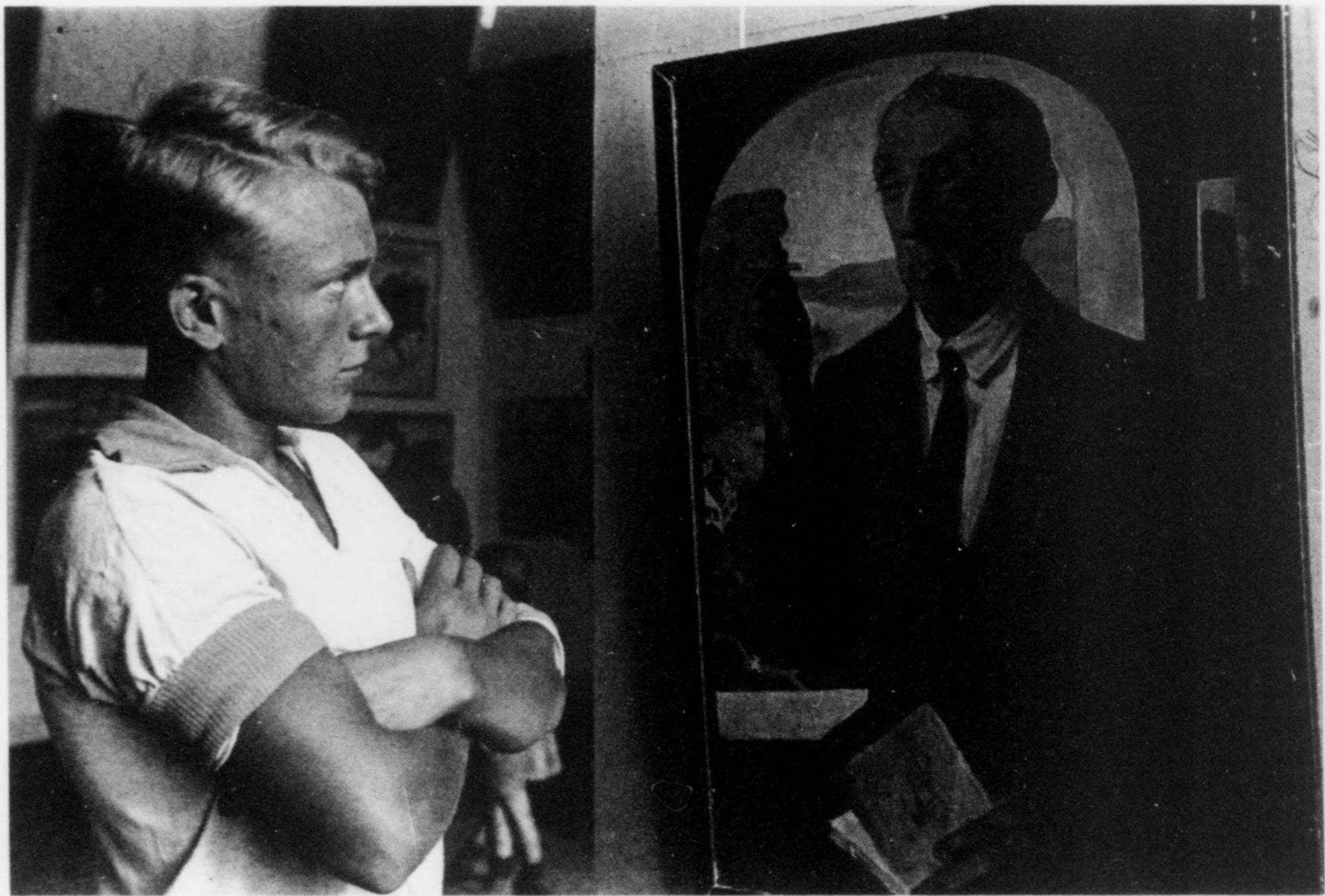
38. *Ibid.*, p. 24. On the intensification of aerial destructiveness in Vietnam to a level dwarfing the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, see Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (New York: Picador, 2013).

of contemporary nuclear politics in spectacles of infinite regress. For all this, Kusama herself was long dismissed as crazy.<sup>39</sup>

The insistence on rationalism in the rhetoric of war is a constant, and responses to war that invoke its unconscious motives court derision. With *No Drones*, Lawler looks at this problem askance. Our current wars, she suggests, are anamorphic editions of the aerial fantasies of the recent past. Stretched-to-fit, she suggests, might be a more accurate description of the metaphorical atmosphere of our time of war than aimed-at-the-right-target. Extensive in space and time, our stretched-out, spread-out wars have become anamorphically distorted, politically and historically diffuse, she points out. As for critique, the target of Latour's challenge to the humanities, Lawler, too, seems skeptical. *No Drones* is pointed, but its angle is oblique.<sup>40</sup>

39. On Kusama's art as a response to war, see Mignon Nixon, "Infinity Politics," in *Yayoi Kusama*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate, 2011), and "Anatomic Explosion on Wall Street," *October* 142 (Fall 2012), pp. 3–25.

40. In his recent essay "Louise Lawler: Memory Images of Art Under Spectacle," Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has declared her work's "most astonishing dimension" to be "the subtlety of its devastating and carefully annihilating antiaesthetic." *Louise Lawler, Adjusted* (Munich: Prestel, 2013), p. 85. Here, I have attempted to make a corresponding claim that Lawler employs a "carefully annihilating anti-aesthetic" anamorphically, and apotropaically, as a response to the mystique of war.



*Viewer at 15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR. State Historical  
Museum, Moscow, June 1933–February 1934.*

Staging Soviet Art: *15 Years of  
Artists of the Russian Soviet  
Republic, 1932–33\**

MASHA CHLENOVA

*We won't talk about which style will result from proletarian art. This problem is not resolved and it may not be for a while. But in any case, we know all the ways and paths that lead there.*

—Aristarkh Lentulov, 1933<sup>1</sup>

*What will be the concrete forms of socialist art? . . .  
What can we do, comrades, if a recipe for a ready-made socialist art does not and cannot exist?*

—Evgenii Kronman, 1933<sup>2</sup>

A documentary photograph from the exhibition *15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR (Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let)*<sup>3</sup> that opened in Moscow in June 1933 shows the extent to which contemporaries perceived this show as a watershed, a moment when the last remnants of the bourgeois culture of prerevolutionary Russia definitively gave way to the proletarian culture of the rapidly modernizing Soviet Union. A clean-cut and athletic Soviet youth looks straight into the eyes of the refined symbolist poet, playwright, critic, and translator Mikhail Kuz'min as painted in 1926 by a fellow member of the artistic group World of Art (*Mir Iskusstva*), Nikolai Radlov. In this confrontation, Kuz'min seems to embody everything the Soviet Union had done away with. The height of his fame as a Symbolist poet was the 1900s and 1910s; in the early 1930s, he was still writing poetry, but was unable to

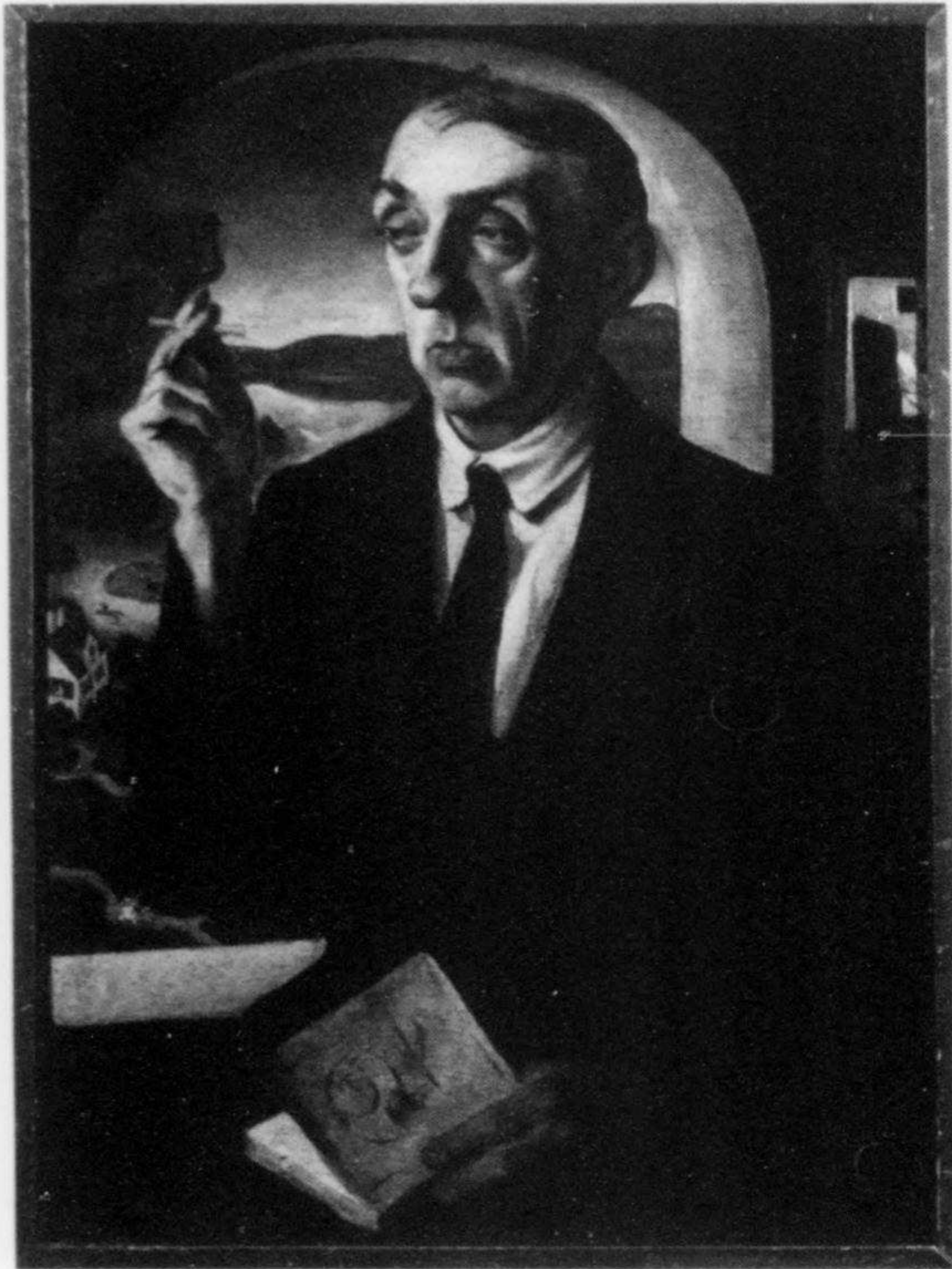
\* This essay draws from my dissertation, "On Display: Transformations of the Avant-Garde in Soviet Public Culture, 1928–1932" (Columbia University, New York, 2010). I am grateful to Christina Kiaer and Kristin Romberg for their encouragement and helpful feedback at different stages of my work on this material and to Cara Maines and Jodi Roberts for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

1. Aristarkh Lentulov during a debate at the State Tretyakov Gallery in January 1933. See "Diskussiiia v GTG po re-ekspozitsii" (Jan. 27–Feb. 8, 1933), Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) f.990 op.3 d.7 l.106-7. All translations by the author.

2. Evgenii Kronman, "O klassike i klassitsizme," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (June 8, 1933), p. 3.

3. RSFSR is an acronym for Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the largest republic of the Soviet Union.

publish and increasingly marginalized.<sup>4</sup> In the painting's background, a mythic landscape set within an arched window typical of Renaissance portraits ties him to the Western humanist tradition. Kuz'min's bodily posture invites contact: Seated close to the picture plane with open arms, he appears to look out. Yet the poet also seems reserved and distant, perhaps because of his formal dress, and introspective: The lit cigarette at the level of his mouth and his semi-open book signal that he is preoccupied with a subject other than his interlocutor. The youth, on



Nikolai Radlov. Portrait of Mikhail Kuz'min. 1926.

the other hand, has the confident, even somewhat condescending look of a master of the universe (*khoziain zhizni*), with folded arms and a slightly skeptical glance. Wearing a fashionable sports shirt on his fit body, he represents the ideal of the times: a healthy, physically strong, and ideologically prepared builder of a socialist society who, both literally and figuratively, embodies the Soviet future. Such an ideal is exemplified by Aleksandr Samokhvalov's contemporaneous painting *Girl in a Soccer Jersey* (*Devushka v futbolke*), which was displayed in the same exhibition and quickly became an iconic symbol of Soviet athletic youth. This seemingly antagonistic encounter between representatives of the Soviet past and future simultaneously reflects the change in the official rhetoric. By 1933 it was conciliatory in tone, having firmly replaced the open class conflict of

the preceding years, and bourgeois specialists were not only welcomed back into the fold of Soviet society, they were offered privileges if they worked for the new state.

As a historical record of the exhibition *15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR*, this photograph also illustrates its officially announced goal: to bring together Soviet artists and their proletarian viewers and thus to serve as a discursive bridge that would generate mutual feedback between producers of art and its consumers. In that sense, the aim

4. Kuz'min's last book of poetry, *Forel' razbivaet led: stikhi, 1925–28* (The trout breaking through the ice: poems, 1925–28), was published in 1929. Critics dismissed it as irrelevant to “the most serious questions of our time” and “a curious monument of a culture that has died out.” Valery Druzin, *Zvezda* 5 (1929), pp. 171–72. Starting in the late 1920s, Kuz'min began making a living only with translations, which grew increasingly scarce. He was also persecuted for his homosexuality, which was recriminalized in 1933. He died in 1936 in complete poverty and isolation. See John Malmstad and Nikolai Bogomolov, *Mikhail Kuzmin: A Life in Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1999), pp. 346–51.

of this unprecedented survey of Soviet artistic production was to stimulate the creation of socially relevant (*sotsial'no znachimye*) works by teaching artists to understand the needs of Soviet viewers and of unions, workers' clubs, and administrative offices, organizations that chose and bought works from the exhibition. Its very title—"15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR" which replaced the earlier working titles "Soviet Art over 15 Years" and "15 Years of Soviet Power"—emphasized the agency of artists in the development of Soviet art. At the same time, the retrospective, with its unprecedented level of publicity, many organized group visits, and heightened attention to viewers' responses, was aimed at compelling the Soviet masses to make an effort to know and understand contemporary artistic production in the country. It was also intended to empower them to have a direct say in what *their* art was going to look like in the future.<sup>5</sup>

The exhibition was conceived in January 1932 to coincide with the fifteenth anniversary of the revolution. Its immediate goal was stated bluntly in major Soviet newspapers: to demonstrate the sheer scale and amplitude of Soviet pictorial achievement and to present this as an illustration of the advantages of the Soviet system of artistic production over that of the capitalist West.<sup>6</sup> As such, *15 Years* established a precedent for state-organized exhibitions on an enormous scale, with carefully orchestrated campaigns of advertising, media coverage, and critical reviews.<sup>7</sup> The first version of the retrospective was held from November 1932 to January 1933 at the Russian Museum in Leningrad; the second, considerably modified version opened in Moscow in June 1933 with the exhibition of painting at the Historical Museum followed by shows in other media at four additional major museums in the capital over the course of the subsequent year.

Accompanying this massive review of Soviet art was the construction and institutionalization of a canonical narrative of the history of Soviet art and a pro-

5. Despite its historical importance, this exhibition has received little scholarly attention. A lengthy article written in 1982 by the art historian and former curator of Soviet art at the Tretyakov Gallery Aleksandr Morozov remains the most extensive source of factual information about the exhibition and contains detailed descriptions of individual works of the emerging Socialist Realist canon. A. Morozov, "K istorii vystavki 'Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let,'" *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie* 1 (1982), pp. 120–67. For all its research merits, however, Morozov's essay has the inherent limitation of having been written within the Soviet context at the time when Socialist Realism was still the only officially accepted artistic style.

6. See, for instance, "Istoricheskaia spravka," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (June 26, 1933), p. 1.

7. One precursor of this exhibition was a 1919 state retrospective entitled *Pervaia Gosudarstvennaia Svobodnaia Vystavka Iskusstv* (The First State Free Exhibition of the Arts), which opened at the Hermitage Museum, then called Palace of the Arts, in Petrograd. It was organized by the Arts Section of Narkompros (Commissariat for Enlightenment), headed by David Shterenberg and Natan Altman, who had invited artists to participate with their latest works. Its goal was "to demonstrate the state of Russian art at the present moment" through all trends and movements. It included a total of 1,826 works by 359 artists. See David Shterenberg, "Polozheniie ob ustroistve khudozhestvennoi vystavki v Petrograde," *Iskusstvo* 4 (October 1919), repr. in *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo za 15 let: materialy i dokumentatsiia*, ed. Ivan Matsa (Moscow: OGIZ, 1933), p. 99. See also Boris Shklovskii, "Svobodnaia vystavka vo Dvortse Iskusstv," *Zhizn' iskusstva* (May 29–30, 1919). In its turn, *15 Years* prefigured such major exhibitions as *The Industry of Socialism, 1935–41*. See Susan E. Reid, "Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror: The Industry of Socialism Art Exhibition, 1935–41," *The Russian Review* 60 (April 2001), pp. 153–84, and Faina Balakhovskaia, "Polnaia i okonchatel'naia pobeda sotsializma v iskusstve. Istoriiia odnoi vystavki," in *Bor'ba za Znamia: Sovetskoe iskusstvo mezhdu Trotskim i Stalinyim, 1926–36*, ed. Ekaterina Degot' (Moscow: Rosizo, 2008), pp. 88–93.

jection of its future trajectory. While initially planned as an inclusive and historically balanced survey of a wide range of past and current Soviet artistic practices, in its final realization the presentation was selective and tendentious. This exhibition and the critical discourse surrounding it completed the public stigmatization of the artistic legacy of the Russian avant-garde as a deviation from the main trajectory of the development of Soviet art, at best, and as an outdated remnant of prerevolutionary bourgeois ideology, at worst. At the same time, *15 Years* became an important step in the articulation of the visual identity of future Soviet art, one that moved from ideological slogans to concrete pictorial terms.

The exhibition was in its initial preparatory stages when, on April 23, 1932, the Party issued a decree dissolving all artistic organizations and forming the Union of Soviet Artists. From that moment on, there was additional incentive for the organizers of the survey to present individual artists not as members of specific artistic groups but as all seeking to work together to advance the development of Soviet art as a cohesive front. The April decree, which most Western art historians view as a repressive measure intended to centralize control of the arts and limit individual artistic freedom, was in fact perceived very differently by artists and critics at the time, among whom it had broad support. By the early 1930s most of them were tired of the bitter rivalry, factionalism, and infighting that had become a major obstacle to productive creative work. From this perspective, most artists saw the retrospective as a long-awaited chance to reevaluate their work in the context of what others were doing in a more open-ended and collegial atmosphere than had been possible for several years. Yet, despite the official call for "the consolidation of artistic forces," competition among artists was far from over: Whose style of painting would be deemed officially suitable? Whose work carried the greatest potential for the future development of Soviet art? The retrospective became a site for fierce infighting over such questions and over inclusion into the official canon of the history of Soviet art that was being established. As the photo-realist painter Evgenii Katsman punned, decisions were made about "whom to exhibit and whom to throw out" (*kogo vystavliat', a kogo vystavit*).<sup>8</sup>

The concept and layout of the planned retrospective were developed by a committee originally headed by Ivan Matsu, a Hungarian-born Marxist art historian and one of the leading theoreticians of Soviet art affiliated with the Communist Academy.<sup>9</sup> Matsu's initial plan laid down a matrix for the new canon of the history of Soviet art, dividing it into three chronological eras: The period of War Communism, the Rehabilitative period (*Vosstanovitel'nyi*), and the

8. This pun is based on the double meaning of the Russian verb *vystavit'*, which literally translates as "to put out" in the sense of "throw out" and/or "put on display." Evgenii Katsman, diary entry from April 9, 1933, in Tatiana Khvostenko, *Vechera na khutore bliz Dinamo* (Moscow: Olimpia Press, 2003), p. 125.

9. Other key members of the original exhibition committee included prominent art historians, curators, and critics who had championed the avant-garde, such as Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov, Nikolai Punin, and David Arkin. See RGALI f.643 op.2 d.2 l.1.

Reconstructive period (*Rekonstruktivnyi*), the last of which opened onto the second Five-Year Plan. Each period was to be depicted dialectically, as a struggle between vanguard and conservative artistic groups. Several months before being appointed to work on the exhibition, Matsa had initiated a major editorial project of assembling primary historical materials that would exhaustively and objectively document artistic activity during the fifteen postrevolutionary years. The goal was to create "a truly scientific [firsthand] history of our artistic practice."<sup>10</sup> Matsa's initial plan for the exhibition adhered to these principles. It portrayed the years of civil war and "War Communism" as dominated by radical-leftist and nonobjective art in particular. But from the early 1920s, during the period Matsa calls Rehabilitative, he described the primary focus of artistic development as that of "getting closer to the Soviet masses by identifying subject-matter accessible to them."<sup>11</sup> The following, Reconstructive period was dominated first by the struggle for proletarian art (until about 1931) and then by the improvement of its quality, with artists beginning to work together peacefully after the Party Decree of April 1932. This narrative framework provided a teleological model for the retrospective exhibition and for the history of Soviet art for decades to come.

As neat as Matsa's plan appeared on paper, the exhibition committee quickly rejected it on the grounds that the idea of an inclusive and exhaustive presentation was practically unrealizable, opting instead for showing "the main artistic trends in view of their service to the revolution's goals."<sup>12</sup> In his introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, the vice-chair of the government committee and the head of the arts section of the Commissariat for Enlightenment (Narkompros) Mikhail Arkadiev spelled out the show's political function: "This exhibition is essentially documentary evidence of the valuation given by the Central Committee of our Party to the state of affairs in artistic organizations, which was brought about by the political and artistic regrouping of artistic forces around Soviet power."<sup>13</sup> Arkadiev's formulation sums up the view of the exhibition's organizers that the Party, seen as the primary agent of artistic reform, was orchestrating a review of artistic forces in order to evaluate how well various artists were able to follow its directives. Yet, as the final title for the exhibition indicated, responsibility for driving artistic development was delegated to the artists themselves—they were encouraged to "come closetogether around the party, the tasks of socialist con-

10. Ivan Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let*, p. 5. Matsa believed that "scientific history is created not second-hand, not on the basis of remarks by critics, contemporary historians, and memoirists, but on the basis of a thorough study of primary documents," and requested documentation from all artistic organizations (*ibid.*). He completed the exhibition plan in February 1932 and editorial work on the collection of documents in July 1932. The latter remained a unique and valuable resource of primary documents for many decades.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

12. "Materials for the Organization of the Exhibition 'Artists of the RSFSR,'" RGALI f.645 op.1 d.470 l.66.

13. M. P. Arkadiev, "Vstuplenie," *Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let. Katalog iubileinoi vystavki. Zhivopis', grafika i skul'ptura* (Leningrad: Russkii Muzei, 1932), p. 4.

struction and of international revolution."<sup>14</sup> While the criteria for the selection and evaluation of artworks were not clearly defined, the exhibition was distinctly presented and perceived by its organizers, participants, and viewers as *a review of political loyalty*, performed first and foremost not by the Party but by the artists, historians, and critics who had to assess carefully and impartially the pertinence of various artistic trends to the Soviet cause.<sup>15</sup>

The massive review of Soviet art opened its doors at the State Russian Museum on November 13, 1932. It was a stately spectacle: Viewers went up a grand staircase decorated with flowers and large banners with agitational slogans. Red carpets were rolled out across most of the thirty-five galleries on the second floor of the museum, which were filled with 2,640 works (1,050 paintings, 1,500 graphic works, and 90 sculptures) created by 423 artists. Painting and sculpture shared the same space, while graphic and applied arts were shown within the same sequence but in smaller adjacent rooms. Most works came from Moscow, though a substantial number were made by Leningrad artists. The exhibition's spatial layout was circular, creating a symbolic continuity between its starting and ending points: Lenin's initial efforts at electrification and Stalin's successes with the first Five-Year Plan. Painted portraits of both leaders—Lenin by Aleksandr Gerasimov and Stalin by Isaak Brodskii—dominated each of the rooms, further suggesting a proximity between the two leaders. Departing from Matsa's proposed layout of the show, the Leningrad exhibition committee eliminated the room dedicated to War Communism and thus dispensed altogether with the need to show avant-garde works of the first postrevolutionary years. Instead, the introductory room was followed directly by three large galleries with paintings by members of the Society of Easel Painters (OST), whose pictorial language still had elements of modernist reductionism and expressive stylization; nevertheless, they were perceived as "one of the most Soviet artistic groups."<sup>16</sup> The founder of OST and the first head of MOSKh (Moscow Union of Soviet Artists), David Shterenberg, occupied a central place with about twenty paintings and thirty works on paper. Other OST members, such as Andrei



*Entrance to 15 Years of Artists  
of the RSFSR. Leningrad,  
November 13, 1932.*

14. Arkadiev, "Vstuplenie," p. 5.

15. One of the organizers of the exhibition, the painter Igor' Grabar', expressed this view most succinctly in his introduction to the catalog: "The exhibition is . . . an examination for a certificate of artistic and political maturity of individual masters and of entire artistic groups. Only comparison can make us come closer to the truth, only a *detailed, careful and impartial* weighing of all pros and cons will lead us to conclusions that are equally convincing and equally needed for artists, mass viewers, and active members of society." Grabar', "Prazdnik masterov kisti, karandasha i reztsa," in *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

16. Grabar', "Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let. Iubileinaia vystavka v Leningrade," unpublished review, January 1933, Manuscript Division of the State Tretyakov Gallery, f.106, op.1, d. 1243, l.8.



*Newsreel footage of 15 Years  
of Artists of the RSFSR.  
Leningrad, 1932.*



*Newsreel footage of 15 Years  
of Artists of the RSFSR.  
Leningrad, 1932.*



*The Society of Easel Painters  
room at 15 Years of Artists  
of the RSFSR. Leningrad,  
1932. Installation view.*

*Paintings by Aleksandr  
Deineka at 15 Years of  
Artists of the RSFSR.  
Leningrad, 1932.  
Installation view.*



Goncharov and Aleksandr Labas, were given their own galleries, where the evolution of their work was meant to exemplify “a healthy development” from formalist preoccupations to Soviet subject matter. Nikolai Punin, one of the key organizers of the Leningrad retrospective, further clarified in his catalogue essay why OST opened the exhibition, writing that the movement “largely grew out of the art of the period of War Communism, in particular out of Constructivism,” and listing the distinctive stylistic traits of the latter movement that he thought were influenced by the earlier one: “industrial subject-matter . . . sharp compositions, restrained colors, and light outlines.”<sup>17</sup> This public presentation of OST as the “foremost left” among Soviet arts, in the nearly total absence of any works of abstraction, Constructivism, or Productivism, exposed the core OST members, such as Aleksandr Tyshler, Aleksandr Labas, and David Shterenberg, to accusations of formalism within months after the show’s opening.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, the Leningrad retrospective shifted its focus away from artistic groups that dominated the Soviet art world until the early 1930s and toward individual artistic development. Artists were granted considerable autonomy in the way their works were presented, and seven of them were given their own galleries and invited to choose and install their works as they saw fit. Artists at the time saw the exhibition as a valuable opportunity to evaluate each other’s work in immediate

17. Nikolai Punin, “Obshchii kharakter vystavki,” in *Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let*, p. 16.

18. These artists became the primary targets of critical attacks by Osip Beskin in his influential 1933 essay and book on formalism in painting. Osip Beskin, *Formalizm v zhivopisi* (Moscow: Vsekhudozhnik, 1933). The term “formalism,” which referred to artists’ “excessive” preoccupation with pictorial form, acquired a particularly derogatory charge at precisely this historic moment. The term “leftist” was widely used during the cultural revolution as an accusation of a departure from the party line, initiated with Stalin’s denouncement of Trotskyism as “leftist deviation” (*levyi peregib*). The derogatory Russian adjective *levatskii*, often used in this context as opposed to the neutral *levyi*, is one example of this negative charge, which remained current after the cultural revolution was officially over.

visual juxtapositions.<sup>19</sup> Published critical reactions and numerous artistic debates organized in conjunction with the show signaled an important shift from theoretical and methodological debates about the future of Soviet art toward a careful consideration of its actual pictorial language.

At the same time, for those artists whose work was excluded from the new narrative, it was a hard blow. For example, Vladimir Tatlin complained bitterly at one of the debates held in Moscow in conjunction with the exhibition: "I attributed a great deal of importance to the '15 Years' exhibition, but my work was not displayed, which is wrong, since I really should have some place in the history of art. By not exhibiting me, artists seem to have excluded me from their ranks."<sup>20</sup> Inclusion, however, was not necessarily an advantage. For instance, Kazimir Malevich, who was given an individual gallery and freedom to choose and install his works, complained in a letter to Ivan Kliun: "The arts administration's attitude toward me took a very malicious form—general recognition, honor, respect, but not a thing more; they don't let me in anywhere and don't give me anything . . . a blockade all around."<sup>21</sup> Malevich's gallery, like the room with works by Pavel Filonov, was situated at a dead end, outside the main exhibition space, and was thus presented as an isolated phenomenon, a deviation, outside the general trajectory of Soviet artistic development, past or future. Yet the Moscow authorities saw even this presentation as too radical. Only thanks to the courage of the director of the Russian



19. During a public discussion of the exhibition held at the Moscow Union of Artists (MOSKh) in conjunction with the Leningrad exhibition, several artists noted that the show was more important to them than to the general public or critics. See "Doklad Vol'tera v MoSKhe i ego obsuzhdenie," December 8, 1932. RGALI, f.2943, l.1128, l.10.

20. Minutes of debates following a presentation about the exhibition held at the Painting Section of the Moscow Union of Artists on December 8, 1932. RGALI, f.2943 d.1128 l.11. It is worth noting that Tatlin ascribed the agency of exclusion to fellow artists rather than to Soviet authorities.

21. Kazimir Malevich, "Letter to Ivan Kliun, December 12, 1932," in *Malevich o sebe, sovremenniki o Maleviche: pis'ma, dokumenty, vospominaniia, kritika*, ed. Irina Vakar and Tatiana Mikheenko, vol. 1 (Moscow: RA, 2004), p. 233.

*Kazimir Malevich (top) and Pavel Filonov rooms at 15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR. Leningrad, 1932. Installation views.*

Museum, Iosif Gurvich, and the direct interference of the first secretary of the Communist Party in Leningrad, Sergei Kirov, could the "leftist" works (such as those of Malevich and Filonov) remain on the walls.<sup>22</sup> The central Soviet press barely mentioned the Leningrad retrospective, leading Igor Grabar', a relatively traditional artist and one of the key figures in the exhibition committee, to speak of the deliberate silencing of the exhibition.<sup>23</sup> Grabar' was likely correct, since central authorities clearly conceived of the Moscow version of the exhibition as seeking to redress its shortcomings in Leningrad.

The months between the two retrospectives in the spring of 1933 saw the onset of a massive critical attack on formalism by the highly influential critic Osip Beskin, the chief editor of the leading art journal *Iskusstvo* and a key member of the exhibition committee in Moscow. Beskin's article "Formalism in Painting" and the critical historical survey by Mil'da Bush and Aleksandr Zamoshkin entitled "The Path of Soviet Art, 1917-32," both of which appeared in the journal in early 1933, were highly influential, and within months were published as books with a wide circulation.<sup>24</sup> These essays marked a radical change in the terms of the Soviet art world. Both presented "formalism" as a negative starting point for formulating the parameters of "Socialist Realism." At the same time, they marked a shift from earlier debates on the future of Soviet art, basing their criticism firmly in the visual analysis of individual artworks. Thus, for instance, Beskin criticized Aleksandr Tyshler's painting style as excessively schematic and monochromatic, stemming from the artist's "complete rejection of the reality of material world."<sup>25</sup> In their turn, Bush and Zamoshkin noted that Pavel Kuznetsov's painting was held back by its "passive epicurean contemplation of reality," which was expressed in "gentle pastel colors and soft contours" that reflect his inability to present the Soviet subject's active will to transform society.<sup>26</sup>

By the time the Moscow version of the retrospective opened in June 1933, the Soviet art world was in a very different place than it had been only half a year before. The exhibition was massive, held in five venues divided by media, and presenting a total of 3,500 works made by around 500 artists; it was lavishly advertised and widely covered by Soviet mass media. Its narrative was ideologically much more streamlined, and the presentation and reception of the artworks were tightly

22. On the eve of the exhibition's opening, members of the government committee looked over the display and requested that the entire "extreme left" part of the show be removed from view and that several galleries be completely rehung. Kirov intervened and the show opened. Iosif Gurvich, "Piatnadsat' let Sovetskoi vlasti i Russii Muzei," manuscript division of the State Russian Museum, f.221 d.2 l.37.

23. Igor' Grabar', unfinished manuscript "Iubileinaia vystavka sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva v Leningrade. Nabludeniia i mysli khudozhnika," manuscript division, State Tretyakov Gallery, f. 106 op.1 d.1252.

24. Osip Beskin, *Formalizm v zhivopisi* (Moskva: Vsekokhudozhnik, 1933). Mil'da Bush and Aleksandr Zamoshkin, *Put' Sovetskoi zhivopisi, 1917-1932* (Moskva: Ogiz, 1933). Bush and Zamoshkin's essay also appeared in an English translation in a special issue of *V.O.K.S. Bulletin of the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries*, 9-10 (1934).

25. Beskin, "Formalizm v zhivopisi," *Iskusstvo* 3 (1933), p. 7.

26. Bush and Zamoshkin, *Put' Sovetskoi zhivopisi*, p. 104.

controlled by centralized governmental structures. Artists were no longer allowed to choose or display their works; all decisions were made by an exhibition committee that was headed directly by the commissar of Enlightenment, Andrei Bubnov, and heavily dominated by arts administrators and influential critics rather than by artists and historians, as had been the case



*A guided tour at 15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR. Moscow, 1933.*

in Leningrad in 1932. Most visitors came in groups that were guided through the exhibition according to a carefully scripted narrative adjusted to their level of education.<sup>27</sup> The exhibition of paintings was held at the Historical Museum on Red Square. Here, sixteen spacious rooms were filled with 1,042 paintings in a salon-style floor-to-ceiling presentation. With an average of 65 pieces per room, individual works unavoidably competed for visibility. The display was more stylistically uniform than in Leningrad a year earlier, bearing the official motto "The style of our epoch is Socialist Realism." The installation's goal was no longer to display a pluralism of visual languages and offer choices to the viewer, but to outline a considerably more rigid and linear trajectory of development with a more pronounced ranking of artistic trends in terms of their usefulness for the future of Soviet art. The organizers no longer foregrounded individual masters, emphasizing generational shifts and broader stylistic developments instead. By basing its layout on these criteria, the exhibition avoided privileging any one former artistic group as the one that would lead the way to Socialist Realism.<sup>28</sup>

27. The main tour was geared toward the general audience, in large part composed of workers brought in organized groups. The second, longer and more sophisticated tour was intended for university students, teachers, and artists, and aimed to "show the dialectics of development of Soviet art in greater depth and breadth," RGALI f.643 op.1 d.25 l.3. It dedicated additional time to the analysis of "formalist" works on display as negative examples of tendencies that needed to be purged from Soviet art.

28. The head of the arts section of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, Mikhail Arkadiev, explicitly stated this goal in his catalog essay: "One should not think that the way to Socialist Realism goes through any one artistic group that existed earlier." M. Arkadiev, "Smotr Sovetskogo iskusstva," *Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let. Katalog vystavki. Zhivopis'* (Moscow: Narkompros RSFSR, 1933), p. xvi.



15 Years of Artists  
of the RSFSR.  
Moscow, 1933.  
*Installation views.*

Monumental portraits of Lenin and Stalin were now displayed on adjacent walls in the introductory room, as they increasingly began to be shown in public spaces. The rest of the exhibition was divided into two halves, presented as a generational shift. The first half included artists who began exhibiting before the revolution and had since "Sovietized" their art with various degrees of success. This group included Boris Kustodiev, Konstantin Iuon, Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin, and Petr Konchalovskii. The second half of the show featured a group of younger artists whose artistic styles matured after the revolution, alongside Soviet culture itself, and who embodied its promising future. These artists included Aleksandr Deineka, Georgii Riazhskii, Pavel Sokolov-Skalia, and Fedor Bogorodskii. This somewhat artificial generational divide gave the show a stronger sense of temporal expansiveness and forcefully thrust Soviet art into the future.<sup>29</sup>

The junction between these two main parts of the exhibition symbolized everything that had to be and was successfully overcome in Soviet art. It consisted of two "formalist" galleries, no visual record of which appears to have been preserved. Gallery seven showed the works of Shterenberg, Tyshler, Labas, Aleksandr Drevin, and Nadezhda Udal'tsova, whom critics had recently condemned as "representational formalists." Gallery eight, a small, poorly lit passageway, was filled with works by those artists whom organizers and reviewers alike labeled "non-objective formalists." It included abstract paintings by Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Kliun, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Liubov' Popova, and Pavel Filonov, as well as Vladimir Tatlin's counter-reliefs and, most ironically, his recently completed flying apparatus *Letatlin*, which the artist himself had insisted be included in the exhibition, unaware of how it was going to be presented and described.<sup>30</sup> This clearly derogatory display was enhanced by a shrewd rhetorical device that invited viewers to identify with Lenin's own mixed feelings about modern art. In large stenciled letters across the top of the gallery wall was inscribed a quote by the revolutionary leader: "I am unable to consider works of expressionism, futurism, cubism, and other '-isms' as the highest manifestation of artistic genius. I don't understand them. They give me no joy whatsoever."<sup>31</sup> The introduction of

29. In his extensive review of the exhibition, the influential critic Nikolai Shchekotov formulated this effect: "The past was moved with varying degrees of honor to the place where it belongs, i.e. to the past, and the future was pushed on forward. . . . It is not a matter of drawing conclusions, but of making an energetic leap forward." N. Shchekotov, "Sovetskie zhivopistsy: vystavka 'Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let,'" *Iskusstvo* 4 (1933), p. 60.

30. Tatlin offered to bring and install *Letatlin* in the gallery devoted to industrialization, stating: "This work constituted a further development of my ideas realized in the Monument to the Third International, and was especially financed by the Commissariat of Enlightenment." V. E. Tatlin, letter to Khvoynik, May 12, 1933, RGALI f.643 op.1 d.1 l.132.

31. This quotation was taken from a report by Lenin's colleague Clara Tsetkin during her conversations with him. This quote (in a longer form) was originally used by Igor Grabar' in his unpublished review of the Leningrad retrospective (see note 16). He took it from the original publication of Tsetkin's conversations with Lenin in *Kommunist* 26 (1924). Grabar' may well have been the one to come up with the idea of putting Lenin's phrase onto the gallery wall.

the subjective viewpoint of the highest Soviet authority almost literally put words into the mouths of mass viewers, many of whom spelled out with relief—in questionnaires available in the galleries—their heartfelt agreement with their revolutionary leader's viewpoint. A prominent art critic, Nikolai Shchekotov, bluntly described this deliberate tactic in his review of the exhibition: "To fight formalist principles . . . by the hands of formalists themselves . . . is the main point of organizing this section of the exhibition."<sup>32</sup>

The display's unambiguous effect of historical displacement, anachronism, and creative isolation was amply evident to the exhibited artists themselves. Thus Malevich wrote: "At the exhibition we were isolated like wild formalists, like enemies, like an extirpation of bourgeois art, as our own end."<sup>33</sup> Kliun described his experience in his diary: "When I stood near my paintings listening to criticism (or rather, abuse), other people who stood behind me and with whom I was not acquainted surreptitiously shook my hand [to express their support]."<sup>34</sup> After the exhibition Kliun was one among many former avant-garde artists who, in his own words, "resolutely rejected non-objective art and began to actively reform [himself] towards Realism."<sup>35</sup> This display and the critical reactions that accompanied it put the last nail in the coffin of the avant-garde legacy in the Soviet public sphere. The avant-garde's arch-enemy, a member of the conservative artistic group AKhR (Artists of Revolutionary Russia), the painter Evgenii Katsman, gloated in his diary:

The formalists are utterly defeated. They will never get up again. . . . The "leftists" think that we, realists, brought them down. No, *it is the viewers who did it*. . . . Victory, damn it, victory! Victory on both exhibitions! For fifteen years, formalists, these bastards, were fooling us. Defeated, defeated all around. Such is the impact the exhibition had.<sup>36</sup>

Such temporal and conceptual opposition presented the history and future of Soviet art in no uncertain terms. "Formalism" was overcome, while Soviet art urgently needed to make a leap forward. According to the exhibition's narrative, the parameters of the new Soviet art were defined in relation to two dialectically opposed stylistic tendencies, which critics discerned in the work of the "older" generation: the late-nineteenth-century realism of the *Peredvizhniki* (Itinerants) and

32. Shchekotov, "Sovetskie zhivopistsy," *Iskusstvo* 4 (1933), pp. 99–100.

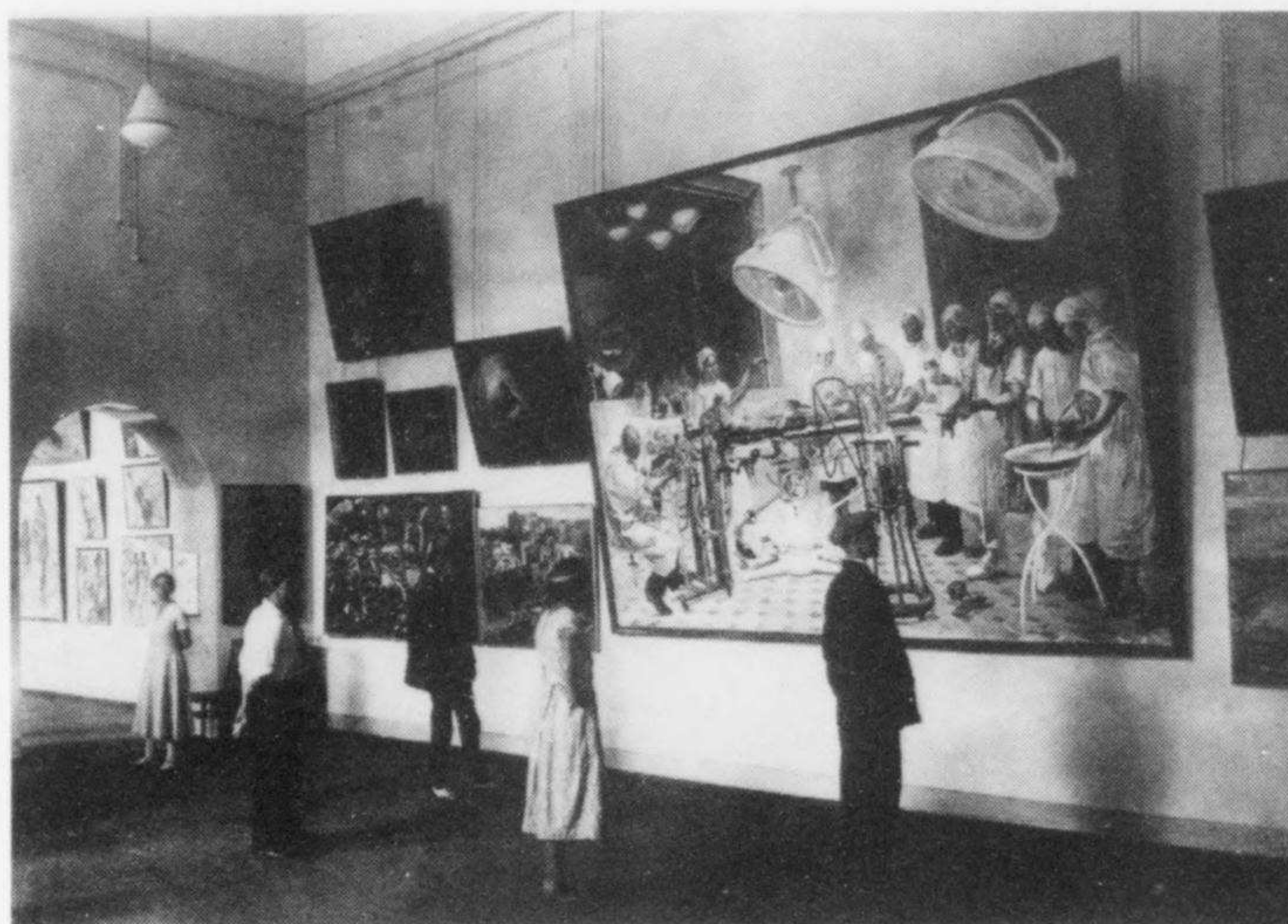
33. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Petnikov, July 15–28, 1933, in *Malevich o sebe, sovremenniki o Maleviche*, vol.1, p. 239.

34. Ivan Kliun, "Recollections," in *Russian Avant-Garde 1910–1930: The George Costakis Collection*, vol. 2, ed. Anna Kafetsi (Athens: National Gallery, 1995), p. 731.

35. Ibid. Kliun recorded his transition in his memoirs: "After the exhibition of 15 Years of Soviet Power [*sic*] I began to doubt more and more often that I was right in continuing my chosen path of experimental art. It became clear to me that I went so far ahead in my work that I lost touch with life . . . I felt this aloofness everywhere. There was no more room for free art; one had to paint what the present moment required. . . . I made a decision to return to realism, so that I could march in sync with contemporary reality. . . . I decided to change to realism not under the pressure of external circumstances—I experienced that pressure for many years . . . this decision matured in me gradually under the influence of life itself." I. V. Kliun, *Moi put' v iskusstve: vospominaniia, statii, dnevniki* (Moscow: RA, 1999), p. 98.

36. Katsma, in Khvostenko, *Vechera*, pp. 36, 128.

the modernism of the Post-Impressionists, especially Cézanne. In its ideal form, the work of the younger group of Soviet artists was seen as “a healthy mix” of these two tendencies, put in the service of the new Soviet state. Strong public and critical responses to two paintings in the Moscow show (Petr Konchalovskii’s *Pushkin* and Vasilii Iakovlev’s *In the Operating Room*) exemplify these discussions. Konchalovskii’s great Russian poet was widely seen as too casual and disheveled. As one working-class female viewer put it, “We associate Pushkin’s name with beauty, but here his ugly legs create a very unpleasant dissonance.”<sup>37</sup> Critics also accused Konchalovskii of an excessive preoccupation with form and especially color, which they claimed overwhelmed the subject matter. Iakovlev’s monumental depiction of an operating room at the famous Sklifosofskii Institute of Medicine exemplified the other extreme that Soviet artists were instructed



Top: Petr Konchalovskii. *Pushkin*. 1930–33.  
Bottom: 15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR.  
Moscow, 1932. Installation view.

37. See “Viewers’ written responses to the exhibition ‘Artists of the RSFSR,’” RGALI f.643 op.1 d.16 n.p. When writing their responses, visitors were asked to identify their occupation by underlining one of the following categories: “worker, office worker (*sluzhashchii*), student, peasant, commander and red army soldier.” The breakdown and range of these categories deserve further analysis. Konchalovskii responded to this criticism by repeatedly repainting the portrait, first covering the poet’s legs completely and then returning them to a half-covered state.

to avoid: cold, unprocessed naturalism and lack of transformative passion in relation to life's minutiae.

The Moscow version of *15 Years* in 1933 marked the end point of a gradual paradigm shift that had taken place over the course of several years. The displacement of the legacy of the avant-garde from the public sphere was effectively accomplished, while the visual parameters of the new Soviet style, while still widely open to interpretation, were articulated more concretely than before. An important corollary of this shift was a fundamental transformation of the role ascribed to Soviet artists, who during the first postrevolutionary decade wielded an almost undivided power over the future of the country's art. By 1933, artists were under strong pressure to respond to the opinion of the "broad public" (*shirokaia obshchestvennost'*). Although relatively well-intentioned in its ideological origins, by the early 1930s this accountability operated according to a circular logic: Influential critics expressed their views in newspapers on behalf of the Soviet masses while the perceptions of those masses were guided by the opinions of the critics. In this process, Soviet artists were relegated to the status of students whose job it was to learn from this public response, construed as articulating the objective needs of Soviet society, and were expected to adjust their artistic practice accordingly.

One article and the response that it generated exemplifies this process, along with the completion of the paradigm shift. In July 1933, Nikolai Bukharin, an influential theoretician and ideologist as well as an aspiring artist who exhibited at *15 Years*, published a review of this exhibition in *Izvestiia*, the second most influential Soviet newspaper after *Pravda*. In this essay, Bukharin articulated a rhetorically shrewd critique of modernist trends in Western and Russian art by examining them through the eyes of a "mere mortal," a "proletarian," who, Bukharin claimed, would be puzzled and appalled by this art's hermeticism, distortion of reality, and "disconnection from the impressions of daily life."<sup>38</sup> Directly attacking Russian abstraction, Constructivism, and Production art as vestiges of a decadent bourgeois mentality within Soviet society, Bukharin proceeded to articulate those features in contemporary Soviet art that appeared most promising for the future of Socialist Realism, emphasizing especially its "comprehensibility for the broad masses."<sup>39</sup> This essay especially disturbed Malevich and Tatlin, each of whom explicitly referred to it as delivering a blow to his respective legacy. Malevich wrote a sharp polemical critique of Bukharin's position, but never communicated his ideas directly to his opponent.<sup>40</sup> Tatlin spoke up during one of the public discussions organized in conjunction with the Moscow retrospective, expressing his distrust of the critics and the press, claiming that they "failed to

38. Nikolai Bukharin, "Nekotorye mysli o Sovetskoi zhivopisi," *Izvestiia* (July 11, 1933), p. 3; repr. in N. Bukharin, *Revolutsiia i kul'tura: statii i vystupleniia 1923-36 gg.*, ed. B. Ia. Frezinskii (Moscow: Fond imeni N. I. Bukharina, 1993), pp. 202-17. Bukharin's essay also appeared in an English translation as "Some Thoughts on Soviet Pictorial Art," *Soviet Culture Review* 9 (1933), pp. 11-18.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

40. In a letter to a friend written in August 1933, Malevich mentions a twenty-six-page response he wrote but never sent to Bukharin. See K. Malevich, "Pis'mo Petnikovu, Avgust 1933," *Malevich o sebe*, vol. 1, p. 243.

explain his art properly to the public and the Party.”<sup>41</sup> In response to Bukharin’s critique of his art, the direct and intuitive Tatlin took up his challenge as one made by a fellow artist rather than an ideologist, and went to see “what kind of work this artist Bukharin himself made.” “I looked at his paintings with blue mountains and white snow,” Tatlin said. “I saw nothing in them that would teach me to understand Socialist Realism or the very basis of what is being advocated for here.” Tatlin’s sincere outcry reflects his desire to be a good Soviet artist if only he could understand what was required of his art. Yet in the ideological climate of the Soviet Union after 1933, while the visual parameters of Socialist Realism might not have been entirely defined, it was no longer up to a single artist to articulate his position to the wide public directly with his work. He had to go through the rhetorical machine of the authorities and the critics in order to reach the “broad Soviet public,” which itself felt empowered to second the opinions laid out for it by the official spokesmen in power.

41. Vladimir Tatlin at the discussion following the presentation by Abram Efros, “Traditions of Western and Old Russian Painting in Our Contemporary Art,” held in conjunction with the exhibition *15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR* (July 17, 1933). Transcript at RGALI f. 643 op.1 d.14 l.27. All subsequent quotes are from this source.



*Wall with Aleksandr Deineka paintings in 15  
Years of Artists of the RSFSR. Leningrad,  
1932. Photograph courtesy of Masha Chlenova.*

CHRISTINA KIAER

*From Leningrad to Moscow*

The thirty-three-year-old artist Aleksandr Deineka was given a large piece of wall space at the exhibition *15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR* at the Russian Museum in Leningrad in 1932.<sup>1</sup> At the center of the wall hung his most acclaimed painting, *The Defense of Petrograd* of 1928, a civil-war-themed canvas showing marching Bolshevik citizens, defending against the incursions of the White armies on their city, arrayed in flattened, geometric patterns across an undifferentiated white ground. The massive *15 Years* exhibition attempted to sum up the achievements of Russian Soviet art since the revolution as well as point toward the future, and Deineka, in spite of his past association with “leftist” (read: avant-garde) artistic groups such as OST (the Society of Easel Painters) and October, was among those younger artists who were anointed by exhibition organizers as leading the way forward toward Socialist Realist art—a concept that was being formulated through both the planning of and critical response to this very display of so many divergent Soviet artists.<sup>2</sup> Known for his magazine illustrations and posters, Deineka had also established himself at a young age as a major practitioner of monumental painting in a severe graphic style that addressed socialist themes, such as revolutionary history (e.g., *Petrograd*), and, as his other works displayed at the Leningrad exhibition demonstrate, proletarian sport (*Women’s Cross-Country Race* and *Skiers*, both 1931) the ills of capitalism (*Unemployed in*

\* The research for this essay was made possible by a fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where I was the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation Member. I would like to thank Robert Bird for his careful commentary on this manuscript.

1. A note about the name of the exhibition: “RSFSR” stands for “Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic,” meaning the Russian republic as opposed to the other national republics of the USSR. I am indebted to Masha Chlenova’s detailed account of this exhibition in her essay “Staging Soviet Art: *15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR, 1932–33*,” also in this issue, pp. 38–55, as well as in her dissertation, “On Display: Transformations of the Avant-Garde in Soviet Public Culture, 1928–33” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2010). I am grateful to her for sharing the archival photograph of Deineka’s wall at the Leningrad exhibition.

2. The Society of Easel Painters (Obshchestvo stankovistov, or OST), which Deineka co-founded in 1925, was a group of modernist-influenced but highly varied figurative painters committed to revolutionary subject matter. Deineka left OST in 1928 to join the association of October (Oktiabr’), which in many ways represented the last stand of the avant-garde, numbering Gustav Klucis, El Lissitzky, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Aleksei Gan, and Sergei Eisenstein among its members.



*Aleksandr Deineka. Defense of Petrograd. 1928.*

*Berlin*, 1932), and the construction of the new Soviet everyday life (*Who Will Beat Whom?*, 1932).

The inclusive and artist-organized Leningrad iteration of the exhibition *15 Years* closed in January 1933 only to open five months later in Moscow under greater bureaucratic supervision and following a significantly sharpened ideological agenda. As Masha Chlenova argues elsewhere in this issue, the Moscow version of the exhibition amounted to the final “public stigmatization” of the avant-garde and formalism, offering a selection of works more weighted toward revealing the appropriate future paths of a Soviet art answerable to the masses.<sup>3</sup> As the organizers emphasized, the Moscow exhibition contained a greater number of very recent works, produced after the epochal Central Committee decree of April 23, 1932, dissolved all artistic groups and ordered the formation of a central Artists’ Union; it was meant to showcase the “post-April artistic production” (*posleaprel’skaia khudozhestvennaia produktsiia*) made possible by the “creative atmosphere” facilitated by this unprecedented new centralized and collectively organized art system.<sup>4</sup>

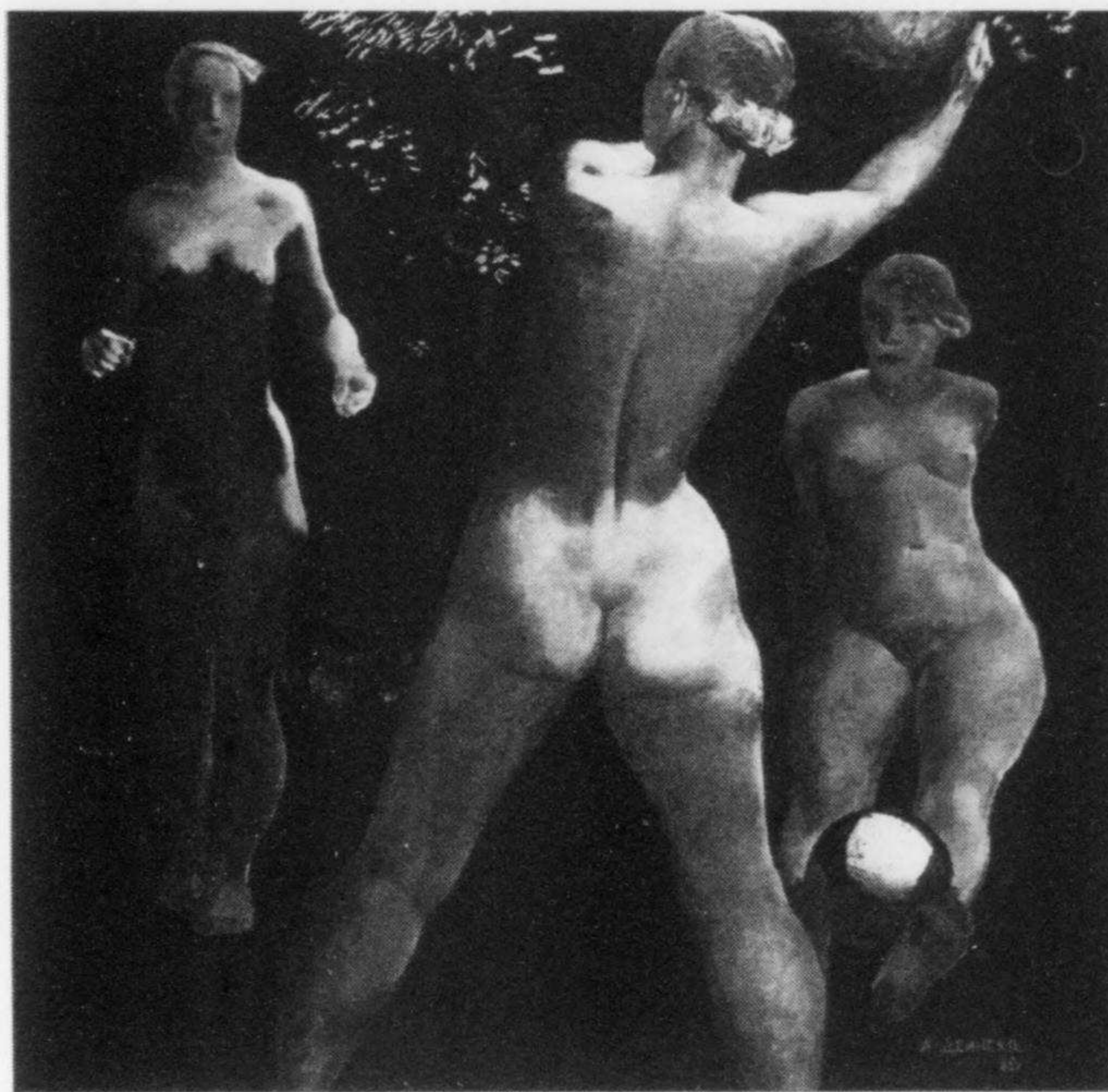
3. Chlenova, “Staging Soviet Art,” p. 42.

4. The authors of both short essays appearing in the catalog of the Moscow exhibition stress the importance of the April decree: A.S. Bubnov, “O vystavke sovetskikh khudozhnikov za 15 let oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii,” and M. Arkad’ev, “Smotr sovetskogo izo-iskusstva,” in *Khudozhniki RSFSR za XV let (1917–1932). Katalog vystavki zhivopis’* (Moscow: Vsekhudozhnik, 1933), pp. v–viii and ix–xvii, respectively; cited phrases from p. xii.

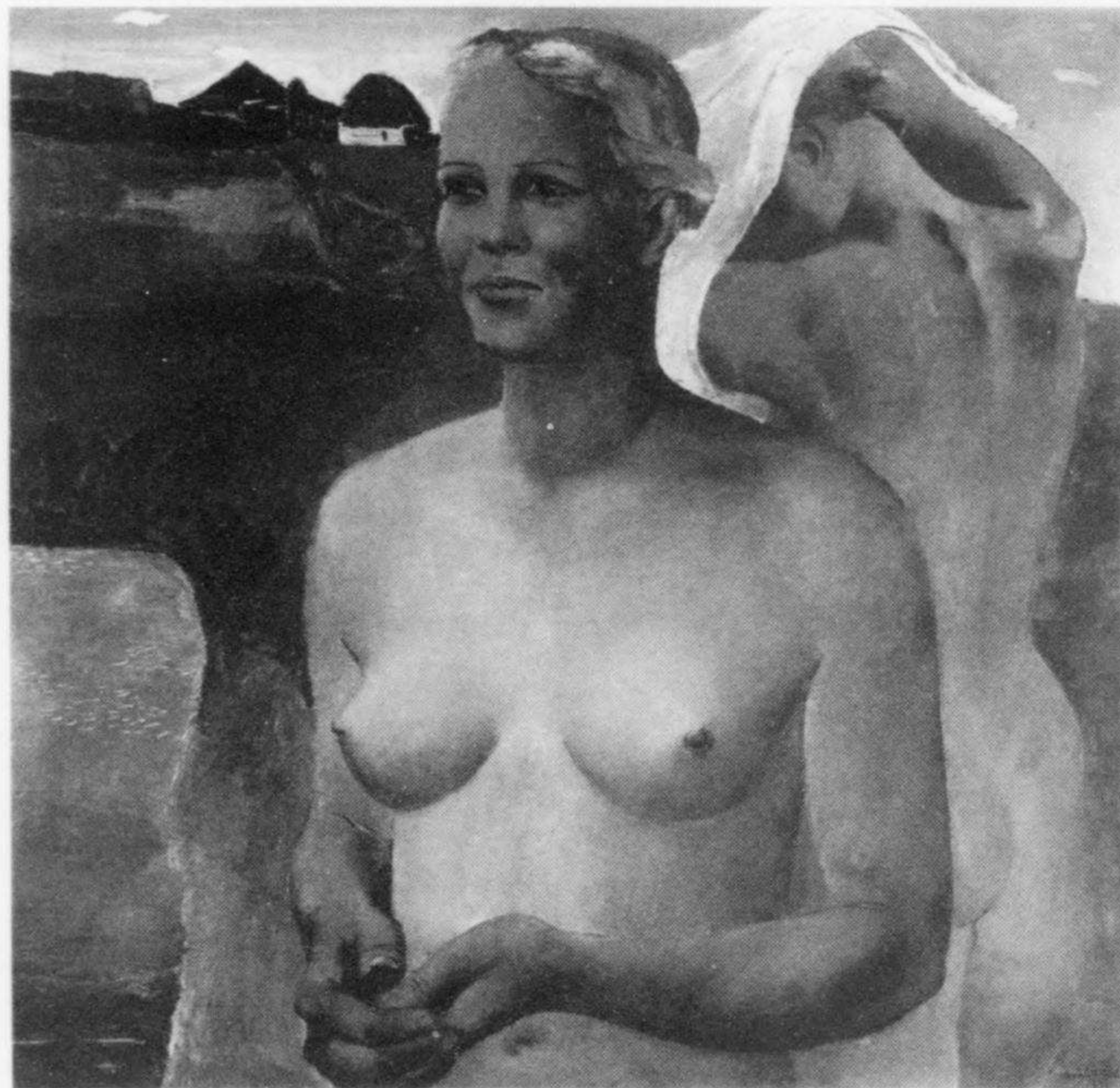
The display of Deineka's works certainly changed dramatically between Leningrad and Moscow, but not necessarily in the anti-formal or ideologically tendentious directions that Chlenova identifies in the exhibition overall. His *Defense of Petrograd* was still on view, as were a couple of his other monumentally scaled proletarian-themed paintings from the mid-1920s, but three recent showstopping "post-April" canvases were now included that would be intensely analyzed by the critics: *Mother (Mat')* and *The Ball Game (Igra v miach)* of 1932, and *Bathing Girl (Kupaiushchiasia devushka*, also known as *Bathing Collective Farm Woman* or *Kupaiushchiasia kolkhoznitsa*) of 1933. Large-scale but intimate, these close-up cropped images of beautiful nude female bodies, only nominally related to the thematics of the new Soviet woman as mother, physical-culture enthusiast, or collective-farm worker, were immediately hailed as "lyrical" (*liricheskii*). Expressive in Russian as in English of feeling, emotion, and sensuality, this term of approval threaded its way through critical response to the exhibition and figured within the developing discourse of Socialist Realism across media. These "lyrical" paintings, and the lyrical critical language that responded to them, open up a different



*Deineka. Mother. 1932.*



*Deineka. The Ball Game. 1932.*



*Deineka. Bathing Girl. 1933.*

model of Socialist Realism than the one we have come to know. This essay will trace this newfound concern with “feeling” as one of the positive or productive contributions of Socialist Realism to the project of revolutionary art, to be distinguished from its negative aim of eliminating the avant-garde from that project. Socialist Realism would change and narrow over the following years, to be sure. But the practice of always reading backwards with the hindsight of later disappointments neutralizes the unrealized possibilities of early moments of Socialist Realism that might have ended differently. This essay aims to retrieve a moment in 1933 when Socialist Realism had the potential to become a radically collective project of artists working at the boundary between private emotion and publicly oriented feeling to create a shared visual language of socialism. This lyrical strand of Socialist Realism was an attempt to rework modernist aesthetic strategies to help viewers to *feel*, as well as to comprehend analytically, the meanings and promises of socialism.<sup>5</sup>

5. The “lyrical” also emerges in debates on Soviet poetry and film of this time, as I discuss in the book-length project on Soviet Socialist Realism from which this essay is drawn. I am grateful to Slavic and film scholars Lilya Kaganovsky and Emma Widdis for inviting me to join their panel “Revisiting Early Stalinism through Visual Culture 1: Bodies & Feelings” at the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) Convention in 2011, for which I first developed these ideas. I would like to thank the audience members there, as well as at the Penn Seminar on Russian/Soviet History and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania, the Institute for Advanced Study, and the conference “Objects of Affection” at Princeton University (all 2012) for their responses to this project.

*Should Socialist Art Be Analyzed or Felt?*

In their variety, Deineka's works on view in the exhibition *15 Years* did straddle feeling and analysis, and they were admired for both according to different, coexisting criteria. On the analytical side, the instructions for tour guides of the exhibition endorsed Deineka's *Petrograd*, along with Georgii Riazhskii's *Collective Farm Team Leader (Kolkhoznitsa-brigadir)*, as examples of the "in-depth depiction of social processes" that were desirable in Soviet painting.<sup>6</sup> We can imagine the tour guide pointing to the female civil-defense soldier who features so prominently in the center of Deineka's composition or to the imposing female team leader talking to another female worker on the collective farm in Riazhskii's painting, in order to analyze the transformation of the "social processes" of women's labor after the revolution. The avant-garde inflection of Deineka's formal language compared to that of Riazhskii does not seem to have troubled this comparative analysis of paintings in which none of the women are subordinated to a male authority figure, nor are they depicted with conventional prettiness.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, the ample nude women pressed close to the picture surface in Deineka's "lyrical" paintings would seem to lack *Petrograd's* analytical or "in-depth" investigation of revolutionary action, as well as its Bolshevik-feminist rigor. With their solidly rendered bodies, the women in Deineka's lyrical paintings are in some ways less "formalist"—less avant-garde—than the more schematic figures of his earlier work, and we might have expected critics concerned with the formation of Socialist Realism to embrace them more for this reason. At the same time, as we will

6. Chlenova, "On Display," p. 366.

7. Susan Reid singles out this painting by Riazhskii (who at 37 was also heavily favored by critics as an important younger artist in the exhibition) as an unusually feminist work within 1930s painting. See Reid, "All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 57 (1998), pp. 133–173. Official Bolshevik ideology maintained a firm stance of equality for women, even if the historical reality of gendered experience belied it, as the vast bibliography of scholarly research on the history of Soviet women attests.



*Georgii Riazhskii. Collective Farm Team Leader. 1932.*

see, critics recognized without censure that the radical cropping, fragmentation, and repetition of these bodies draw just as firmly, albeit differently, on the avant-garde pictorial lexicon. Art historians discussing Socialist Realism, when they attend to it at all, tend to focus on the enforced transformation of the modernist techniques of the avant-garde in the direction of a conventional mimetic realism.<sup>8</sup> While some version of this transformation undoubtedly took place, especially in the rejection of abstraction, artists and writers charged with formulating Socialist Realism remained engaged with the possibilities of "leftist" art, imagining a Socialist Realist reworking of its terms. For most critics responding to the exhibition *15 Years*, the significance of Deineka's shift to the lyrical had less to do with its formal qualities, concerning the sin or virtue of his more or less modernist pictorial strategies, than its content—specifically, of feeling.

If Deineka's new lyrical paintings did not fully satisfy the demand for historically concrete analyses of social processes, they were incorporated into, or even themselves engendered, a new set of values within the discourse of Soviet visual culture: socialist versions of "feeling" (*chuvstvo*), "sensation" (*oshchushchenie*), "emotion" (*emotsional'nost'*), "lyricism" (*lirizm*), and "joy" (*radost*). The artist Ivan Semenov, for example, wrote an unusually direct and ebullient review of the Moscow exhibition *15 Years* in the popular evening newspaper *Vecherniaia Moskva* entitled "An Art of Joy" (*Iskusstvo radosti*).<sup>9</sup> Visiting the exhibition before it opened to the public, he writes from an artist's perspective, opening the review with the insider image of artists nervously milling on the day before the opening, worrying that their pictures might be moved or hung badly at the last minute. His writing is more direct and obviously personal than that of the professional art historians and critics who weighed in on the show, but it introduced the same language of sensation and emotion that permeated critical responses to the exhibition: "The further we penetrate into the exhibition," he writes, "the harder and stronger beats the pulse of the Soviet epoch." Impatiently passing through the early rooms of works by older artists to arrive at "the joyful panorama of young Soviet art" in the final rooms, "saturated with the bright colors of reality [*deistvitel'nost'*]," he has little left over for the abstract works by Malevich, Filonov, or Tatlin, which stare out from their frames "like the eye sockets of empty skulls"—the deathliness of that simile contrasting with the "beating pulse" and saturated color he values in the newer Soviet art.<sup>10</sup>

8. The standard interpretation of the trajectory of Deineka's career is that, while he was always a figurative artist, his shift from the experimental and graphic canvases of his early years as a painter in the 1920s, when he was influenced by the avant-garde, to the more three-dimensional, immediate, and painterly canvases of the early 1930s resulted from the demands imposed by the developing doctrine of Socialist Realism—that he "bent sufficiently in the prevailing wind," as Matthew Bown, a leading Western author on Socialist Realism, once put it. Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1991), p. 119.

9. I. Semenov, "Iskusstvo radosti. Na iubileinoi vystavke," *Vecherniaia Moskva* (June 25, 1933), p. 3.

10. Ibid. For a detailed account of the layout of the exhibition and the place of the avant-garde rooms within it, see Chlenova, "Staging Soviet Art," in this issue.

Deineka's lyrical painting *Bathing Girl* embodies this pulsating socialist joy for Semenov:

There are nude girls in Deineka's picture. And this picture does not seem out of place next to Petrov-Vodkin's tragic canvas *Death of the Commissar*. Life is joyful, life is dazzling. Reality gives the artist a scattering of great and small themes, equally awaiting creative reflection.<sup>11</sup>

The term "dazzling" (*oslepitel'nyi*) can also mean "blinding," but it is not properly life but the paintings themselves that dazzle—or blind—the eye with their overwhelming depiction of larger-than-life, rosy flesh pushing against the tightly



Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin. *Death of the Commissar*. 1928.

cropped frames. What are we to make of this excitable language of sensory experience and affect intruding into what we have been led to think of as the more analytical discourse on the "thematics" of "reality" in Socialist Realism?

A vivid instance of the opposition between feeling and analysis in the propagation of Socialist Realism burst off the pages of the central art journal *Iskusstvo* (Art) at the end of 1933. Celebrating sensation and emotion, the venerable art historian and critic Abram Efros wrote an exhaustive

fifty-page review of the exhibition that was immediately and brutally refuted, in the very same issue, by the journal's recently appointed editor-in-chief, the author behind the recently initiated anti-formalism campaign, Osip Beskin.<sup>12</sup> Efros's text surveys in detail the messy variety of Soviet painting as it struggles, as yet in vain, to "sustain the capaciousness" of Socialist Realism as a concept (Efros, p. 64). Yet he alights throughout on examples of artists who demonstrate the qualities of sensation and emotion that Semenov applauded. He praises Aleksandr Labas for the

11. I. Semenov, "Iskusstvo radosti."

12. See Abram Efros, "Vchera, segodnia, zavtra," *Iskusstvo* 6 (1933), pp. 15–64, and Osip Beskin, "O 'nezainteresovannosti esteticheskogo suzhdeniia,'" *Iskusstvo* 6 (1933), pp. 65–76; further citations will be given parenthetically in the body of the text as "Efros" and "Beskin," respectively. Beskin had just published his article and book against formalism; see his *Formalizm v zhivopisi* (Moscow: Vsekokhudozhnik, 1933) and Chlenova's discussion of him in "Staging Soviet Art."

way his painting "shakes and trembles with an emotional and painterly lyricism" (Efros, p. 42). The artists Fedor Antonov, Samuil Adlivankin, and Fedor Shurpin are not "cold," but rather "they love people and they know how, or almost know how, to show them through their love"; Shurpin depicts his female protagonists with "lyrical passion" and Antonov's painting *Love (Liubov)* is "pleasant to look at . . . with your eyes and with your feelings," a phrase that evokes the image of an embodied, emotive vision (Efros, pp. 56-57). In the paintings of Georgii Riazhskii, he sees "revolutionary vitality" (*revoliutsionnaia zhiznennost*; Efros, p. 59).

Beskin's rebuttal, sharply titled "On 'The Disinterestedness of Aesthetic Judgment,'" was not directed exclusively at Efros's interest in "feelings," but also at his prerogative, typical of the bourgeois art critic, to make a "disinterested aesthetic judgment" when such disinterest (Beskin never mentions Kant by name) is antithetical to the struggles of Soviet art. Beskin discounts Efros's method of consistently tying his aesthetic judgments of the sensuous form of paintings to the problems of representing the individuality and vitality of the new Soviet person, and the new socialist reality itself.<sup>13</sup> Beskin's Kantian angle is more a pretext to criticize Efros for *any* focus on aesthetics when the guiding criterion of judgment should be the extent to which the artist analyzes the "truth of reality" (*pravda deistvitel'nosti*) through a realism defined by contemporaneity (*sovremennost*), principles (*printsipial'nost*), and ideas (*ideinost*), as well as political and social analysis (*analiz politicheskii, obshchestvennyi*; Beskin, pp. 69 and 72). Beskin does not provide a specific content for any of these terms; they function as placeholders for an unspecified historical objectivity that he opposes to what he sees as the asocial, individual, and subjective pitfalls of Efros's emphasis on aesthetics in artworks that Beskin doesn't like. In terms of desirable realistic form, he warns only that naturalism is too passive while formalism is too subjective (pp. 69-70), and the only real content that he demands from art and criticism is general and unsurprising: an account of "the entire complexity of the class struggle in its most delicate manifestations and nuances" (p. 65). In order for the work of art to be realistic, it must "share a common language with its viewer"—but the nature of that language or commonality is defined only negatively, by its difference from bourgeois aesthetics (p. 69). Beskin thunders that Efros, in his asocial concern with his own aesthetic "feelings" about the paintings, "simply profanes the concept of socialist" in the term Socialist Realism (p. 69).

The lines, then, were starkly drawn. At one point Beskin jokingly refers to "us narrow dogmaticians," but the joke is unfunny because it's uncomfortably close to the truth (Beskin, p. 67). At this formative moment, in 1933, there was room for different approaches to Socialist Realism on the part of artists and critics alike, and Beskin's humorless harping on the catchphrases of truth to reality, idea, principle, and so on was not yet fully dominant within Soviet art. Even the prominent bureaucrat and critic Nikolai Shchekotov, who was one of the early organizers of the

13. Beskin chides Efros for forgetting that "the critic in our understanding of the word is not just someone who evaluates, but a public leader, and therefore each of his words must possess a particular *responsibility*" (p. 65; emphasis in original), confirming Chlenova's similar claim about the ideological leadership role accorded the Soviet critic in her article in this issue.

exhibition *15 Years* and whose epic ninety-two-page essay on the exhibition in *Iskusstvo* served as a kind of official review, used the language of sensation and lyricism. Although he, like Beskin, could also be sharply critical of previously formalist artists who were guilty of “an inadequate understanding of Soviet reality,” his review attended in generous detail to scores of paintings and he effused, in terms strikingly similar to Semenov’s invocation of “dazzling” life, that the exhibition “plays and glitters with innumerable colors. For the unaccustomed eye, it can be difficult to deal with this multicolored play.”<sup>14</sup> Less dogmatic critics than Beskin, then, recognized that artists could convey their perception of the new Soviet reality as much through their pictures’ aesthetic effects as through their subjects.

*From Private to Public*

This emergence of what we could call a *haptic* aesthetic was a phenomenon detected by critics rather than a programmatic shift in artistic production.<sup>15</sup> Some artists, writers, and intellectuals perceived the April decree as a welcome sign of the end of the contentious accusations and antagonisms of the class war waged by the militant Russian Associations of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) and Artists (RAPKh) during the so-called cultural revolution that dominated much of the first Five-Year Plan (October 1928–December 1932).<sup>16</sup> The easing of the rhetoric of class war, as well as the triumphal rhetoric of the successful completion of the Plan leading to the achievement of socialism, opened the possibility of art’s exploring not just socialist struggle but the joys of the lived experience of socialism more broadly—without the constant anxiety of being attacked as a “class enemy” (*klassovyi vrag*). This shift in artistic interest was articulated most explicitly, in 1933, in the discourse of Soviet film. In an important article in the central film journal, which discussed painting as well as film, the cinema critic and historian Nikolai Iezuitov identified the necessity of both a “style of socialist concepts” or “intellectual style” and a “style of socialist feelings” or “emotional style” for the development of Socialist Realism.<sup>17</sup> When art critics identified Deineka’s recent paintings as “lyrical,” they recognized his work as a site where this emerging rhetorical

14. Nikolai Shchekotov, “Sovetskie zhivopistsy: Vystavka ‘Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let,’” *Iskusstvo* 4 (1933), pp. 51–142; citations from pp. 115 and 120.

15. I use the term “haptic” here in the art-historical sense, as it was developed by Alois Riegl, who opposed the “haptic” to the “optic”: If the optic mode of vision takes things in at a distance, the haptic is a mode of vision that is near, analogous to the sense of touch in the way that it synthesizes discontinuous sensory inputs. Riegl had originally used the term “tactile” for this mode of vision, but changed to “haptic”—a term he took from the language of physiology (from the Greek *haptein*, to fasten)—because he worried that the tactile might be taken too literally as “touching.” See Margaret Iverson, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 9 and p. 170, n. 8.

16. See, for example, the grateful letter from a group of poets to the Central Committee in 1932, published in an important document collection: “Pis’mo gruppy poetov sekretariam TsK VKP(b),” in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds., *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), pp. 173–74, and the broader discussion in Brandon Taylor, “After the April 1932 Decree,” ch. 3 in *Art and Literature under the Bolsheviks, Volume 2: Authority and Revolution, 1924–1932* (London and Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1992), pp. 183–94.

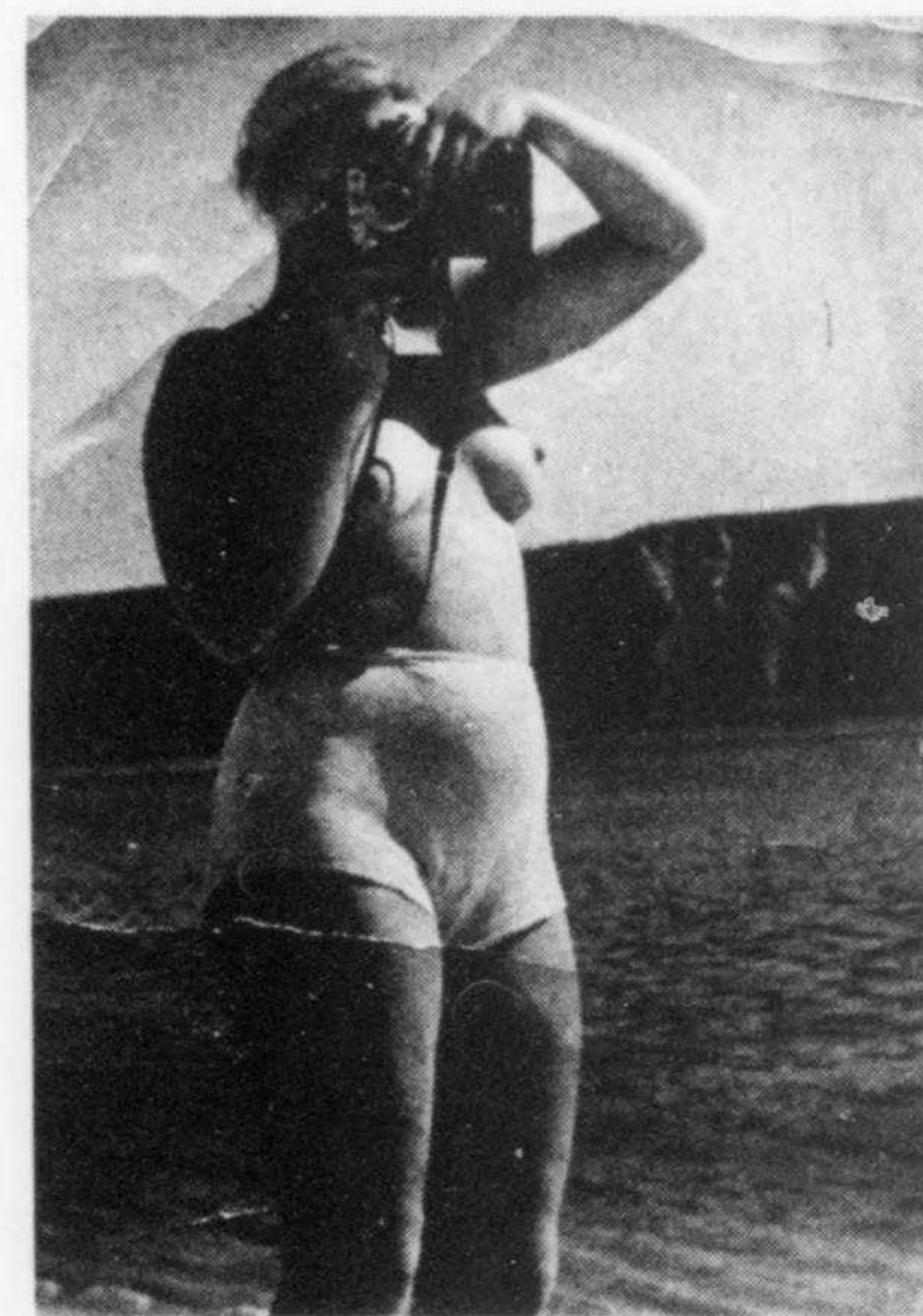
17. N. Iezuitov, “O stiliakh sovetskogo kino,” *Sovetskoe kino* 5–6 (1933), pp. 31–47; citation from p. 47. On Iezuitov and this moment in Soviet film, see Emma Widdis, “Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity,” *Slavic Review* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2012), pp. 590–618.

shift took material form: from the linear and thematic to the haptic and emotional and from the depiction of clothed ideological actors to less thematically identifiable “nude girls”—when nudes had not previously appeared in his public work, and were almost unheard of in the chaste Soviet art of this moment.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Deineka, this change in his practice seems to have resulted from a convergence of events in his private emotional life with the emerging public rhetoric about an art of socialist feelings. Briefly put, in 1932 Deineka met a girl.

The beautiful blonde in *Mother*, *The Ball Game*, and *Bathing Girl* was not a professional nude model but a specific young woman with a renown of her own, and Deineka was in (unrequited) love with her. Rather than the blank facial and bodily “type” (*tipazh*) that he usually depicted, the woman who lent her body and face to these pictures was Liudmila Sergeevna Vtorova, known as Liusia, a champion long-distance swimmer from the Dinamo sports complex in Moscow, where Deineka met her when she had just turned seventeen. According to her older sister, Evgeniia Sergeevna Vtorova—also a champion swimmer—he immediately fell for her (“*on srazu zhe vliubilsia v nee*”), arriving at their family home with a big box of chocolates.<sup>19</sup> Even though he was by then a

18. The one exception to the chronology of Deineka’s nudes, the painting *On the Balcony* (*Na balkone*, 1931), showing a naked, barely pubescent girl standing on a sunlit balcony, would not be publicly exhibited in Russia until it was shown in Deineka’s first solo exhibition in 1935. Although it constitutes his earliest “lyrical” painting, its lack of a public Soviet reception prevented it from entering into the critical discourse of lyricism discussed in this essay.

19. The identity of Liusia Vtorova as the model for these pictures was mentioned in a memoir essay by the aviator and writer Ivan Rakhillo. See his *Serebrianyi pereulok* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1978), p. 458. My account of Liusia’s encounter with Deineka is based on interviews conducted with her sister Evgeniia Sergeevna Vtorova in Moscow, April 2001. On the Vtorova sisters and their photo albums, see my “The Swimming Vtorova Sisters: The Representation and Experience of Soviet Sport in the 1930s,” in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Sandra Budy, et al., pp. 89–109 (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2010).



*Liusia Vtorova. 1930s.*

famous and successful artist, and, judging by photographs, a fit and attractive man to boot, Liusia would not get involved; she knew he was living with someone, and she had a boyfriend her own age.<sup>20</sup> The big sister's story of Deineka's love for Liusia may or may not be trustworthy, but given Deineka's strong identification with Soviet sports, it is not surprising that he would have been attracted to the much younger, athletic, and strikingly beautiful Liusia—at least to the extent of bringing her a box of chocolates and, more importantly, sketching her. Her outright rejection of him would likely have stung his pride, potentially complicating his emotions as he incorporated her image into his paintings.

Deineka's lyrical paintings, however, do not seem to aim for—nor even to betray—an expression of his personal feelings toward Liusia. Rather than telling thematic stories about Soviet girls like Liusia that direct viewers' emotions in particular ideological ways, the paintings convey a more generalized "emotionality" that is not securely directed toward either a fixed personal or narrative end.<sup>21</sup> Their origins may be private or personal, and the nudity, especially, may originate in Deineka's desiring gaze at the young swimmer. The extreme self-containment of these female figures may well stem from Liusia's own self-possession at a surprisingly young age, as suggested not only by her coolly turning Deineka down but also by some of the snapshots we have of her—particularly ones in which she holds the camera up to her eye as subject as well as object of representation. Yet the immediacy of the original private desire recedes in the final production of these large, formally composed canvases that aim for what Efros called the "public breadth" of Socialist Realism (Efros, p. 59). Despite their seemingly intimate subjects, these paintings were not like the private concoctions created by artists in the West, who were inventing alone in their studios with their naked models, hoping for buyers. Deineka was under contract with the organization Vsekokhudozhnik, the central state commissioning agency, which entered into contracts with artists stipulating that a certain number of works be produced within a certain period of time in return for a monthly stipend—a system (*kontraktatsiia*) that, in theory at least, allowed artists in good standing to produce works to be purchased by museums or distributed to the network of various Soviet institutions.<sup>22</sup>

Efros's demand for "public breadth" in Soviet art emerges in specific contrast to the private or personal experiences of artists, and he calls attention to the difficult process of mediating between the two to achieve the aims of Socialist Realism. The occasion for this discussion is his enthusiastic response to Aleksandr Samokhvalov's *Girl in a Soccer Jersey* (*Devushka v futbolke*, which he misnames

20. At this time, Deineka lived with the artist Pavla Freiburg, a Latvian Party member nine years his senior.

21. In his review of Deineka's work in the first, Leningrad iteration of the exhibition *15 Years*, written for a Leningrad newspaper, Moisei Brodskii refers to the "emotionality" (*emotsional'nost'*) that he sees already in the front-striding male figure in Deineka's *Defense of Petrograd* (1928). See Moisei Brodskii, "A. Deineka," *Krasnaia gazeta* 284 (1932), p. 3.

22. For a detailed and highly critical account of this system, see Galina Yankovskaya, "The Economic Dimensions of Art in the Stalinist Era: Artists' Cooperatives in the Grip of Ideology and the Plan," trans. Rebecca Mitchell, *Slavic Review* 65, no. 4 (Winter 2006), pp. 769–91.

*Fizkul'turnitsa*, or [female] physical-culture enthusiast), one of the most popular paintings in the exhibition *15 Years*:<sup>23</sup>

In his magnificent . . . *Fizkul'turnitsa* you recognize the beautiful "girl of our country." Very few artists, old or young, can boast of this: theirs are either a private event, not transferable to the public, i.e., a naturalistic portrait, lacking any public breadth; or a schematic type, i.e., a conditional depiction, without living individuality. The "Soviet portrait" . . . demands precisely this double task: the public-personal (*obshchestvenno-lichnoe*) depiction of the person (Efros, p. 59).

Deineka, in his transformation of the "private event" that is his relationship with Liusia to the "public breadth" of his lyrical paintings, would seem to achieve this "double task" at least as well as Samokhvalov. Efros in fact introduces this discussion of Samokhvalov by noting that he "cannot yet be compared to Deineka." Yet Efros can't see this "public-personal depiction" in Deineka's paintings because Deineka's "girls" are not sexually available enough to alert Efros to their "private" origins. Throughout his review, his delight in lyricism, passion, vitality, and personal feelings is often tied to depictions of accessible, attractive women, however laboring and Soviet, betraying a conventional masculine desire.<sup>24</sup> The female figures in *Girl in a Soccer Jersey* and Deineka's *Bathing Girl* stand in nearly identical poses and resemble each other closely, but the clothed "girl" in the jersey is more objectified and available than the naked one. Framed against the blank background, Samokhvalov's figure exists just for us, and the fitted soccer jersey, with its sug-



Aleksandr Samokhvalov. *Girl in a Soccer Jersey*. 1932.

23. On the popularity of this painting as an emerging Soviet icon, see Chlenova, in this issue.

24. Efros's conventional views of gender emerge also in the special criticism he reserves for the two main female artists represented in the exhibition *15 Years*, Ekaterina Zernova and Ol'ga Ianovskaia; the latter, in particular, he judges harshly for what he sees as the overly feminine qualities of her painting: "It mutters formlessly, it makes things too sugary" (p. 61).

gestively loose string tie, reveals a shapely torso sinuously curving toward us. Deineka's blockier collective-farm worker (*kolkhoznitsa*), knitted into the landscape composition and closely entwined with another figure seen from the back, her own double, is more self-contained and, in spite of her nakedness, deflects Efros's desiring gaze. If Efros had been more alert to the operations of what a later generation would call his male gaze, he might have detected Deineka's specific achievement: reworking a private, conventionally gendered erotic desire (of an older man for a beautiful, barely adult woman) into a more diffuse emotionality with a potentially collectivizing social force.

#### *Monumentalism and Its Fragments*

Deineka accounted for the explicitly collective orientation of his recent work in a speech he gave in late January 1933, between the Leningrad and Moscow presentations of the exhibition *15 Years*. From the stenogram of his speech, we can see he offered an admittedly oblique explanation for the anti-narrative emotionality that had emerged in his recent painting (i.e., the lyrical Liusia cycle), which he characterized as a response to his perception of himself as a graphic and monumental artist rather than a narrative "easelist." The context for his remarks was an evening dedicated to a discussion of his work at the Master of Arts Club in Moscow, attended by fellow artists, critics, and art historians. In his historical accounting, he described his reasons for leaving the Society of Easel Painters (OST) in 1928 for the radical new association October:

By nature I didn't feel a kindred spirit with OST. I painted very few easel paintings—two pictures a year. As a matter of fact I was doing completely different things so, naturally, I was drawn to convert OST into a different organization and that's why I left it and entered "October."<sup>25</sup>

The October group promoted architecture, design, and mechanically reproducible media, especially posters (to which Deineka dedicated much of his energy in the period 1930–33), and sanctioned painting only in the form of the monumental mural, the approach most geared to collective production and reception. Deineka eventually left October for the briefly dominant proletarian artists' group RAPKh in 1931, and by 1933, after the dissolution of all artistic groups by the April decree, association with the discredited October group was not something to advertise. Yet Deineka affirmed his commitment to their ideas, stating that he spent more time working in graphics than in painting and expressing his regret

25. Aleksandr Deineka, in a lecture on his artistic method given at the Masters of Arts Club, Moscow, January 29, 1933; stenographic report cited in B. M. Nikiforov, *A. Deineka* (Moscow: Izogiz, 1937), p. 42.

that he had so far had only a few opportunities to work on monumental murals. "Our time is in essence more graphic than painterly," he says:

For all that has happened I still hold the position of an anti-easelist. I consider this to be correct, because an easel painting is a limited idea of a gold frame of one and a half meters or more. For us this is too small a size—in both scale and circulation.<sup>26</sup>

If he was an "anti-easelist," why was he making lyrical easel paintings of Liusia, most of them in the vicinity of one and a half meters and displayed in gold frames?<sup>27</sup> One answer might be that even as easel paintings, these works were meant to demonstrate how "our time is in essence more graphic than painterly." We might read Deineka's contrast of "graphic" with "painterly" not in the conventional art-historical sense of *disegno* versus *colorito*, the firm line of the pencil versus the touch of the brush, or simply, in terms of medium, a drawing (or a drawn poster design) versus an oil painting—but more metaphorically as a kind of code for a direct aesthetic language communicating feeling or emotion (the "graphic" or decorative nature of large-scale murals) versus the truthful language of realism (not too naturalistic, not too formalist) demanded by someone like Beskin for analyzing contemporary social processes (the "painterliness" of the narrative easel painting). (This is the kind of demand to which Deineka likely gestures in the phrase "for all that has happened.") Largely deprived so far of opportunities—which is to say, commissions—for making actual monumental murals, for now he practices monumental scale and simplified graphic forms within the cramped confines of the one-and-a-half-meter gold frame.

Critics responding to Deineka's work at this time seized on this notion of him as a "monumentalist"—a term that openly referred to his reworking of modernist techniques. Efros is perhaps most forceful, even poetic, in his account of how Deineka's massive scale produces the opposite effects of the "chamber" or "easel" painters:

His latest works are fragments of some kind, bits of larger compositions that would require a whole wall. For Deineka the scale of a room is already cramped. His *Mother and Child* is only a sketch for some kind of large fresco; *Girls Playing Ball* are asking for a massive plane; *The Bathing Kolkhoznitsa* would only gain in the antique chastity of her nudity if she could take up more space (Efros, p. 57).

Deineka's visual language of oversized scale and fragment manages to distance the viewer from the immediacy of the nude "girls": They are transitory

26. Deineka lecture, 1933; cited in Nikiforov, *A. Deineka*, p. 54.

27. The conventional answer is that he did so out of opportunism—or, less negatively put, out of a recognition of current realities. The new post-April art system would promote not only realism as a style but also oil painting itself as the most valued medium in the hierarchy of mediums, so Deineka would have to overcome his earlier sentiment of not feeling a "kindred spirit" with easel painting. On the ideological significance that the large-scale oil painting (*kartina*) would increasingly have for Socialist Realism as the 1930s progressed, see Reid, "All Stalin's Women."

figures on their way to larger spaces, and the "antique chastity" of the bathing *kolkhoznitsa's* nudity will only come into focus on a larger surface. As we have seen, it is symptomatic of Deineka's disjunctive haptic effects that Efros cannot *see* the nudity in these lyrical figures: He sees only fragmentation and distorted scale, while the bodies remain, for him, chaste and sculptural. In emphasizing Deineka's scale, Efros may have been cribbing from the distinguished writer and critic Sergei Romov, who had previously called Deineka a "monumentalist" in his new paintings, claiming that what he needed were entire cycles of frescoes: "A single painting is crowded for him, it presses in on him, it oppresses him, just like the small room in which he works. Deineka needs walls."<sup>28</sup> Calling cinema a modern dynamic "fresco" ("In our new conditions, which will prevail: the frescoes of Leonardo or the 'frescoes' of Pudovkin?"), Romov points to the influence of cinema and photography on Deineka's work.

Neither Romov nor Efros spells out how this all might work in specific pictures, but it's not difficult to read all three lyrical paintings in the show *15 Years* as fragments, in the sense that photographic snapshots or film stills offer decontextualized fragments of reality, with pieces of bodies cut off or cropped, and looming discrepancies of scale that can bring the object startlingly close. It is as if the depiction of social processes or the social totality demanded by the thematic model of Soviet painting had been replaced by the body itself as a totality, with social processes largely edited out. The critic Boris Nikiforov gets more specific about how Deineka's "monumental style" works in *Mother*: The artist achieves "maximum expressiveness" by "simplifying and generalizing" the forms to create a "feeling of rhythm" in the composition.<sup>29</sup> The simplified, rhythmic forms that achieve maximum expressiveness on a monumental surface have a different, directly haptic effect when realized on the smaller scale of the easel painting. This haptic effect has nothing to do with the surface tactility of colorful paint or the sensuous touch of the artist; the paint is sparingly applied and resolutely monochrome in spite of the luminous white of the mother's face and child's forehead and the warm tones of the skin. The intensity of sensation comes rather from the way that Liusia's life-size body is pressed so closely to the tightly cropped picture surface that she seems to be almost in our space, available to touch. With the view of Liusia from the back and the child from the front, the composition stimulates the tactile sense that we could walk around this mutually absorbed pair as if they formed an enclosed sculpture.

The self-contained sculptural feel of the smooth, monochrome bodies, as well as the impressively classical slopes of Liusia's profile, gesture toward the model of the antique. This model was not pursued much by critics; Efros referred only briefly, as we have seen, to the "antique" chastity of the *Bathing Girl*, and

28. Sergei Romov, "A. Deineka," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* 39 (1932), p. 2. As this article is only one page, future citations will not be referenced separately.

29. Boris Nikiforov, "Aleksandr Deineka," *Iskusstvo* 3 (1933), p. 100.

Shchekotov mentions in passing that Deineka's lyrical paintings "show a critically diffracted connection to the classicism of ancient Greece."<sup>30</sup> His emphasis is on the "diffraction" of the classical, which comes out in the radical telescoping of the composition, as well as the stark, blank background that harks back to Deineka's earlier, "schematic" paintings. These elements work against classical harmony—including the ideological harmony between (Soviet) mother and child, a story that Deineka had concocted. Like him, Liusia was childless and would remain so all her life; placing the babe in her arms may have had more to do with his interest in imagining Liusia in sensuous contact with another body than in maternity as such (though he would likely have anticipated a positive response to this ever-popular thematic convention). The haptic effects of fragment and sensation—the symptom of Deineka's personal, libidinal feelings for Liusia as the ideal representative of the new Soviet body—turn this potentially sentimental "Soviet Madonna" into a less-directed image of touch and closeness, of diffuse emotional energy or "joy," rather than an ideological story of Soviet maternity.



*Liusia Vtorova. 1930s.*

#### *The Emotional Saturation of the Image*

This reading of *Mother* has attempted to flesh out what the critics might have meant when they applied terms like "emotion" and "lyricism" to the formal strategies of Deineka's "monumentalism." Nikiforov and other critics never articulate specific ideological interpretations of the subject matter of Deineka's lyrical pictures; the emotionality they see is, rather, a non-instrumentalized, or at least a generalized, visual language of socialist feeling—appropriate for an affirmative public art, certainly, but not directly harnessed to Beskin's themes of analyzing the political or the public. Nikiforov, for example, concludes that Deineka's avant-garde-derived simplification and generalization of forms in *Mother*, "so simple at first glance," allowed him to achieve an "emotional saturation of the image" (*emotional'naia nasyshchennost' obraza*).<sup>31</sup> The emotion, by implication, is a desirable one, but its uses for the Soviet project are left unspecified.

If the "emotional saturation of the image" stems at some level from

30. Shchekotov, "Sovetskie zhivopistsy," p. 120.

31. Nikiforov, *A. Deineka*, p. 100.

Deineka's feelings for Liusia, however pictorially transformed, then it is doubled and tripled in *Bathing Girl* and *The Ball Game*, where the multiple female figures are only so many repetitions of the same woman. As in *Mother*, the haptic pictorial effects overtake the ideological "story" of *Bathing Girl*, in which Liusia is transformed into a peasant girl taking a break from her labors by going for a swim, a well-ordered farm just visible in the background and an ostentatiously ruddy working suntan on her hands and face. The distinguishing feature of the composition is its tactile investigation of the figure's body from the front, standing erect, and the back, gracefully bent at the neck as she dries herself. From the front, Deineka's usually smoothly rendered, generalized body surface is interrupted by the ostentatiously realistic detail in the depiction of the navel, fingernails, nipples, ear, and facial features, even if, seen from the back, the body is more characteristically represented as all burnished surface swells and hollows. Yet as close as this frontal lifelike body is pressed toward us, it is not fully available as eroticized flesh: Its placement in the uniform picture surface prevents this, refusing to let the pink skin be different from the sandy pink dirt of the landscape, as does the tight jigsaw puzzle of the composition. The brilliant white swath of towel, for example, wedges open a space between the two bodies seemingly pressed close against each other, opening an imaginative space for the viewer to circumnavigate them like the sculptural group of mother and child in *Mother*. This nearly abstract curve of white finds its compositional counterpart in the vertical strip of glittering silver on the lower left, which won't behave, in scale or orientation, as a corner of an actual pond in which the *kolkhoznitsa* might have been swimming. The landscape becomes a tactile mosaic of flat, geometrically blocked shapes and occasional thick strokes of paint, working against the realism effect created by the detailed portrayal of the body. It conveys an energy or intensity or, to use Nikiforov's terms, an emotional saturation rather than a specific emotion.

*The Ball Game* is perhaps the most "supercharged" of the lyrical paintings in its presentation of the sheer overpowering totality of the body as a force dispersed across the picture surface.<sup>32</sup> First, there is the formidable architectural vertical of that severely cropped body seen from behind, seemingly anchored by steel beams in the ground, buttocks clenched and arm muscles rippling, which both carves up and bars our entry into the dark unreadable space—or better *surface*—beyond. The two other figures float on this surface, one standing uncertainly, the other in a reclining seated position with legs stretched out before her in a showy foreshortening that defines the shallow space between the threesome. The purported *fizkul'tura* (physical culture) theme of a ball game is fully subordinated to the pictorial exploration of Liusia's body in the form of the intensification of the

32. I use Devin Fore's suggestive term "supercharged" to evoke the intensity or emotional saturation of certain Socialist Realist images, although my account of realism in Soviet painting of this moment diverges from his analysis of the grotesque *Überstaltung* or overcoding of mimesis in interwar art. See Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), p. 229.

foreground figure, as if we could lean close to touch it; the triple replication of the figure, in different positions, again as if the composition walks us around her body; and the stilled, dreamlike state of these bodies and the variously obscured faces that suggest a sensation more of diffuse erotic reverie than of athletics. The rhythmic surface pattern of glowing figures forms a tight triangle within the intimate dark space. In its anti-narrative fragmentation and disjunction of scale, and in its dynamic circulation of rhythms of light and dark, the picture performs all the terms critics associated with Deineka's "monumentalist"—or avant-garde-derived—technique.

*Reworking the Avant-Garde for Socialist Realism*

Deineka's lyrical paintings embody the "reworking" rather than the outright rejection of avant-garde pictorial strategies in the pursuit of a new form of realism. In his review, Efros openly praises the former OST artists for "reworking from within the means of 'leftist' art, expanding its possibilities, enriching its applications" (Efros, p. 45). Sergei Romov derides the philistines (*obyvateli*) who see only *modernichanie* (a derogatory form of "modernism") in the work of Deineka, and points, as we have seen, to the dynamizing effect of the modern visual forms of cinema and photography on Deineka's pictorial structures. Nikiforov is most explicit about Deineka's "closeness to the 'leftists,'" which, he points out, "ended only very recently." Their influence on Deineka can be seen in his "attentive relation to the specific means of art; to the emotional expressiveness of color, rhythm, dynamic movement"—precisely the qualities that he credited with the intensified emotion in Deineka's work. "Deineka," he concludes from all this, in language similar to that of Efros, "is one of the best examples of the correct and critical use and *reworking* of the creative problematic of the leftists in connection to the tasks of the battle for the style of Socialist Realism."<sup>33</sup> In this reworking, the leftist forms no longer pursued earlier avant-garde strategies of negation, or participation in production, or direct entry into life, although some of the political affect of these strategies was preserved, even rescued, within the most hopeful construction of Socialist Realism as a shared, haptic project of socialist communication.

One of the central "creative problematics" of modernism that would need to be reworked or simply jettisoned by Socialist Realism was the staunch tradition of the female nude, in which pictorial innovation was worked out across the bodies of naked women. Shchekotov was the only critic directly to address Deineka's lyrical pictures within this tradition of sexualized images of women (albeit without explicitly discussing the nudity), and he did so as a way of articulating the critical intelligence of the haptic aesthetic and its contribution to Socialist Realism. He immediately identifies *Mother* as a "lyrical image of a mother with a child in her

33. Nikiforov, A. *Deineka*, pp. 102–105; my emphasis of "reworking."

arms." But his argument about the effect of this lyricism is specifically feminist, countering patriarchal constructs of femininity and maternity:

This is not the sentimental petit-bourgeois (*meshchanskii*) female animal who has been served up to us countless times under all kinds of guises by the artists of the capitalist countries, not the mother beholden to her husband as master, provider, tyrant; this is a powerful image of an energetic, independent, free woman, in whom biology is mediated by elevated social consciousness (pp. 120–121).

Although he does not offer an analysis of how *Mother* works as a painting, beyond naming its lyricism, something in its pictorial structure prevents him from perceiving the nudity as reflecting either a femininity fully anchored in the body or a socially mediated sexual availability.<sup>34</sup> Extending his argument to include the female figures in *The Ball Game* and *Bathing Girl*, he sharpens the distinction between Deineka's nudes and the stereotyped or sexualized representation of women within academic classicism or Impressionism, respectively:

[Deineka's] type of woman . . . is a successful attempt to find an image of a woman worker who is beautiful in a new way, in our way, and, at the same time, it is a stand against academically conditioned "correct" facial features, constructed according to the desiccated and petrified clichés of ancient plasters and, on the other hand, a sharp protest against the "piquant-erotic" ladies of bourgeois society, painted with such great mastery, for example, by the recently deceased French master Renoir (p. 121).

Deineka's lyrical pictures of women who are beautiful "in our way" do not simply counter bourgeois artistic stereotypes of women or provide images of the thematic of the "new woman" of socialism; they transform the very notion of a "Soviet thematic" in Socialist Realism:

Before these works by Deineka, the viewer, *regardless of his will*, is made smarter, is internally enriched, in so far as they evoke a mass of associations with contemporary Soviet reality, and excite him with the novelty of their unexpected, artistically vital impressions and the freshness of the questions posed by the artist. Here the Soviet thematic is resolved not in the didactic *lubok* mode, but philosophically (philosophy in action, to the extent that the artist intervenes in life).<sup>35</sup>

In the face of the insistence by someone like Beskin on the analytical and thematic rather than the aesthetic, Shchekotov suggests that the constantly reiterated the-

34. Shchekotov writes that he doesn't have the space to offer "formal analysis" of these Deineka paintings in the context of his exhibition review, but that such an analysis "would give us a lot of interesting material to strengthen even further our conviction that here before us is a great step toward socialist realism" ("Sovetskie zhivopistsy," p. 121).

35. *Ibid.*, emphasis added. The *lubok* was the traditional Russian woodcut, often incorporating text.

matic of “contemporary Soviet reality” can itself be haptically experienced “in action,” through the sensuous excitement provoked by the vitality of artistic forms.

Lyrical Socialist Realism is not a reactionary regress into a precognitive arena of pure feeling but an intelligent—even philosophical—critical intervention with powerful elevating effects on the viewer’s conscious experience.<sup>36</sup> This effect is not necessarily less ideological than the narrative forms of Socialist Realism—the goal was, after all, to create a conscious viewer who would participate in the shared project of socialism—but the ideological address is more diffuse, and more open to individual experiences of the meanings of socialism, because it is directed toward the feelings more than the analytical capacities of the viewer. In this alternate understanding of the “Soviet thematic,” the artist’s intervention into life is emotive and affective rather than production-oriented (as it had been in the grandest ambitions of Constructivism) or analytical of the truth of reality (as in the Beskin version of Socialist Realism).<sup>37</sup> This is, in effect, a proposal for the critical value of deploying emotion as a social force, and for the social value of communicated emotion.

Ivan Semenov, who had found such “joy” in the new Soviet art at the exhibition *15 Years*, understood emotion as a social force. He concluded his fervent review by invoking not just sensation and emotion but love as well—the hoped-for love between Soviet artists and their viewers:

The mass viewer will come tomorrow to study the Soviet artists. He will single out the works that are close to him, that ignite his vitality and love of life, and at the same time he will come to learn from the artist. He will learn to love the artist. For the country must know its artists.<sup>38</sup>

Semenov imagines that the joyful paintings will educate the viewer through emotion, through love. Reversing the vector of emotion, Efros, we recall, wrote of

36. Recent affect theory, which distinguishes between sub-cognitive, biologically imprinted affects and the socially, linguistically, and cognitively determined emotions, might seem to offer a set of terms for the distinction I am making between the lyrical (affective) strand of Socialist Realism and the more ideologically determined emotions mobilized by thematic or didactic Socialist Realism—especially given the vitalist language of sensation that suffuses many critical responses. This theoretical distinction breaks down, however, because the shared feelings evoked by the paintings are too worked out to be pure affects: They are produced by the sophisticated, entirely cognitive structures of the pictures themselves, and they are connected to specific social and critical ideas about (socialist) joy. For a clear synopsis of terms, see the “Glossary” in Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008), pp. 20–36; for a lucid critique, see Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 434–472.

37. Certain practices of Constructivism, in their orientation toward the experience of consumption as well as production, also encompassed an emotive or affective address to the viewer/user, and can form, together with lyrical Socialist Realism, an alternate history of Soviet art as the production of socialist affect. On this aspect of Constructivism, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

38. I. Semenov, “Iskusstvo radosti,” p. 3. Here he equates Soviet artists with heroes of labor by referring directly to the recently created slogan “the country must know its heroes.” The phrase first appeared in the article “Luchshie iz luchshikh” (The Best of the Best) in the newspaper *Pravda* (March 6, 1931), p. 5, on prizes awarded to top-producing workers. It would soon appear in widely published brochures and posters, such as Gustav Klucis’s poster *Labor in the USSR (Trud v SSSR)* of 1931, produced in an edition of 30,000.

three favorite artists in the show who “love people and they know . . . how to show them through their love”; the emotional force of the paintings, in other words, stems from the shared emotions of the artists toward the collective people of the Soviet land. While this emotional language describing the relationship between the socialist artist and viewer may seem overwrought, it finds its parallel in the length and intensity of the reviews by Efros and Shchekotov, as they search and search for evidence of artworks that will get it right, that will be adequate to the overwhelming feelings sparked by the collective endeavor of socialism. We know that those idealistic feelings would eventually be ruthlessly instrumentalized, even trampled, and that the idea of the Soviet Union as a modern lyrical community would become harder and harder to sustain. But the lyrical paintings and the emotionally charged response they elicited at this moment of the exhibition *15 Years* in 1933 can still stand as a model of the possibility of an art engaged in a collective project and of socialism as an alternative affective economy.



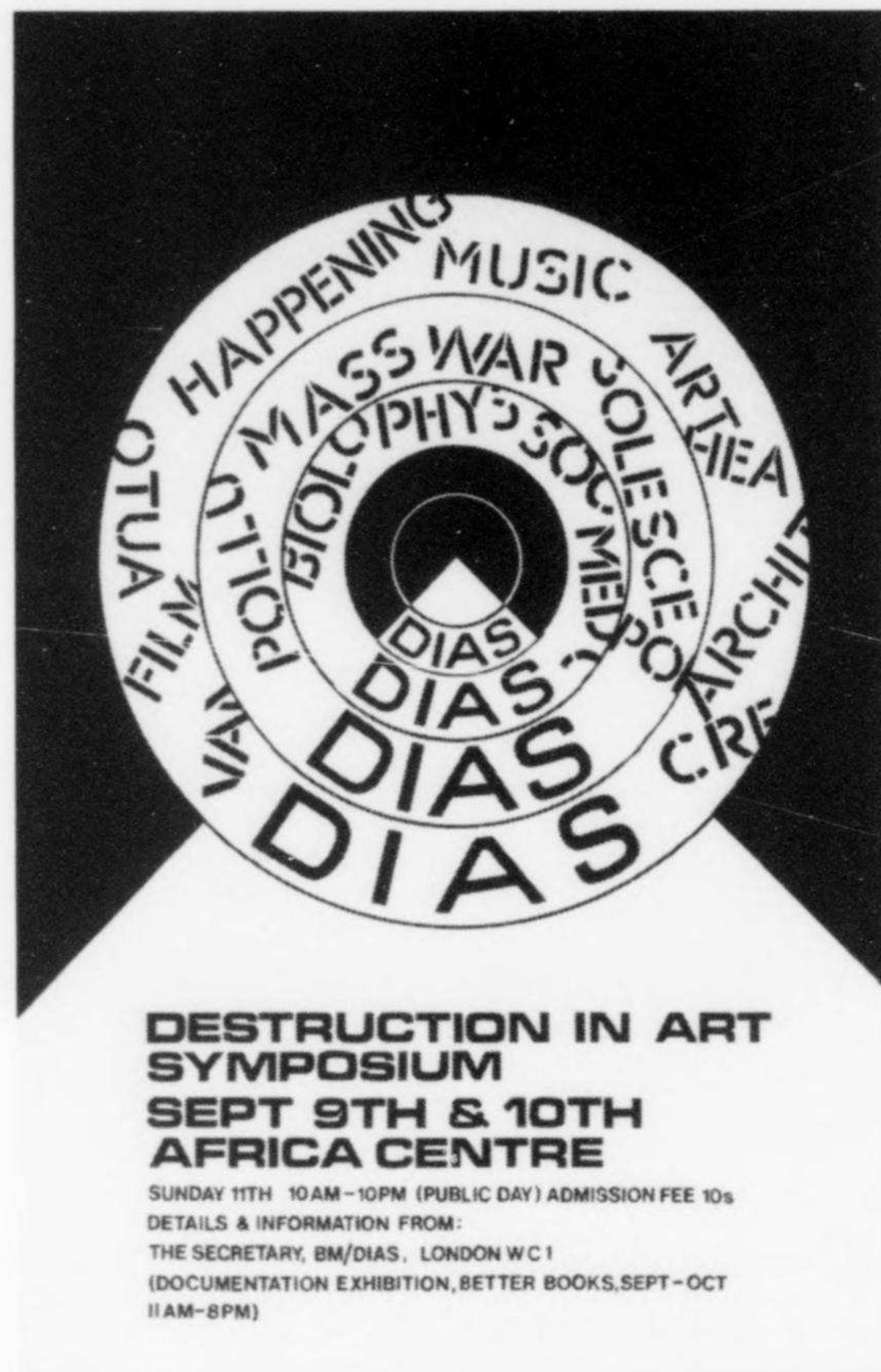
*Institute for Direct Art. Ten Rounds for Cassius Clay.  
Destruction in Art Symposium, 1966.*

## Citizen Brus Examines His Body: Actionism and Activism in Vienna, 1968

BETH HINDERLITER

The question "Is nonviolence a possibility?" was a lightning rod of disorder in the 1960s as leftist groups became militarized, claiming counter-violence as the most effective vehicle of self-preservation. Numerous publications, whether advocating counter-violence as self-destruction or as self-preservation, from Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression* (1963) to the collection *The Dialectics of Liberation* (which appeared in 1968 and featured essays by Herbert Marcuse, R.D. Laing, and Stokely Carmichael), spoke to the problem of venting human aggression and thereby ending our "mass suicide."<sup>1</sup> Artistic use of violence at the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium in London, where Viennese Actionists as well as members of the Fluxus group gathered to stage performances of their works such as *Ten Rounds for Cassius Clay*, questioned the sublimation of violence or its aggravation via aesthetic strategies. In suggesting that nonviolence in an oppressive society was the equivalent of self-destruction, Actionists participated in a broader discussion of the character of violence being conducted by a number of activist groups at this time. It dismissed self-defense in favor of revolutionary violence. The Actionists politicized self-destruction as a means of routing bourgeois individualism and its internalization of repressive aspects of the state apparatus, forming group-subjects as in *Wehrertüchtigung* [Toughening Up the Army] from 1967, which had performers parodying the training exercises of army soldiers and reveling in corporal abjection. In this sense, the political capacities of Actionism can be seen not just in its partnering with student-activist groups to offer "teach-ins," as at 1968's "Art and Revolution" (a manifestation of performance and actions co-organized by the Viennese Actionists and a student group at the University of Vienna); they are more widely manifest in the Direct Art performances of the mid-1960s and in Günter Brus's Body Analysis actions, which question the relationship between the materiality of the human body and the political identity of the citizen subject. Here, violence applied to the body as material seeks to overturn the originary violence

1. Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York: Bantam, 1967). *The Dialectics of Liberation* issued from the 1967 symposium of the same title that took place in London and brought together figures of the anti-psychiatry movement with leaders of the New Left to "demystify human violence in all its forms." David Cooper, ed., *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968).



*Poster for the Destruction  
in Art Symposium. 1966.*

that is the basis of state power and to render visible the internalization of repressive social forces.<sup>2</sup>

In 1966, the year after Austria's first celebration of its national holiday since the Austrofascist dictatorship had canceled it in 1934, Viennese Actionists Brus and Otto Mühl decided to form an "Institute for Direct Art"—signaling a schism in Actionism over whether aggression was to be used as means or end. Far from celebrating the health of the young Second Republic, they maintained that, in a

2. Numerous critics have denounced Actionism as apolitical and regressive. Gilles Deleuze wrote in *Cinema 2* about the films of the Actionists: "Sometimes this cinema of the body mounts a ceremony, takes on an initiatory and liturgical aspect, and attempts to summon all the metallic and liquid powers of a sacred body, to the point of honour or revulsion, as in the essays of the Vienna School, Brus, Mühl, and Nitsch. But can we talk in terms of opposite poles [the everyday body and the ceremonial body] except in extreme cases which are not necessarily the most successful?" Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989), pp. 191-92. From a different point of view, animal-rights activist and favored actress of Hitchcock Tippi Hedren has criticized the work of Hermann Nitsch for many years as being exploitative to animals.

favorite phrase, "the Alps have an extremely damaging effect on the Austrian mentality."<sup>3</sup> Direct Art sought to confront what Brus would later call the "frozen authoritarian structures in politics and art" by combining Mühl's material actions with Brus's self-mutilations in order to create a "total" or "direct" art in which they would perform actions intended to resemble those of a "madman" or "fool."<sup>4</sup> Declaring that Direct Art would have great significance to its audience of "sensible mentally ill people," Mühl and Brus noted an inversion of vigor and decay in Austria.<sup>5</sup> The supposedly "sensible" people of Austria were now invoked as cretins who had, in Brus's words, "cheered the brown-shirted shit" of the Nazis. Now the Actionists celebrated criminals and perverts for their health.

Brus and Mühl's first total action, *Ornament Is a Crime* (June 2, 1966), took place in Adolf Loos's villa in Vienna and consisted of their smearing themselves and one

3. Günter Brus and Otto Mühl, "Direct Art, B & M," *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, ed. Malcolm Green (London: Atlas Press, 1999), p. 236.

4. Brus in an interview with Danièle Roussel, in *Der Wiener Aktionismus und die Österreicher*, ed. Danièle Roussel (Klagenfurt: Verlag Ritter, 1995), p. 19.

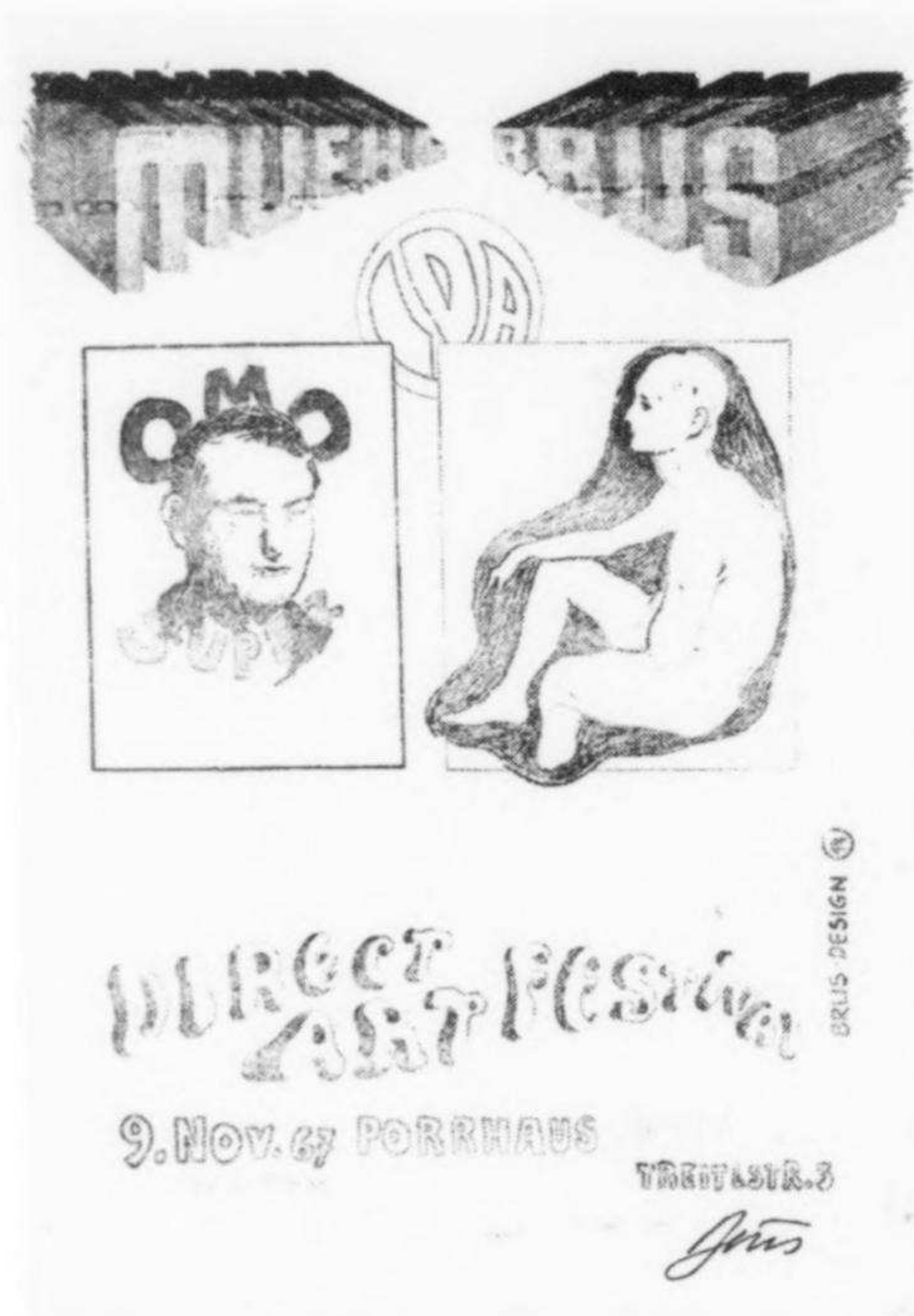
5. The Actionist diagnosis of Austrian neurosis thereby countered this inversion of vigor and decay with Dionysian excess, or, to use Hubert Klocker's term, with a "subjectivist technique of ecstasy." Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* suggested that a society imbued with "neuroses of health" gave rise to the cathartic forces of the Dionysian. These neuroses of health, according to Nietzsche, belonged to a society in efflorescence whose strength and optimism prompted a cathartic craving for ugliness. Likewise, modern society in its democratic decline correspondingly produced a "cheerful" attitude of scientist positivism and its utilitarian logic. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin, 1994).



Poster for "Art and Revolution." 1968.

female participant with food substances and paint while screaming and thrashing about on the floor, demonstratively regressing to the primitive love for decoration so despised by Loos. Their revalorization of aggressive strategies of smearing, defiling, and mutilating—gestures otherwise criminalized or rendered taboo in bourgeois society—was initially justified in the early stages of Actionism via the psychoanalytic concept of abreaction. Aggression was to be contained in the space of the theater, giving a means of controlled venting to human instincts and drives. In the Actionists' first collective publication, *Die Blutörge* (*The Blood Organ*), Hermann Nitsch elaborated on what the Actionists were doing when they used such aggressive means. "I take upon myself," he wrote, "all that appears negative, unsavory, perverse, and obscene, the lust and the resulting sacrificial hysteria, in order to spare YOU the defilement and shame entailed by the descent into the extreme."<sup>6</sup>

6. Hermann Nitsch, "O.M. Theatre Manifesto," in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 132. The first action called *The Blood Organ* was accompanied by a publication of the same name, which was to last for six issues. Hermann Nitsch, Otto Mühl, and Adolph Frohner walled themselves into a cellar for four days, June 1–4, 1962, during which they sought to transform "the entire material of the cosmos" through a process of the removal of inhibitions and the accessing of instinctual drives. Conceived as an *Ausmauerungsaktion* (walling-out action), *The Blood Organ* aimed to topologically and genealogically re-traverse Western culture and to liberate subjectivity from the reign of the bourgeois terrorism, which Mühl labeled the *Wichtel* (garden gnome). They tore, ripped, shredded, beat, smashed, and smeared. While Frohner and Mühl occupied themselves with producing junk sculptures, Nitsch nailed the carcass of a dead lamb onto a canvas and splattered blood and intestines over the painting. As they surfaced through the wall (kicked in by a woman dressed in an evening gown) art was declared to have returned to its primitive depths.



Poster for the Direct  
Art Festival. 1967.

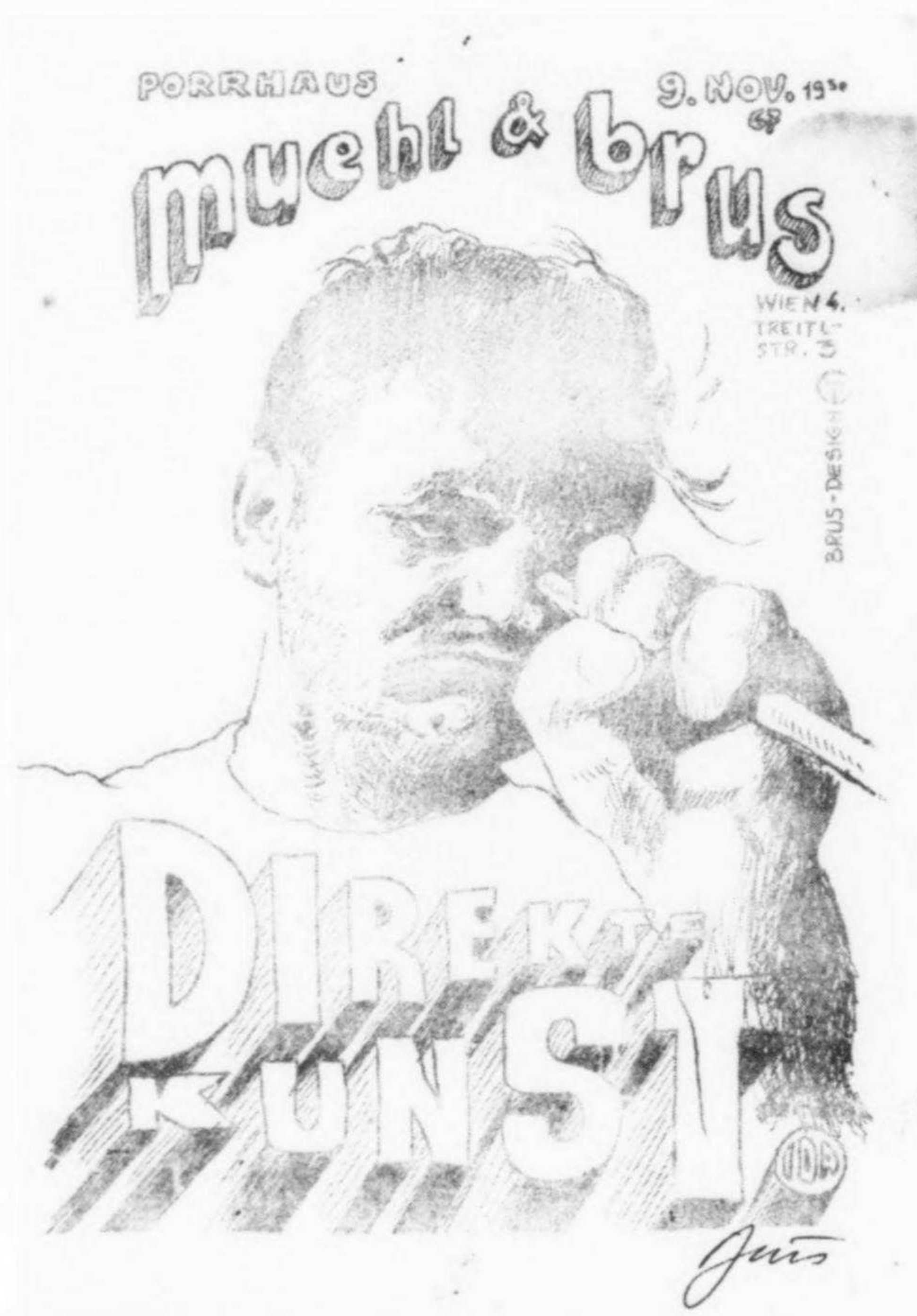


*Günter Brus and Otto Mühl.  
Ornament Is a Crime. 1966.*

In the charged atmosphere of the Loos villa, such degradations were presented as a rejection of civilization rather than its preservation. Direct Art proposed to accelerate violence rather than express (and thereby end) it, raising the question of the effectiveness of therapy by chaos. Direct Art's aggressive strategies, which ranged from the worlds of masochism and sadism to those of scatology and infantile regression, confronted Austrian optimism and the discourse of reconstruction that animated the *Wirtschaftswunder*—a discourse that privileged patriotism above the critical analysis of democracy and antifascism that was under way in France and divided Germany.<sup>7</sup> Direct Art combined aggression with a refusal of rational communication. Experiments in sound art as well as hysterical physical theater challenged the status of humanism and Enlightenment discourse. Asserting that “inner life will be reduced to its bodily functions,” Direct Art attacked the belief in

7. See Anthony Bushell, ed., *Austria 1945–1955: Studies in Political and Cultural Re-emergence* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1996).

universal foundations, the promotion of individualism, the privileging of reason, and the fear of otherness and abjection.<sup>8</sup> Blurring the distinctions between health and disease and between valorization and stigmatization, Mühl suggested in 1973 that artists are, in the end, just as “sick” as their governments. Brus’s work in particular challenges the way the body and its materiality is tied to citizenship, not merely by his defecating on the Austrian flag or masturbating while singing the national anthem but also by his highlighting the body as both the target of state repression



*Poster for the Direct Art Festival. 1967.*

and that which constantly escapes it. In the highly repressive context of postwar Austria, Brus’s aligning of an abject body and symbols of the state recalls not only the suppressed memories of the Holocaust and its victims but also the low level of activist activity in Vienna in 1968. Brus visualized the taboo and the repressed in

8. “Direct Art Manifesto” (1968), in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 110.

order to bring violence and aggression to the foreground of consciousness, reinstating the importance of the Holocaust as a historical caesura in the face of political claims by the Second Republic that the Republic stood for the continuing ideals and achievements of the Austrian resistance, when in fact resistance had been marginal at best.<sup>9</sup> Actionism, then, is the dialectical inverse of the activism that was flourishing elsewhere in May 1968.

Direct Art demanded that artists repeat the aggressions that society had directed on their bodies. Following the creation of the Institute for Direct Art, Mühl elaborated his motivations in an interview: "I do it on account of my worldview. For political reasons, I'm aggressive."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Brus remarked in an interview that "controlled aggression was often directed toward my body, the sole object of expression in this case, which played a similar role to the canvases of the work of Schiele, Soutine, Picasso, Bacon, and Fontana. Art that requires materials from the world of cruelty in order to reveal new ways of seeing is never violent, but probably the only humane form of expression."<sup>11</sup> A poster for the Direct Art Festival of November 9, 1967, designed by Brus, suggests that those who have witnessed scenes from a world of cruelty must, like Oedipus Rex, put out their eyes.

The problem of aggression as a means or end alone was central to the mobilization of destruction as an art tactic in the 1960s. While the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) presented itself neutrally, claiming that it sought merely to assemble the maximum amount of information on the new art forms related to "the cataclysmic increase in world destructive potential since 1945," it was also criticized for having acquiesced to "the very syndrome it professes to be so seriously concerned about."<sup>12</sup> And a number of invited artists, from Joseph Beuys to Bruce Connor, refused to participate on the grounds that its focus on destruction was too narrow. The Actionist contribution to the symposium was itself increasingly polarized. With

9. While the governmental pamphlet "Justice for Austria! Red-White-Red Book," published in 1946, unequivocally declared Austria to have been the first victim of the Nazis, "left in the lurch by the whole world," this victim thesis was already challenged in the early 1960s as at best a foundational myth of statehood and at worst a shameful attempt to avoid war reparations and an example of gross cowardice that hindered democracy and ignored the real victims of the Holocaust. Direct Art heightened the challenge to the "official memory" of the recent past, as Austria reinvented itself, in the words of the postwar education minister Felix Hurdes, as "a counter-concept to Nazi Germany" by returning to Catholic values, celebrating its supposedly untainted musical heritage, and embracing Austrian nationalism as derived from a supposedly harmonious multiracial Habsburg empire. Such half-truths provided Austria with a "usable past" that could support Austrian claims in the present to have achieved a stable democratic society. Rather than acknowledging the years of 1945 to 1955 as having consisted of a process of denazification, Austria considered itself to have suffered an unjustly long occupation by the Allied forces. See Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

10. Mühl in an interview with *Wiener Woche* (1966), in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 240.

11. Catherine Grenier, "Interview with Günter Brus," in *Günter Brus: limite du visible* (Paris: Le Centre, 1993), p. 275.

12. DIAS press release as quoted in Kristine Stiles, "Sticks and Stones: The Destruction in Art Symposium," *Arts Magazine* 65 (January 1989), pp. 54-60. Roger Barnard, "DIAS: Playing With Fire," *Peace News* (October 7, 1966), pp. 5-8.

Nitsch's larger project of the Orgies Mystery Theater increasingly following a more Beuysian model of the shamanistic healing of postwar wounds, Direct Art, represented by Mühl, Brus, and Oswald Wiener, instead relied on the concept of *Entzweckung* (removal of purpose), which Mühl had formulated in his chaotic Material Actions to counter Nitsch's ritualized use of materials and formalized theatrical scripts. Furthermore, Direct Art rejected the purported neutrality of the DIAS in order to "punish Austria with grim visions."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Beuys's figurative invitation to "show your wound," Direct Art proposed a literal wounding of the artist's body, as in Brus's body-analysis actions, and of the social body conjured up in their "grim visions." The intention was to inflict new injuries that would take precedence over preexisting social problems. In the "Direct Art Manifesto" (1968), Mühl explained that the "worldwide cretinization of the masses by the pigs of art, religion, and politics can only be halted by the most brutal of all available materials. Pornography is a suitable means for healing our society of its genital panic."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Mühl came the closest to Beuys's homeopathic project once he gave up creating actions in an art context and began his Aktionsanalytische Kommune (AA Commune), whose name signals the merger of therapy and action. It was a combination witnessed by Beuys himself during his visit to the AA Commune on January 26, 1983, during which he participated in that evening's *Selbstdarstellung* (self-presentation) performance. While Beuys married his therapeutic aims to the spectacular conditions of a cult of personality, Actionism in Vienna located the bourgeois ego as a keystone of Austria's "state of emergency" and pursued its destruction. Actionism subverted bourgeois individualism using multiple strategies: Brus's masochistic destruction of the ego; Mühl's courting of the "madness" of sadism; and the privileging of irrationality and taboo instincts repressed by society that they shared in their works. In a later interview, Brus differentiated his approach from that of Mühl:

The biggest difference between our approaches was clearly that he produced his actions as a director using participants while I almost exclusively brought my own body into play. Also in contrast with him, I was occupied more and more with the intention of minimizing the use of materials. I must also say however that Mühl and I created quite a few important works together. Later, around 1975, after an extremely militant performance of his communards in our Berlin apartment, I decided to break with him once and for all. Some years later, I relaxed this decision.<sup>15</sup>

Given the ritualized absurdity and pomp of Nitsch's Orgies Mystery Theater, the increasingly fascist structures of Mühl's commune and his later prison sentence, and Brus's rejection of actions in favor of expressionist poem-paintings inspired by Schiele, Actionism has often been interpreted as a dead-end practice, as an ineffective infantile regression or narcissistic perversion, or simply as extrapolated

13. Otto Mühl, "Cinema Direct Art," in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 108.

14. "Direct Art Manifesto," in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 110.

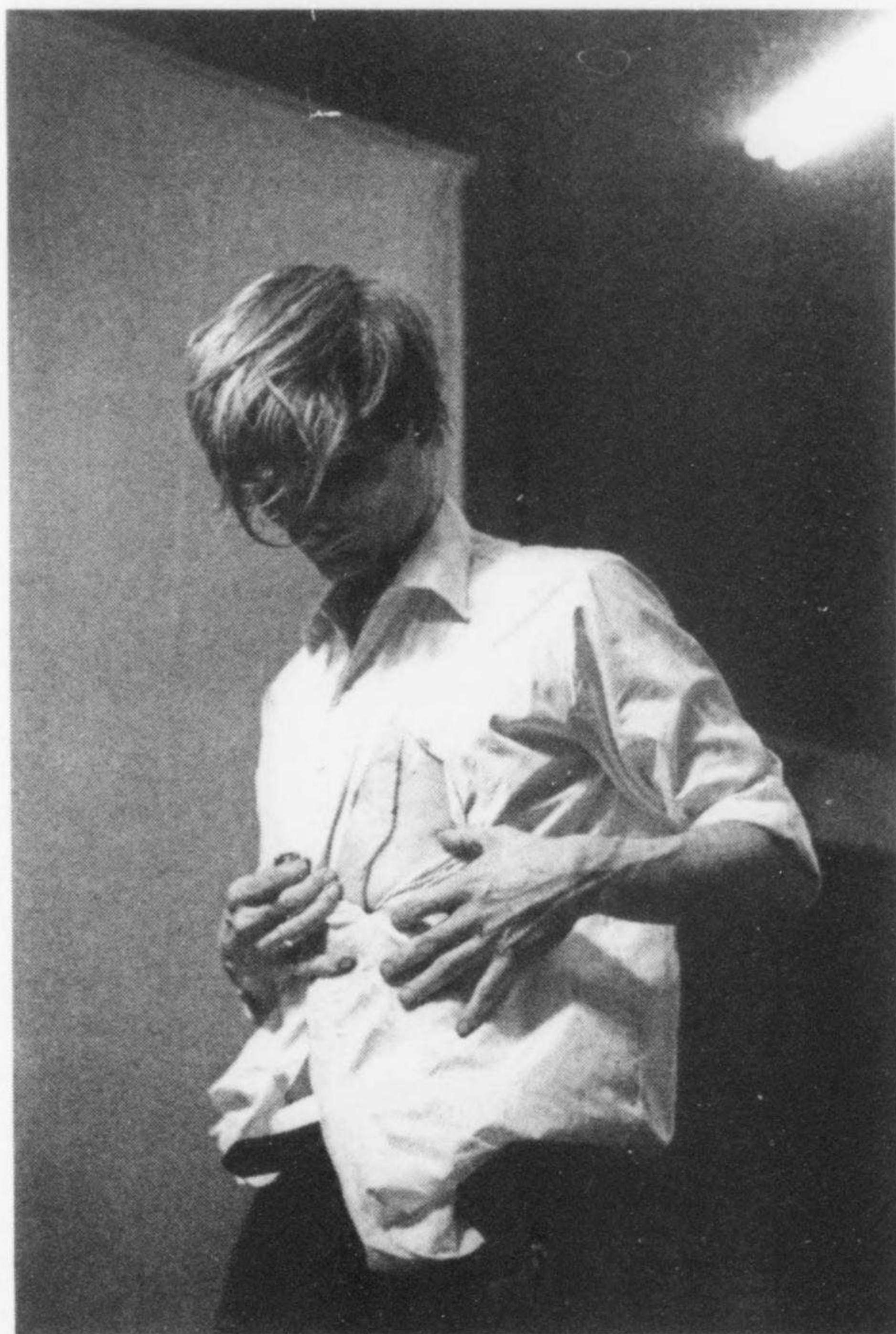
15. Brus in an interview with Danièle Roussel, in *Der Wiener Aktionismus und die Österreicher*, p. 20.

action painting. Yet the group's model of aggression, particularly as it concerns the body-analysis actions of Brus, needs to be examined as a highly effective model of political agitation, one that inverts the typical formula of putting bodies into the space of political action, offering instead to put action into the space of the body.<sup>16</sup>

In the first of his body-analysis actions in 1967, Brus moved away from the "total art" projects elaborated with Mühl by adding masochistic wounding and displays of peeing and shitting to his actions. Seeking to visualize and render public aspects of the body that are otherwise private, if not abject, Brus asked the filmmaker Kurt Kren to document his peeing and shitting actions with the same level of graphic precision—as Brus put it—as Hitchcock used in capturing the sweat on Cary Grant's forehead.<sup>17</sup> Although the "film action" *20 September* was a private performance for the camera, Brus did perform public "body analyses" in front of a large audience, as in *Sheer Madness* in February 1968 and *Citizen Günter Brus Studies His Body* in May of that year. In the invitation for *Citizen Günter Brus Studies His*

16. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1947), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), p. xiv.

17. Brus, "Body Analysis," in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 52.



*Brus. Sheer Madness. 1968.*



Poster for Citizen Gunter Brus  
Studies His Body. 1968.

*Body*, Brus listed the specific targets of his action: “Austrians who walk around with Metternich in their trouser pockets”; “Austrians who are religious freaks”; “Austrians who award official prizes to the mentally incompetent and stamp out reasonable perversion”—they all “give me a pain in the ass,” Brus commented.<sup>18</sup> With these icons of Austrian false consciousness in mind, Brus dressed in a shirt and women’s underwear, slashed his leg and chest with a razor blade, allowed the blood to drip into a jar containing egg yolks and pubic hairs, and then drank the contents of the jar. Finally, he defecated in the jar to the accompanying soundtrack of the iconic opening bars of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. While Nitsch had used sacrifice and violence as abreactive rites of purification that transcend everyday laws and render the body sacred, Brus demanded that the body become incoherent and multiple. Operating between the poles of a masochistic destruction and a narcissistic valuation, Brus’s body analyses examined his body in its animality in order to undermine its use by the state as a political individual.

18. “Invitation to *Citizen Günter Brus Examines His Body*,” in *Nervous Stillness on the Horizon*, ed. Monika Faber (Barcelona: Actar, 2005), p. 62.

With all of France embroiled in the events of May 1968 and the demand for political change, Brus focused instead on the material limits of his own flesh. While participants in the upheavals in France were seeking to “seize speech” in order to articulate their protests against capitalism, American imperialism, and Gaullism, Brus, as he engaged with student groups in Vienna in 1968, used an inverse approach, merging the visual conditions of political protest with a refusal of rational communication. Brus sought the annihilation of rational communication and its coherent subject by “stuttering, stammering, burbling, groaning, choking, shouting, screeching, laughing, spitting, biting, creeping”—a list of gerunds that Brus used to describe his transformation of speech into sound and the body into base material.<sup>19</sup> His stress on the materiality of language recalls the Futurist techniques once described by Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, who argued that if “language should remind us of anything, let it remind us of a saw or the poisoned arrow of the savage.”<sup>20</sup> By including in his body analyses such activities as self-mutilation, pantomiming childbirth with the use of hunks of raw meat, hiding in a sack, and eating off the floor like a dog, Brus performed a destruction of some of the social taboos that determine the productive subject. At the same time that factory workers in France were joining with students, activists, and farmers in what Kristin Ross has called a massive experiment in “declassification”—one in which fluidity of identity put into question the conception of the social upon which the state based its authority to govern—Brus was performing a similar task by exploring the animality of the individual citizen, which he saw as escaping state classification and instrumentalization. While protesters in Paris shouted slogans such as “We are all German Jews” to invoke an ethical identification with otherness in the face of the authoritarianism and compartmentalization of the Gaullist state, Brus tested the limit at which humanity breaks down into a materiality wholly Other to the state. Recalling his actions at a later date, Brus reported, “At that time I’d have eaten dog’s shit to prove that I was human—and I mean that literally.”<sup>21</sup> In seeking to find the human in the space of the bankrupt citizen, Brus’s actions pursue Hannah Arendt’s suggestion in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that the Holocaust revealed that the Enlightenment rhetoric of the “rights of man” was a misnomer, since these are rights that can only be enforced as “rights of a citizen.”<sup>22</sup> In the postwar climate of Austria, where a thorough process of denazification would have involved the conviction of 70 per-cent of the judicial system alone, Brus tests the a priori body of the citizen in a painful search for the human.

19. “Invitation to Second Total Action *Ornament Is a Crime*,” in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 41.

20. Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, *The Word As Such* (Moscow: 1913).

21. Brus, *Morgen des Gehirns* (1993), quoted in *Viennese Actionism: Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch, Rudolf Schwarzkogler* (Seville: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2008), p. 310.

22. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968).

In order to push back against the forces of disciplinary power, Brus renounced a coherent subjectivity, aligning himself with a fragmentation that is neither productive nor capable of being co-opted. Thus the importance for Brus of dividing and serializing the body: "I injured myself to show that movements are not enough, that one must grab hold of movement and quasi-deform the body."<sup>23</sup> The masochist chooses to injure himself, according to Gilles Deleuze, in order to emphasize the severity of the law. By requesting his punishment in advance of having committed any misdeed, the masochist derides the law and finds "liberation" from it through disavowal, allowing himself to be reborn without the mediating tyranny of law. He or she also disavows the pleasure that should have come before the punishment, so that pleasure is interrupted, deprived of its genitility, and transformed into the pleasure of being reborn. Masochistic repetition is no longer the desire to repeat a previous pleasure, Deleuze argues; rather, "repetition runs wild and becomes independent of all previous pleasure."<sup>24</sup> Thus, repetition and pleasure exchange roles, producing a recognition of the structural aspect of law. Repetition thus becomes for-itself and the subsequent pleasure of re-sexualization is not related to pain (pain is an effect only) but is related to repetition. Repetition as such can restrain pleasure and lead to an intensive state of desire and the annihilation of a coherent subject, exposing the violence inherent in law, which Walter Benjamin has called the "something rotten in law" [*etwas Morsches im Recht*].<sup>25</sup> Brus concurred, declaring that when "approximately ninety-eight percent of [his] body was beaten physically and spiritually into shape," he made up "the remaining two percent by beating [himself]. . . . Now it laughs one hundred percent."<sup>26</sup> Such laughter in the face of the law shows scorn for the basis of the law's power, an

23. Brus as interviewed in *View* 4, no. 3 (Spring 1986), p. 12.

24. Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 120.

25. In a short text titled "Desire and Pleasure"—originally written as a letter to Foucault—Deleuze specifies the importance he places on desire and the differences between his and Foucault's uses of these two terms. "As for myself I can hardly bear the word 'pleasure'. . . . I cannot give any positive value to pleasure, because pleasure seems to me to interrupt the immanent process of desire; pleasure seems to me to be on the side of strata and organization; and it is in the same movement that desire is presented as internally submitted to the law and externally interrupted by pleasures; in the two cases there is negation of a field of immanence proper to desire. I tell myself that it is no accident if Michel [Foucault] attaches a certain importance to Sade, and myself on the contrary to Masoch. It's not enough to say that I am masochistic, and Michel sadistic. That would be good, but it's not true. What interests me in Masoch is not the pain, but the idea that pleasure comes to interrupt the positivity of desire and the constitution of its field of immanence (as also, or rather in another way, in courtly love—constitution of a field of immanence or of a body without organs where desire lacks nothing, and guards itself as much as possible from the pleasures which would come and interrupt its process). Pleasure seems to me to be the only means for a person or a subject to "find themselves again" in a process which overwhelms them. It is a re-territorialization. And from my point of view, it is in the same way that desire is related to the law of lack and the norm of pleasure." Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure," *Le magazine littéraire* 325 (October 1994), pp. 57–65.

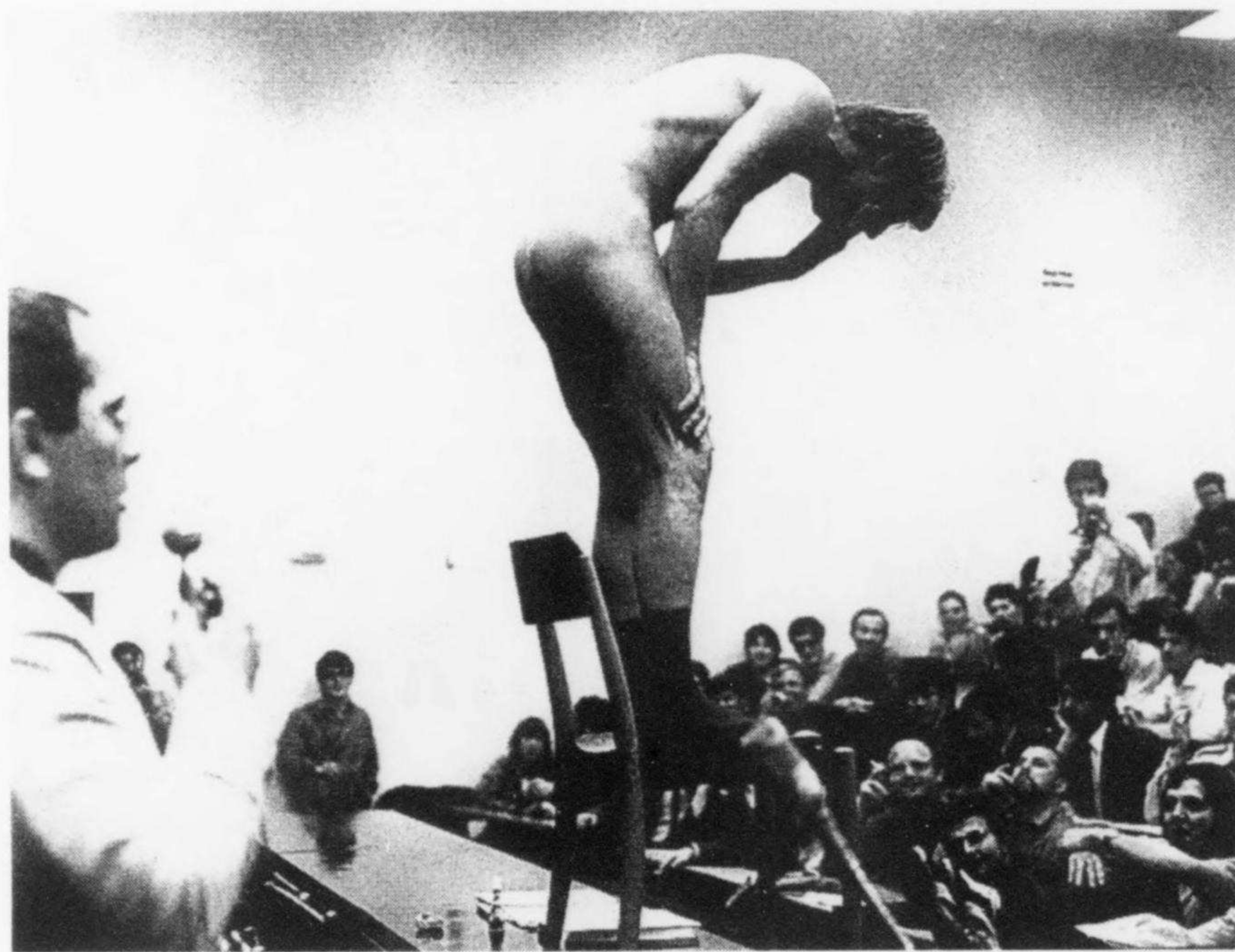
26. Günter Brus, *Writings of the Viennese Actionists*, p. 259.

expression of the idea that, as Slavoj Žižek has written, “the ultimate truth about the reign of law is that of an usurpation.” Similarly apropos is a comment by Žižek:

The illegitimate violence by which the law sustains itself must be concealed at any price, because this concealment is the positive condition of the functioning of the law: it functions in so far as its subjects are deceived, in so far as they experience the authority of law as “authentic and eternal” and overlook “the truth about the usurpation.”<sup>27</sup>

Rendering this usurpation visible, Brus became a clear victim of state repression, being detained by the police after his Vienna “stroll action” (*Wiener Spaziergang*, 1965), fined for agitating during a municipal meeting about the war in Vietnam, and later sentenced to a six-month prison term for public indecency through his actions in the event “Art and Revolution” on June 7, 1968. This event, which took place at the University of Vienna as the disorder of May was winding down yet before the police retook the Sorbonne in Paris on June 16, provided a moment, if a belated one, that erased the distinction between artists, activists, and students. Gerald Raunig has called

27. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 204. One might stress, however, that a society should maintain a balance between these two poles so as to become neither a repressive dictatorship nor a paranoid society where one sees lurking in all social operations what Michael Taussig has described as a “public secret.”



Brus. “Art and Revolution.” 1968.

such a mixing of art and politics a “negative concatenation,” noting, in the case of “Art and Revolution,” that it failed to provide political reform and moreover led to the voluntary disbanding of the leftist student organization.<sup>28</sup>

“Art and Revolution,” rather than being a “failed overlapping” of the artistic and political per Raunig, sought to formulate the political as embedded within the artistic. Brus’s body analyses combined with Oswald Wiener’s lecture on language elaborated via cybernetic models and Mühl’s whipping of a masochist articulated a space of non-instrumentalization (in the non-sense of sound poetry and the materiality of the abject body) of sense experience from which to criticize the state. While different “group-subjects,” or *groupuscules*, in France sought to “seize speech” in May 1968 to bring about political and cultural revolution without directly controlling or overthrowing political institutions, “Art and Revolution” rejected communicative speech altogether by regressing to the infantile (as in Mühl’s pissing contest) and letting the primacy of the body assert itself (as in Brus’s defecation and fecal smearing). The text of the event’s invitation launched a direct challenge to state authority. Written by the activist group that had organized the event, the SÖS (Sozialistischer Österreichischer Studentenbund), it declared: “Our assimilatory democracy maintains art as a safety valve for enemies of the state. . . . The consumer state drives a wave of art before itself; it attempts to bribe the ‘Artist’ and to rehabilitate his revolutionizing ‘Art’ as an art that supports the state.”<sup>29</sup> Thus aligning artists with enemies of the state, the event rejected the panacea of art, deeming chaos to be the only tool capable of countering state authority. Brus later commented, however, that the event was an uncertain allegiance between the student activists and the Actionists:

The “university action” acquired a different touch because of the left-wing activists of the day, who hitched the Actionists to their cart. The problem lay in our different ways of thinking. We hadn’t subscribed to the objectives of the left. Our orientation was more anarchistic, and all the shouts of Mao and Ho-Chi-Minh weren’t really planned. That kind of thing, if it occurred at all, was of marginal significance, never central to us. We certainly were engaged with Marxism, but of course without the kind of eagerness that would have justified calling us left-wing artists.<sup>30</sup>

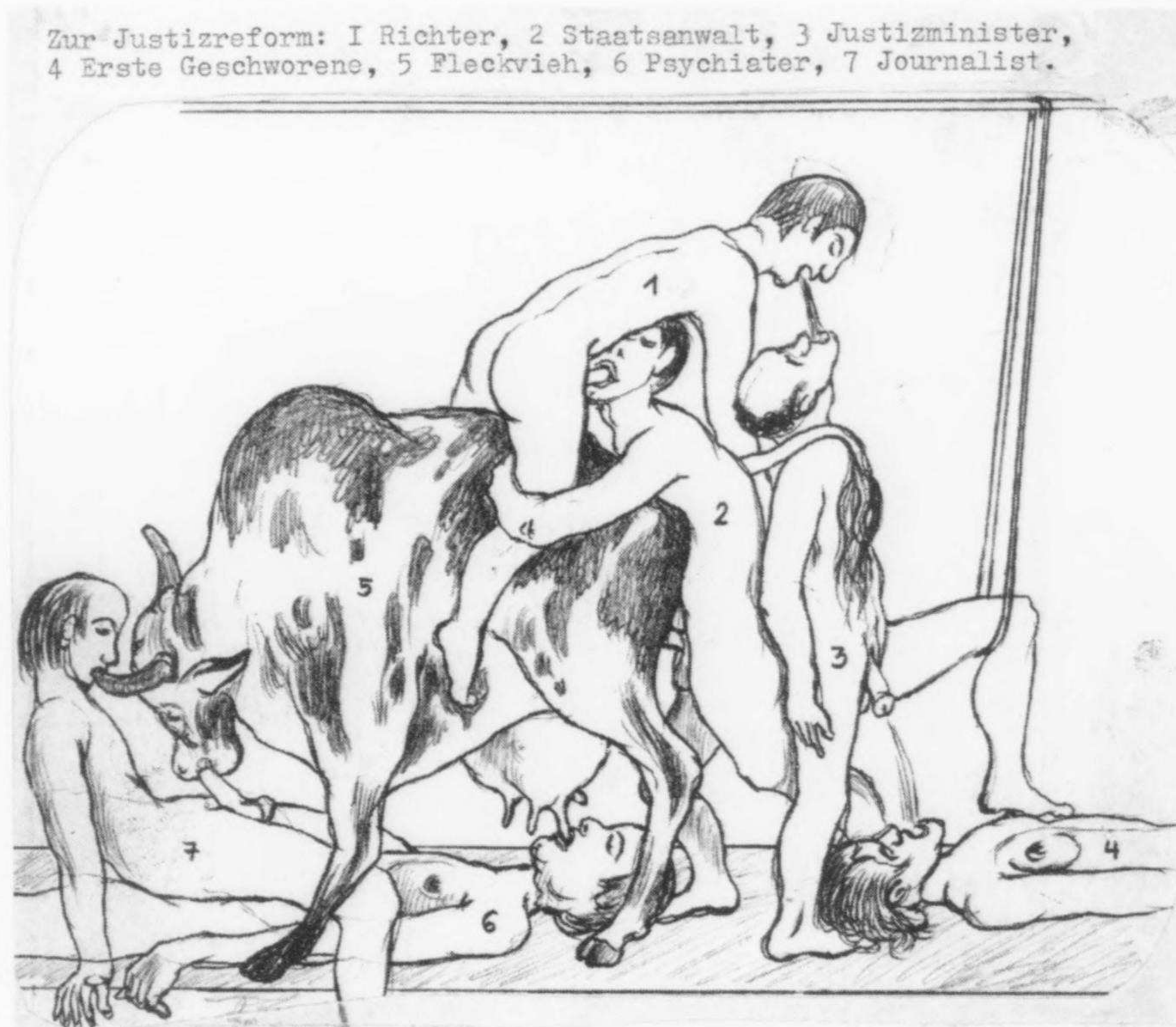
Judged by a court psychologist to be “psychopathic” but not “mentally or emotionally disturbed” and sentenced to a jail term for his acts of “indecent,” Brus left Vienna to avoid prison. Living in Berlin from 1968 to 1976, he offered up suggestions for a *Justizreform* that involved transforming the Austrian judicial system into

28. See Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (London: Semiotext(e), 2007).

29. Invitation to “Art and Revolution” (1968) in *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, p. 57.

30. Günter Brus in conversation with Johanna Schwanberg (June 1997), as quoted in *Nervous Stillness on the Horizon*, p. 62.

an orgiastic daisy chain that would heal the country of its "genital panic." In a drawing, he likened the state's power to an absurd circle jerk, which, if transgressed from above or below, confirms only its circular power. Brus's reformist view of the state sought neither its platform for speech nor its undoing. In submitting to its absurdity and testing the limits of the human remainder of this



Brus. "Zur Justizreform,"  
from Irrwisch. 1970.

submission, he derides the state's authority, rendering visible how the state subjects us to a power it derives from that which it has severed us from

In a drawing by Brus, a policeman's severed phallus becomes a matraque, the nightstick used to suppress protesters in 1968, while his penis is replaced by a weighty ball and chain. Similarly, another drawing from the same period reveals a priest having surrendered his sex for the cross: The church's power rises in a phallic extrusion, detaching sexual force from the individual body and preserving it for the institution. The humor of the masochist is to submit to the blows of the state in order to reveal, in a larger sense, the fraudulent basis of its power. Its blows hurt, and may in the end be fatal, but as a slogan from 1968 declares, "*on ne matraque pas l'imagination.*"

The slogans of 1968 activism, including "We are all German Jews" and the Actionist claim that "inner life will be reduced to its bodily functions," identified humanity with the conditions of its immediate survival once it had been stripped of the institutionally protected rights of the citizen. Seeking to render visible the links connecting the material body to the political citizen-subject, the Actionists lived in a state of anteriority, a self-imposed exile prior to the state's branding of them as criminals. The postwar myth of Austria as victim, initiated in 1946 with the "Red-White-Red" book (a publication by the Austrian government that espoused this victim doctrine), established a superstructural model of politics that, by ignoring the true victims of World War II—those "citizens of nowhere in the world" invoked by Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—had failed to see how politics is embedded in the natural and social conditions of life.

Actionism, once the target of police repression, is now exhibited in major cultural establishments in Austria (with traditional art-historical notions of individuality, career, and oeuvre) and around the world: Nitsch designed the set for the Viennese State Opera's production of *Herodiade* in 1995 and Brus had a major retrospective at the Albertina Gallery in 2004. Their actions, once indecent, have now been recuperated as icons of a usable past of resistance (though whether this resistance is to totalitarianism, authoritarianism, or corporate models of consumption is unclear). The recent rehabilitation of Actionism, though, problematically negotiates its denunciation of state tyranny, witnessed for example in conservative Austrian politician Jörg Haider's approach to Actionism. In an interview about Actionism, Haider advocated the utter necessity of artistic freedom, but only as long as it does not transgress the strictures of the state.<sup>31</sup>

31. Danièle Roussel, *Der Wiener Aktionismus und die Österreicher*, pp. 107–08.

The Surveillant Gaze:  
Michael Haneke's  
*The White Ribbon*\*

MARTIN BLUMENTHAL-BARBY

Michael Haneke's 2009 *The White Ribbon* is set in the village of "Eichwald." Eichwald cannot be found on any German map. It is an imaginary place in the Protestant North of Eastern Germany in the early twentieth century. What is more, Haneke tells his black-and-white tale as the flashback narration of a voice-over narrator—a series of defamiliarizing techniques that lift the diegetic action out of its immediate sociohistorical context, stripping it of its temporal and topographical coordinates. Against this backdrop, is it possible to hear the name "Eichwald" without being reminded of, on the one hand, Adolf Eichmann, Nazi SS-*Obersturmbannführer* and one of the key architects of the Holocaust, and, on the other, the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald?<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Eichwald is not Buchenwald, and no 56,000 humans are being murdered here. Yet why this peculiar terminological fusion? What characterizes Eichwald, this model of a society in which adults have no names but merely function as representatives of a particular class and profession: the Baron, the Pastor, the Teacher, the Steward, the Midwife, etc.?<sup>2</sup> What distinguishes this village that appears to be largely isolated from the outside world, this village that outsiders rarely enter and from which no one seems to be able to escape?<sup>3</sup> What identifies this

\* I thank Malcolm Turvey and Ansgar Mohnkern for their discriminating feedback and insightful comments, which were a guiding inspiration.

1. Peter Kümmel, in a review for the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, was the first to draw attention to the symbiotic etymology of the village name "Eichwald": "*The White Ribbon* is set in a village called Eichwald, a name evoking both 'Eichmann' and 'Buchenwald'" (<http://www.zeit.de/2009/42/Das-weisse-Band/seite-2>, accessed October 18, 2012). To be sure, Haneke himself commented on the inspirational force that Adolf Eichmann's infamous defense during his 1961–62 trial in Jerusalem had on him. Eucleating the initial motives that led him to pursue the project of *The White Ribbon*, he notes: "It was . . . also related to the fact that I had seen a documentary on Adolf Eichmann's self-defense. At that time, I simply couldn't get the gist of his defense as 'I was a true servant of my people' out my head." Michael Haneke, "*Das weiße Band*," in *Nahaufnahme: Michael Haneke. Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag Berlin, 2008), p. 157. (All translations from German are mine.)

2. On the metonymic character of the fictitious village "Eichwald," see Michael Haneke in his interview with Geoff Andrew, "The Revenge of Children," *Sight and Sound* 19, no. 12 (December 2009), p. 16.

3. How difficult it is to leave the hermetically sealed sphere of Eichwald becomes evident when the Schoolmaster, one of the few newcomers (and only for that reason, it seems, sympathetic toward a more reformist pedagogy), intends to visit Eva, his fiancée, in a nearby town: He has to borrow the Baroness's bicycle yet instantly finds himself pressured by the Midwife, who lays moral claim to the bicycle in order to

prison-like community with its oppressive atmosphere, its tiny rooms and low ceilings, its myriad alcoves, niches, windows, and hallways that evoke a general sense of "entrapment" and incarceration?<sup>4</sup> This world in which even the camera appears to be shackled, to never zoom, hardly to pan or tilt, thus depriving the image of any dynamism, any mobility? Who—in this confining milieu—are the guards, who the detainees? And what characterizes the putatively illicit activities that appear to lie at its enigmatic center and around which the entire film seems to revolve?

## I

In the "prison" of Eichwald we encounter a wide range of strategies conducive to the production of submissive bodies. These strategies—educational, clinical, and military mechanisms of power applied to the human body—present themselves as part of a sophisticated system of observation and control. The most prominent "disciplinary" discourse in Haneke's film undoubtedly is that of *education*,<sup>5</sup> including the work of the Schoolteacher, whose voice-over guides us through much of the film, but also the rigid educational regime enforced by the Pastor and symbolized by the white ribbon that he ties around his children's arms or into their hair. Intimately related is the (sub)discourse that regulates the villagers' *sexual* life, as exemplified by the Pastor's response to his son Martin's masturbatory activities. Curiously, he enforces his disciplinary method by white ribbons that tie the boy's hands to his bed at night—a pedagogical technique symptomatic of the white ribbon's semantic "polyvalence" as cinematic symbol.<sup>6</sup> Of course, Haneke's film is permeated by a discourse of *medical* care, exemplified by both the Midwife and the Doctor, who initially figures as representative of medical surveillance and then, in the course of his own hospitalization, is subjected to that same surveillance. A strangely inverted discourse of regulatory actions is evinced by the devotion and love with which the Midwife watches over and cares for her mentally disabled son—a form of affection diametrically opposed to the panoptic conception of a *mental institution*, which would involve centrally stationed staff monitoring perimetrically positioned inmates. One of the subtlest yet most pervasive disciplinary discourses in the film is the regulation and

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go to town herself to talk to the police. After a bit of to and fro, he gives her the bike, giving up on his plan to visit his fiancée and the individual freedom that such an excursion promises. Similarly, the Baroness—appalled by the "malice" and "apathy"—announces her intention to leave the village permanently to her husband; yet she, too, as the religious service in the final sequence adumbrates, never comes to implement her plan, remaining confined to where (diegetically speaking) she appears to "belong."

4. See James S. Williams, "Aberrations of Beauty: Violence and Cinematic Resistance in Haneke's *The White Ribbon*," *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2010), pp. 48–55, here p. 50.

5. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), pp. 135–230.

6. "There are all possible kinds of 'ribbons' in the film," Fatima Naqvi astutely remarks: "the wire which causes the doctor's fall, the rope that the farmer hangs himself with, the riding crop used to beat the children, the crocheted border, the tied-on sign. The polyvalence of this symbol . . . becomes apparent in light of the many associations evoked by the use of 'ribbons.'" *Trügerische Vertrautheit: Filme von Michael Haneke* (Vienna: Synema, 2010), p. 139.

control of labor, illustrated by the rhythmic, perfectly choreographed movements of the farmers' bodies during harvest and captured in memorable long shots. This discourse of surveillance of work also surges to the fore when the narrator reports in bureaucratic jargon that "the wife of a tenant farmer died in a work accident. The woman, who had an injured arm, was dispensed by the Steward from harvesting chores and assigned to lighter work in the sawmill."<sup>7</sup> The "dispensing" of the woman from harvesting chores and her subsequent "assignment" to the sawmill exemplifies a form of capitalist observation or *workplace surveillance* famously reflected on by Karl Marx in his analysis of the difference between manual and mental tasks, the subordination of labor to capital.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the bureaucratic tracking and record-keeping prominently explored in Max Weber's theory of modernization<sup>9</sup> finds itself epitomized by the Teacher's secretarial work during the harvest, or toward the end of the film as the Teacher mentions the "drafting" of eligible young men to the military in response to the outbreak of war. The men's draft, indicative of a change, a new era, evokes a form of file-based surveillance, which exceeds traditional face-to-face surveillance in complexity insofar as it is bound neither to a particular moment in time (transcending past, present, and future) nor to a particular location (encompassing the local as much as the supra-local).<sup>10</sup> What these modes of observation and control share—whether face-to-face or file-based, whether relying on actual or metaphorical supervision—is the accumulation of knowledge that in turn enables the regulation and regimentation of social life and the managing of people: that is to say, the practice of government. What emerges, more generally, is an understanding according to which surveillance attends less to the operation of a particular system of control (and its respective means and ends) than to a societal state, a condition of life.<sup>11</sup>

## II

What lies at the epicenter of *The White Ribbon*, of course, are the mysterious crimes, beginning with the Doctor's accident. And of course we have every reason to presume that the children, who time and again appear curiously conspiratorial, are behind all this. Yet while Haneke's film seems to suggest precisely that, there is no absolute certainty. For even though the diegesis unfolds along the lines of the mysterious crimes and incessantly intimates that it is the

7. "Die durch eine Armverletzung nur beschränkt arbeitsfähige Frau war vom Gutsverwalter bei der laufenden Erntearbeit abgezogen und zu den leichteren Abrufarbeiten im Sägewerk eingeteilt worden." *The White Ribbon*, directed by Michael Haneke (2009; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

8. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1976), p. 1034–35; Elia Zureik, "Theorizing Surveillance: The Case of the Workplace," in *Surveillance as Social Sorting*, ed. David Lyon (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 31.

9. See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Martino Fine Books, 2012); David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 50.

10. See Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, p. 75.

11. See also Dietmar Kammerer, *Bilder der Überwachung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 268.

children who commit those crimes, the crimes do, after all, occur *offscreen*; they remain unheeded by the monitoring gaze of the parents and by the monitoring gaze of the camera. The children, as it were, move out of the parents' field of vision when committing their crimes. And interestingly, not only do the parents *not* see their children committing these crimes, but we, Haneke's spectators, don't see the children either.

It is against this backdrop that a certain correspondence between the parents and us emerges. We attempt to investigate the crimes, as the parents do; we, like the parents, seek to identify the culprits. Curiously, in spite of Eichwald's overt appearance as a disciplinary society, its internal systems of surveillance appear conspicuously deficient. An example presents itself as Sigi, the Baron's son, is kidnapped and tortured under the most mysterious circumstances. One afternoon—"the harvest feast reunited the whole village"—the boy disappears unnoticed amid the bustle only to be found in the middle of the night—"tied upside down"—in the sawmill: "His trousers were pulled down, his buttocks bleeding from cane strokes." The children increasingly attract our attention as potential suspects yet, time and again, succeed in finding spaces to commit their crimes unseen and unobserved—unseen and unobserved also by the eye of the camera, that is, by us, Haneke's cinematic observers. Strangely, this flawed *panoptic* situation, in which a *few* parenting and educating adults monitor (or try to monitor) the *many* children, increasingly turns into a synoptic situation in which *many* adults seek to identify the *few* terror-inducing criminals (i.e., the children).<sup>12</sup> This change from panoptic to synoptic surveillance of course corroborates our enactment of and complicity with the supervisory gaze of the adults.<sup>13</sup> It is in this context that the Baron (temporal leader of the community

12. The word "synopsis" is derived from the Greek *syn* ("together") and *opsis* ("view").

13. I borrow the notion of synoptic surveillance from Norwegian sociologist Thomas Mathiesen's influential article "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's Panopticon Revised." Mathiesen investigates "one limited and consciously selected aspect of Michel Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's concept of the 'Panopticon': in his book *Discipline and Punish*, the aspect of surveillance, and the emphasis on a fundamental change and break which presumably occurred in the 1800s from social and theatrical arrangements, where the many saw the few, to modern surveillance activities where the few see the many." Mathiesen submits "that Foucault contributes in an important way to our understanding of and sensitivity regarding modern surveillance systems and practices . . . but that he overlooks an opposite process of great significance." If the Foucauldian panopticon enables the few to watch the many, Mathiesen's conception of the "synopticon" (exemplified most vividly by mass media, especially television) allows "the many . . . to see the few." It goes without saying that these two notions are not to be conceived antithetically, since they work in parallel and are interrelated, as Mathiesen himself remarks. "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's Panopticon Revisited," *Theoretical Criminology* 1, no. 2 (1997), p. 215. Leon Hempel und Jörg Metelmann aptly extrapolate: "The panopticon can be understood as producing individuality and the synopticon producing totality if, as in the ideal case in the media attention economy, the objective is to focus the largest possible interest on *one* single person. Yet at the same time, both of these imply their opposites: The panopticon produces totality in the form of a central authority which sees everything. The synopticon creates individuality as the production of the 'I' through the gaze of the many." Leon Hempel und Jörg Metelmann, "Bild - Raum - Kontrolle: Videoüberwachung als Zeichen gesellschaftlichen Wandels," in *Bild-Raum-Kontrolle: Videoüberwachung als Zeichen gesellschaftlichen Wandels*, ed. Leon Hempel and Jörg Metelmann (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 18.

and responsible for its physical well-being) asks the Pastor (religious leader of the community and responsible for its spiritual well-being) to let him address the congregation on the Sunday following the crime:

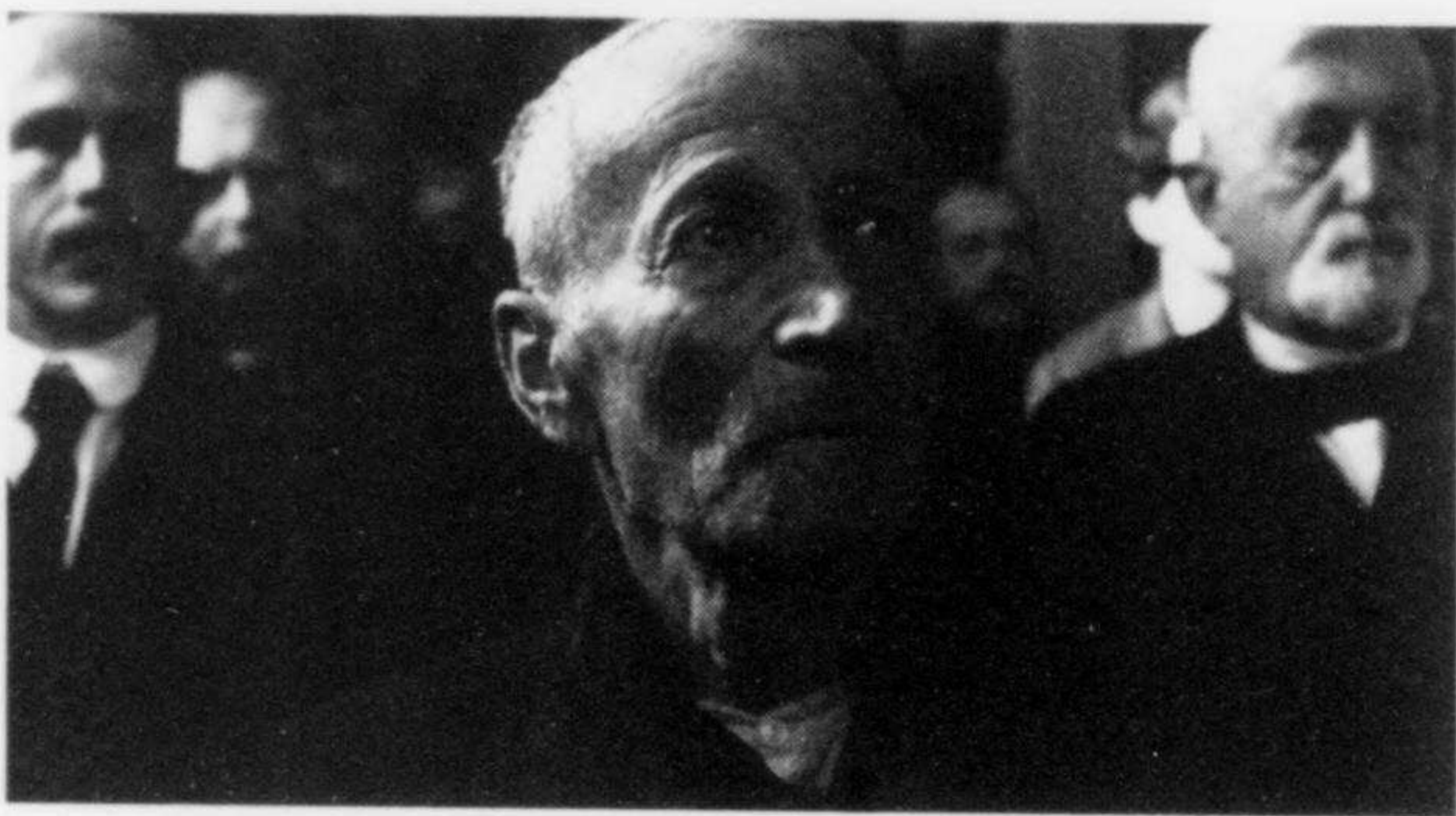
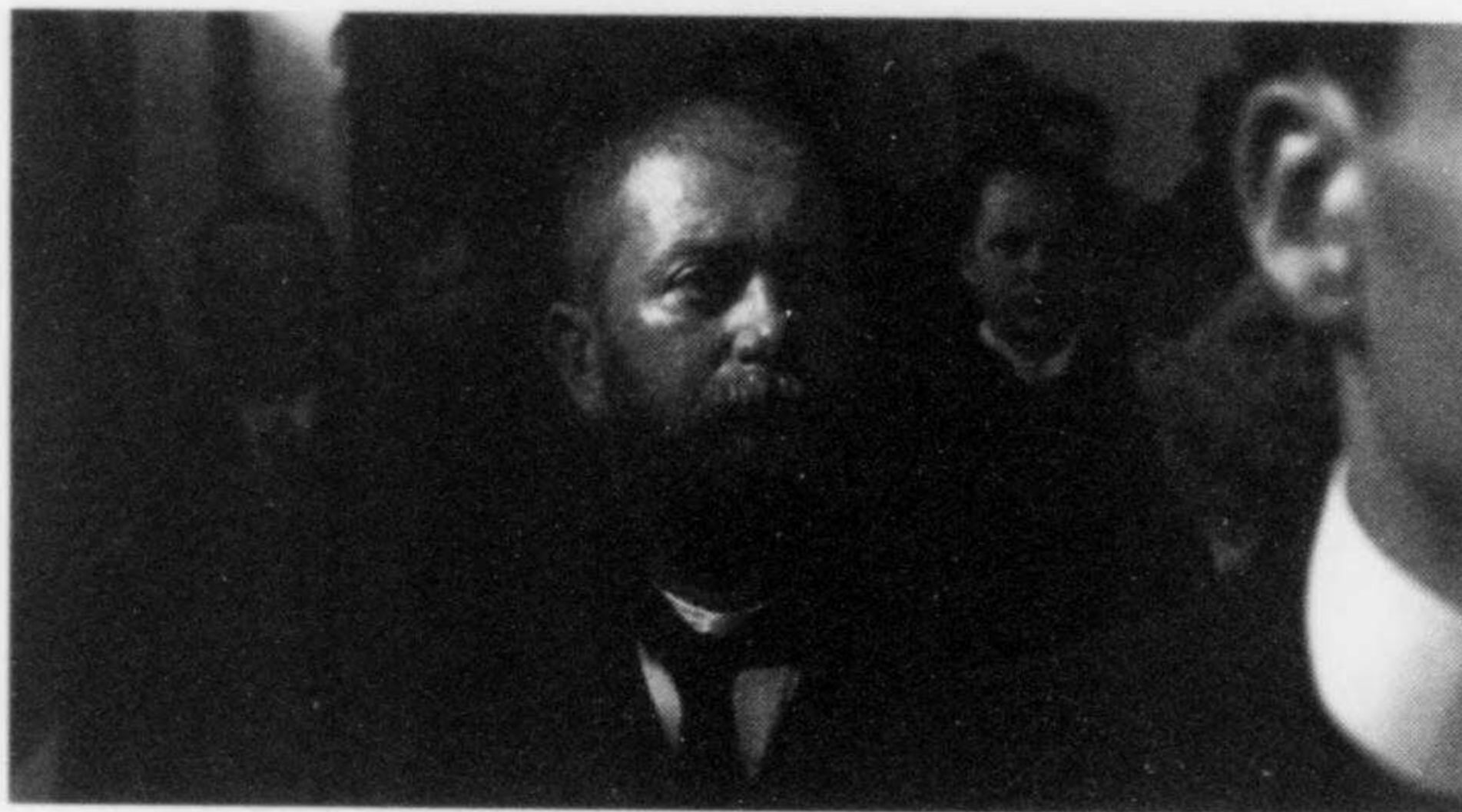
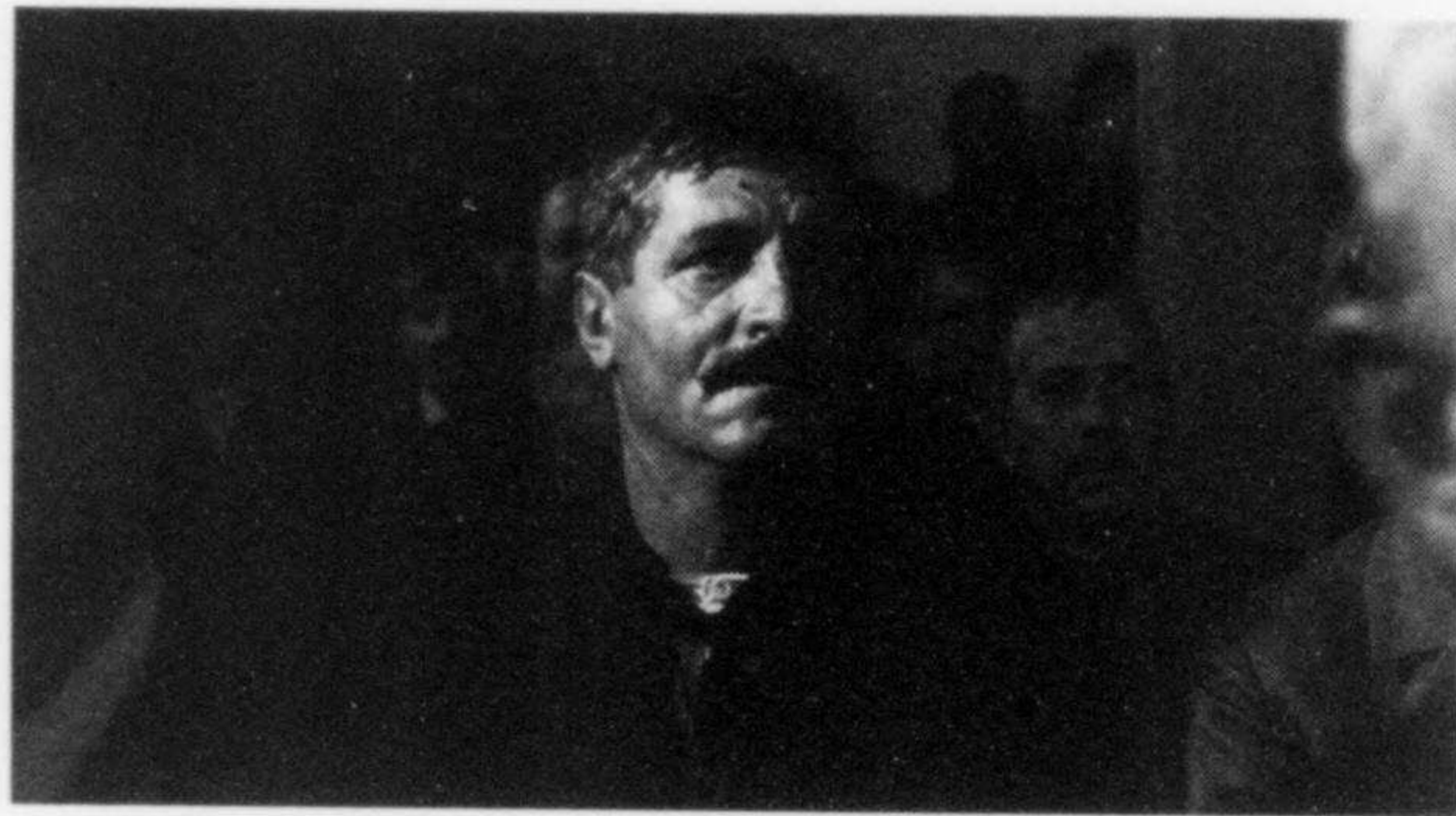
City policemen questioned many of you this week. To no avail. . . . I'll remind you of a fact that most of you may have forgotten. Two months ago, our doctor had a riding accident and is still not back from hospital. This accident was caused by a wire strung in his garden, with the explicit intent of bringing him down. There, too, nobody knew, saw, or heard anything. We all know it. Those who injured my son, and the Doctor, are here among us, in this room. I won't let such crimes go unpunished, and hope nothing like that happens to any of your children. *That's why I call upon you all. Help me find the culprit or the culprits!* If we fail to find out the truth, the peace of our community will be gone.

The Baron's speech is, with regard to the question of surveillance, particularly revealing insofar as at the very moment that he says that "the culprit or the culprits" are among the locals—"in this room"—the camera, probing and in medium close-up, begins to focus on the faces of those very locals,<sup>14</sup> faces that—in their archaic rigidity and sharp stylization—seem to quote the portraiture art of German photographer August Sander.<sup>15</sup> In a certain way, our observational gaze operates here in extension of the diegetic gaze of the police. Oddly, however, the policing, probing gaze of the camera does not appear to be launched as a point-of-view shot from the perspective of some-one, the camera rather enacts a seemingly agentless authority outside the filmic diegesis, a surveillant perspective outside the frame and its epistemic order.

The spectatorial experience conjured up by the camera's eye is such that we simultaneously do and do not partake in this atmospherical state of exception—this state in which we observe the locals and the locals observe each other, in which, indeed, everyone observes everyone else. This is a situation in

14. What is at issue here is what Samuel Weber, in a somewhat different context, elegantly describes as a certain "expectation— . . . very much related to the onto-Christological tradition . . . —that privileges the face as the bodily part that 'embodies' the 'whole,' i.e. the soul or identity of the 'person,' and thus is more than just a bodily 'part.' . . . 'Transparency' . . . becomes giving face and figure to forces that often cannot be reduced to individuals, neither to their faces nor to their figures. . . . Transparency is . . . installed when the 'culprits' are brought to justice: killed, imprisoned, converted—but, above all, given face." John W. P. Phillips, "Secrecy and Transparency: An Interview with Samuel Weber," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28 (December 2011), pp. 162–63.

15. Haneke, in fact, acknowledged the impact that Sander's photography had on the austere aesthetics of *The White Ribbon* and noted, "Sander's works have an incredible brilliance; they are not realistic photos, not snapshots. They are highly stylized images." Michael Haneke, "Das weiße Band," in *Nahaufnahme*, p. 146. Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* provides (not unlike Haneke's film) a quasi-encyclopedic selection of early-twentieth-century social archetypes, including "the peasant," "the craftsman," "the artist," "the woman," etc.



*Michael Haneke. The White Ribbon. 2009.*

which “guilt” is based on suspicion and indolence seems suspicious. We can hardly overstate the importance of this synoptic state of surveillance, in which everyone is at once enactor “of” and subject “to” surveillance, both observer and observed.<sup>16</sup> The “city policemen” (representing the quasi-divine, quasi-omniscient, ever-watchful “eye of the law” that Friedrich Schiller famously described in his “The Song of the Bell”) and the Baron seek to foster a form of *participatory* surveillance, which involves *all* villagers and encourages them to identify and disclose the culprits.<sup>17</sup> This moment in *The White Ribbon* is most telling with respect to the village’s power-political architectonics in that the Baron characterizes the task of caring for and protecting the population as one that is not only his; power, as it were, is not exclusively organized in hierarchical ways. Instead, his plea to the public “to be proactive in passing on information about suspicious persons or incidents” suggests a *horizontilization* of power.<sup>18</sup> As such, it correlates with the other (educational, medical, military, etc.) disciplinary discourses that appear to dissociate power from the individual and organize it systemically instead, exerting force in transformative (rather than merely punitive) ways. This is a form of government that relies on the internalization of interdictions, mores, and norms—on self-governance *through* the population practiced in conjunction with the accumulation of knowledge *about* the population. It is this combination of self-control *through* and knowledge *about* the population that allows for the identification of, for instance, the obstinate “Max Felder,” who, in an act of vengeance for his killed mother (who died in a sawmill accident), “cut off [the Baron’s] cabbages.” It is this mode of social regulation and control that also allows the Baron to clear young Felder of the crime against his son, since everyone “knows” that Max Felder, because of his “mowing prowess,” had no time to torture the child. “As for his father”—the Baron “knows”—“he’d bite off his tongue rather than cover for his wayward son”—a “knowledge” that allows him to “salvage” old Felder’s “honor,” that is, his status *inside* the community.

Indubitably, in a most crucial way, the surveillance apparatus of the village of Eichwald fails to identify the originators of the crimes, that internal menace to the established society that threatens to contaminate its social hygiene and spiritual certitude. In an atmosphere suffused by paranoia, mutual distrust, and fright, sociopolitical principles like the difference between public and private life evaporate. *Private* incidents of children beating other children assume *public* significance. And, conversely, a *public* incident such as Max Felder’s “statement” of slicing the Baron’s cabbages—an old custom to express discontent about bad pay—is utilized as a *private* act of vengeance for the killed mother, precipitating a

16. See Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, pp. 6–7.

17. On the issue of participatory surveillance, see Mike Larsen and Justin Piché, “Public Vigilance Campaigns and Participatory Surveillance after 11 September 2001,” in *Surveillance: Power, Problems, and Politics* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2009), pp. 187–202, esp. pp. 196–97.

18. See Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, p. 40.

*private* fight between father and son. Similarly, the Baroness explains the supposedly *private* decision to separate from the Baron as a result of the hostile *public* atmosphere, the "malice, envy, apathy, and brutality . . . persecutions, threats, and perverse acts of revenge." In an atmospherically exceptional state where established rules are suspended, a space opens for individuals to sovereignly manifest their power. It almost seems as if the exceptionality of the social situation calls for exceptional measures to be taken (evoking what Carl Schmitt described as "situational law").<sup>19</sup> It is thus that the Baron, for instance, in response to his son's misfortune, decides to discharge Eva, the nanny, from her service, this nanny who has no part in the son's misfortune whatsoever, yet finds herself scapegoated nevertheless. And it is thus that the villagers' children manifest their power in sovereignly exercised acts of brutality that seem to echo the violence to which they are subjected by their parents.

Against the backdrop of this perceived state of exception, what seem to ensure a whiff of normalcy are, if anything, the communal routines, rhythms, and rituals of everyday life. These are "soft" regulatory dynamics, including religious holidays (Christmas and Pentecost) or seasonal festivities (at, for instance, harvest time). We witness communal rituals such as the children's confirmation, the weekly attendance of church service, or the daily attendance of school. We are presented with customs revolving around premarital courtship (in the case of the Schoolmaster and his beloved), as well as countless seemingly minor gestures including ways of relating to superiors, of addressing parents, or of greeting teachers. The normalizing thrust of these gestures can hardly be overemphasized, as evinced by the Pastor's seemingly cruel symbolic refusal to have his children kiss the back of his hand before going to bed, or Martin's negligence of greeting the Midwife, a faux pas for which his sister formally apologizes on his behalf. We encounter routines such as the society's reproduction under the supervision of the Midwife. We are introduced to the diverse configurations of family life (the Pastor's family, the Baron's family, the family of the tenant farmer Felder, the Doctor's desolate family, the Steward's family), including their idiosyncratic dining rituals, etc. The "soft" regulatory dynamics at stake here also involve the strictly regulated ethnic self-image of the community of Eichwald, according to which the Polish guest workers are welcome to help with the harvest, yet it is also understood that they are to remain among themselves during the subsequent festivities, that they remain outsiders. At issue is, finally, an established understanding of "well-being" ("Eat and drink your fill! You earned it!" the Baron says to the locals at the harvest feast) as well as the various

19. "Situationsrecht," rather than succumbing to an impeccable logic of "calculability" (*Berechenbarkeit*) and "certainty" (*Sicherheit*) is characterized by such concepts as "state of danger" (*Gefährdung*) and "case of necessity" (*Nottlage*). On Schmitt's conception of *Situationsrecht*, see "Staat, Bewegung, Volk," in *Die Dreigliederung der politischen Einheit* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt Hamburg, 1934), pp. 43–44; *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 13–14; *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004), pp. 19–20.

means ensuring the well-being of the state, i.e., the executive work of police officers and the draft of young men for the war at the end of the film. We are presented with, conceptually speaking, those internal and external mechanisms that are often subsumed under the concept of biopolitics and that allow modern societies to watch and govern themselves.<sup>20</sup>

### III

Thus far we have encountered the phenomenon of surveillance, in its various nuances, as one practiced by the adults. What complicates things is that Haneke's film rehearses surveillance also as a phenomenon practiced by the children. And just as we, Haneke's spectators, frequently find ourselves assuming the perspective of the adults disciplining the young, so there appear to be numerous moments when the camera is on eye level with the children, entangling us in yet another odd relationship of complicity.<sup>21</sup> To begin with, there are moments of direct perceptual identification, for instance when the Baron gives a speech in the church while the camera is inconspicuously positioned in the back of the church among the children, who, together with us, listen as the Baron speculates about the putative perpetrators of the vicious crimes—those crimes that they, the children, have of course committed. And there are various other moments in which the children listen and watch under duplicitous circumstances, including outright moments of visual and acoustic surveillance. Remember Anni, who, in the very beginning, "*observed* the accident [of her father, the Doctor] from a window." Or Klara, who at one point seems to be *observing* how her father, the Pastor, in the company of the Teacher, approaches the school building. Or the very carefully composed sequence in which she and the other children *eavesdrop* on the police interrogation of the Steward's daughter. Consider how the Steward's son, who had stolen Sigi's whistle, *peers through* the window as he awaits his furious father's homecoming. Or the deep-focus shot depicting the children as they *peek through* the shutters of the Midwife's house so as to learn something about Karli, her tormented son. Indeed, there are myriad moments in which the camera appears to hover at the children's eye level, assuming a seemingly agentless gaze that, without being associated with any one child in particular, seems to extend the children's perspective: An uncanny example presents itself with that eloquent long shot portraying the children as they leave the harvest feast with the Baron's son—only, we later learn, to enfeeble and torture him in the sawmill.

20. See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 317–27.

21. See also James Williams, "Aberrations of Beauty: Violence and Cinematic Resistance in Haneke's *The White Ribbon*," *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (June 2010), p. 48; Catherine Wheatley, "Unexpected Tenderness," *Sight and Sound* 19, no. 12 (December 2009), p. 19.

And yet, although we increasingly come to realize our strange complicity with the children, the originators of the mysterious crimes, we, as indicated, are not only complicit with the children but also, as part of our quest to hunt down the culprits, complicit with the parents. More often than not, their diegetic surveillant gaze corresponds with our spectatorial gaze. And what it means to be complicit with the parents becomes tangible at various moments throughout the film—for example when the Pastor interrogates his son Martin, an interrogation that we largely experience in extension of the father's gaze, which confronts his son's ever more perturbed look. The Pastor systematically unsettles his son's composure and with determination brings him to the point where, in tears, the boy is ready to confess to his masturbation—or rather, where the father, in a gesture of caring control, “spares” him that very confession, presenting it instead as the inevitable denouement of his skillful questioning.

If, for a moment, we “interrogate” the specific cinematic enactment of this interrogation scene, especially with an eye to our role as spectators, which in Haneke's films typically appears particularly accentuated, then we encounter a peculiar tension: the father's lecture, reflecting the rigidity of nineteenth-century sexual morals, is bracketed by two scenes that cite the depravity of the parents' sexual morals. What *precedes* the scene is the Doctor's homecoming from the hospital, a moment of reunion that opens his eyes to the sexual attractiveness of his fourteen-year-old daughter—the daughter with whom he, disturbingly, is soon to practice sexual intercourse. The Pastor's harangue, directed toward his son, about those “finest nerves of his body in the area where God has erected sacred barriers” is *succeeded* by an initially ambiguous scene that quickly reveals itself as the Doctor's quest for sexual relief, a demand inflicted upon the Midwife, who readily bends over, makes herself available for an act that, in its visual appearance, could not be any more mechanical and geared toward the swift alleviation of the Doctor's pent-up sexual needs. What, we might ask, is the effect of this peculiar editing on us as the film's spectators? How do we, who continually follow the events through the eyes of the adults, view those very adults here, those adults with whom we, on the one hand, are initially encouraged to identify but who, on the other hand, appear as pedophiles and in less-than-flattering circumstances? No doubt, the paradoxical effect emanating from Haneke's montage—contrasting the Pastor's pontification regarding sexual matters with the parents' sexual depravity—is one that, didactic as it may be, forces us into an active mode of spectatorship. This active mode of spectatorship is certainly not aligned with any one moral stance in particular. And yet, in light of our intermittent identification with the parents, neither does it allow for the comfort of an unbiased, neutral, impartial, or (to keep with the film's normative infrastructure) “innocent” perspective.

What it means to be complicit with the parents—to pursue this question just a little further—becomes disturbingly clear when we perceive how the Doctor humiliates his mistress, the Midwife, who raises his two children, runs his household, and supports him in his medical practice:

[Y]ou disgust me. . . . You're ugly, messy, flabby, and have bad breath. . . . I've really tried to think of another woman while making love to you. One who smells good, who's young, less decrepit than you, but my imagination can't manage it. In the end, it's you again, and then I feel like puking and am embarrassed at myself.

Haneke's composition of this scene, especially his high-angle/low-angle shot/reverse shots implicating us as the Doctor's doubles, triggers a sharp sensation of discomfort and intensifies a distinct sense of spectatorial guilt. What it means to be complicit with the parents becomes patent, above all, in that somber scene in which we assume the surveillant gaze of the Doctor's son, Rudi, seeing from his point of view as he walks in the middle of the night through the dark house, unsettled by his sister's empty bed next to him. We share his distress and disorientation as the camera gropes through the dark, allowing us to see as little as the boy, eventually to discover the sister in a brightly lit cellar room in the process of being sexually molested by her father. While Haneke's film ostensibly explores the disciplinary measures deployed by the parents in their raising of sons and daughters, at this point the simple formal device of a point-of-view shot from the child's perspective complicates things profoundly. For now it is not the child who is being watched by the parent but the abusive father who is surprised by the child's gaze. The trap of visibility is the trap in which Haneke's abusive father finds himself, thereby embodying what could be described as an inversion of the inversion epitomized by the panopticon.<sup>22</sup> Not unlike Foucault's inmate, he (the supposed "guard") finds himself in the spotlight and under (our) scrutiny, caught by a faceless agent emerging from the dark.

#### IV

We earlier noted that not only do the child-criminals not show the behavior expected of them but that, when committing their crimes, they indeed shirk the surveillant gaze of their parents (and, concomitantly, our gaze, insofar as we enact

22. To briefly recall, in the ancien régime the Sun King epitomized the bright center of power, a systemization of visibility that the panoptic model reversed. It placed the prisoner at the center of the stage, in the spotlight, as it were, leaving him "alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible"—as opposed to the powerful guard, who is veiled by darkness. "The panoptic mechanism," Foucault writes, "reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 200.

the parental gaze). Cinematographically, of course, "everything that takes place offscreen . . . provokes the imagination of the viewer more than what he sees."<sup>23</sup> That in a film—a visual medium, after all—the most important events cannot be seen confounds us, raising important epistemic and, particularly crucial in our context, ethical questions. The fact that the children, allegedly watched by their parents, contrive to escape into an invisible realm, that is, elude (diegetically) the parents' gaze and (extra-diegetically) the camera's gaze, which after all determines our perspective—this correspondence incisively reinforces our complicity with the parents' surveillant gaze.

And yet, the children are frequently shown as they—and with them we—observe, eavesdrop, and spy on their parents, thereby unsettling any "unidirectional model of power" with regard to the question of who is watching and who is being watched.<sup>24</sup> Against the backdrop of the dominant tendency in surveillance studies to downplay the active role of the surveilled, it appears pivotal to accentuate the manifest role played by the children in *The White Ribbon*. If the Foucauldian paradigm drew much attention to how people are "made up" by powerful institutions,<sup>25</sup> Haneke's film seems to allow for the emergence of a more subversive dynamic. In *The White Ribbon*, the dichotomy between watcher and watched is seriously called into question insofar as the children themselves quite frequently appear as invisible, "watching" forces over their unwittingly "watched" parents. In the words of Michel de Certeau, "Behind the 'monotheism' of the dominant panoptical procedures, we might suspect the existence and survival of a 'polytheism' of concealed or *disseminated practices*."<sup>26</sup> It is such tacit practices that "break through the grid of the established order and accepted discipline" of which Haneke's tale tells.<sup>27</sup> It is his child protagonists' agency, their furtive, clandestine resistance, that a reading of his film must take into account. Surveillance, one might say, presents itself as a process that *does* considerably more than it sets out to accomplish; it precipitates performative repercussions (the children's counter-surveillance) that belie the asserted agenda of those who claim control.

## V

A direct confrontation of the two surveillant cohorts, the surveillant adults and the surveillant children, occurs during that fateful interrogation of the Steward's daughter, who is questioned by the police about her dubious premoni-

23. Michael Haneke, "Das weiße Band," in *Nahaufnahme*, pp. 169–70.

24. See Catherine Zimmer, "Caught on Tape?: The Politics of Video in the New Torture Film," in *Horror Film after 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*, ed. Aviva Briefel and Sam Miller (Austin: University of Texas, 2011), p. 87.

25. See Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, pp. 90–93.

26. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), p. 188. See also Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, p. 92.

27. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, p. 197.

tion of the mayhem inflicted upon the Midwife's son. While the police interrogation takes place behind closed doors, the children, collectively and conspiratorially, lurk behind the door and eavesdrop. Haneke translates this state of reciprocal distrust and monitoring into an image, specifically the moment at which the police officer opens the door and surprises the eavesdropping children. Divided by the frame of the door, the two groups that observe each other throughout the film confront each other here face-to-face and unambiguously take note of the respective other's act of surveillance: The adults (exemplified by the police and the Teacher) interrogate the girl and are surprised by a group of children (led by the Pastor's daughter, Klara) evidently listening in on the interrogation.<sup>28</sup> The direct encounter between the children and the adults enunciates questions that have occupied us throughout the film. And it emphatically does so—given the *mise-en-abyme*-inducing door frame that structures the image—with regard to our role as spectators of Haneke's cinematic frames. At this point, we develop an acute

28. This, like the other scenes of interrogation and questioning, has to be seen in the context of the adults' disciplinary endeavors, which normalize and regulate the children's lives. Notably, such moments of interrogation abound in the film: Recall the police officer's questioning of the Midwife and the Doctor's daughter at the beginning of the film, or the Teacher's conversation with the Pastor's children toward the end. Remember how the Pastor interrogates his son Martin about the latter's nefarious self-pleasuring activities; or how the Baron asks the tutor about the whereabouts of his son Sigi; or the city policemen's questioning of the locals about the crime against the Baron's son. These instances have to be understood as part of a process in which, as Judith Butler puts it, "populations are monitored, detained, regulated, inspected, interrogated, rendered uniform in their actions, fully ritualized and exposed to control and regulation in their daily lives." Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), p. 97; see also Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), pp. 87–104.



sense of the curious double-bind in which we are caught up: We know of the crimes of the children against their parents, and we know of the transgressions and crimes of the parents against their children. Our identification with the children and their guilt is frequently overshadowed by our identification with the parents and their guilt. What are we to make of this convoluted situation? How are we to account for our double complicity with the parents as well as the children in light of the moral stakes that Haneke's story seems to raise? How, more concretely, do we come to experience our own ethical role, our own responsibility in this tale of guilt?

## VI

The film's ethical complexities, at least those raised on a diegetic level, forcefully emerge as the Teacher reveals to the Pastor his discoveries about the children's role as originators of the various crimes.<sup>29</sup> The increasingly reticent Pastor closes the windows as he listens to the Teacher, in order to keep what he knows the Teacher is about to say inside the room. He sanctimoniously denounces his discoveries as "aberrations" and "monstrosities" and accuses the Teacher of having a "sick mind." "Denial is the utmost original sin, in the social as much as in the individual realm," Haneke asserts.<sup>30</sup> It may or may not come as a surprise that, of all the characters, the Pastor, the one who ties white ribbons around his children's arms and into their hair to keep them from "sin" and "selfishness" and "deception," inflicts guilt upon himself by succumbing to self-deception, that is, denial. It may or may not surprise us that guilt and innocence, even within the orbit of the church, cannot be discerned all that clearly. And yet, that is precisely what Haneke also appears to insinuate imagistically as the fortress-like walls of the church (the institution that claims authority on matters of guilt and innocence, or, symbolically, black and white) are veiled by darkness over the course of three long takes. Gradually the church, positioned in the bright light of moral authority, is veiled by the darkness of collective denial. Denial, of course, does not only characterize the proselytizing Pastor or the church; both, for the sake of communal order, vehemently insist on the perpetuation of an idea: the idea, the shibboleth of the children's innocence.<sup>31</sup> Haneke's voice-over narrator also tells us of the increasing village gossip, of rumors and conjectures that testify to a collective state of denial, and that cul-

29. "When the Doctor had his accident, last year, the children appeared in his garden. Supposedly, to help Anna. . . . When the Baron's son was found . . . he'd been with the children just before. . . . The Steward's daughter predicted that Karli would be beaten. She says she dreamt it. The police think she's lying. From whom did she find it out? Who told her?"

30. Michael Haneke's interview with Franz Grabner, "Der Name der Erbsünde ist Verdrängung": Ein Gespräch mit Michael Haneke," in *Michael Haneke und seine Filme: Eine Pathologie der Konsumgesellschaft* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2005), p. 34.

31. At issue here is a feature that Hannah Arendt described as the "modern lie." If the traditional lie implied a transitive speech act that was directed away from the agent so as to deceive someone, the



minate in the suspicion that the Doctor and the Midwife are likely originators of the various crimes. "It was suspected that, wanting to spare his legitimate children and himself from public disclosure of his guilt, the Doctor had fled with them." As we hear these words, Haneke's excessive long-take cinematography functions as a performative perturbation that challenges the narrative cues provided by the voice-over. That in the villagers' hunt for a culprit "the Doctor" merely serves as a scapegoat, that the guilt at issue is more complicated and especially more collective and precisely as such subject to collective denial—all that finds itself hinted at in the course of Haneke's painfully-long long takes. We are forced to pause and to reflect on the putative stability of such categories as guilt and innocence, which do not always present themselves in black and white, and the overwhelming complexities of these ecclesiastic parameters, which, with all their ambiguity, Haneke forces upon us as his spectators.<sup>32</sup>

Haneke, who in more ways than not appears as his Schoolmaster's double, does not, as the very last sequence illustrates, allow us to follow the action from the safe distance of passive spectatorship. Instead he emphatically confronts us with the question of *our relation* to the negotiated questions of innocence and guilt. We find ourselves—in extension of the camera's gaze—placed on the altar, that authoritative space typically reserved for the Pastor; we see the congregation enter

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modern lie is primarily reflexive and amounts to an act of self-deception. See Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 231–39. In a different context, Walter Benjamin describes this phenomenon as "objektive Verlogenheit" (objective mendacity). In his "Remarks on 'Objective Mendacity'" (written about 1921), he remarks: "It is not the subjective lie for which the individual would have to take responsibility. Rather, he is 'bona fide.'" Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 60.

32. This is, after all, the backdrop against which one may have to assess the film's tendency to complicate conventional color symbolisms of black and white. For instance, the Teacher tells of "the snowy landscape [that] sparkled so brightly *that it hurt the eyes*." Similarly, the ominous news of the assassination of the archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, marking the beginning of the Great War, reaches the Baron (amidst a contrapuntally private marital dispute) on a *white* horse.

"The use of black-and-white film," Haneke remarks in an interview with Roy Grundmann, "is . . . in the service of alienation. On the one hand, it is meant to give spectators easier access to the time period. Any images we know about this period are black-and-white. This is one of the effects of its use in the film. But the other one is that the black-and-white always constitutes a certain stylization, which, rather than pretending to be a naturalist image of reality, emphasizes the prototypical character of the story. It is an artifact and is being presented as such." Michael Haneke's interview with Roy Grundmann, "Unsentimental Education: An Interview with Michael Haneke," in *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, ed. Roy Grundmann (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 600. It is remarkable how unambiguously Haneke attributes his decision to use black-and-white film to the fact that "through the invention of photography, the late nineteenth century [is] connoted black and white . . . in the mind of the general public." Michael Haneke, "Das weiße Band," in *Nahaufnahme*, p. 147. This deliberate evocation of what one might describe as an imagistic naturalism appears to be at odds with his concurrent claim that black-and-white allows for abstraction and "alienation" to induce a distanced, critical, and reflective stance from the spectator. See Haneke's interview with Grundmann, "Unsentimental Education," p. 600; see also Haneke's interview with Rüdiger Suchsland, "Eine gewisse Arroganz ist in der Kunst kein Fehler," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (October 15, 2009). Haneke's paradoxical argument prefigures a tension throughout his film, where white does not always symbolize innocence and black does not necessarily represent guilt—where, in brief, traditional moral valences appear less unequivocal than *The White Ribbon's* title seems to insinuate.



the church, see the children sing. They sing the first stanza of a well-known hymn by Martin Luther loosely based on Psalm 46 from the Book of Psalms, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God": "A mighty fortress is our God,/a bulwark never failing;/Our helper He, amid the flood/of mortal ills prevailing./For still our ancient foe/ doth seek to work us woe;/His craft and power are great,/and, armed with cruel hate,/On earth is not his equal."<sup>33</sup> The children extol God as a "mighty fortress," a never-failing, unswerving "bulwark" that wards off evil forces. Given the outbreak of the war alluded to by the narrator, it appears safe to say that the notion of the adversary is to be conceived here more broadly, including the political enemy, the enemy of the state.<sup>34</sup> The whole community of Eichwald gathers for a "solemn service." A new enemy outside German borders has been found. The internal enemy, who instigated the various crimes, is forgotten; the communal order, as the last shot insinuates, is reinvigorated. Elated by the music, the congregation here reinforces its communal self-image—an ideological determinateness portrayed in the film's last long take. This shot's visual composition appears particularly remarkable in view of the seeming dividedness yet ultimate generational unity of the parents, who occupy the bottom part of the frame, and the children, who seem to "spring" or "germinate" from their parents into the upper half of the image—a biologicistic logic underlined by the adornment and foliage ornamentation integrated into the *mise-en-scène*.

Is such denial of the violent events and the reasons that led to them one

33. Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," trans. Frederick Henry Hedge, in *An American Anthology: 1787-1900*, ed. Edmund Clarence Stedman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), p. 878.

34. See Michael Haneke's interview with Grundmann, "Unsentimental Education," in *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, p. 604.

that Haneke forces us to ponder in the course of this final long take, in which we face the congregation from the elevated position of the altar? The aged Teacher talks a lot about the change that took place, how he was drafted in 1917 and later opened a tailor's shop in town—his whereabouts during the time of the Second World War remaining strangely unmentioned. "The name of the original sin is denial," Haneke reiterates apodictically.<sup>35</sup> Is denial the guilt we incur if we—like the villagers of Eichwald—look away, forget about the disturbing details of Haneke's screenplay (which, no doubt, only gains in gravity if viewed through the historical lens of the Third Reich)? Is the villagers' guilt—their collective as well as individual denial—the guilt of which Haneke, the other teacher in this film, seeks to alert us? Is that, after all, his "lesson"?<sup>36</sup> *The White Ribbon's* theatrical trailer appears to suggest just that when it presents itself as a series of snippets that are linked—who could possibly be surprised at this point?—by a white ribbon in the form of white screens. They are linked by the very white ribbon that—metaphorically—Haneke seems to tie onto us, thus reminding us of our putative guilt, your guilt and my guilt. Haneke ties his white ribbon on us to remind us of the innocence that we, while watching his film, appear to have forfeited owing to our spectatorial complicity and likely denial. Is this film, which commenced with a fade-in from black to white and ends with a fade-out in black, is this filmic spectacle that emerges out of guilt and fades into guilt, indeed destined to precipitate this experience? The experience of how easy it is to become guilty just by being there, by being a voyeur, and how easy it is to fall into denial over that guilt?

By the end of the film we find ourselves, via the camera's cold gaze, staring from the altar and facing the congregation from an odd outsider position—outside the congregation, of course, but also, as a result of Haneke's excessive long-take cinematography, outside the world depicted or perhaps even, figuratively, the world *qua* world.<sup>37</sup> The result of this idiosyncratic cinematographic rendition could be described as the empowerment of the spectator not in spite of but precisely because of the distance evoked by the long take.<sup>38</sup> If throughout the film we found ourselves in the position of complicit spectator-doubles—of either the vio-

35. Michael Haneke's interview with Franz Grabner, "Der Name der Erbsünde ist Verdrängung": Ein Gespräch mit Michael Haneke," in *Michael Haneke und seine Filme*, p. 39.

36. Haneke's didacticism, to be sure, did not always sit well with critics. Roy Grundmann, for instance, notes: "Leaving things out is a standard *modus operandi* in Haneke's work—there are gaps and then there is a spine. The directions for filling in the gaps at times come across as rather didactic. They threaten to remove Haneke's textual edifices from a comparison with what Theodor W. Adorno, whom he reveres, characterized as the open-ended forms of modern art." Grundmann in "Unsentimental Education," in *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, pp. 593–94.

37. John David Rhodes offers a careful meditation on the peculiar sensation of *exteriority* that emanates from Haneke's images, a sensation beautifully invoked by Stanley Cavell's phrase "the camera's outsideness to its world and my absence from it." See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1979), p. 133; quoted in John David Rhodes, "Haneke, the Long Take, Realism," *Framework* 47, no. 2 (January 2006), p. 20.

38. See also Michael Haneke, "Film als Katharsis," in *Austria (in)felix: zum österreichischem Film der 80er Jahre*, ed. Francesco Bono (Graz: Blimp, 1992), p. 89.



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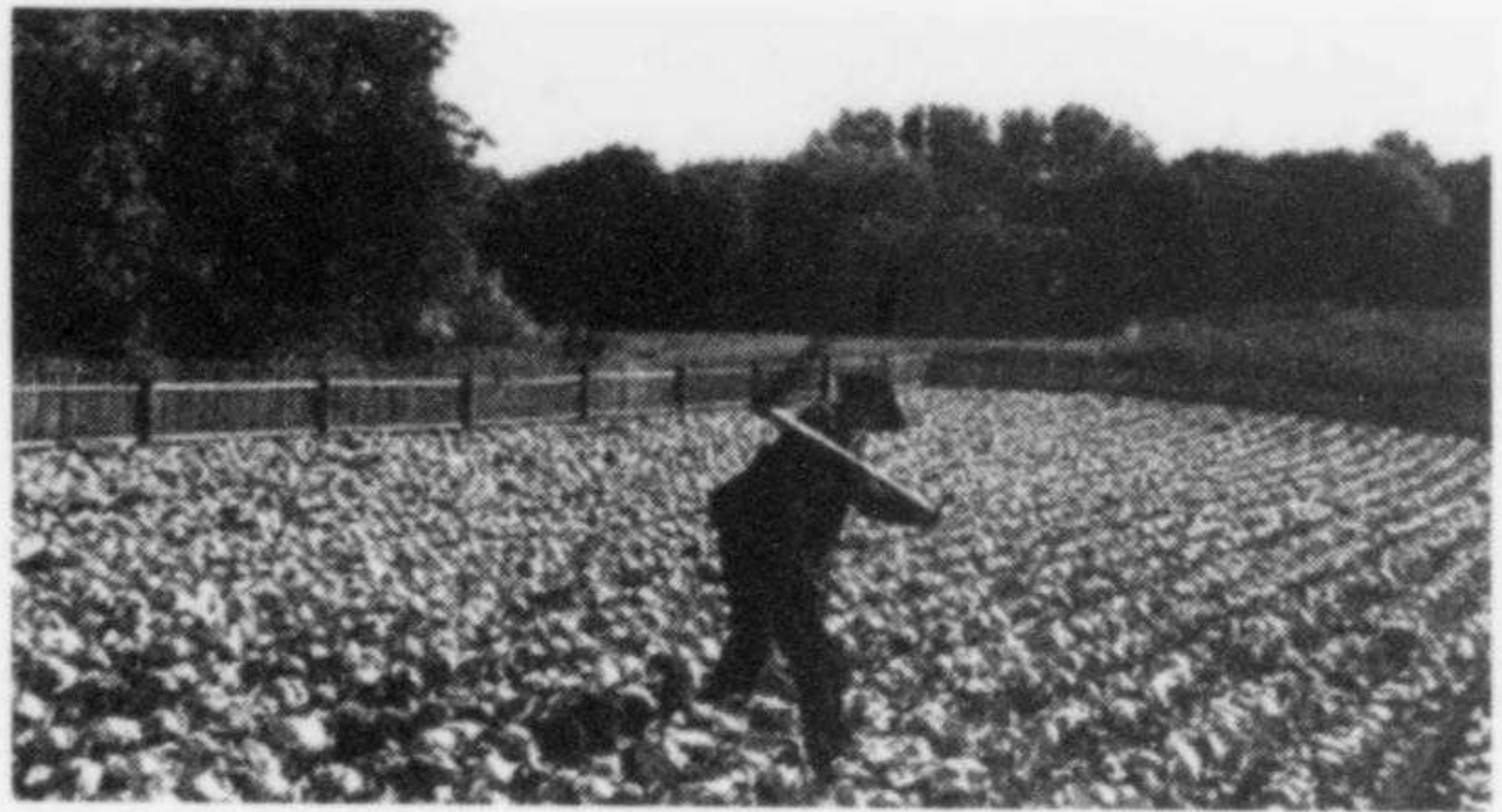
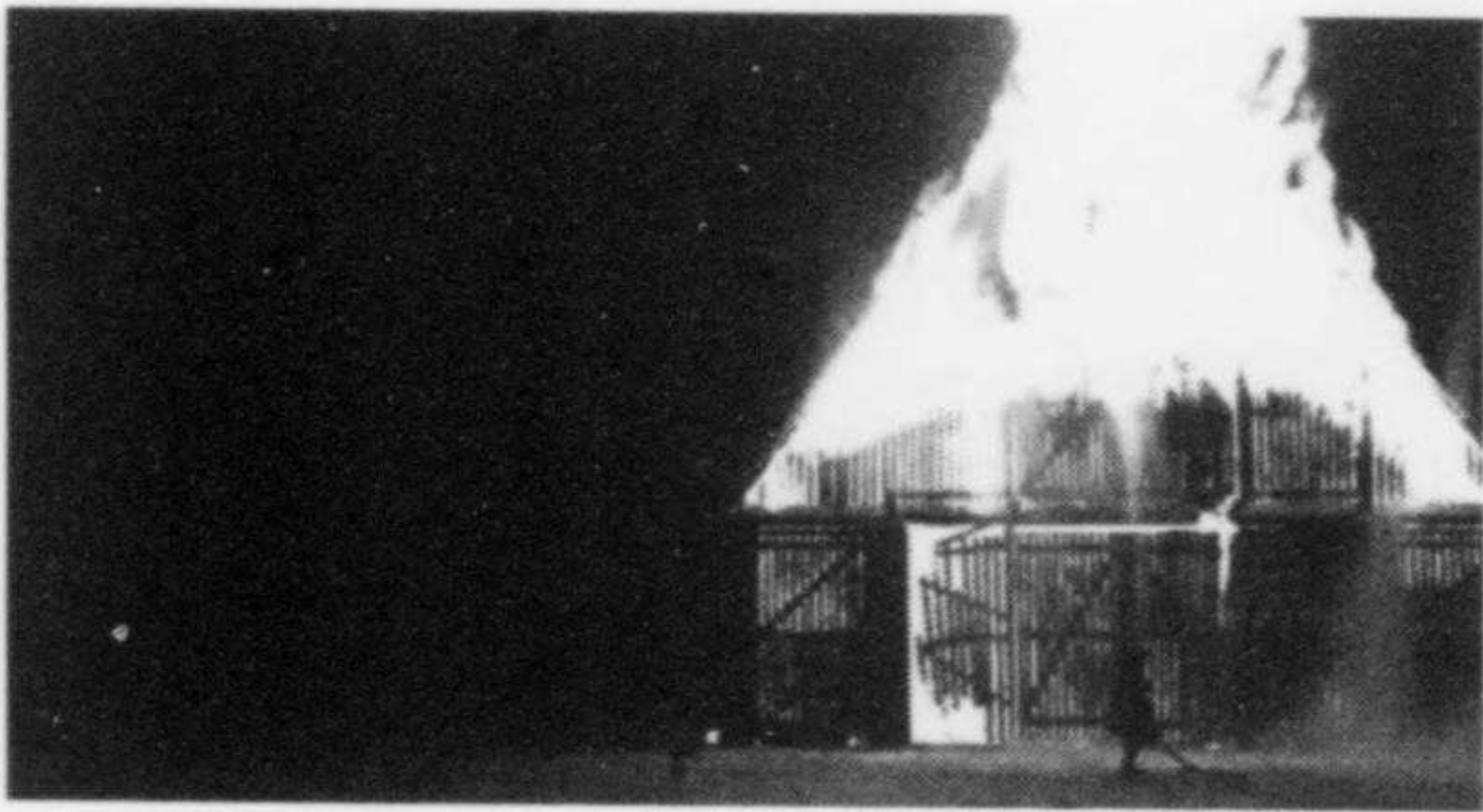
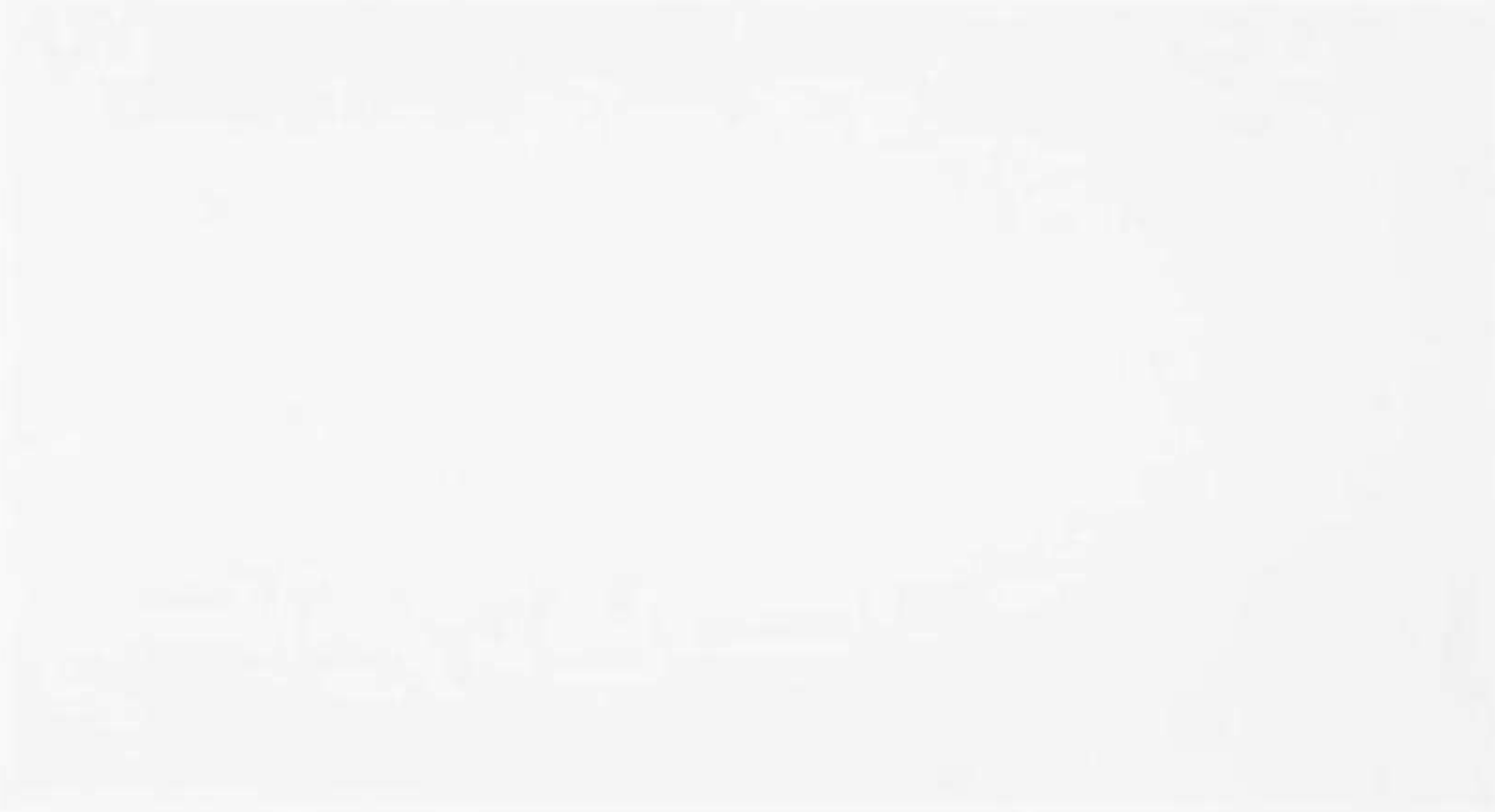
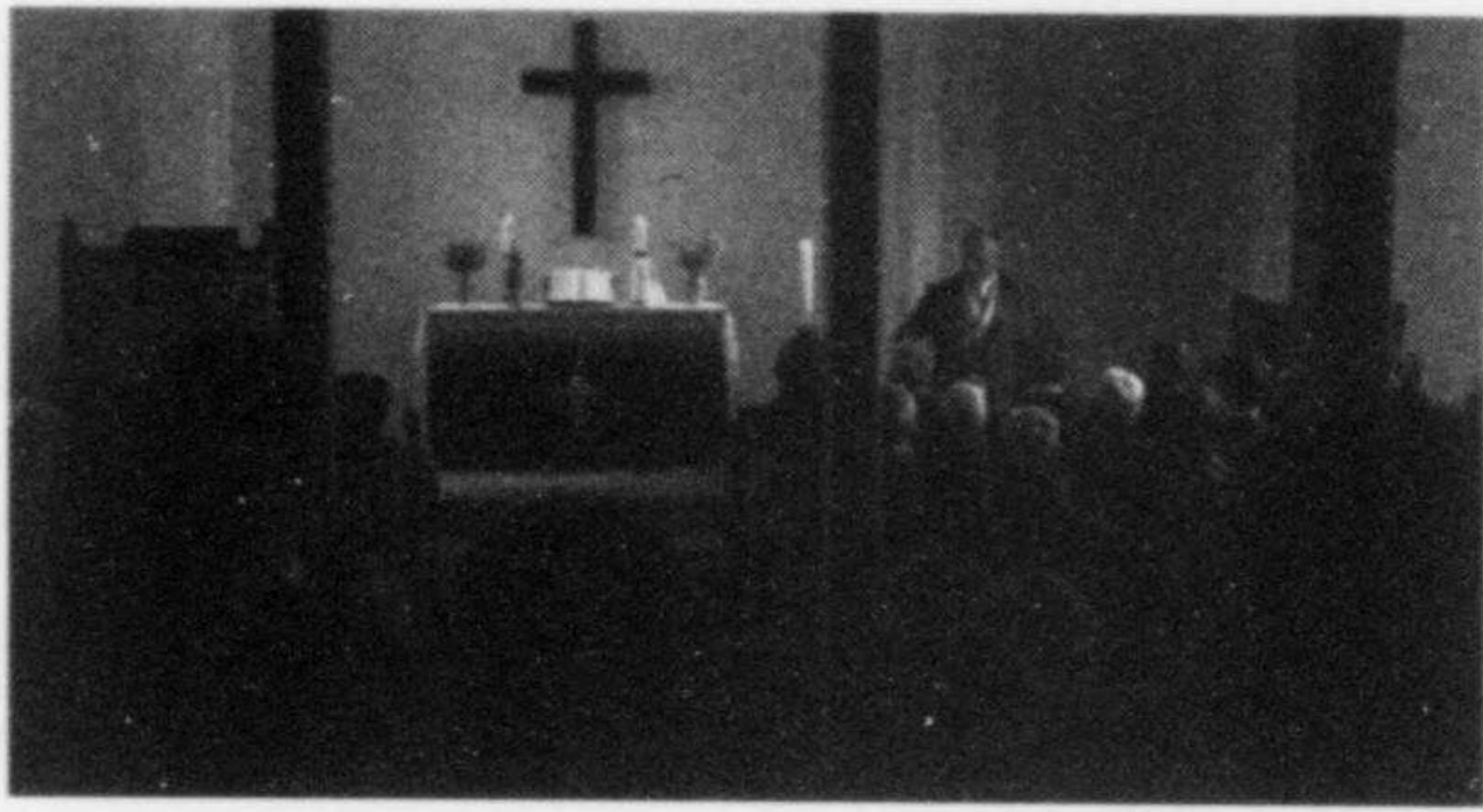
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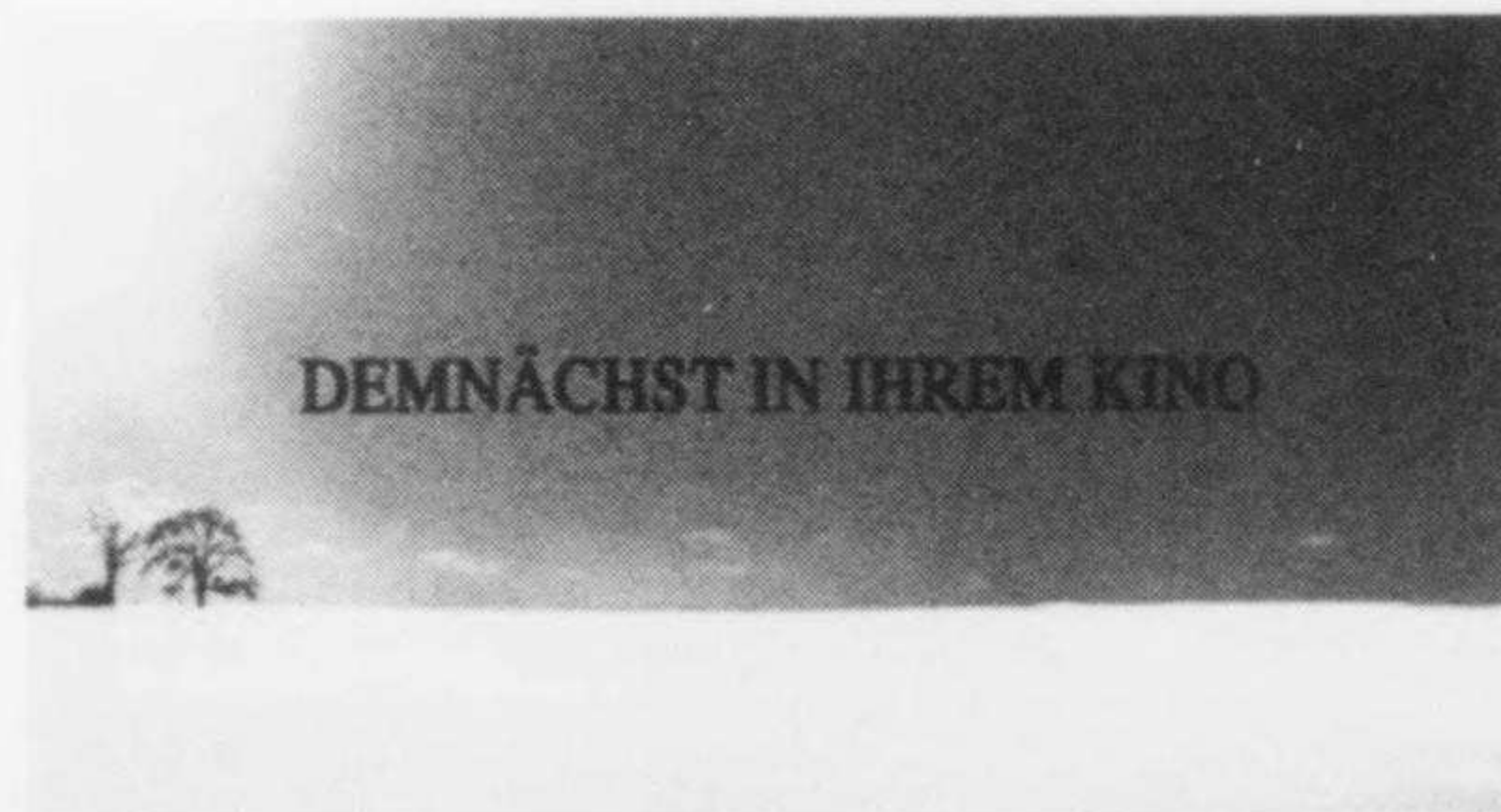
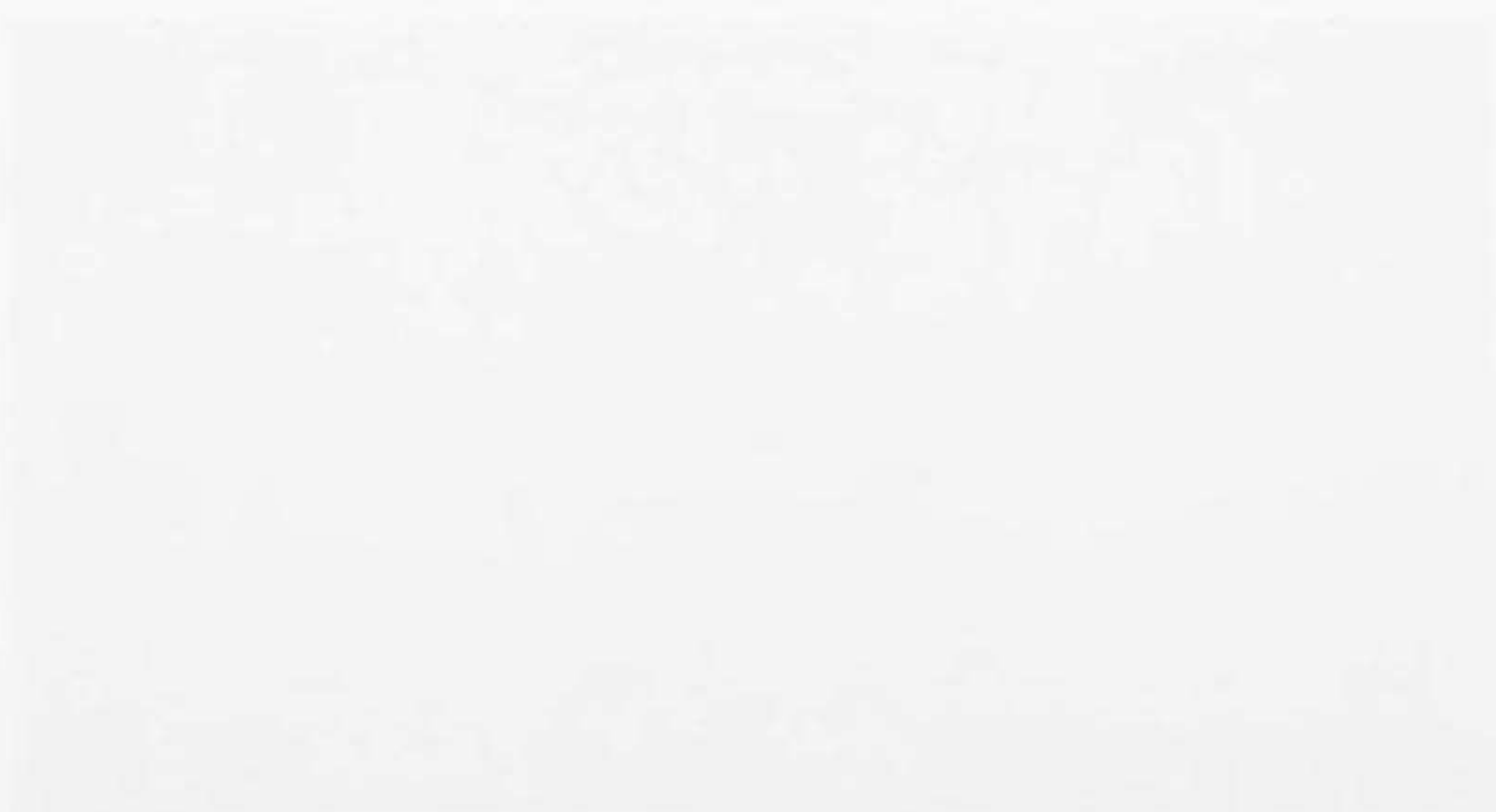
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"Wunderschön fotografiert und sehr beeindruckend" *Le Monde*



*Trailer for The White Ribbon. 2009.*





lent parents or of the violent children—then at this point our surveillant gaze is of a radically different nature. At this point we assume, from the altar, an outside-gaze that gestures toward a strangely other sphere beyond *The White Ribbon's* diegetic world and any referential framework one might feel inclined to extrapolate from it. What emerges, beyond possible allegiances with the surveillant parents or the surveillant children, is the camera's very own complicity with the visual efficacy of surveillance as ontological condition of Haneke's cinema.<sup>39</sup> Which, of course, does not exempt us (who continually gaze through the camera's eye) from the guilt we have incurred as spectators and figurative bearers of Haneke's white ribbon. This relentlessly dark, gloomy, enigmatic film cast in and concerned with guilt is undoubtedly one that allows for no escape from the order, the ban of guilt—not for the parents, not for the children, and not, least of all, for us. Is guilt, then, and denial over that guilt any less the Teacher's stigma than it is ours? We cannot but finish our story the way the Teacher began his: "A lot of it is still obscure, and many questions remain unanswered." Not a confession. But a concession, perhaps.

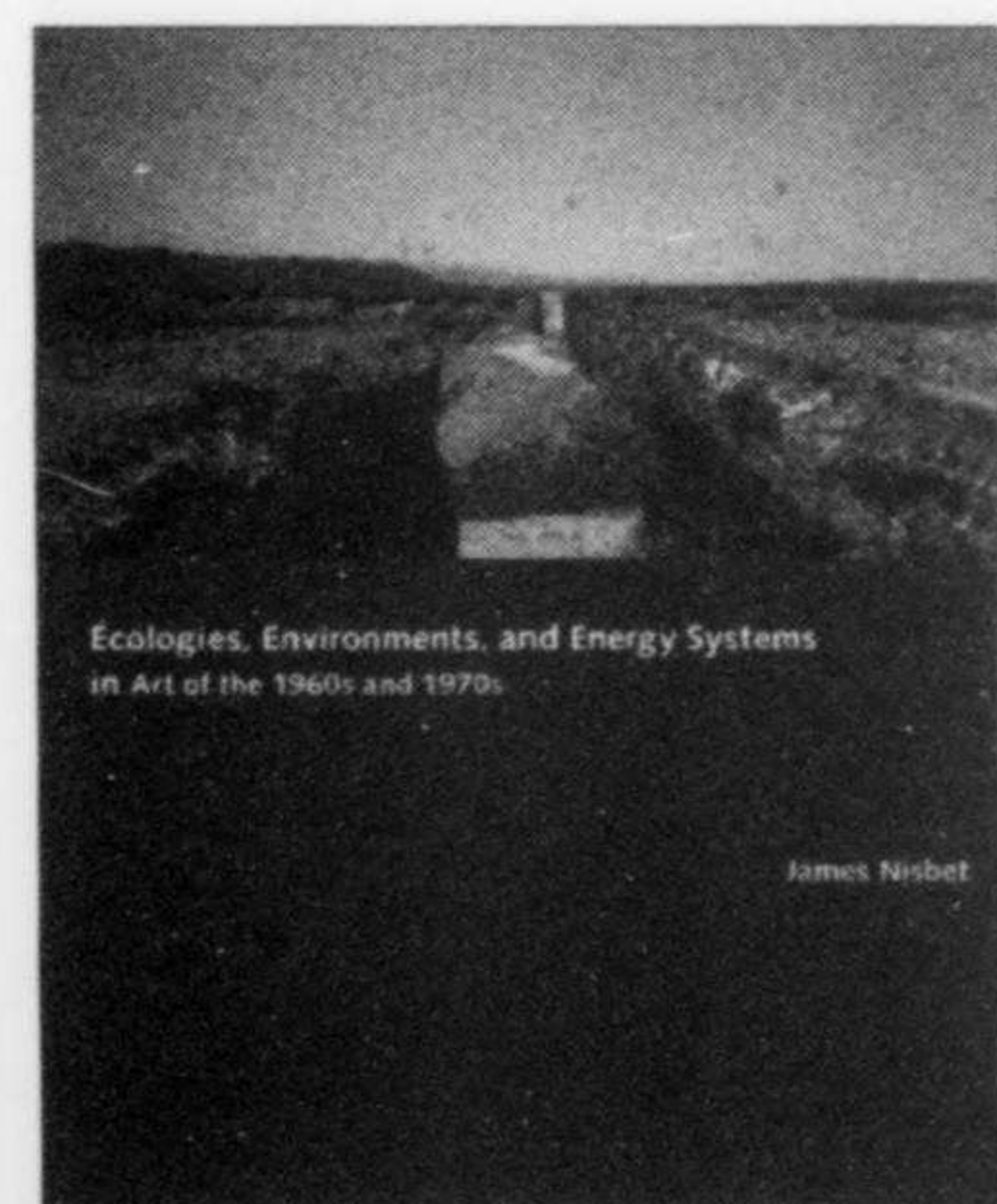
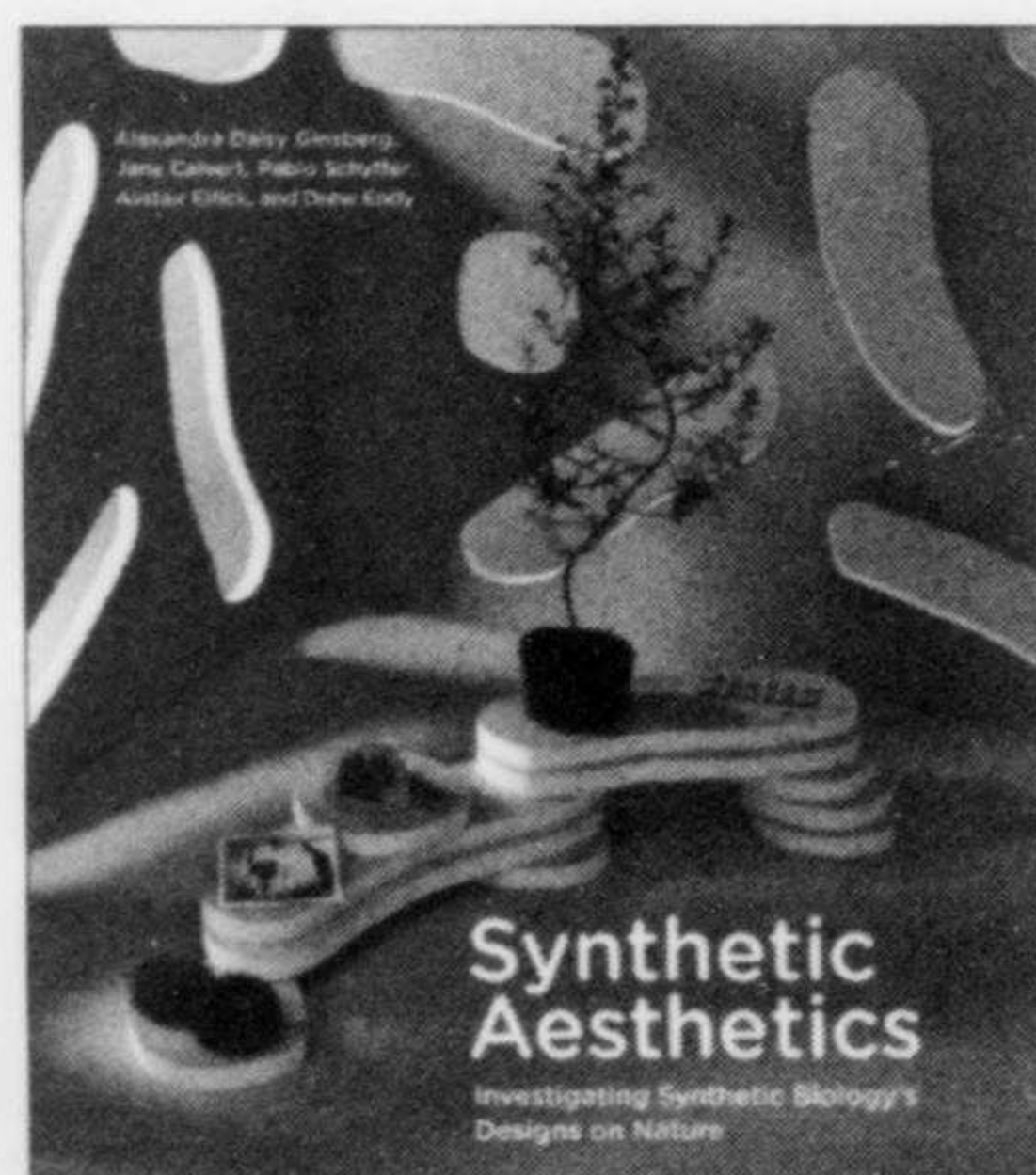
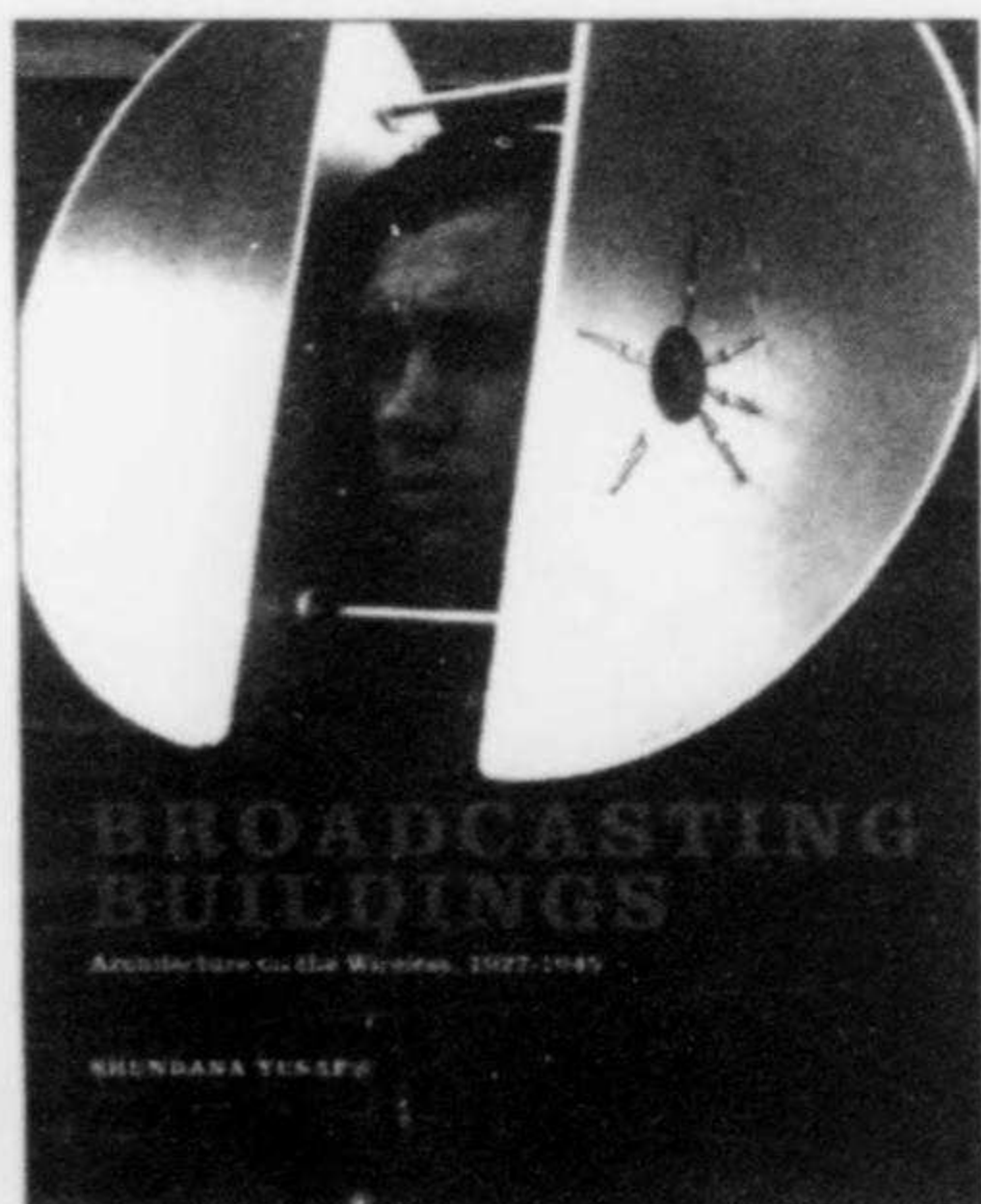
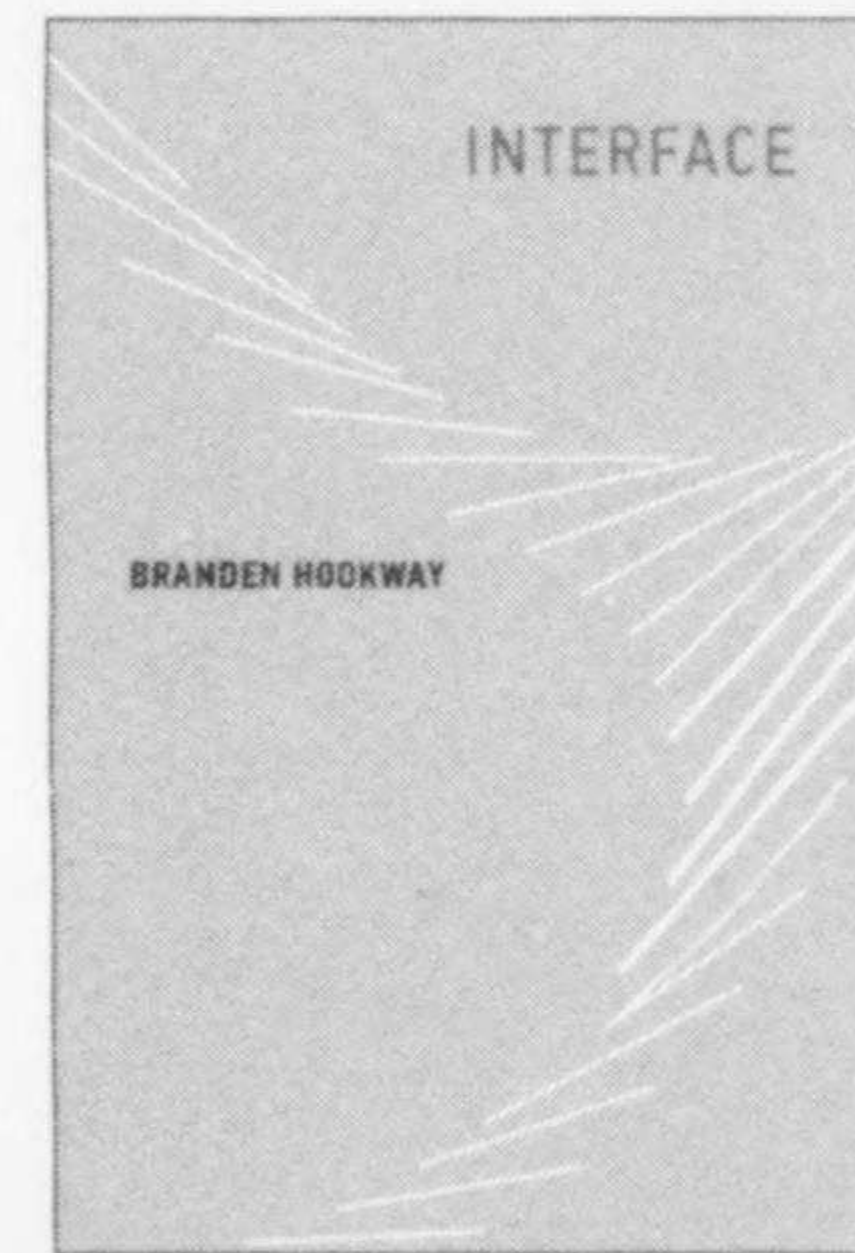
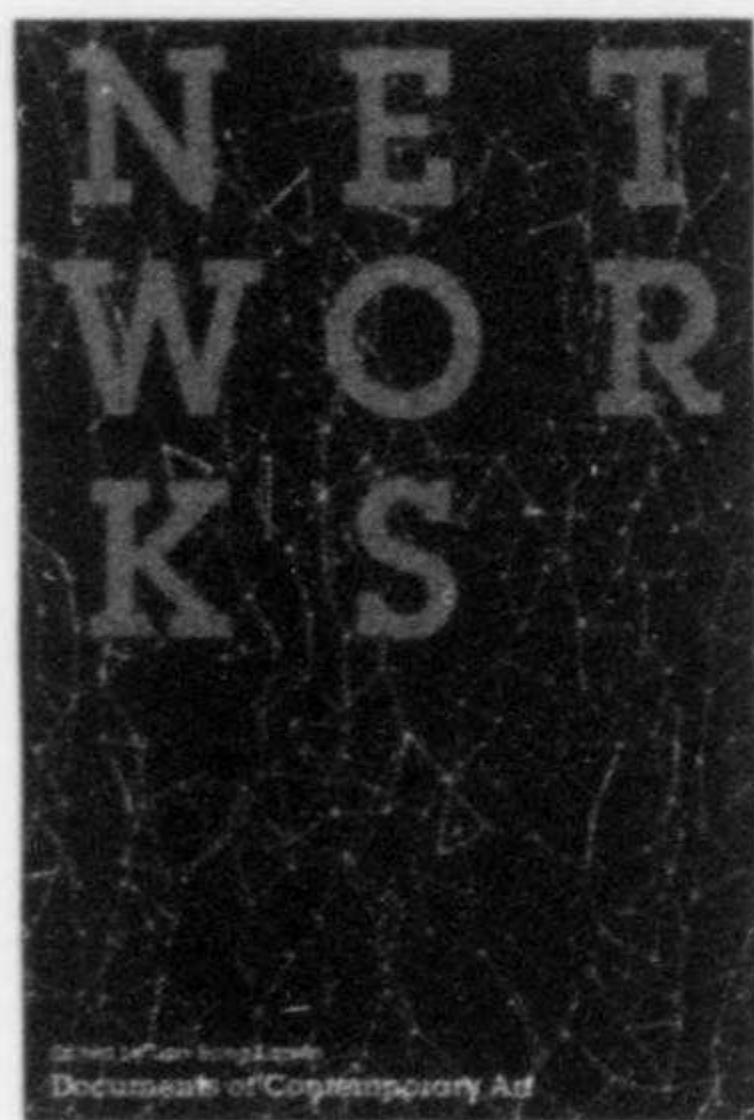
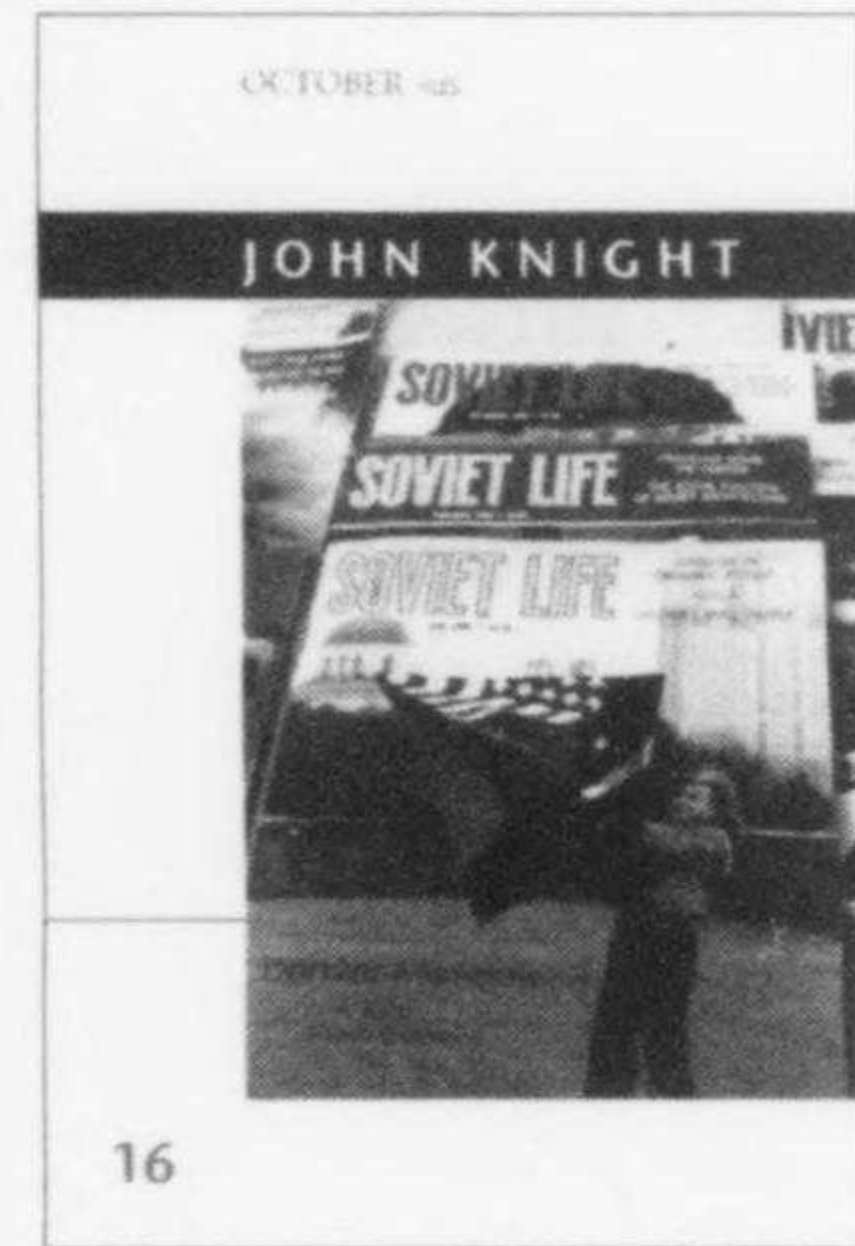
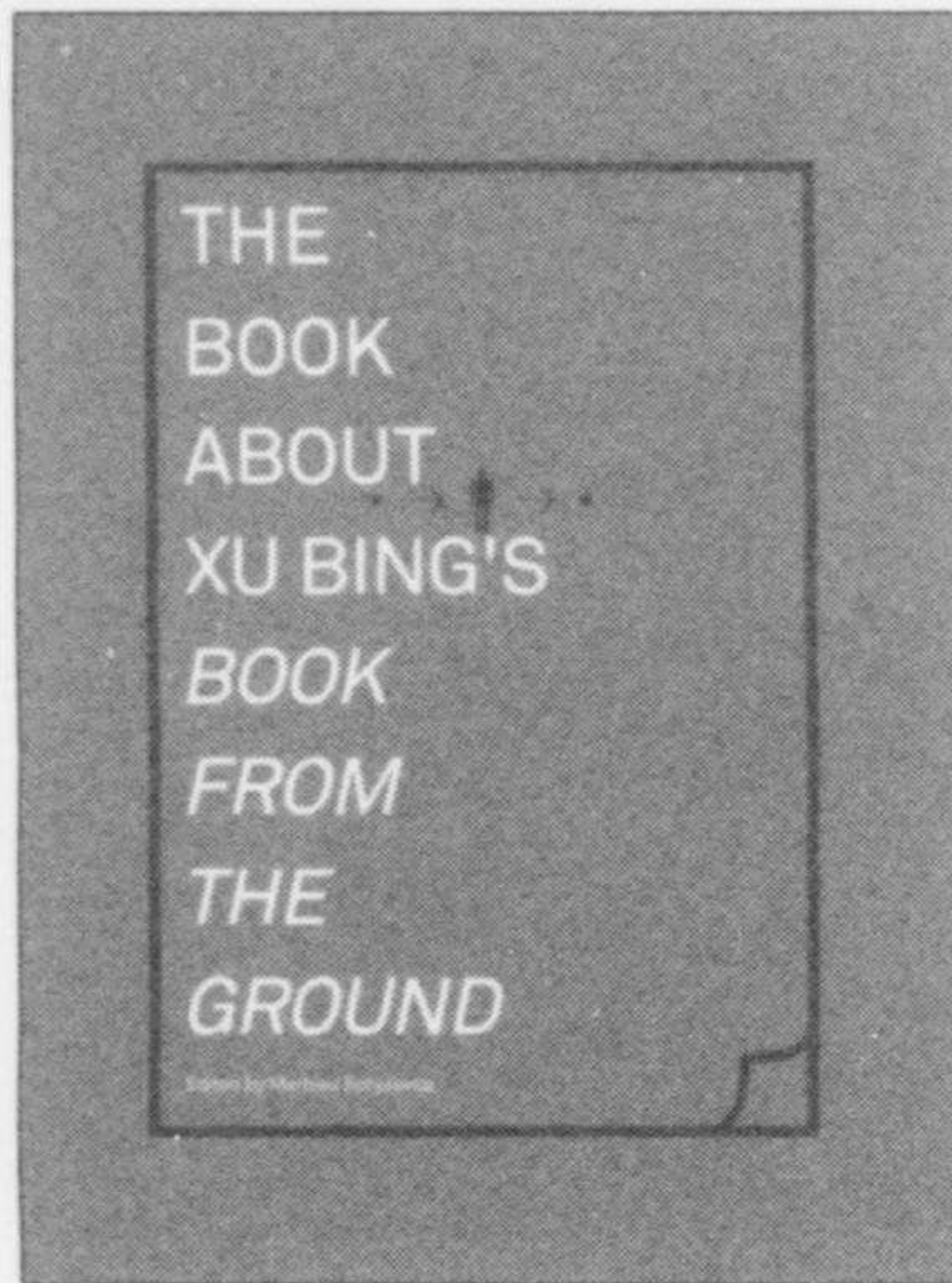
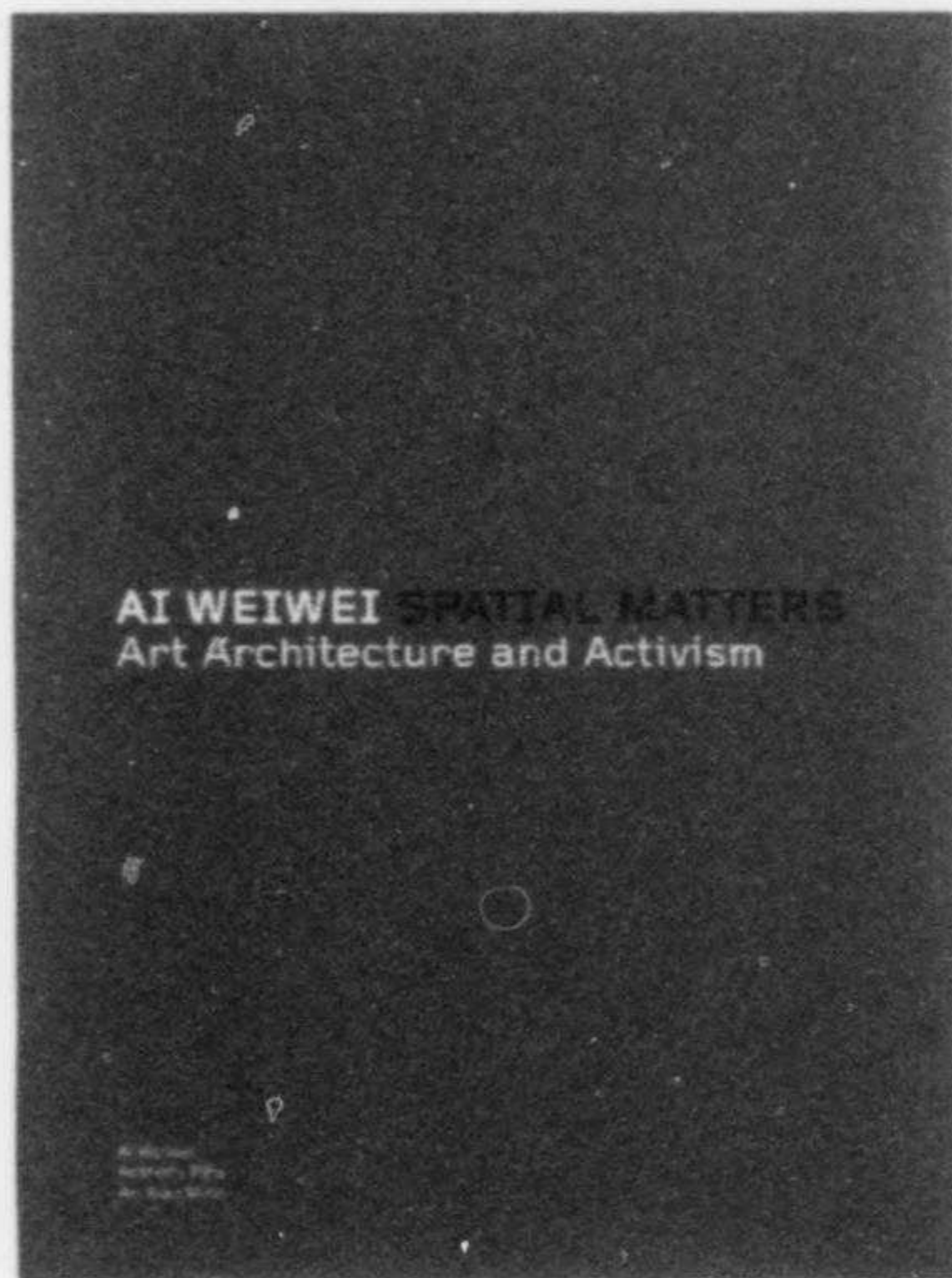
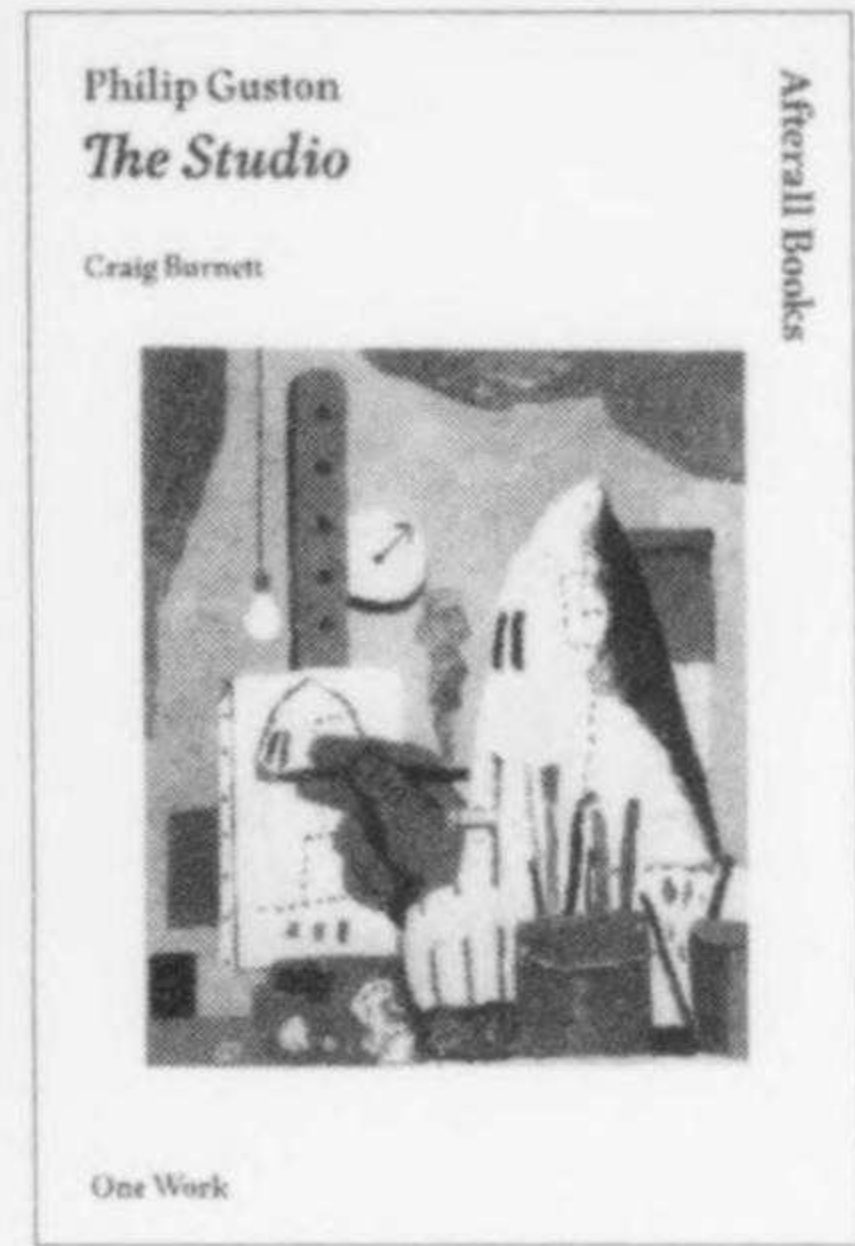
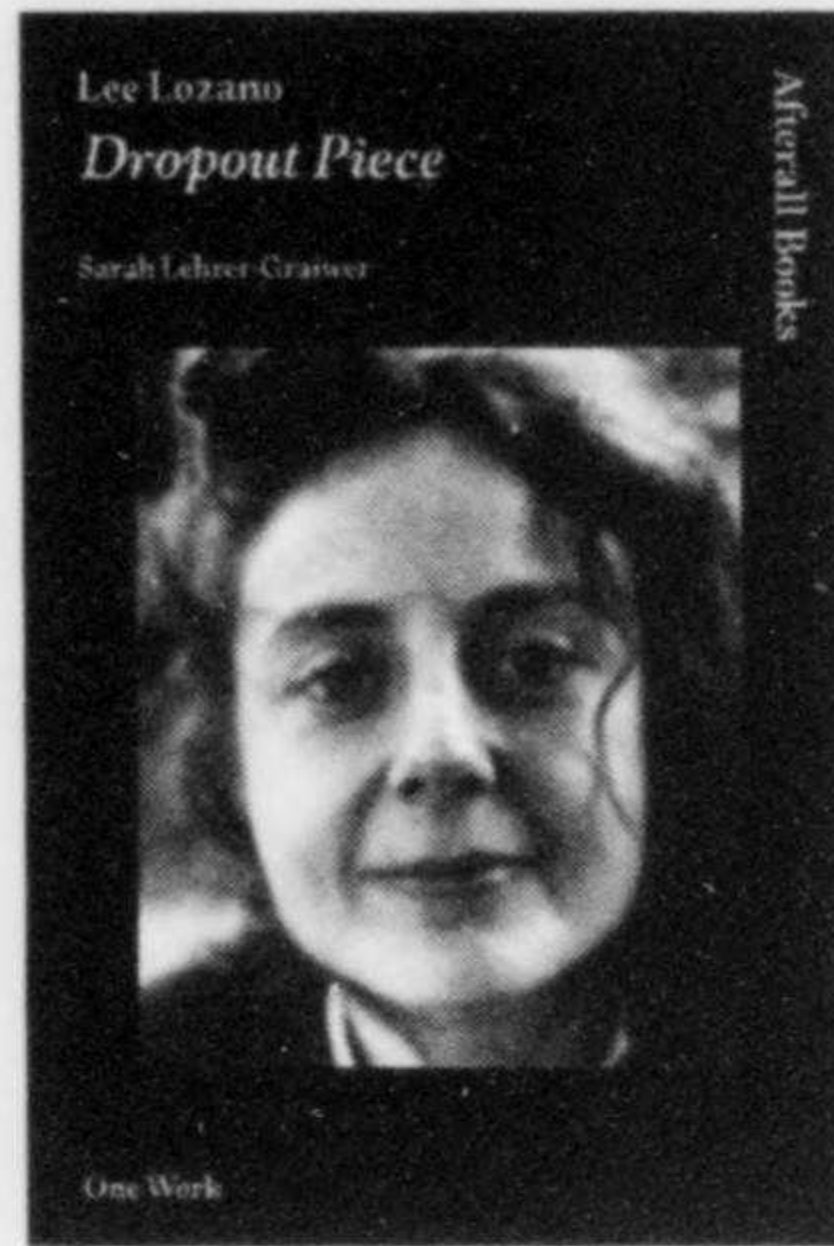
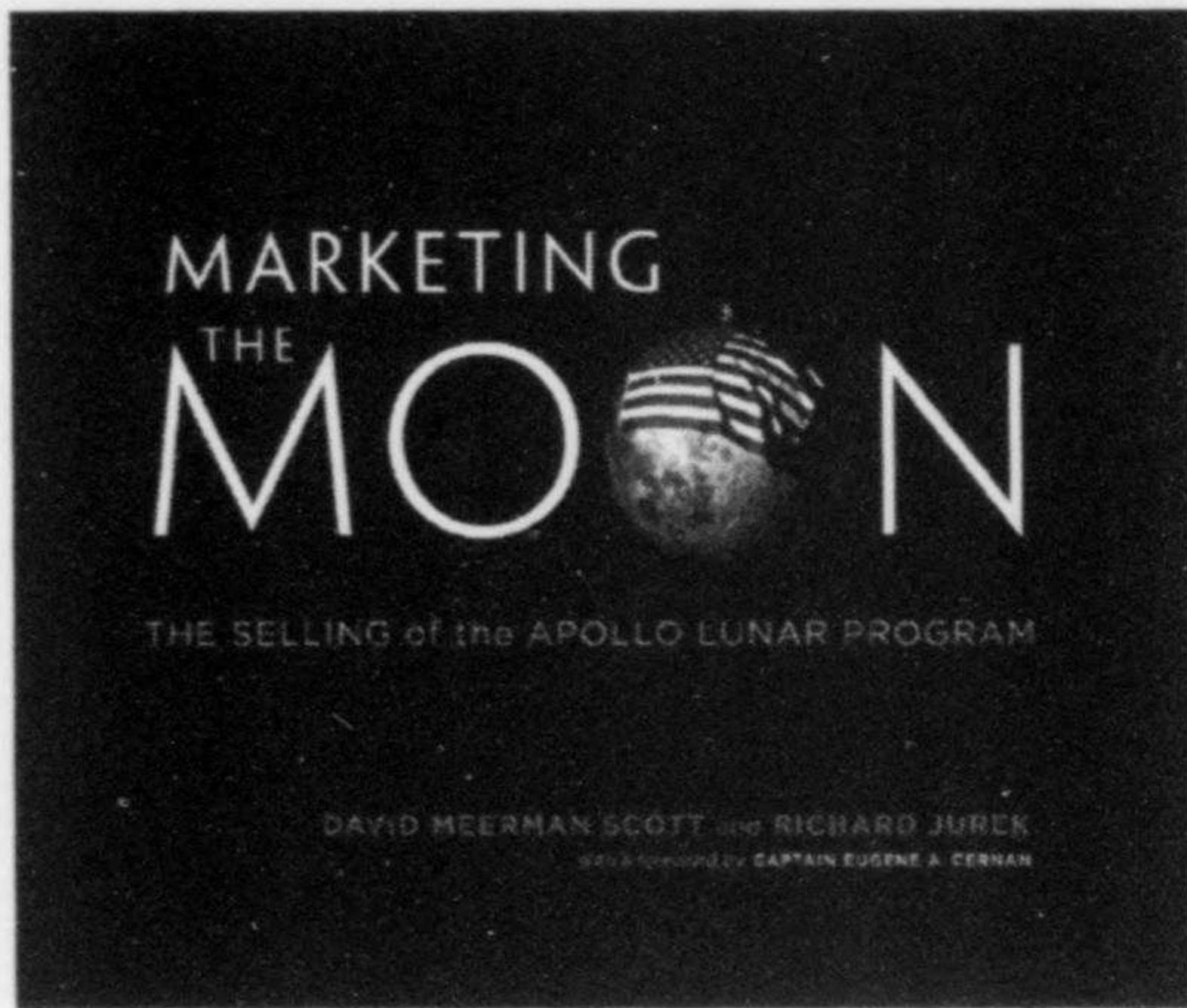
39. For a nuanced discussion of the vicissitudes of surveillance in narrative cinema, see Thomas Y. Levin, "Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of 'Real Time,'" in *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 578–93, here esp. p. 589.



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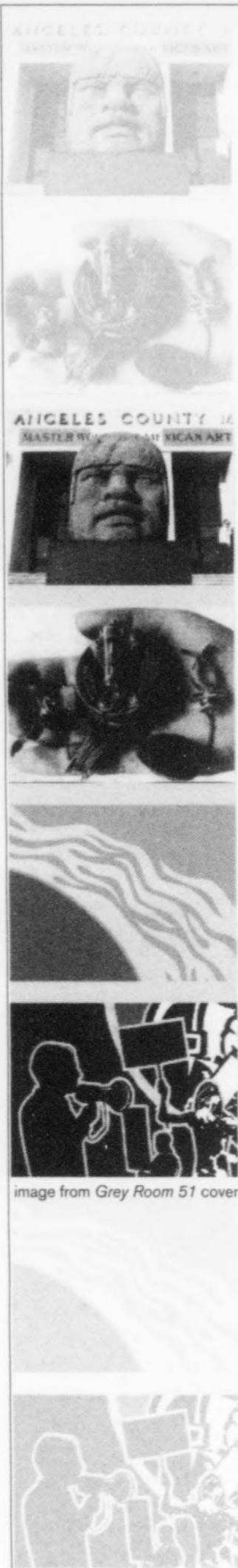
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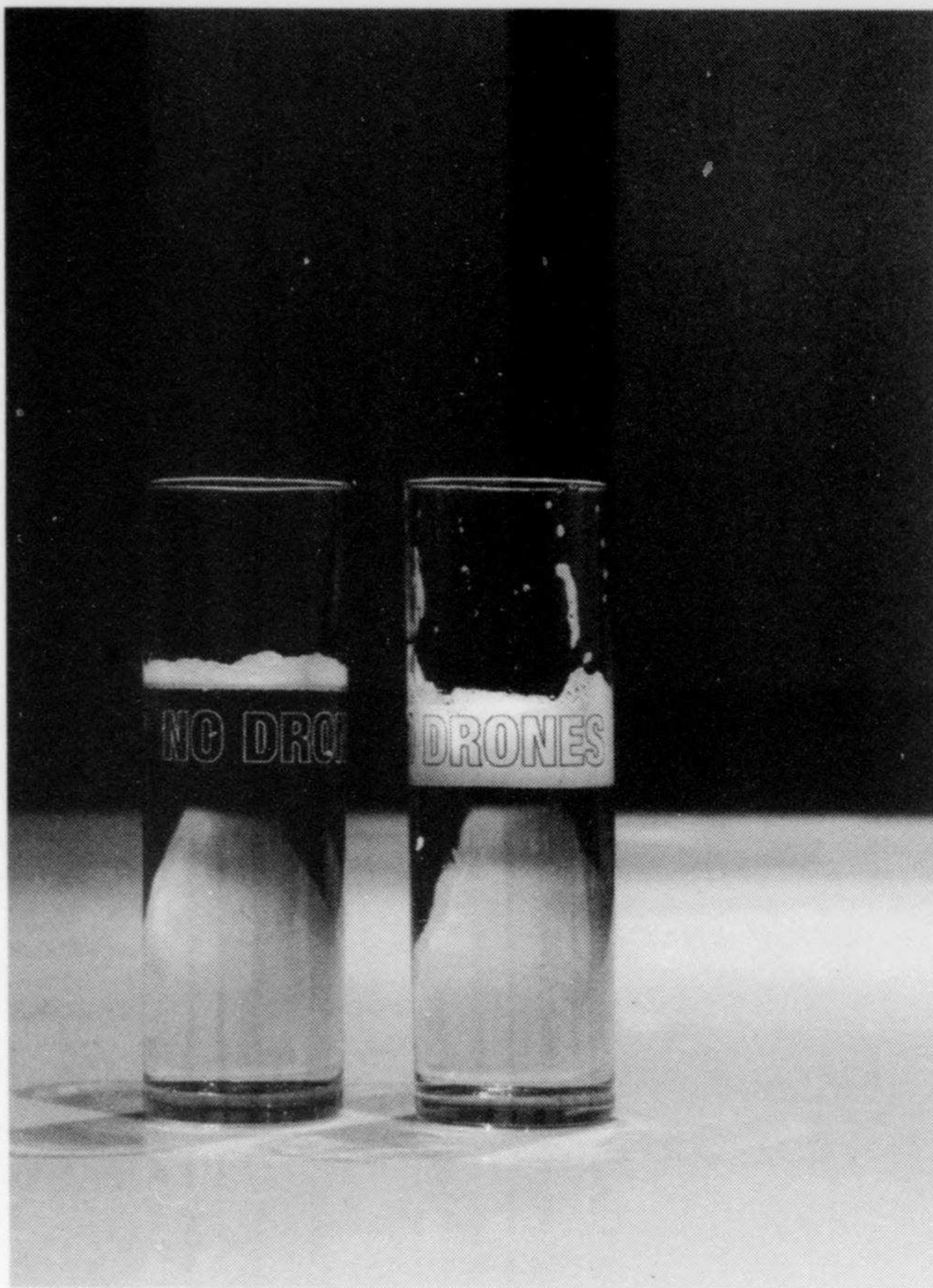
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